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SEEING SUBJECTS: RECOGNITION, IDENTITY, AND VISUAL CULTURES IN LITERARY MODERNISM

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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The Graduate School

University of Kentucky

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SEEING SUBJECTS:
RECOGNITION, IDENTITY, AND VISUAL CULTURES IN LITERARY
MODERNISM

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
George Micajah Phillips

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Jonathan Allison, Associate Professor of English

Lexington, Kentucky

2011

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

SEEING SUBJECTS:
RECOGNITION, IDENTITY, AND VISUAL CULTURES IN LITERARY
MODERNISM

Seeing Subjects plots a literary history of modern Britain that begins with Dorian Gray obsessively inspecting his portrait's changes and ends in Virginia Woolf's visit to the cinema where she found audiences to be "savages watching the pictures." Focusing on how literature in the late-19th and 20th centuries regarded images as possessing a shaping force over how identities are understood and performed, I argue that modernists in Britain felt mediated images were altering, rather than merely representing, British identity. As Britain's economy expanded to unprecedented imperial reach and global influence, new visual technologies also made it possible to render images culled from across the British world—from its furthest colonies to darkest London—to the small island nation, deeply and irrevocably complicating British identity. In response, Oscar Wilde, Joseph Conrad, T. S. Eliot, and others sought to better understand how identity was recognized, particularly visually. By exploring how painting, photography, colonial exhibitions, and cinema sought to manage visual representations of identity, these modernists found that recognition began by acknowledging the familiar but also went further to acknowledge what was strange and new as well. Reading recognition and misrecognition as crucial features of modernist texts, *Seeing Subjects* argues for a new understanding of how modernism's formal experimentation came to be and for how it calls for responses from readers today.

KEYWORDS: British modernism; recognition; visual culture; British national culture; social class in London

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MODERNISM

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For Tiffany
insieme per sempre

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Colleen Glenn, Josh Reid, and Aparajita Sengupta. The same is true for Jonathan Sircy, who also went above the call of friendship to read and comment on more of this project than anyone outside my committee.

Our homes are our first schools, and what I owe to the teachers I have found there is beyond words. Long before I learned to read critically, I had the great fortune to grow up surrounded by parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles, aunts, and cousins whose appreciation for stories—how to tell them, listen to them, and live with them—has been one of the great pleasures of my life. My parents, Faye and J. K., have been encouraging, loving, and singularly supportive in every imaginable way at every step of my education. They have been my first and my best teachers. Gary and Gayle Lauderdale have been a second set of parents, models of patience, kindness, and munificence on so many occasions. No one knows how to deflate a burden, or an ego, better than siblings, and Carson and James always had a kind word and a wry comment ready for both. My daughter, Auden, from whom I have learned so much already, is usually quick to remind me of two things: by telling me that God's presence is always with me, even if I do not know or feel it, and by showing me again and again the powerful simplicity of being present with each another. With the rare and unspeakable joy she inspires in thousands of small ways, I am often breathless.

And, at last, there is Tiffany, without whom I could not have come to know the best ways to celebrate, to parent, to take a photograph, to argue fairly, to read carefully, to live generously, to love unconditionally, to be kind, and, simply, to be. With love, gratitude, and ceaseless awe, this dissertation is dedicated to her.

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Coming to Terms

—I fear those big words, Stephen said, which make us so unhappy.[1]

This dissertation plots a literary history of modern Britain that begins with Dorian

Gray obsessively inspecting his portrait's changes and ends in Virginia Woolf's visit to

the cinema where she found audiences to be "savages watching the pictures." It focuses

on how literature written in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, focusing

most closely on the period from 1880 to 1930, regards images as possessing a shaping

force over how identities are understood and performed. My central claim is that

modernists in Britain felt mediated images were altering, rather than merely representing,

British identity. As Britain's economy expanded to an unprecedented imperial reach and

global influence, new visual technologies also made it possible to render images culled

from across the British world—from its furthest colonies to darkest London—to the small

island nation, deeply and irrevocably complicating British identity. In response, Oscar

Wilde, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, T. S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf

sought to better understand how identity was recognized, particularly visually. By

exploring how painting, photography, colonial exhibitions, and cinema sought to manage

visual representations of identity, these modernists found that recognition began by

acknowledging the familiar but also went further to acknowledge what was strange and

new as well.

This project is, then, about modernism, modernity, visual cultures, identity, and

recognition: big words I want to unpack in this introduction.[2] After giving each of these

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[1] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Corrected Text, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986), 26.

terms its due, I will return to the argument I have begun to set forth here to add more depth, explain how what I have to say speaks to the discipline, and to offer a map for how the rest of my dissertation makes its case.

Modernism and Modernity

For whatever else it may have been, then, British modernism was a literary and cultural response to a period that was coming to know itself as crossed with forces that were competing, contradictory, incongruous, and often profoundly complex. These grand, impersonal forces—capitalism, imperialism, national culture, and technology among them—were understood as holding undue and unregulated sway over everyday life. The "crisis" of representing modern life felt by so many in Europe in the decades leading up to and following the turn of the twentieth century was a crisis born of this very problem.[3]

In such an atmosphere, how does one begin to tell a story?

I regard the aesthetic currents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that we retrospectively call "modernism" as giving voice to a few key recognitions about the deep complexities of modern life. In part, this is recognition in Aristotle's sense of *anagnorisis*, a moment of epiphanies about the self and its situation in the world. But modernism's was also a particular kind of recognition, for one of the insights that reading modernist literature is likely to offer is that scenes of recognition are also scenes of misrecognition, of misunderstanding or misinterpretation. This is because modernist

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[2] Though I refer to the work of other scholars here, my purpose in this introduction is not to provide a comprehensive literature review of these topics; that would take us too far afield and take up too much space. Instead, I want only to clarify my terms and adumbrate my argument.
[3] Though it has become a cliché to say that modernism was born of a "crisis of representation," Pericles Lewis reinvigorates that claim by consolidating a wealth of such statements from modernists in *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Introduction.

texts strongly and self-consciously suggest that any given event or cultural product

(including a text) is overdetermined, meaning it emerges from more than one source.

Moreover, modernist texts encourage readers to see that any event or cultural product has

two (or more) effects, some of which we understand immediately and others that we do

not spy for some time, if indeed we ever do. That is the view of modernism I take in this

project, and given debates about the definitions of modernism and modernity—debates

that seem only to wax and wane without ever entirely disappearing—not all will find it

satisfactory. I will return to the topic of modernist recognition in a moment, but let me

say here that it a is a way of coming to terms with that both allows new insights while, at

the same time, highlighting the limits of those insights.

For all the resistance to definition that modernism and modernity have created,

there are two points of critical consensus surrounding modernism at the moment. The

first is that modernism demands deep historicizing, ways of reading that can square its

forms and experimental techniques with events that were taking place at the same time.

The second is that there is little else that can be agreed upon when it comes to this

durable but vexingly inadequate label. If it is still true that modernism is a vague term

that signifies, as Michael Levenson wrote of modernism nearly thirty years ago, things

have not become much clearer since.[4] Perhaps its period should be expanded; perhaps its

geography, too.[5] Perhaps we should speak of *modernisms* instead.[6] Perhaps we would

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[4] Michael Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), vii.
[5] Susan Stanford Friedman has written on this dual expansion in two counterbalancing articles: "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies," *Modernism/Modernity* 13.3 (2006): 425-43; and "Planetarity: Musing Modernist Studies," *Modernism/Modernity* 17.3 (2010): 471-99. See also the contributions to *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*, ed. Laura Doyle and Laura Wienkel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005). For a broad but valuable survey of modernist studies since the 1990s, see Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123.3 (2008): 737-48. In addition to finding that notions

do better without the term altogether.[7] If modernist studies is in the midst of redefining

its key term, this project that has been going on for some time now, and with no end is in

sight. It seems the nature of studying modernism is to ask what the term means.[8] These

questions, it should be clear, are questions not only about modernism as such but about

the time and place from which it emerges. Even the most basic statements about

modernism tend to return to questions about its context.[9]

     For this reason, scholars of modernism have lately been more content to make

pronouncements on modernity rather than modernism. Modernity may be a vague

signifier as well, but here, at least, are a few more points of consensus. The modern era

begins in seventeenth-century Europe as with the onset of capitalism and Enlightenment

rationalism; matures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and begins tending

toward postmodernity—that is, social life defined by mass media and late capitalism—at

or around the turn of the twentieth. Without doubt, the crisis of representation to which

modernists felt compelled to respond is the product of the social flux generated by

capitalist expansion and its effects, as many have observed. "All that is solid melts into

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of modernism have been expanding in terms of time and geography, Mao and Walkowitz also discuss the
effects of media (visual and otherwise) as a emerging as a crucial context for studying modernist literature.
[6] See *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker et al (Oxford and New York: Oxford
University Press, 2011), and Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley and Los Angeles:
University of California Press).
[7] Though few are making this case, its attraction is palpable. For example, in the Introduction to *Fateful
Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development, and Literature 1860-1960* (Princeton and Oxford:
Princeton University Press, 2008), Douglas Mao (a past president of the Modernist Studies Association)
explains his decision to make "relatively sparing use of [the term] 'modernism' in [his] study" (12) though
his book focuses on Wilde, Joyce, Auden, and other modern writers because of modernism's vestigial
associations with high culture are misleading, and because arguing a term as contested as "modernism"
runs the risk of sidelining projects like his which at any rate are not seeking to make claims that definition.
[8] This tendency goes back to study modernism by asking fundamental questions about it appears as early as
Harry Levin's seminal essay, "What was Modernism?" (in *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature*
[New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966], 271-95).
[9] To take a familiar instance, Astradur Eysteinsson insisted, "the self-conscious break with tradition must, I
think, be seen as the hallmark of modernism, the one feature capable of lending the concept a critical
coherence most of us can agree on, however we may choose to approach and interpret it" (*The Concept of
Modernism* [London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990], 52).

air," as Marx said, and, as Marshall Berman has shown some time ago, the widespread goal of securing affluence brought in tow a widespread sense of effluence.[10]

Further, our understanding of the experiences of acquisition and circulation of capital and precious materials in nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been deeply enriched by postcolonial theory and criticism. Scholars like Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and Mary Louise Pratt have made clear that movement itself is a feature of modernity by exploring the period's unprecedentedly wide-ranging travel, migrations, and commercial traffic.[11] Postcolonial approaches to modernist studies has deepened and enriched the ways in which we can appreciate British identity as reflecting and seeking to resist movement. For Ian Baucom, the very notion of "Britishness" was an attempt to secure a stable, traditional sense of Englishness by housing it in recognizable locales throughout England and its colonies (in the Gothic architecture Ruskin revered, the country house, and cricket fields, for example). Yet wherever sites of Englishness stood, it seemed, colonial subjects, immigrants, and finally citizens of the Commonwealth paid tribute to the customary notions of what Englishness meant before the expansion of empire beyond the British Isles that these sites memorialized while also inhabiting and redefining those sites, and thereby Britishness, for themselves. The central features for such redefinitions, then, are at once the locations themselves and how subjects move within and through these spaces. "For in creating an empire whose commercial, political, demographic, and cultural economies depended on a continuous traffic between the English here and the

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[10] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988).

[11] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222-37; and Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

imperial there, England rendered its spaces of belonging susceptible to a virtually infinite, and global, series of renegotiations." In these spaces, the "topographies of Englishness . . . are always sprawling, mutating, solidifying, and collapsing once again."[12] Locations and architecture meld solid identities only to watch them melt away once more.

If modern identities can be nested in a sense of place, they also reflect a sense of pace. "The car [too] was modernist mobile architecture," as Enda Duffy explains, and, like the architecture whose altered meanings Baucom carefully assesses, cars had more than one cultural meaning: they were a pleasure for travel and also a sight to see. To see a fast car, or evidence of a car crash, makes for "a media spectacle" whose "power derives from their success at awakening our own memories of real experiences."[13] The ability to travel more widely and more efficiently inspired new notions of seeing as well as new things to see. The many ways technologies of transportation altered modern life—connecting previously remote corners of the globe and creating new points of travel and migration and the exchange of communication and capital—were sensed individually as changes in visual experience. For historians of the cinema, the technology that most readily anticipated filmic images was the railroad, which offered the experience of watching a scene pass by that appeared at once continuous and broken into frames.[14] Think, too, of the impressionism with which Conrad experiments in texts that take place abroad or at sea, a technique which relies on visual evidence while also remaining deeply

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[12] Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 38, 221.

[13] Enda Duffy, *The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 6, 3.

[14] See Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997); and Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. chap. 1.

suspect of sight itself.[15] Throughout the modern era are suggestions that sight and images,

even still images, connote a sense of movement that for many felt like the zeitgeist of the

period.[16] Such fluidity was reflected in efficient transportation, and in the alacrity with

which one might accrue, or lose, wealth.

What all of this suggests—and this is the point I want to make before moving to

the next section—is that one of the features of modern life to which modernism

persistently points us is that the complexities of modern life bear close ties to the seen

and unseen. One of the peculiar facets of turn-of-the-century modernity was that, as daily

life for many in the west became imbued with visual technologies and attention to ways

of seeing, modern life seemed also to be defined by the global circuits of commercial and

imperial traffic that invisibly connected European metropoles to distant lands. If an

invisible hand governed capitalism since its earliest stages, as Adam Smith had it,

imperial capitalism multiplied and extended its veiled forces. In a well-known

representation of Edwardian London, John Maynard Keynes captures in a salubrious

domestic scene the effects of the economic boom that began in the late nineteenth century.

"The inhabitant of London [of "the middle and upper classes"] could order by telephone,

sipping his morning tea in bed, the various products of the whole earth, in such quantity

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[15] The "artist [who] plunges into himself" that Conrad celebrates in his manifesto of literary impressionism, the Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1898; in Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness: Authoritative Texts, Background and Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Paul B. Armstrong, 4th ed. [New York and London: Norton, 2006], 279), seems a close relative of anyone who, like Tuan Jim, cannot speak the truth of his own narrative because "he had indeed jumped into an everlasting deep hole" (Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, 1900 [New York: Penguin, 1986], 125). These metaphors centralize the praise for or discouragement regarding what one sees that appears throughout both texts. For more on the visual dimension of Conrad's impressionism, see Jesse Matz, *Literary Modernism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 138-54.

[16] Leo Charney has found that early cinema helped characterize the modernist era as a period of "drift." Yet even before the appearance of cinema, argues Lynda Nead, paintings, caricatures, and other still images seemed invested with a sense of mobility. See Charney, *Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity, and Drift* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998); and Nead, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c.1900* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

as he might see fit, and reasonably expect their early delivery upon his doorstep."[17]

Keynes's imbrication of the immediate with the remote calls attention to the deep ties

binding global commodities with local metropolitan consumer identity. Keynes's

description also calls attention to the permeable boundaries separating these locations—

indeed, to the *necessity* of passing through these boundaries in order to construct the

largely unseen delivery system that will respond to the phone call placed by Keynes's

middle- or upper-class Londoner. Although few would say there is much in modernism

that trusts what Conrad calls "the visible universe,"[18] there is more than enough evidence

to suggest that it is just as mistaken to read "the logic modernism" as claiming "that

images per se are bad" as it is outdated to regard modernism(s) as possessing a singular

"logic."[19] If we read modernism instead to gain a fuller understanding of how modern

vision was at once revealing as well as obfuscating, we can come to a better

understanding about how the crosscurrents of social life at the turn of the century

impressed themselves on British subjects.

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[17] John Maynard Keynes *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920), 10-12. Though Keynes looks back in 1919 with more than a little nostalgia, his assessment of a widely international economy whose products were accessible and in demand has nonetheless been roundly corroborated by contemporary economic historians as the closest the world came to a global economy before the 1980s. For comparisons of early- and late-twentieth-century global economies, see, for example, Maurice Obstfeld and Alan M. Taylor, *Global Capital Markets: Integration, Crisis, and Growth* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[18] Conrad, Preface, 279.

[19] This phrase appears in Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 275, but can be taken as an emblematic of a broader tradition of reading modernism as hostile toward sight. I have more to say about this claim, and about *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, in Chapter 4.

Visual Culture and Modern Britain's Visual Cultures

As an object of study, "visual culture" refers to studying the range of visuality outside of art history proper.[20] Svetlana Alpers is often credited with helping to popularize the term, and, as she explains in her response to the "Visual Culture Questionnaire" that appeared in the art theory and criticism journal *October* in 1996, she wanted a term that made it possible to discuss painting as well as "cultural resources related to the practice of painting," a shift in approach meant to allow one "to focus on notions about vision (the mechanism of the eye), on image-making devices (the microscope, the camera obscura), and on visual skills (map-making, but also experimenting)."[21] Since that time, studies contributing to knowledge on visual culture have continued exploring sight in various contexts in terms of power ("the gaze" or other dominant "ocular regimes" vs. subversive or minor acts of seeing) and alongside ways of making and disseminating images.[22] Alpers and other theorists of visual culture, such as Michael Baxandall, Norman Bryson, Jonathan Crary, Michael Ann Holly, Martin Jay, W. J. T. Mitchell, and Keith Moxey, intend to depart from the traditional path of studying the history of art in order to open the tools of visual interpretation to a wider spectrum of cultural practices and artifacts. The meaningful difference between the disciplines of art history and visual culture studies is that the latters seeks to historicize sight itself and to

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[20] There is an unfortunate ambiguity in the term "visual culture": it is sometimes the name given to an object of study, and sometimes the name given to the study of that object. I have tried to ensure that in these pages "visual culture(s)" refers only to what is being studied so as to deal with questions of method separately.

[21] "Visual Culture Questionnaire," *October* 77 (Summer 1996), 26.

[22] One could cite any number of studies here, but I will cite just two that have been particularly influential in literary studies. On "ocular regimes" and the rhetoric of sight as knowledge, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993). On the evolution of sight in nineteenth-century Europe and the development of visual technologies, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

widen the kinds of images and institutions, high and low alike, that can be considered acceptable for examination. Many of the scholars I have just named would agree that studying high art and aesthetic traditions has its place, and that art history ought not to be abandoned. The point of studying visual culture is, then, to augment rather than to replace art history.

The study of visual culture provides theoretical models for parsing literary modernism's deep engagements with a range of visual artifacts, from visual arts (particularly painting) to mass culture entertainments (colonial exhibitions) to visual media that blurred the high/low culture line (photography and cinema). At the same time, literary modernism's approach to and appropriation of visual cultures sometimes demand that we reconsider visual culture theories, many of which were formulated by attending to late-twentieth- or early-twentieth-first-century conditions. I should be clear that my focus throughout is on literature and the insights the study of language has to offer. That is, I am not an expert in visual forms nor pretend to be. But recent studies of visual culture offer the opportunity for enriching our understanding of the cultural contexts in which modern writers lived and worked, and can help unknot riddles in texts particularly attentive to spectacles, images, and acts of looking. In her response to the *October* questionnaire, Michael Ann Holly offers a point of departure I find useful here. "What does visual culture study? Not objects, but subjects—subjects caught in the congeries of cultural meanings."[23] Similarly, my focus will be on modern subjects and how they understand sight to play a role in constructing identities.

Because cultural meanings are produced in different contexts, I have found it useful to follow Maggie Humm in speaking not of a "visual culture" that works more or

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[23] "Visual Culture Questionnaire," 40-1.

less uniformly across Britain but rather of "visual cultures" in the plural.[24] I treat

throughout to painting, photography, colonial exhibitions, and cinema as discreet visual

cultures because each form carried its own aesthetic aims and expectations, loose set of

conditions for viewing, and connotations for what kinds of audiences it was produced and

marketed. The boundaries separating these visual cultures were far from rigorously

enforced, to be sure, but they were palpable nonetheless. Visitors to colonial exhibitions

might well at other times have been viewers of paintings at London's most exclusive

galleries and museums, of course, and certainly the authors I consider here crossed the

boundaries of the high and the low in their visual pursuits. E. M. Forster, for one, went to

the Japan-British Exhibition held at Shepherd's Bush in 1910 to see the Japanese

paintings on display there. He found the paintings, but not displayed according to his

expectations. "I have been to Shepherd's Bush, but was disappointed," he explained to a

correspondent; "the painting huddled away among the commercial work, & not

catalogued. Then to the B[ritish] M[useum], which, with coy dignity, has brought out *its*

Chino-Japanese pictures, and simply knocked Shepherd's Bush into a cocked hat."[25] It is

telling that Forster complains, not of the mixture of classes he would have encountered at

the exhibition, but of the differences in how paintings are not consistently displayed—

and thus not viewed in the same way—from one visual culture to another.[26]

Visual culture studies, in short, attempts to create a discipline for studying

everyday life by wedding social theory and art history making it well suited for the study

[24] Maggie Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography, and Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003). Pluralizing visual cultures allows Humm to trace the distinct impact photography, cinema, and film journalism had on modernist writers, as well as to describe how Woolf and Vanessa Bell contributed to these separate modes.
[25] *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, ed. Mary Lago and P. N. Furbank, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1983-5), 1:109; Forster's italics; the brackets elaborating "British Museum" belong to Lago and Furbank.
[26] E. M. Forster, "The Birth of an Empire," in *Abinger Harvest* (New York: Harcourt, 1964), 47.

of literary modernism. Ephemeral by definition, our sense of what the everyday must have been like for modern Britons remains in extant posters, pictures, and films, in the guidebooks that survived their exhibitions, and, most powerfully, I would insist, in imaginative literature. Bringing visual culture studies to bear on modernist narratives is partly a way to supplement critical and historicist theories of literature. But the study of visual culture is itself an unfinished and (to borrow Bahktin's word) an unfinalizable project. The chief difficulty for those who study the history of perception and vision, Jonathan Crary explains, is that

> perception and vision . . . have no autonomous history. What changes are the plural forces and rules composing the field in which perception occurs. And what determines vision at any given historical moment is not some deep structure, economic base, or world view, but rather the functioning of a collective assemblage of disparate parts on a single social surface.[27]

Though there are a number of methods for reconstructing what Crary calls the "social surface" of daily life—such as assembling the cultural artifacts I have just mentioned— imaginative literature preserves that surface and its changes. Such writing captures the wide, seemingly limitless expanse of vision that poses problems to Crary and other historians of visual culture, chronicling the changes in everyday sight brought by new media and new visual content alike. Perhaps literature's oldest lesson is that the act of writing (whether in chronicling or imagining) is also an act of response and theorizing, and the literature of modernism offers no shortage of responses to and theories of modern seeing.

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[27] Crary, *Techniques*, 6.

Identity and Recognition

When I write of identity in this dissertation, I have in mind a social sense of self that emerges from contact with others, and in particular the construction of those subjects as we have just seen Michael Ann Holly explain it, as "caught in the congeries of cultural meanings." The cultural meanings that become most significant here are those which emerge where Britishness and consumer culture are in play. As will become clear, I have been informed by critics who theorize identity in these or similar ways, and while I add to and complicate their accounts of British identity, I want to steer clear of accounts that are totalizing. This will no doubt disappoint those who want a more theoretically rigorous sense of identity that emerges from putting, say, the Lacanian self in dialogue with Foucauldian power. Or I might at least have engaged expressly with Louis Althusser, the theorist most closely associated with recognition and for whom identity emerges at the moment of being recognized (or hailed, or interpellated, in Athusserian terms) by another.[28] I find this claim a useful starting point—as well as Althusser's broader call for studying capital's reach into all corners of social life—but little more than that. To begin, one cannot speak of Althusserian recognition without finding identity always already ensnared within ideology, and to enter that debate now seems unnecessary as theoretical models of capitalist identity shift focus from the restricting power of production to the agency involved in consumption.[29] Second, as I will be discussing in a moment, recognition cuts both ways: it is an act that involves one who recognizes as well as

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[28] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-86. W. J. T. Mitchell, whose theories of visuality emerge by using ideas from marxism, psychoanalysis, and iconology to critique one another, offers a useful challenge to Althusser's theory of recognition by placing it against recognition as the iconologist Erwin Panofsky understood it. See Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 25-34.

[29] The theorist most closely associated with searching for new ways to inhabit a world in which capital and capitalist ideologies are nearly ubiquitous and anticipate the subject is Fredric Jameson.

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another who is recognized. For Althusser, the recognizer is always an uncomplicated agent of the state.[30] If Althusser is at pains to claim that recognition has a politics, my reply would be that its politics are inextricable from the affective dimensions of recognition on which Althusser says little, but which modern authors and poets have considered deeply. Ultimately, though, I do not take up Althusser expressly simply because do not find empirical definitions of identity very compelling. Studying identity as a mode of self-understanding, consciously or not, that emerges and is performed, imagined, and which intensifies or recedes for particular people or groups at a particular time and place is far more practical to my mind. Just as identity is contingent, so, too, are the cultural mechanisms that produce it, like recognition, products of history. The people, time, and place that I study here are clear; how recognition was historically constructed for modernist-era Britons now needs elaboration.

Modern writers in a variety of contexts were concerned with recognition—what it is, how it works, and what it does—and, in surprising contrast to many of the differences of the period that scholarship's pluralized modernisms reflects, many modernists in Europe and America came to understand recognition in similar ways. For these modernists, recognition names an initial response that is both intellectual and affective, and which usually involves seeing. As Ralph Ellison's invisible man knows, this makes recognition responsible to identities: "But to whom can I be responsible, and why should I be, when you refuse to see me? . . . Responsibility rests upon recognition, and

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[30] Though I do not take up Althusser expressly in Chapter 5, I read a similarly enclosed social life in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) as calling upon its readers, not to capitulate to its ideological enclosures, but to imagine other productive modes of resistance. If Althusser could be read in the same way, then the more expansive notion of recognition I take up in this section of the introduction would be a starting point for critiquing interpellation as Althusser conceives it.

recognition is a form of agreement."[31] The agreement here rests with how viewers can

confer the status of subject on others simply by looking at them (or refusing to), pointing

not only to a deep-seated desire to be acknowledged but also to the power of a glance to

confer that acknowledgement.[32]

Wallace Stevens provides another iteration of this responsive and responsible

mode:

> [W]e recognize, even if we cannot realize, the feelings of the robust poet
> clearly and fluently, noting the images in his mind and by means of his
> robustness, clearness and fluency communicating much more than the
> images themselves. Yet we do not quite yield. We cannot. We do not
> feel free.[33]

Stevens's sense of recognition as possibly, though not necessarily, overlapping with

realization speaks to the difference between modernist recognition and Aristotlean

anagnorisis. What does come through for Stevens are "images . . . communicating much

more than the images themselves," and though he writes with a particular text, Plato's

Phaedrus, in mind, it is hard not also to hear in these lines what could sound like a

reader's initial response to, say, "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" or "The Idea of Order at

Key West." And an initial response it is: recognition is for Stevens prelude to something

that demands more ("Yet we do not yield. We cannot."). Indeed, Stevens goes on to

illustrate his explanation of recognition as a beginning by making that explanation his

point of departure for writing about how the imagination is inseparable from "real" life.

Closely wed to perception and the imagination, then, recognition serves a different

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[31] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1981), 14.

[32] Kwame Anthony Appiah discusses both the affective and political dimensions of such acknowledgement in "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 149-64.

[33] Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1965), 5.

purpose to moderns than it had in eras past. As an intellectual process, recognition is

more than acknowledging the familiar. It is one of our operations for generating the

possibility of becoming, of inventing new states from older ones. In his philosophical

mode, Eliot used recognition to delineate the process of turning what is imagined into the

real.[34]

In her recent and illuminating book, *Uses of Literature*, Rita Felski discusses

recognition in this very way. Whether in encounters with high culture aesthetics or in the

course of daily life, recognition "brings into play the familiar and the strange, the old and

the new, the self and the non-self."[35] Felski aims for a critical apparatus that accounts for

how recognition can point to something one already knows while also leading one to new

insights with what had already seemed familiar. "Recognition is not repetition," she

explains; "it denotes not just the previously known, but the becoming known" (*UL* 25).

As she makes clear, to think in this way is to square affective responses to aesthetic

products like texts or pictures with theories about them so that recognizing does not

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[34] Because meanings have to be acknowledged in order to exist at all, Eliot explains, any number of
habitual activities ("judgments" are what Eliot has in mind), do not exist unless we recognize that we are
doing them. Thus it is "everywhere the case," writes Eliot in *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy
of F. H. Bradley* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), "that until the ideal is recognized as real, it
is not even ideal. And I use the word 'recognize' with this in view: the idea as idea (as meaning) is neither
existent nor non-existent, and could we consistently keep to this internal view it would not be real. It will
be said, I know, that the externality of the idea is implied in its internality. But this implication exists only
for a point of view which contains both points of view" (37).

[35] Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 49 (hereafter cited in text as *UL*).
Terence Cave also centers his study *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (New York, Oxford, Toronto:
Clarendon Press, 1988) on recognition's ambivalence, whether it is "the mark of intelligibility or the
unintelligible." He differs widely from Felski, however, in his conclusions. His survey of recognition
scenes in the western canon concludes with readings of James and Conrad that suggest recognition "has
progressively become less distinct, less capable of definitive articulation; it has been wrapped in layers of
delicate and unstable perception" (496). I find Felski's approach, which she calls the "phenomenology of
recognition," a more productive way of reading because it regards both perception and recognition as
informing one another in particular historical situations: "What I find valuable about phenomenology is its
attentiveness to the first person perspective, to the ways in which phenomena disclose themselves to the
self. Phenomenology insists that the world is always the world as it appears to us, as it is filtered through
our consciousness, perception, and judgment" (*UL* 17).

simply reiterate. Rather, like Stevens's encounter with *Phaedrus*, Felski hopes to come

to know happens when we "recognize [ourselves] in a book" (*UL* 23).

What I am charting in this literary history of modernism's recognitions are the

early strands of our postmodern era in which Felski comes to these conclusions about

recognition. This history also has much in common with the early stages of late

twentieth-century globalization as anthropologist Arjun Appadurai explains it. For

Appadurai, a number of communities across the globe have experiences governed by the

confluence of imagination, media, and migration. My interests are similar to Appadurai's

in that I am concerned with how mediated images from abroad "seem to impel

(sometimes compel) the work of the imagination. Together, they create specific

irregularities because both viewers and images are in simultaneous circulation. Neither

images nor viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound within local,

national, or regional spaces."[36] Because the first sizeable waves of immigration did not

arrive in England until after the scope of my project (a moment usually dated to the

arrival of the *Empire Windrush* to London from Kingston in 1948), there is less to do

with the migration of peoples to England in the pages that follow than with the transport

of money, artifacts, and images to London from the world over.[37] For centuries it had

been the case that the wealth acquired abroad was spent at home and, indeed, used to

purchase furniture, sculptures, paintings, and materials like ivory and silks from

elsewhere to decorate the English home and domesticate the foreign. But it is also the

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[36] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.
[37] Despite the fact that four of the authors I focus on here—Wilde, James, Conrad, and Eliot—immigrated to London, I have not taken up immigration here in part because these writers were, for the most part, eager to assimilate, and partly because immigration is hardly the social issue in prewar England that it becomes after 1948.

case that, from the Victorian period onward, it became increasingly difficult to understand where and to whom these objects and materials belonged as photographs of them in their indigenous locations circulated in their adopted metropolitan homes. As a result, various strategies for managing recognition appeared in the nineteenth century. Beginning with the Great Exhibition of 1851, Britain sought to domesticate foreign items simply by arranging them for display, a practice that had gained a perverse edge as peoples, too, were put on display at colonial exhibitions beginning in the 1890s. In time, mediated images themselves seemed to suggest distance and unfamiliarity. For Woolf and Eliot, the new technology of cinema seemed already stippled with a sense of discovery from without, as if watching films were uncannily like seeing the birth western civilization itself. All of these things testify to the urgency modernists and their contemporaries felt for being able to recognize identities captured in images and composed from more than one source, at once in England and territories overseas. To quote Stevens once more, "If it was only the dark voice of the sea / That rose . . . But it was more than that."[38]

Recognizing Modern Identity

We now arrive at the question of argument. As I have been saying, I will be pursuing recognition as it was constructed in the modernist era, and a key component to this pursuit will be bringing together readings of modernism within its visual cultures. But why do this? Why single out recognition as a social practice at this time? What claims to British or consumer identities and to literary representations of such identities

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[38] Wallace Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West," in *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997), 105.

does recognition have? What lessons do we stand to learn by reading modernism in this way?

One answer to these questions would be that the period I have referred to as "the modernist era"—by which I mean roughly 1880-1930—goes by other names as well. For Walter Benjamin, this was the age of mechanical reproduction: the period in which lithography, photography, and cinema were widely distributed for the first time and the impact of all those images on subjectivity and politics was only beginning to be understood.[39] For the historian Eric Hobsbawm, the same period brought Britain's age of capital to a close and began its age of empire: the era of the Berlin Conference, the Anglo-Boer War, and the expansion of a British economy based on imperial resources and commodities.[40] A number of very strong studies have made the case for modernism as the emergent aesthetics of the age of mechanical reproduction;[41] many more have found it productive to read British modernism as emerging from the dense fabric of colonial and postcolonial relations. Of late, the new modernist studies has attended to the convergence of these co-defining historical forces by reading the spectacular propaganda of empire, the power of the disembodied gaze of imperial authority, or the visual

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[39] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 1935, trans. Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Marcus Bullock et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996-2003), 3:101-33. This English translation, heavily revised and working from a different typescript, is now preferred to Zohn's previous translation, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." I retain this phrase because of its familiarity. In her article "Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema" (*October* 109 [2004]: 3-45), Miriam Hansen explains the reasons for preferring this new translation and the typescript from which it works.
[40] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* (New York: Scribner, 1975) and *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage, 1989).
[41] Though they speak largely to an American context, the best examples here are Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Karen Jacobs, *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* (London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

phenomenologies of Anglophone Caribbean writers living in London.[42] Yet none of

these proposes a way of understanding how British modernism emerges as an intellectual

and affective response to the age of empire and technological reproducibility, nor to how

the images may have purported to represent the identities of Britons but were imagined

by their viewers to possess other meanings, to call for other responses. Questions about

why modernist narratives and poems often present images as challenges to recognition,

identity, or both go unanswered. Attending to recognition allows us to better understand

how Britons came to make sense of themselves, one another, and their colonial "others"

in the course of daily life in during an age in which capital, empire, and reproducible

images vie for the position of regnant theme. Moreover, considering how national

culture, capital, and visual cultures in Britain interpenetrated one another can expose

deeper insights into the question of why modernism emerged when it did, of why

previous aesthetic conventions seemed so untimely to the poets and novelists whose

careers began in the fin-de-siècle and the years leading up to World War I.

I argue that a great deal of modernist literature regarded images as extending

identities, as shaping forces that do not simply represent what identities are but which

have the capacity to reaffirm or alter, consolidate or fragment them as well. Paintings,

photographs, and films are, of course, representational forms; one could argue that even

expressionist pictures represent desires or modes of consciousness. Modern writers

themselves regarded these as representational forms. But the distinction that must be

made is that modernists also knew that representational forms did more than the work of

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[42] These approaches can be found in a number of scholarly works that I engage with later in this dissertation. A few are worth mentioning at the outset as particularly cogent and already influential: Mark Wollaeger, *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900-1945* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Mary Lou Emery, *Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

representation. Images in particular have the peculiar qualities. As W. J. T. Mitchell

suggests in the very title of *What Do Pictures Want?*, viewers have a willingness to

attribute emotions, desires, and other interior states to images.[43] During the modernist era,

a host of images define identities in various ways: portraits are meant to reflect a self-

image; photographs reproduce individuals as well as "types;" and commodity spectacles

give shape to desires, while images of the cultural "other" offer glimpses into that with

which Victorian and post-Victorian viewers wished to disidentify. Further, the properties

of images were understood to have some effect on the identities of those portrayed. The

portability and proliferation of mediated images alone meant such images could have

been, and indeed, were seen by new audiences every day. The ease and frequency with

which an image might pass from one visual culture to another—to say nothing of their

immersion into everyday life—also changed the conditions of viewership and visual

interpretation before new standards could replace them. In this way, reading modernist

literature that explores the visual cultures of its time reveals a great deal beyond seeing or

images as such. It tells us about how they imagined the worlds of which they were part.

I suspect that many of those living in Britain in the period in question knew as well as

anyone that communal identities are constructions of the imagination.[44] Indeed,

persistent concerns about what unseen forces are holding influence over the way British

communities were being imagined animates much of the literature of modernism.

　　In the chapters that follow, I trace the historical construction of recognition from

the beginning of the nineteenth century to on or about 1930. Because a loose chronology

is implied here, let me be clear that chronology is important to my argument only as a

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[43] W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
[44] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Rise of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2006).

loose structure. This is not a history of concrete developments that moves in a fixed

teleology, but a literary history that chronicles authors' responses to acts of looking.

These are uneven developments. Though it will be clear that visually recognizing

someone or something comes to acquire the denotation I outlined above in the modernist

period, not everyone in the same time and place regards sight—let alone distinct visual

cultures—in the same way. Literary histories, in their most cogent forms, account for the

different rates of processing, backward steps, recursions, and repetitions as well as

profound insights and great leaps forward—the phases involved in all learning, including

at a broad, cultural level.

Chapter 2 offers a brief overview of how the cultural conditions surrounding sight

were changing in the decades leading up to modernism. I provide some historical

background into the emergence of photography in Britain but attend most closely to how

seeing was understood in nineteenth century literature by William Wordsworth and

Thomas Hardy, and in the polemical writing of Thomas Carlyle. Photography, according

to these authors, had two important effects on processes of recognition. The first was in

making images portable, and therefore no longer determined by their contexts, so that for

the first time natural order—the Romantic sublime itself—was effaced by an artifice that

appeared to allow nature to write itself (as photography's etymological root promised).

The foundation for a picture's meaning shifted from the image's context to that which

lies within the frames of the mechanically reproduced image itself, a shift that had

implications for conceptions of identity on a number of levels. Photography altered the

way national identity was recognized when members of the Royal Geographical Society

began arguing, as early as 1841, that the new medium was critically important to the

project of mapping the British world. Britishness shifted from being an identity

indigenous to Great Britain to an identity that had some degree of purchase all over the

world. As images of British territories from all over the world began flowing back to

Britain itself, concerns for how to recognize British identity paralleled a general anxiety

that, after photography, viewers could no longer make sense of the vast archive of images

that represented the world at large.

Chapter 3 argues that Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) marks a

moment at which recognizing the image of identity becomes inextricably bound to

misrecognizing some key feature of it. Wilde's novel takes the familiar medium of

portraiture and repeatedly demonstrates that Dorian Gray's portrait calls to be both

recognized *and* reinterpreted with each viewing: each time Dorian Gray and Basil

Hallward encounter the painting, they see the face of Dorian Gray and yet must come to

terms with why it is not the face they expected. Among Dorian Gray's decadent

behaviors that cause his portrait to alter are his acquisition of goods from all over the

world, an obsessive and excessive stockpiling of rare, beautiful, and decorative things

meant to make his home resemble the kind of beautiful picture his portrait cannot be.

Reading essays and reviews in which Wilde characterized paintings as decorative art, and

taking into account his claim that his novel was about decorative art, I argue that *The

Picture of Dorian Gray* presents the accumulation and careful display of decorative

materials and styles associated with cultures outside of Britain as part of the visual

imagery that was meant to appear "English."

Focusing on the relation of identity and capital, Chapter 4 makes the case that

Henry James regarded photography as a preeminently modern tool for recognition. I read

James's Preface to *The Golden Bowl* (1909) as reflecting on a career spent writing fiction

that seeks to explore modern identity from within and without by negotiating the blurry

boundary between character and what James sometimes called "type," or what he calls in

the Preface writing of "the particular attaching case *plus* some near individual view of

it."[45] Photography supplies James with the metaphors and diction for explaining the acts

of rereading and revision as acts of recognizing both the familiar and the heretofore

unacknowledged in his own work. Moreover, in his artist fiction, James regarded

photography as lending a form to type. As I make clear in a reading of "The Real Thing"

(1892), James regarded the flatness of types and photographs as a feature that could

either be recognized as limiting or as a point of departure for more complex identities.

Chapter 5 explores writings by two of modernism's best-known ironists, Joseph

Conrad and E. M. Forster. Writing during London's era of colonial exhibitions, I argue

Conrad and Forster discovered that attending to the gaze these visual contact zones

solicit—a detached scientific gaze that does not empathize with whom or what it looks

upon—called not for further detachment but for new forms of productive reengagement,

such as curiosity. In *The Secret Agent* (1907), Conrad ironizes late-Victorian and

Edwardian London's disdain for the "primitive" as necessary for recognizing "civilized"

identity. The conspicuous absence of genuine curiosity in *The Secret Agent* burdens the

novel's irony as the only tool available for responding to a late imperial culture Conrad

characterizes as governed by fetishizing scientific observation. By contrast, curiosity

emerges in Forster's review, "The Birth of Empire" (1924), not as irony's naïve opposite

but as that which may learn from the distance irony produces. For Forster, curiosity

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[45] Henry James, Preface to *The Golden Bowl*, vol. 23 of The New York Edition of Henry James (New York: Scribner's, 1909), v-vi.

serves as a necessary and fresh vantage point for recognition which tests tentative styles of reattachment to the metropole that seek deeper knowledge of British India and late imperial London than colonial exhibitions can display. I argue that reading such texts today calls not for reaffirmations for ironic distance but for pursuing an alternative knowledge of curiosity's role in response itself by considering it within the paradigm of modernist irony.

Chapter 6 moves from the exhibition space to the cinema house, and reads comments on cinema by Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot as capturing an approach to intimacy both explored further in their literature. This chapter explores how the apparently opposed postures of impersonality and intimacy came to be modernism's compensations for the sense of fragmentation and disunity after the emergence of film. I seek to undo a commonplace in film theory that understands cinema as inviting audiences to identify with what they see onscreen and yet feel themselves to be incomplete, not fully integrated with what they are watching, a process psychoanalytically-informed film criticism calls "suture." I argue instead that the relationship between modernist audiences and film could be better understood by attending to writings by Woolf and Eliot on or informed by film which use the movement inherent in film as a way to describe the shifting relationship between film and audiences. Reading Woolf's essay on "The Cinema" (1926) against Walter Benjamin's Work of Art essay (1935), I find that early film inspired its audiences to associate the camera eye with an anthropological gaze directed at their own cultures, a gaze that speaks to the desire for distant observation and yet feels close identification. I find that the impulses of impersonality and intimacy tend to surface in Woolf's early novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), and Eliot's early poetry and

poetics whenever filmic techniques, such as montage and quick cutting, are strongly

asserted. A brief conclusion revisits and consolidates the claims I make in the preceding

chapters.

If we approach recognition as a historically determined and key component to

understanding how audiences negotiate the imaginative worlds created in stories and

pictures with the world they imagine themselves to live in, then recognition requires the

intense scrutiny of taking affective response as well as theoretical positions into account.

This may be good advice for any approach to criticism, but it is indispensible for thinking

through how aesthetics helps instruct audiences in what is known and unknown, what is

conceivable and inconceivable. "Precisely because of [recognition's] fundamental

doubleness," Felski writes, "its oscillation between knowledge and acknowledgement, the

epistemological and the ethical, the subjective and the social, the phenomenology of

recognition calls for more attention in literary and cultural studies" (*UL* 49). This project

hopes to contribute to that end.

Chapter 2
**Heroic Visions and Sixpence Photographers: Visuality and Recognition in
Nineteenth-Century London**

Recognition in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Let us begin in London in the early nineteenth century, a time safely before

modernism but which was already bearing its earliest signs. As England's urban

populations rapidly increased over the course of the nineteenth century (from one million

in 1801 to three times as many by 1861), visual media, too, were on the rise with

"Victorian 'show business' centered firmly in London."[46] Throughout the century,

metropolitan visual cultures in England suggested to their viewers ways of seeing that

challenged earlier assumptions about the images they mediated. In so doing, even the

most apparently trivial technology or novelty could urge viewers to question what kinds

of visual interpretation certain content called for. In a sense, this was no new

development. As Richard Altick explains in his magisterial *The Shows of London*,

London has a long and rich history of visual cultures that reaches at least as far back as

the medieval church's display of religious relics in the fourteenth century. Over the

course of several centuries, a host of spectacles—wonder cabinets, museums, exhibitions,

panoramas, street shows, picture-advertisements, photographic display, and

phantasmagoria among them—provided a means of instruction to a largely illiterate

urban population in matters of science and travel. This education came in the form of

entertainment, "an indispensible way of momentary escape from the dullness, the mental

vacuity, the constriction of horizons, the suppression of the imagination which were too

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[46] Joss Marsh, "Spectacle," *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker
(Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 277.

often the price of life in the enveloping city."[47] Even as London's instructive visual

entertainments placed a premium on audiences' affective responses, their pedagogy was

often in the realm of alterity and identity, at once negotiating the bounds of Englishness

(and later, Britishness) while coterminously instructing viewers how to trace the contours

of their own personal identities in relation to a national collective.

In "Metropolitan Perception and the Emergence of Modernism," Raymond

Williams warns against regarding the metropolis as the center of the production of a

single, dominant cultural identity. Cities are complex and contested places, homes to a

number of minority identities as well as dominant cultural expressions, and the conflicts

between these are most readily apparent, Williams explains, when we attend to

perception. In the long history of its metropolitan visual cultures, London has inspired a

number of responses that are suggestive of how personal narrative might be extrapolated

from the shock of the new. Williams enjoins his readers to trace currents of modernism

that run far deeper than 1890 and which permeate much further than a dominant cultural

narrative.[48]

One relatively early wellspring for modernism and the fragmented metropolitan

perception that concerns Williams, and one that is important to the concept of recognition,

appears in Book Seventh of the 1805 *Prelude*, William Wordsworth's poetic account of

his arrival in London.[49] Wordsworth's response to the city's new and often disruptive

popular visual attractions and the social life that surrounds them is, as Williams points

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[47] Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1978), 1-2.
[48] Raymond Williams, "Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism," *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*. ed. Tony Pinkney (London and New York: Verso, 1989), 37-48.
[49] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979; hereafter cited in text by book and line number of the 1805 version of the text in this edition).

out, instructive for understanding how modernism's responses to its own postindustrial,

metropolitan landscape. Disoriented by "Advertisements of giant size" (7:210), street

fairs ("a hell / For eyes and ears" [7:659-60]), panoramas ("the spectacles / Within doors"

which "ape / The absolute presence of reality [7:245-6, 248-9]), and, "[a]bove all," the

isolation of this urban *Gesellschaft* where "[e]ven next-door neighbors" who see one

another regularly live as "[s]trangers, not knowing each other's names" (7:117-20).

But if, as Williams suggests, Book Seventh of *The Prelude* is a testament to the

how themes we typically associate with writing a century after Wordsworth are no less

present for Romanticism (anomie, fragmentation, and concerns with mass culture among

them), this poem also asserts itself as a triumph over London's discomfiting visual

environment—a triumph difficult to imagine as conceivable in the era of Prufrock's

observations. Watching strangers go by, Wordsworth discovers the key to understanding

his surroundings.

> Here, there, and everywhere, a weary throng,
> The comers and the goers face to face—
> Face after face—the string of dazzling wares,
> Shop after shop, with symbols, blazoned names,
> And all the tradesman's honours overhead:
> Here, fronts of houses, like a title-page
> With letters huge inscribed from top to toe;
> Stationed above the door like guardian saints,
> There, allegoric shapes, female or male,
> Or physiognomies of real men,
> Land-warriors, kings, or admirals of the sea,
> Boyle, Shakespear, Newton, or the attractive head
> Of some quack-doctor, famous in his day. (7:172-83)

Wordsworth makes a virtue of being able to recognize the features of the city with which

he repeatedly comes in contact ("[f]ace after face," "[s]hop after shop") by showing that

the metropole can be read as a text. By recording impressions of the city's "motley

imagery" (7:150), he produces a mental legend for London's architecture, streets, and

people that makes parts of the city legible "like a title-page" that offers the most

important contextual clues for making sense of all that one sees. Storefronts become

allegories for what they contain, as readable as the "physiognomies of real men" where

visible surfaces provide clues of what lies beneath. Like challenging texts, the opacity of

this space dissolves as its most repeated images offer clues for its interpretation. In this

supremely disorienting space, an overarching narrative has become available to the poet.

What's more, by the end of Book Seventh, Wordsworth's autobiographical

account generalizes the particularities of his experience so that his readers may take up

the tools left behind by the *Prelude* and interpret London in much the same, skillful way.

The city that seemed at first to overwhelm with its variety of sights and swells of people

now appears part of a grander design. The masses who had been "melted and reduced /

To one identity by differences / That have no law, no meaning, no end" (7:703-5) are

gathered once more at book's end, this time to be reinserted into a unified, cohesive story.

> But though the picture weary out the eye,
> By nature an unmanageable sight,
> It is wholly so to him who looks
> In steadiness, who hath among least things
> An under-sense of greatest, sees the parts
> As parts, but with a feeling for the whole.
> . . . .
> By influence habitual to the mind
> The mountain's outline and its steady form
> Gives a pure grandeur, and its presence shapes
> The measure and the prospect of the soul
> To majesty: such virtue have the forms
> Perennial of the ancient hills—nor less
> The changeful language of their countenances
> Gives movement to the thoughts, and multitude,
> With order and relation. (7:708-14; 722-30)

Where nearly all of Book Seventh has been devoted to detailing the specific sights, at times offering strings of nouns that inundate readers just as Wordsworth had felt overwhelmed by the city's unrelenting spectacles,[50] the focus here turns from the "unmanageable sight" of fragmented images to a consideration for the larger "picture." Inhospitable streets, buildings, and urban flotsam are dwarfed by the "mountain's outline" that tropes the return of nature to Wordsworth's mind, the guarantor of "steady form[s]" that has been subtly present for the poet all along, as it is to anyone who possesses this kind of vision ("to him who looks / In steadiness"). Wordsworth's poetic mapping of London installs its many images within a readable context that renders even the most apparently meaningless sight comprehensible, transforming London from a space of busyness, evanescence, and confusion into one of "[c]omposure and ennobling harmony" (7:741).

I have dwelt on this poem because in it I find Wordsworth to be enacting what might be called a Romantic theory of vision in which Wordsworth finds a place within

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[50] Consider, for example, this presentation of London early in Book Seventh which is nearly entirely composed of nouns, describing things seen quickly with little time to discover what any of those things is doing:

> And first, the look and aspect of the place—
> The broad highway appearance, as it strikes
> On strangers of all ages, the quick dance
> Of colours, lights and forms, the Babel din,
> The endless stream of men and moving things,
> From hour to hour the illimitable walk
> Still among streets, with clouds and sky above
> The wealth, the bustle and the eagerness,
> The glittering chariots with their pampered steeds,
> Stalls, barrows, porters, midway in the street
> The scavenger that begs with hat in hand,
> The labouring hackney-coaches, the rash speed
> Of coaches travelling far, whirled on with horn
> Loud blowing, and the sturdy drayman's team
> Ascending from some alley of the Thames
> And striking right across the crowded Strand
> Till the fore-horse veer round with punctual skill:
> Here, there, everywhere, a weary throng[.] (7:154-71)

the sublime natural order for the bewildering collection of urban images that resound

with English history as well as colonial and commercial expansion (such as the "Land-

warriors, kings, or admirals of the sea" arraying storefronts) because he has discovered a

way of seeing that places these images in the foreground of a broader, meaning-

bestowing context. For all that modernism inherits from Romanticism, and for all the

characteristics Williams rightly identifies as belonging both to the industrial and imperial

eras, modernists departed decidedly from the Romantics on the question of how to

represent and interpret the visible world.[51]

But this Romantic vision would gradually become more difficult to sustain after

the introduction of photography in the mid-nineteenth century with the assimilation of

photography into everyday life. Photography and similar technologies produced

greater—far greater—numbers of mediated images estranged from their contexts than

ever before, making negotiations between the singular and the general, and the personal

and collective, increasingly uneasy. The distinctiveness of a person, location, and work

of art drastically changed as new technologies reversed the requirements of spectatorship,

bringing images to viewers rather than the other way around.[52] Moreover, photography

opened questions of perception and its interpretation. At the same time that

photography's admirers touted its realism, photographs also drew attention to their

difference from unmediated human perception. "Camera vision, in short, was essentially

modern precisely because it was not perfectly mimetic," writes Michal North, "because it

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[51] Louis Menand argues for another distinction between a Wordsworthian image and modernist one in *Discovering Modernism T. S. Eliot and His Context*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 41.

[52] See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 1935, trans. Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Marcus Bullock et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996-2003), 3:101-33.

opened up to human perception possibilities unnoticed by the eye and displayed the

'social fantastic'[53] that had lived unnoticed inside the restrictions of everyday reality."[54]

The complex questions of representation and reality that began anew with photography

had the effect of calling attention to the problematic authority often attributed to visual

perception.

By making it possible to possess a visual archive of people and places,

photography was becoming the province of recording, establishing, and reestablishing

identities. As changes in technological reproduction in the 1850s and 1860s made

photographic images easier and cheaper to produce, Londoners went from relatively little

exposure to photography to a wealth of photographed images available in an array of

forms. Travel photography arrived from around the world, *cartes-de-visite* (calling cards

with photographs on one side) circulated among the upper and upper-middle classes, and

urban anthropological photography captured images of the poor. Each of these forms

were distinct products, but, in a culture that was for the first time becoming saturated

with mass-reproduced images, each was also instructing viewers to regard the social

world as populated not by individuals so much as by "types."[55] This notion was soon

reflected in literature as authors of Victorian triple-deckers made adroit use of minor

characters whose motivations and behaviors reflected their place in the social order.

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[53] See Pierre Mac Orlan in Christopher Phillips, *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Arts), p. 27.

[54] Michael North, *Camera Works*: *Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 30.

[55] Cf. W. J. T. Mitchell: "Visual culture is the field in which social differences manifest themselves most dramatically. It is the site, in Levinas's terms, where we encounter the Other and produce templates or search mechanisms for discriminating types of people" ("An Interview with W. J. T. Mitchell," in Margaret Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture: The Study of Culture after the Visual Turn* [Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2005], 245). A thorough genealogy of visual culture as a field of study has yet to be undertaken, and surely would reveal some of the subterranean connections between that postmodern field of study and its retention of vocabulary and assumptions surrounding pictures from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

"Part of the genius of Dickens," as E. M. Forster explains it, "is that he does use types and caricatures, people whom we recognize the instant they re-enter, and yet achieves effects that are not mechanical and a vision of humanity that is not shallow."[56] Types enrich the background and help characters in the foreground ring true.

But, as Nancy Armstrong observes in *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, while it is certainly true that "types have through time and the sheer repetition and accumulation of photographs achieved something like the status of objects," as something found and not made, the effect of this process has not been to imprison subjects in a small gallery from which they must choose their identity.[57] On the contrary, it underscores modern subjectivity as located between seeing and being viewed. One learns to recognize types in order to deviate from them. I will have more to say about how Armstrong's study of British realism is significant to the issue of types in Chapter 3, but for now I want to point out a broad claim she makes about how type emerges for Victorians alongside photography.

> As Victorian photography established the categories of identity—race, class, gender, nation, and so forth—in terms of which all other peoples of the world could be classified, literary realism showed readers how to play the game of modern identity from the position of observers. Maintaining their difference from those who did not occupy this position was paramount. Maintaining that difference transformed their images of other people into the secret core of Western individuality.[58]

By arguing that photography robs images of their original contexts and places them within a new context, that of the photographic archive itself, Armstrong's argument strikes at the heart of the condition of technological reproducibility. Because

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[56] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, 1954), 109.
[57] Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 30.
[58] Armstrong, *Fiction*, 26.

photographs were used as evidence for metanarratives of identity, the tension here is not one that is simply between images and texts. Rather, it is a question of how to recognize images that, from one angle, could corroborate the metanarrative and, from another, could weaken it. Reproducing the social world as realistic meant borrowing from the genre that purports to reflecting, not creating, that world. But with this is also a difficulty of distinguishing subject and type. Difference must be maintained, Armstrong intones, because in the course of standing in for a group, the typed figure in a photograph is no one in particular. Evacuated of specific identity, that face could belong to many.

For the denizens of Victorian London, this was not a mere lofty or philosophical issue. In *London Labour and the London Poor* (1862), Henry Mayhew reports of a pair of disingenuous sixpence photographers who regularly convinced sitters that pictures of other people's faces were, in fact, their own portraits. Whenever this pair's equipment failed, or when sitters were too impatient with the time it took to take and develop a print, these photographers handed over a photograph of someone else, insisting that it was "a correct likeness." Despite what might seem an improbable swindle, Mayhew's photographers recall only a handful of instances when they couldn't convince sitters of their ploy (such as when an elderly woman was given a photograph of a bearded sailor). "The fact is," one of the photographers declared, "people don't know their own faces. Half of 'em have never looked in a glass half a dozen times in their life, and directly they see a pair of eyes and a nose, and they fancy they are their own."[59]

Odd as this story sounds at one level, there is a certain sense in which Mayhew's anecdote delivers a familiar story about modernity. As industrial society slips into the age of technological reproducibility, identity becomes more atomized, subject to the

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[59] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 4 vols. (New York: Dover, 1968), 3:209.

depredations of anomie and fragmentation, to the point that even the features one's own face appear unknown. The burgeoning urban populations of the nineteenth century doubtless contribute a great deal to this sense of personal identity. Since the technologies of mechanical reproducibility both inspired and aided the earliest attempts at the quantitative study of metropolitan life, it would be tempting to conclude that Mayhew's photographers were successful at duping their patrons because those patrons were ready to accept that their faces were reflective of social types. And, in fact, this is the reading suggested by Mayhew's multivolume, encyclopedic contribution to the large body of Victorian scholarship that attempts to assemble, describe, and classify urban types with the aid of photography. (Even the photographers themselves, like so many of the figures who populate Mayhew's *London*, are known to us by profession only, their names and biographies having been long erased.) But given that many of these photographers' subjects needed convincing that the picture they were handed was their own, it is perhaps more accurate to say that these Londoners found themselves challenged to compete with what they were told was the veracity of the photographic eye. They were caught in the difficult position North describes of having to recognize photography's fidelity to the real and its "hyperreal," mechanical presentation. As its name suggests and as North also reminds, photography was initially imagined as the technology that would allow nature (or, better still, capital-N "Nature") to write itself in images. It ought to have been a Romantic technology par excellence. Yet the history of photography's reception from modern writers to mass culture spectators that North sedulously and sinuously traces in *Camera Works* points to the friction between the image as photography records it and the image as the eye perceives it.[60]

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[60] North's observation of photography's etymology appears in *Camera Works*, 3-4; much of the rest of his

The moment at which Mayhew's photographers hope to persuade their patrons into literally buying into another's image points to the shift from a Romantic vision to a modern vision that unfolds at a mass cultural level. Regardless of whether these photographers succeed, this moment points to the context's failure to describe the subject in the picture, or, in other terms, the failure of metanarrative to define identity. There are (at least) two things this moment has to teach us about how recognition has changed since Wordsworth. The first is the degree to which science and technology were replacing nature as the great explanatory framework for urban identity. If it seems a stretch for Wordsworth to relocate London under the outline of a mountain in order to extend nature's jurisdiction, Mayhew's photographers rest assured in the knowledge that telling their patrons that the camera never lies will be a much easier case to make. But we also learn from Mayhew's report about what happens when technology replaces nature in this way. Nature lends order precisely because it exists before humanity: it requires no explanation because everything else should conform to its organic order. Technology, on the other hand, is an artifice and system for constructing further artifices. Like all artifices, including art, technology is understood as useful or accurate to the degree that it informs perception.

These are important lessons for understanding how Mayhew's story of a pair of opportunist sixpence photographers captures the conditions of metropolitan identity as the age of mechanical reproduction gets underway. Mayhew provides a moment that challenges recognition by highlighting the close affinities of the unknown and the known, reminding that one lies just over the other's horizon. But what makes this moment particularly complex is that it poses its challenge to recognition in an unexpected way.

study is devoted to understanding how photography was regarded by moderns as a kind of writing.

The photographers promise their sitters that the image allegedly belonging to them is an *unfamiliar* one, and, stranger still, the sitters accept the unfamiliar likeness more often than not (or, at least, they are content enough to walk away from the photographers). There is a powerful ambivalence underwriting this story, one that suggests that the visitors to the sixpence photographer's camera acknowledge a certain uneasiness with accepting a photograph of a strange face, but also unsure how to articulate that discomfiture, particularly against the temptation to defer to the mechanical eye. "People will think the camera will do anything," brims one of the photographers.[61] As the nineteenth century approaches its close, a vast catalogue of urban photography collects the familiar and unfamiliar alike and retrospectively creates narratives of recognition to explain them. Here is an image of the poor London street vendor, there the Indian shaman, and there Australian aborigine—each as identity as clear and distinct from the other as it is similar to those conscribed to the same category. What to do when individual perception disputes the assurances of technologically reproduced (and, thus, putatively verifiable) information becomes no easy matter. More importantly, it fosters a reliance on the ability to recognize visually displayed identity and visually encoded types.

Recognition in the Age of Empire

In the spring of 1840, a few months after Louis Daguerre had explained his new invention to Paris's Académie des Sciences, Thomas Carlyle was writing his own series of lectures to be delivered in London on a topic apparently unrelated to the daguerreotype: greatness in its most ahistorical, universal sense. But, as Carlyle explains it, the power one exerts depends upon how one sees, for "the degree of vision that dwells

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[61] Mayhew, *London*, 4:209.

in a man is a correct measure of the man," and so his lectures on heroes would return

again and again to the question of vision.[62] In fact, the hero for Carlyle not only

possesses incisive vision, but also illuminates the paths of others as well. Regardless of

place or position, Carlyle explained, the hero is "the living light-fountain," the custodian

of "the light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darker world and this not as a

kindled lamp only, but rather as a natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven; a

flowing light-fountain, as I say, of native original insight, of manhood and heroic

nobleness" (*H* 236).

"Nobleness," "shining by the gift of Heaven," providing "native . . . insight" and

"enlighten[ing] the darker world": as his rhetoric suggests, Carlyle's hero receives his

mandate by dutifully bearing the responsibility of spreading European rationality to the

rest of the world. There is a very long tradition, one which reaches across many cultures

of borrowing from the rhetoric sight to explain understanding, to which Carlyle's *On

Heroes and Heroism* contributes.[63] But rather than simply borrowing this visual rhetoric

in the service of knowledge once more, Carlyle makes the kind of knowledge he has in

mind inextricable from a metaphorical clear vision, and to this knowledge he gives the

name "visuality." As Nicholas Mirzoeff points out in a fascinating article, it was in *On

Heroes and Heroism* that Carlyle, perhaps taken with the metaphor of light as knowledge,

coins the term.[64] Just as Wordsworth had described being able to see London by the

conclusion of Book Seventh, Carlyle used "visuality" to mean a clear sense of wholeness

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[62] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* and *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, vol. 12 of The Works of Thomas Carlyle (Complete) (New York: Collier, 1897), 333 (hereafter cited in text as *H*).
[63] Martin Jay and Richard Rorty offer two sweeping surveys of that philosophical tradition; Jay's is especially attentive to how this tradition gave birth to widespread suspicion of vision. See Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); and Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
[64] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "On Visuality," *Journal of Visual Culture* 5.1 (2006): 53-79.

that subsumes apparently meaningless fragments. Carlyle explains in a discussion of

Dante that what made the medieval Italian poet truly heroic was his ability to see "[n]ot

the general whole only; [for] every compartment of it is worked-out, with intense

earnestness, into truth, into clear visuality. Each answers to the other; each fits in its

place, like a marble stone accurately hewn and polished" (*H* 320). Carlyle prizes such

seeing because it expresses a complex narrative in a way that is "swift, decisive, almost

military" (*H* 321).

The ease with which he moves in characterizing the personality type of the hero

from vision to a military campaign is indicative of Carlyle's interest in portraying heroes

as effective leaders in expanding empire. (Carlyle's interest in Oliver Cromwell, who

would be the subject of a later book, helped inspire *On Heroes*.) Even England's closest

approximation to Dante is enlisted in this mission as one of the British Empire's brightest

beacons.

> England, before long, this Island of ours, will hold but a small fraction of
> the English: in America, in New Holland, east and west in the very
> Antipodes, there will be Saxondom covering great spaces of the Globe.
> And now, what is that can keep all these together in virtually one Nation,
> so that they do not fall out and fight, but live at peace, in brotherlike
> intercourse, helping one another? . . . what is it that will accomplish this?
> Acts of Parliament, administrative prime-ministers cannot. . . . Here, I say,
> is an English King, whom no time or chance, Parliament or combination
> of Parliaments, can dethrone! This King Shakespeare, does not he shine,
> in crowned sovereignty, over us all . . . ? We can fancy him radiant aloft
> over all the Nations of Englishmen, a thousand years hence. (*H* 340)

According to this line of thinking, the sovereignty of the British crown over the distant

territories it claims as its own is less important than symbolic collective identification.

Italy's political unification is still two decades away, "yet," Carlyle insists, "the noble

Italy is actually *one*: Italy produced its Dante; Italy can speak" (*H* 341)! If Dante can be

the "living light fountain" who inspires the disparate principalities of the Italian peninsula to unite symbolically, so, too, can Shakespeare become an icon who "shine[s]" "over all the Nations of Englishmen." For what such imagined collective identifications of national communities with poets offers, and which political and legal borders do not, is the guarantee that the people of a nation can recognize themselves as part of a single culture bound, if not by political sympathies, then by their shared pride and admiration for their artists. If Carlyle sounds like many of his contemporaries in reading literature as consolidating national identities, he goes further in casting heroes Dante and Shakespeare as "heroes," figures vested with a powerful, orderly, and ordering vision that sees all and knows how everything "fits in its place" (*H* 320).

Carlyle's invention of visuality in this sense is important in part because it provides a sweeping influence for transferring this kind of seeing from a medieval Christian theology—and, as Wordsworth would have it, from a secular Romantic vision—to an act necessary for the advancement of empire. By writing of visuality as the province of the handful who possess a clear picture of their surroundings and a near-divine awareness of the consequences of their own actions, Carlyle made visuality exclusive in both senses of that term: limiting it to an elect group, and making it a mode of perception that did not admit alternative epistemologies of the subject, nation, or empire. Carlylean visuality, Mirzoeff writes, "was not visible to the ordinary person whose simple observation of events did not constitute visuality," and thus was all the more prized: "[t]he centrality of Carlyle's discourse of visualized heroism to Anglophone imperial culture was such that any claim to such subjectivity had to pass by visuality."[65]

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[65] Mirzoeff, "On Visuality," 57, 54.

But if Carlyle would help disseminate links between visuality and imperialism, he

was not alone in associating the two. A year after Carlyle delivered these lectures (1841,

the same year *On Heroes* was first published), Henry Fox Talbot invented the calotype in

England, and almost immediately members of the Royal Geographical Society began

making claims that photography was indispensible for its mission of producing British

maps of the globe. The renowned astronomer Sir John Herschel, who coined the term

photography, was making the claim that geography aspires to the condition of the

daguerreotype. The lengthy exposure times of early photographic processes like the

daguerreotype and calotype made them impractical for portraits, but relatively well suited

for reproducing views of vast spaces in small, portable pictures. Thus photographic

apparatuses became standard equipment for all manner of expeditions from nearly the

beginning (Herschel even mounted an unsuccessful campaign to include photographic

equipment in an Antarctic expedition in 1839).[66]

Moreover, photography's close association with information-gathering and

accuracy of vision made it critically important to the construction of colonial otherness in

England.[67] Like Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, a number of

photographers sought to contribute to proto-anthropological accounts in the form of

photographic collections of distant cultures. The similarity between photographing types

in the metropole and types abroad was not lost on Victorian viewers. About a decade

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[66] James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 21-8.

[67] See, for example, Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson, eds., *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); and Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations of the "Native" and the Making of European Identities* (Leicester and New York: Leicester University Press, 1999). Not all photographic images of the colonies or colonial subjects purported to be scientific; some were clearly meant for entertainment. But, as we have seen, London's visual cultures have a long and storied history of imbricating instruction and entertainment. "In an age when few people travelled," Maxwell explains, "these images were regarded as evidence of what was happening in the distant regions located at the edges of empire" (7).

after Mayhew, John Tompson published *Street Life in London* (1878) to expand a visual

vocabulary of the types Mayhew and others helped identify. The techniques Tompson, a

fellow of the Royal Geographic Society, used to photograph the London poor had been

honed earlier the same decade when he took his camera to east Asia to photograph *The*

Antiquities of Cambodia (1867) and *Illustrations of China and Its People* (1878).

Tompson's career attests to a need sensed both in the late Victorian city and the larger

world beyond it: a need to see places and people who remain hidden to eyes that do not

travel east (or even as far as the East End). To see those places and people is to have

acquired some information about them, though what that knowledge amounted to was

difficult to say. In lieu of descriptions, the aim in these works is simply to picture and

compare, to classify and differentiate. Photography's legendary fidelity masked the

photographer's selectivity, and viewers seem not to have noticed that photographers may

have labored greatly in some cases to keep with their own classificatory systems,

"seek[ing] out a Chinese who looks more Chinese than the others," as Jean-Paul Sartre

later quipped.[68] Tompson and Mayhew also reveal the degree to which photography

brought changes in visual literacy that had ramifications for negotiating national identity

and defining personal identity. If the aim in all of this cataloging was to make strange

and unaccounted figures familiar, it seemed to be having the opposite effect. The

unfamiliar now appears in starker relief.

It is for precisely these reasons—because the recognition of one inevitably points

to the other—that Carlyle's ideological construction of visuality couldn't hold. By

pointing to an often unacknowledged or little-discussed mode of perception, visuality

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[68] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 23.

inevitably suggested subjective points of view also associated with vision. As Mirzoeff

points out, Carlyle's intent for the term was further destabilized by the dual potential of

vision that of "the visual subject, a person who is both the agent of sight (regardless of

biological ability to see) and the object of discourses of visuality."[69] Edward Said tracks

a similar trend at work more broadly in colonialist discourse in *Orientalism*, observing

that the subjectivity inherent in the rhetoric of witness of cultural alterity that is required

to maintain national identity also contains all the volatile ingredients for deconstructing

these essentialisms.[70] Recognition, and especially recognition by sight, becomes in this

context a critically important process because it is the mode in which identities are

defined and negotiated.

As this reference to Said's account of imperial European discourse suggests, the

definition of a collective British identity in the nineteenth century rested upon perceived

differences from colonial others. According to other foundational writings on

colonization by Sartre, Albert Memmi, and, above all, Franz Fanon, this process was

central to the development of western cultural identities during imperial rule.[71] Drawing

from the intimate bonds that Hegel surmised existed between master and slave, these

early postcolonial theorists detailed the ways in which Romantic notions of the subject—

self-sustaining, Enlightened, and bourgeois (or better)—buoyed western individuality by

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[69] Mirzoeff, "On Visuality," 54.

[70] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Vintage, 2004). In a chapter devoted to explaining the tensions of recognition when "beholding [the] self as Western representative is pre-eminently worked out in visual terms," specifically "the circular vision by which the details of Oriental life serve merely to reassert the Orientalness of the subject and the Westernness of the observer" (247), Said claims that the boundary orientalist vision installs is quickly displaced when orientalist writers emphasize their own personal testimonies, making the histories they write "and the narrative by which history is represented argue" that objective "vision is insufficient" alone; it requires the narrative of the witness to accompany it (240). The binary between east and west was perpetually in need of policing precisely because it was perpetually in need of inspection.

[71] See Sartre, *Colonialism*; Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld (New York: Orion Press, 1965); and Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

submerging that subject's material and financial dependency on the colonies. For these

writers, colonial conditions provide a perverse form of identification by which colonizers

define themselves by negating the colonized. In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio

Negri summarize this process in this way: "Only through opposition to the colonized

does the metropolitan subject really become itself. What first appeared as a simple logic

of exclusion, then, turns out to be a negative dialectic of recognition."[72] At the same time,

however, this conception of recognition seems meager to the task of explaining the many

nuanced ways in which recognizing others works to help create, affirm, or challenge

notions of identity. Though the best postcolonial criticisms demonstrate the rich

interplay between national, cultural, and geographical identities, this notion of

recognition remains almost entirely uninterrogated despite influential theories of

hybridity, performativity, and the coexistence of irreconcilable notions of identity. It

compels us to ask: How useful is it to continue to speak of recognition in these terms?

The succeeding chapters will be devoted to the problems opened by this question,

but for now, and by way of conclusion here, we can trace the ways Thomas Hardy

brilliantly captures the difficulties of recognition and metropolitan identity as they appear

near the end of the nineteenth century in *A Laodicean* (1881). As the novel opens, the

aristocratic De Stancy family is coming to the end of its line. The De Stancy's ancient

castle has recently been purchased by an upwardly mobile railroad baron who has hired a

young architect, George Somerset, to restore and add onto the medieval structure.

Somerset's antagonist is William Dare, a photographer who claims no nationality.

Against Somerset's geographically specific name, Dare renounces local specificities.

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[72] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 128.

When Somerset asks what place Dare calls home, he replies, "I have lived mostly in India, Malta, Gibraltar, the Ionian Islands, and Canada. I there invented a new photographic process, which I am bent upon making famous." Later, when other characters speculate about Dare but are unable to draw any conclusions about who he is—"I think he is a Canadian," says one; "he is an East Indian," declares another; "[t]here is Italian blood in him," insists a third—they come to the punning conclusion that, possessing "no nationality," the photographer is "[a] complete negative."[73] Hardy fuses these two elements of Dare's biography so that Dare's abilities as a photographer are, in fact, drawn from his origins abroad. Emerging from his dispersed background, Dare's life story reminds that the basic effect of photography entails the removal of images from their original contexts, the very settings that had been used to define those images, just as Wordsworth had rendered even London's most vulgar advertisements and seediest street performances meaningful by making them part of a grander, natural scheme, and just as Carlyle had argued the hero was endowed with a similar vision of completeness.

The early toll photography was taking on visual experience and visual knowledge is apparent in the main plot of *A Laodicean*, which concerns Somerset's amorous pursuit of Paula Powers, the daughter of the railroad magnate who has acquired De Stancy Castle. When Somerset first sees Paula, she is standing before a Baptist congregation in a church her father had helped finance and defaulting on her promise to be baptized according to her father's wishes. Standing in refusal before the dissenting chapel, Paula's "modern type of maidenhood . . . looked ultra-modern by reason of her environment" (*L* 11). The narrative that follows this initial appearance reveals this first impression an accurate one; indeed, Somerset will come to have mixed feelings for this ultra-modern figure, feeling at

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[73] Thomas Hardy, *A Laodicean*, 1881 (New York: Penguin, 1997), 46, 62-3 (hereafter cited in text as *L*).

times attracted to her and at other times "a violent reaction towards modernism, eclecticism, new aristocracies, everything in short, that Paula represented" (*L* 90). In so doing, *A Laodicean* suggests what many other realist novels do: that people can be understood by their appearances. All that is in the background shapes for viewers, and readers, the character in the foreground.

Yet, at the same time, the discussions about Dare's lack of background that trouble the novel's other characters means that *A Laodicean* testifies to the fact that interpreting people with reference to their background is becoming increasingly difficult at a time when those backgrounds—both their immediate surroundings and their geographical origins—are not stable. It is not automatic that both kinds of background should be problematic, but Hardy's novel often presents them as related. The photographic technique Dare invents abroad is a way to manipulate images, and he doctors an image of Somerset at a critical point in the novel to stain the architect's reputation by making him appear drunk.[74] Moreover, Dare's occupation as a photographer circulating the globe would almost certainly have been in the service of the Royal Geographical Society, for whom he would have been taking photographs to supplement and aid cartography, or, like Tompson, photographing nonwestern subjects for English viewers, helping strengthen the system of types into which Dare refuses to

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[74] Dare's false photograph of a "drunk" Somerset fools the other characters, and Somerset is left to the arduous task of explaining that the photograph must somehow portray a lie. The medium is new enough that no one in the novel, including Somerset, knew that Dare or anyone else had invented techniques for altering photographic prints. "To them that picture of Somerset has all the cogency of direct vision" (*L* 282). The trick is that much more difficult for Somerset to undo because, like Dare, he is an outsider to this community and when other characters look at the photograph they find it out of character but likely attributable to the familiar trajectory of male youth. No one "could have looked upon it and doubted that the photograph was a genuine illustration of a customary phase in the young man's private life" (*L* 281). Somerset recovers from the momentary damage to his reputation, but in the process learns that images can highjack agency, engendering stories unlicensed by their subjects. Identity, Hardy reveals, is as much a matter of reception as performative act.

admit himself. In this way, *A Laodicean* testifies to the ways in which, at the level of national culture, visual media would seem to provide a clear set of boundaries between one nation and another, grounding the legitimacy of domestic Britishness in the rejected, unfamiliar alterity of the other.

What Hardy's novel reveals about the processes of recognition at the end of the nineteenth century lies in its ability to persistently create affiliations between visuality and transnationalism while remaining ambivalent to both. The desire for modernity is coupled with the fervor of technological progress found throughout the Victorian period, but that yearning is tempered by an awareness that technologies are dispersing Britishness across the global and diluting its local particularities. As the novel ends, Paula Powers styles herself "a representative of the new aristocracy of internationality" and elects to marry Somerset rather than a De Stancy, "a representative of the old aristocracy of exclusiveness" (*L* 376). De Stancy Castle burns to the ground, and Paula and Somerset will build something new and "eclectic in style" next to the old site that will be "a perfect representative of 'the modern spirit'" (*L* 378, 379). But the novel's final lines find the "ultra-modern" Paula unable to part entirely from traditional Englishness. She laments to her new husband "I wish . . . my castle wasn't burnt; and I wish you were a De Stancy" (*L* 379)!

In spite of what Carlyle may have intended, making visuality a key component to Britishness opened the door to redefining British national identity, and the very notion of laying claim to identity in Britain as well by making identity subject to the unstable and unpredictable possibilities of recognition. Visual recognition encompasses affective responses, like Paula's appreciation for the noble De Stancy Castle, as well as the rational

procedures of ordering and judgment that Carlyle associates with it. What is significant

about the vitality of affectivity and rationality is that both contribute to the construction

of identities, and at the turn of the twentieth century, the age of empire and mechanical

reproduction, an unprecedented number of mediated images in paintings, photographs,

exhibition displays, and films called upon their viewers to recognize what they see and to

understand their relationship to "the visible universe."[75] The chapters that follow attempt

to explain modernism's appropriation of the affective and imaginative dimensions of

recognition that Carlyle disavows, and how and why modernists used recognition to

pursue their own theories of visuality.

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[75] Joseph Conrad, Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'* 1898, in *Heart of Darkness: Authoritative Texts, Background and Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Paul B. Armstrong, 4th ed. (New York and London: Norton, 2006), 279.

Chapter 3
Decorative Art, Accumulation, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Following the serial publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), a number

of critics disparaged the novel, and its author responded. The exchanges in the *St. James*

Gazette and the *Observer* in which Oscar Wilde felt called upon to defend the novel's

coded sexual politics have become well known as statements of Wilde's own sexual

politics.[76] But his letters also are meant to defend an aestheticist agenda that sets beauty

above all else and claims to have no interest in morality in art, claims which led Wilde to

write a new Preface for his novel a year later—and which came to haunt him at Old

Bailey in 1895. Tucked away in these exchanges is, however, a curious comment that

has received little attention. After weeks of responding to critics disparaging his novel,

Wilde made his last statement on the matter.

> Finally, let me say this—the aesthetic movement produced certain colours,
> subtle in their loveliness and fascinating in their almost mystical tone.
> They were, and are, our reaction against the crude primaries of a doubtless
> more respectable but certainly less cultivated age. My story is an essay on
> decorative art. It reacts against the crude brutality of plain realism. It is
> poisonous if you like, but you cannot deny that it is also perfect, and
> perfection is what we artists aim at.[77]

While it is no surprise to find Wilde claiming *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for

aestheticism, and setting it against all that he found intolerable about realism, it is quite

strange to discover the way in which he makes his claim: "My story is an essay on

decorative art." This unelaborated comment suggests two things I want to consider here.

The first is that Wilde meant for his novel to be read as bearing similarities to decorative

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[76] Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), chap. 5; Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 104.
[77] Oscar Wilde, "To the Editor of the *Daily Chronicle*," 30 June 1890; quoted in *The Picture of Dorian Gray: Authoritative Texts, Backgrounds, Reviews and Reactions, Criticism*, ed. Michael Patrick Gillespie, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2007), 365 (hereafter cited in text as *PDG*).

art; the second is that Wilde's readers might be able to recognize a novel about a picture as making a contribution to decorative art.

If this was difficult to ascertain, it would have been much easier for Wilde's earliest readers, and audiences since, to read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as commenting on recognition itself. Dorian Gray's furtive but obsessive glances at his portrait come from finding the picture to be his own portrait, and yet to be slightly different as well. Like the logical reversals of Victorian common knowledge that underpin Lord Henry Wotton's aphorisms, Dorian's picture is always familiar but never as one remembers it. At the novel's climax, the painter Basil Hallward finds himself in a disquieting scene of recognition. The moment takes place just after Basil finds Dorian outside his home in Grosvenor Square late one evening, and just before he will murder Basil. It is a foggy night, and Dorian, who hoped to evade his friend, almost slips by Basil, but does not. He follows Dorian home where he confronts him with vague but scandalous rumors going around their London club. Basil says he is fearful the rumors are slandering Dorian's reputation, but what he clearly wants most is to be assured that they are unsubstantiated, that all those who leave the room at the very mention of Dorian's name are mistaken. Basil can't bring himself to believe rumors about anyone with a face like Dorian's because, he believes, "[s]in writes itself across a man's face," and Dorian's face, now nearly thirty-eight, remains as unsullied as ever. But he remains doubtful. In order to know for certain the rumors are not true, he would "have to see [Dorian's] soul" (*PDG* 126, 128). Dorian laughs at first, but is soon taken with this request and leads Basil upstairs to the attic where he has kept his portrait hidden since it began its offending

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changes. And it is here that Basil looks upon his picture of Dorian Gray for the first time

in nearly two decades.

> An exclamation of horror broke from the painter's lips as he saw in the
> dim light the hideous face on the canvas grinning at him. There was
> something in its expression that filled him with disgust and loathing.
> Good heavens! it was Dorian Gray's own face that he was looking at! The
> horror, whatever it was, had not yet entirely spoiled that marvellous
> beauty. . . Yes, it was Dorian himself. But who had done it? He seemed
> to recognize his own brush-work, and the frame was his own design. The
> idea was monstrous, yet he felt afraid. He seized the lighted candle, and
> held it to the picture. In the left-hand corner was his own name, traced in
> long letters of bright vermilion.
> It was some foul parody, some infamous, ignoble satire. He had
> never done that. Still, it was his own picture. He knew it, and he felt as if
> his blood had changed in a moment from fire to sluggish ice. His own
> picture! What did it mean? (*PDG* 130)

What is immediately striking is this moment's refusal to allow itself to be either a scene

of the recognition of the familiar (though Basil understands that he has painted this

image) or an encounter with radical, unknowable alterity (though he is, as he wished,

looking at what the novel assures us is the image of another's soul). Basil understands

what he sees to be both "his own picture" *and* "some foul parody" of it, a difficult fact to

conceive because this doubleness results partly from the fact that what he sees is replete

with "horror," "disgust and loathing" yet still resonant with "marvellous beauty." The

coterminous existence of such qualities is precisely what makes this scene so powerful

and significant. The strange nature of self-recognition at the heart of this novel appears

here as it does in Dorian's obsessive returns to his portrait.

A key part of recognizing that the portrait is Dorian Gray's arrives as Basil sees

that "the frame was his own design." The frame, the picture's most decorative

embellishment, works in this scene in a way that is central to Wilde's conception of

decorative art. Decorative art is, for Wilde, a term that describes art that literally appears

on the margins and which is also meant to soften the edges between "art" and that which

we typically oppose to art ("life" was Wilde's favorite antimony; "reality" another). As

we shall have occasion to observe below, decorative art also denotes for Wilde an

exchange between western and nonwestern cultures, making decorative art the nexus of

several currents that inform identity in fin-de-siècle England, particularly among

aristocrats like Dorian Gray, Lord Henry Wotton, and Basil Hallward. Decorative art

adorns the homes of these characters, as well as many of the objects found there, just as it

was found in the homes of Wilde and his contemporaries. There were several reasons for

this, including making the home more pleasant, showing affiliations with aestheticism,

and demonstrating the wealth required to purchase decorated things. But in uniting *The

Picture of Dorian Gray* with such art, Wilde seems to be suggesting that the display of

the decorative does something more as well. In this chapter I want to read *The Picture of

Dorian Gray*, and Dorian Gray's picture, as sites where we are invited to recognize

Dorian Gray's identity as inflected by the presence of decorative art. In order to do that,

let us first look to Wilde's writings in the years before publishing his novel in which he

often linked decorative art and pictures.

Pictures, the Decorative, and Enjoyment

On the evening of 30 June 1883, art students at London's Royal Academy

assembled to listen to Wilde deliver a lecture on painting and national traditions. In the

course of the evening, Wilde's survey of visual art and artists from the classical and

modern world refuses to define beauty, arguing instead for a descriptive theory that

"seek[s] to materialise it in a form that gives joy to the soul through the senses. We want

to create it, not to define it. The definition should follow the work: the work should not

adapt itself to the definition."[78] Wilde's "Lecture to Art Students" then culminates in an

important, though somewhat enigmatic, definition of another term.

> What is a picture? Primarily, a picture is a beautifully coloured surface,
> merely, with no more spiritual message or meaning for you than an
> exquisite fragment of Venetian glass or a blue tile from the wall of
> Damascus. It is, primarily, a purely decorative thing, a delight to look at.
> ("LAS" 320)

At first, Wilde seems to withhold more than he discloses about the nature of pictures and

the conditions under which they are viewed. Yet this statement is alive to the constructed

nature of beauty, and, upon further inspection, seems to aim at forging a particular notion

of beauty which no doubt sounded peculiar in the ears of an audience who might well

have been expecting the former student of John Ruskin and Walter Pater to discuss the

beauties of *La Gioconda*, Turner, or the Pre-Raphealites. Wilde passes on these, and

indeed on pictures in the strictest sense, to turn instead toward a more flexible definition

of pictures which underscores a "purely decorative" essence. More surprising still, this

aesthete refers not to the decorative arts of England's Arts and Crafts Movement. What

is revealing, in other words, is that this description of pictures as decorative things

bypasses the artifacts of England's galleries, churches, and even its indigenous aesthetic

movement to attach itself instead to objects from the Mediterranean. Far from arbitrary,

however, the provenance of Venetian glass and Damascus tile long predate modernity

and point, in Venice, to the world's oldest global marketplace and, in Damascus, to a city

which Wilde had recently associated with the "incommunicable" alterity of Oriental art

and culture for Western audiences.[79]

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[78] Oscar Wilde, "Lecture to Art Students," in *Miscellanies*, vol. 10 of Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, ed.
Robert Ross (London: Methuen, 1908), 311 (hereafter cited in text as "LAS").
[79] In "L'Envoi: Rose Leaf and Apple Leaf" (1882), Wilde again deploys the image of the "blue tile from
the wall of Damascus" to shade forth the notion that art in general, and painting in particular, is "a

This exposition of pictures, which comes at an early and sometimes forgotten

moment in Wilde's career (when he was little more than a lecturer on aestheticism),

restores an important context for considering his conceptions of art and modernity. In the

years between his address to the Royal Academy and the publication of his novel (1883-

90), Wilde employed the term *decorative* in a cryptic and idiosyncratic way to denote a

form of beauty that is non-mimetic and transnational. Writing of decorative arts in the

dialogue essay "The Decay of Lying" (1889), for example, Wilde contends that the

"whole history of these arts in Europe is the record of the struggle between Orientalism,

with its frank rejection of imitation, its love of artistic convention, its dislike to the actual

representation of any object in Nature, and our own imitative spirit."[80] Here, Wilde's

somewhat specious account finds its purpose in leveraging one of many salvos against

realism. But he could just as easily use it, as he does in an 1888 review, to attack

Romantic expression as well as realist presentation.

> Wherever we find in European history a revival of decorative art, it has, I
> fancy, nearly always been due to Oriental influence and contact with
> Oriental nations. Our own keenly intellectual art has more than once been
> ready to sacrifice real decorative beauty either to imitative presentation or
> to ideal motive. . . . [which has been] its strength, and yet its weakness is
> there also. It is never with impunity that an art seeks to mirror life.[81]

As one of Wilde's favorite metaphors—life as the mirror of art—suggests, western art

circles around but never passes through "real decorative beauty." Wilde is also clear that

such beauty is not accessed in nonwestern art either. Rather, the suggestive metaphors

that he begins deploying in his Royal Academy lecture, and which recur in later writings

beautifully coloured surface, nothing more, and affects us by no suggestion stolen from philosophy, no
pathos pilfered from literature, no feeling filched from a poet, but *by its own incommunicable artistic
essence*" (in *Miscellanies*, 33; my italics).
[80] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed.
Richard Ellmann (New York: Random House, 1969), 303 (hereafter cited in text as "DL").
[81] Oscar Wilde, "A Fascinating New Book," in *Reviews*, vol. 9 of Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, ed.
Robert Ross (London: Methuen, 1908), 330.

such as "The Decay of Lying," posit decorative art as belonging neither to the east nor the west, but arising from the "contact" or "struggle" between the two. Wilde reiterates this point presumably because he feels that, as the origin point for "real decorative beauty," east-west encounters may sometimes go unnoticed, that intercultural influence has already become naturalized for English audiences and, hence, invisible.

One important avenue for this naturalization can be detected in Wilde's writings on pictures, a subject to which he devoted more energy than he did to decorative art. If pictures are "purely decorative thing[s]," as he maintained at the Royal Academy, pictures of the late nineteenth century nonetheless do a different kind of cultural work than decorative art. The coupling of painting and decorative art is one of many occasions in Wilde's oeuvre where we find him following the lead of his friend and mentor, Walter Pater, and taking Pater a step further. In *The Renaissance*, Pater demands that "painting must be before all things decorative, a thing for the eye," by which he meant that aesthetically pleasing painting reflects a blending of traditions, not boundaries between them.[82] Pater has in mind the styles of painters within a Venetian school in this essay (on Giorgione), but Wilde clearly finds purchase in imagining the decorative as the site where recognition might be challenged literally from the margins, where "new" styles from all over the globe meet the "old" traditions of Britain and Europe. In this way, Wilde maintained a distinction between the "decorative" and the "pictorial" to redress western visual artists for privileging realism over arepresentational aesthetics. Illustrations in English books, for example, "are too essentially imitative in character," and English illustrators stand to learn from "Japanese art, which is essentially decorative, [and] is

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[82] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, Vol. 1 of The Works of Walter Pater (London: Macmillan, 1900), 146. He continues in the same passage: paintings must be "more dexterously blent than the marking of its precious stone or the chance interchange of sun and shade upon it."

pictorial also."[83]   As early as his American lecture tour of 1882-83, Wilde dichotomized

eastern and western art as arepresentational and mimetic, respectively. In "The English

Renaissance of Art," the lecture he most often delivered in America, Wilde declared

> this restless modern intellectual spirit of ours is not receptive enough of
> the sensuous element of art … And this indeed is the reason of the
> influence which Eastern art is having on us in Europe, and of the
> fascination of all Japanese work. While the Western world has been
> laying on art the intolerable burden of its own intellectual doubts and the
> spiritual tragedy of its own sorrows, the East has always kept true to art's
> primary pictorial conditions.[84]

Whereas "[d]ecorative art emphasizes its material," painting "annihilates it.

Tapestry shows its threads as part of its beauty: a picture annihilates its canvas; it shows

nothing of it" ("LAS" 321). This material erasure accompanies the suppression of the

cultural conditions under which Wilde had been arguing paintings are produced. If the

purpose of pictures is to generate aesthetic appreciation for their beauty, Wilde

discouraged his Royal Academy listeners from inquiring into the cultural construction of

these effects in order to underscore the effects themselves. "A picture has no meaning

but its beauty, no message but its joy. That is the first truth about art that you must never

lose sight of. A picture is a purely decorative thing" ("LAS" 321). In making this claim,

Wilde positions himself to make another more significant, albeit more implicit, statement.

If the term *decorative* connotes for Wilde transcultural struggle *and* contact, resistance

and hybridity, Wilde claimed quite literally to see these tensions captured in

contemporary painting.

Dorian Gray's picture reflects who its subject knows himself to be even as it also

discloses to him unacknowledged, even unknown, dimensions of himself. This is

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[83] Oscar Wilde, "Some Literary Notes," in *Reviews* 392.
[84] Oscar Wilde, "The English Renaissance of Art," in *Miscellanies* 260-1.

especially true after Dorian Gray forsakes the stability of fixed identity for sensual and aesthetic experimentation in the dense, lengthy chapter chronicling chains of obsessions with things that "possess that element of strangeness that is so essential to romance" (*PDG* 109). Dorian Gray's intense devotion turns from Eastern perfumes to French jewelry to musical instruments from Tunisia, India, and South America, eventually sampling as many globally purloined objects and stories as his wealth will allow. Unmistakably, this is the point in the novel, for Wilde as much as for his critics, that Dorian Gray crosses over into the sphere of the degenerate. But this is degeneration not by Max Nordau's definition ("a morbid deviation from an original type"), but closer to another rough contemporary, the literary critic Holbrook Jackson, who declared degeneration a profound sense of ennui and enervation that grows "not out of senility . . . but out of surfeit," and more specifically out of the excesses that came with practices which "removed energy from the common life and set its eyes in the ends of the earth whether those ends were pictures, blue and white china, or colonies."[85] Looking back on the fin-de-siècle in the 1910s, Jackson captures an early sense in which national identity is altered by what happens at its fringes, that cultural production happens, as Homi Bhabha argues, at the edges or between boundaries rather than in institutionalized places or practices.[86] Though they appear arbitrary, Jackson's examples are incisive. By linking pictures with the colonies, he points to both as sources of power that emerge from the margins—whose affecting power accrues precisely because of its marginal status. Further, in white and blue china (the example that literally appears in-between pictures

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[85] Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, translated from the second German edition (New York: Appleton, 1895), 16; italics suppressed; Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen-Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, 1913 (London: Grant Richards, 1922), 65.

[86] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2005).

and colonies), Jackson lights upon the capacity of aristocratic home décor to deliver exotic art and materials to domestic English interiors, interweaving the homely with what Bhabha calls the "unhomely," and wedding the tools for civilized dining with designs beautiful for their blending of eastern and western styles.[87]

Though Wilde is a notoriously capricious thinker, reading his comments on pictures and decorative art throughout the 1880s and 1890s reveals an uncharacteristically consistent set of ideas regarding beauty and pictures. It would not be an exaggeration to say, moreover, that this theory was a significant but subtle part of Wilde's contribution to the aesthetic and cultural criticism of his day. If the point is easily missed, it is because Wilde makes that point with a form of art that has never quite found a comfortable place in literary scholarship. "It is the paradox of aestheticism," goes one such dismissal, "that Ruskin and Morris wanted to revolutionize society and all the things in it and that finally they and their followers succeeded only in establishing a new decorative style. . . . Similarly, Wilde most often shuts out the world and plays with decorative arabesques."[88] Yet to have muted the significance of decorative art for aestheticism, and Wilde in particular, is to have overlooked the force Wilde attributes to the presence of styles like arabesques in Europe, a powerful gravitational pull that demands reconsidering late Victorian England's fascination with transnational aesthetics in a world still widely imagined as partitioned by distinct national cultures.

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[87] Bhabha, 14-5.

[88] René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950, Volume 4: The Later Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 411. Wellek's discussion of Wilde here is also paradigmatic in its frustration with Wilde's "divergent views," and yet the very categories into which Wellek usefully groups these views—"panaestheticism, the autonomy of art, and a decorative formalism" (409)—have, I want to suggest, more in common than they initially seem.

In this decade Wilde persistently repeats not an analogy that likens pictures to decorative art but a homology that insists they are one in the same. It is an odd way of speaking of both pictures and decorative art, to be sure, but one which becomes more clear if we read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as that homology's terminal point. The suggestion I read Wilde to make is that pictures have begun to take on identities of their own. That is, they have come to work in a way that is easier to see in decorative art than in pictures themselves. Wilde's descriptions of the decorative always put it on the move, communicating between the margin and the center on the page and shifting between east and west in its origins.

Dorian Gray's Decorative Effects

Decorative art also has an important place in the compulsive search for the new, Wilde's contribution to the aesthetic changes that would later be called modernism and which bears the distinctive markers of desires exercised in the marketplace.[89] A crucial part of Wilde's aim in promoting aestheticism was to define and personify "beauty" according to aristocratic standards of exclusivity and expense, and because so many of the products that were exclusive and expensive in fin-de-siècle London were imported products, particularly from the Arab world and East Asia, this also meant objectifying nonwestern cultures and people. What western eyes see in such locations, explains Jeff Nunokawa in *Tame Passions of Wilde*, is "a longing for an exoticism removed from the realm of the real."[90] The styles metonymically associated with countries like China and

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[89] On Wilde's aestheticism and its uneasy ties to consumerism, see Regina Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); and Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).
[90] Jeff Nunokawa, *Tame Passions of Wilde: Styles of Manageable Desire* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 48.

Japan, *chinoiserie* and *japonisme*, were prized for packing images with seemingly endless ornate details. The many works flowing out into Europe from Japan in particular from the mid-nineteenth century onward could supply the yearning to which Nunokawa refers, but it could never slake it. On the contrary, the extravagant style of that country came to mirror the excess of commodities Japanese art brought to Europe, and "to the West in the middle of the nineteenth century, Japan had become a storehouse for English, American, and French artists and collectors."[91]

By the 1890s, enough of that storehouse had been relocated to European cities for Vivian, Wilde's mouthpiece in "The Decay of Lying," to claim "the Japanese people, as they are presented to us in art . . . are the deliberate self-conscious creation of certain individual artists" ("DL" 315). Once that style has been transported to other spaces, he continues, it imbues its new surroundings and those who inhabit them with its former location.

> And so, if you desire to see a Japanese effect, you will not behave like a tourist and go to Tokio. On the contrary, you will stay at home, and steep yourself in the work of certain Japanese artists, and then, when you have absorbed the spirit of their style, and caught their imaginative manner of vision, you will go some afternoon and sit in the Park or stroll down Piccadilly, and if you cannot see an absolutely Japanese effect there, you will not see it anywhere. ("DL" 315-6)

What becomes clear in this moment is that the most cherished experience art can offer the aesthete, an exchange of the tedium of the everyday with an indulgence in the beautiful, can also be the displacement of national and cultural identity. Moreover, that displacement occurs as those with means assert their ruling-class identities by acquiring private collections of Japanese art and décor. When the aesthete's home becomes a collections house for Asian styles, London eclipses Tokyo as the preeminent site for "an

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[91] Nunokawa, *Tame*, 48.

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absolutely Japanese effect" precisely because that effect is the product of "picture[s] by Hokusai, or Hokkei, or any of the great native painters" on display in Europe's museums ("DL" 315). For those who can afford it, the vapid mimesis that Wilde (unfairly) associates with Victorian realism ought to be replaced by the beauty of a foreign style that is best "absorbed" "at home."

Wilde provides a thicker description of this theory in the opening lines of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. As Lord Henry Wotton idles in Basil's studio, he sits in a room decorated with the accouterments of imperial and global commerce: a Japanese table, Persian saddlebags, Egyptian cigarettes. Birds fly across the English garden just outside, casting their shadows on the Indian silk curtains that hang over the studio's window. The swift movement of their shadows produces "a kind of momentary Japanese effect" for Lord Henry. If these flitting shadows bring to mind the paintings Vivian described, it is because, for Lord Henry, they "seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion" despite being images rendered in a "necessarily immobile" medium (*PDG* 5). The essence of the "Japanese effect" is the pleasure created by the illusion of movement, and enhanced by the awareness of modern mobility and transportability: of being able to bring curtains from India or cigarettes from Egypt, and of being able to sit comfortably in a London abode pretending to be in a Japanese painting.

The Japanese painting Lord Henry imagines to be at the outer edge of the studio does more than prefigure the novel's eponymous shifting, fantastical picture. Standing on an easel "in the centre of the room" (*PDG* 6), the prominently displayed portrait of Dorian Gray appears as much the product of global commercial networks and imperial reach as the furniture that surrounds it and the cigarette smoke that envelope it. The dear

décor immediately indicates that we are not in the home of a starving artist but in the privileged room of an artist of the leisure class who, quite literally, can afford to be a painter.

Clearly the foreign furniture and materials assembled in the opening tableau of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are meant to appear elegant, beautiful, and worthy of the worship of pleasure Lord Henry will soon espouse and Dorian Gray will consume. They are meant, that is, as a counter to the long lists of realist and moral attributes for which Wilde so often arraigns English art and literature. One such list, in "The Decay of Lying," is provided as evidence for the existence of "the 'genre ennuyeux,' the one form of literature that the English people seem to thoroughly enjoy" ("DL" 295-6). In suggesting an alternative catalogue of things worthy of enjoyment that are not indigenous to England but indicative of British contact with the larger world, Wilde loosens a lynchpin of traditional cultural identification. This accords with Slavoj Žižek's explanation of how enjoyment is culturally constructed and understood. Communities beyond one's own, Žižek claims, are typically imagined as having a dysfunctional relationship with enjoyment: they are too ascetic, too indulgent, or simply don't learn to enjoy things the way we do. Thus nationalism and ethnic exceptionalism spark from the resentment that emerges when ethnic communities imagine that an "other" community is denying it the pleasures of its particular shared way of life. The concept of an ethnically uniform "nation *exists* only as long as its specific *enjoyment* continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices."[92] Moving the center of that enjoyment away from "curates, lawn-parties,

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[92] Slavoj Žižek, "Enjoy Your Nation as Yourself!" *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (London and Durham: Duke University Press 1993), 202; italics in original.

domesticity, and other wearisome things" ("DL" 295) and to décor imported from India, Persia, Egypt, or Japan to London's parlors, the first lines of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* set the novel in the center of vast commercial circuits. It is a difference, in other words, of removing the emphasis from what is distinctive about England and Englishness and placing it instead on the fact that London's most wealthy obtain their symbols of status from elsewhere. Rather than being that which local national identity can define itself, enjoyment arrives from across the Channel, if not from across the world. Though a far cry from the mythologies of particularly English enjoyment (sojourns to the country house, for example), in an important respect, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* records an aspect of everyday aristocratic life that, by 1890, had been with Englanders for generations—the supplying of domestic interiors with imported goods—and renders those items as distinctly out of place as they are fashionably emplaced in several aristocratic London residences.

As a repository of respectable expensive global commodities, Basil's studio finds its counterpart in the East End opium dens Dorian Gray will later frequent. In addition to being near the docks that the British Merchant Company's commercial networks find their origins and their terminals, these seedy locales where Dorian Gray spends much of his time are also frequented by the lower-class, prostitutes, and "half-caste[s]" who smile a "crooked smile, like a Malay crease" (*PDG* 157). Though it is here that Dorian Gray furtively seeks refuge from his sins and the esteemed clubs where Basil feared his reputation was in jeopardy, it is also here where Dorian Gray is recognized by a Malaysian prostitute who tells James Vane (now a sailor in the British Merchant Company) that Dorian Gray is, in fact, the same man responsible for Sybil Vane's suicide

some years ago (*PDG* 159-60). It is tempting to read this moment as an uncomfortable moment of recognition for Dorian Gray, and perhaps Wilde as well, about the limits of performed English aristocratic identity. For Curtis Marez, it is in the opium dens that Dorian Gray comes in contact with "the 'colonial' identity Wilde had tried to erase: if the toothsome Malay sailors are Wilde's others, they also constitute so many self-portraits."[93] Yet I want to argue that at the heart of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is not an attempt to repress or "erase" colonial identity, nor any other form of identity. Rather, Wilde's novel repeatedly asserts that the most aesthetically pleasing products of fin-de-siècle England—beauty itself as Wilde and his contemporaries understood it—bear styles that emerge from transcultural contact and appear in products that can only be purchased at high, exclusive cost. Just as surely as the narcotic, self-abnegating pleasure Dorian Gray craves in the East End is the logical endpoint of the "New Hedonism" Lord Henry propounds, that decadent philosophy is itself the terminus of the long leisured tradition of the aristocratic sampling of the wealth of "new" products from around the globe that make their way to London.

If the histories of modern European metropoles are histories of imperial accumulation, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is among London's most self-referentially "modern" works because it is a novel of accumulation *par excellence*. Much of the novel concerns itself with the consequences of Dorian Gray's accumulation of sin, objects, and aesthetic and sensual experiences while making parallel glances at Britain's accumulation of colonial history and commercial global transactions. The novel is also deeply invested in questions of how visual culture provides the basis for understanding one's culture by

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[93] Curtis Marez, "The Other Addict: Reflections on Colonialism and Oscar Wilde's Opium Smoke Screen," *ELH* 64.1 (1997), 282.

reinserting images of the past into the present. Not only can accumulation never be reversed or cast aside in the novel; it constantly reappears in a changing picture. And, perhaps most disconcerting for late Victorian visual epistemologies, it suggests that if the deleterious effects of such accumulations can be seen but not visually decoded. Just as sin does not write itself across a face, as Basil believes, the objects possessed by England's most elite inhabitants are in plain sight but hide the costs, financial and otherwise, of putting them on display.

It is in this sense that the world Dorian Gray inhabits is most aptly figured as a picture and purely decorative thing. Surrounding himself with aesthetic *objets* culled from every continent, Dorian Gray's home becomes a collections house that gives form and shape to Pater's eclectic ideal. These beautiful and absorbing possessions are meant to exert powerful influences over him, not because of magical or even moral qualities, but because of their very status as beautiful and absorbing. Dorian Gray's purpose in assembling this grand collection is to create an environment not steeped in aesthetic beauty but constructed from it: a gloriously aestheticist space that may exert a benevolent influence on Dorian Gray.[94] But what Dorian Gray comes to discover is that beauty, too, has a history, and that his most treasured things, crafted by European artisans or Afghan tribesmen and collected by British tradesmen, possess other stories that neither Dorian Gray's home nor Dorian himself can contain—stories which, moreover, tarnish his purchases and lead him to acquire still more things. It is no accident that the chapter detailing the years Dorian Gray spends accumulating his collection falls halfway through the novel and midway through Dorian Gray's life's journey, a crucial point at which his

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[94] On Wilde and the tradition of regarding aesthetic spaces as exerting a palpable influence, see Douglas Mao, *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development, and Literature 1860-1960* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

feelings toward the changes in his portrait turn from the masochism of "monstrous and terrible delight" to a mix of anxiety and weariness.[95] At last it becomes clear that constructing a domestic interior out of pure aesthetic pleasure turns out to be a gargantuan effort at substituting his home for the lack of pleasure he comes to associate with that irretrievably doomed portrait. Expending his fortune to create a home that resembles a beautiful picture, Dorian Gray hopes to press Basil's shifting portrait of him further into the margins of his life and his home (he has recently relocated it to the attic from his bedroom). Yet the picture's changes nonetheless continue to close in on Dorian Gray.

The allegory is not difficult to spot. Dorian Gray comes to realize that he has been defined by his possessions at the very moment when his English aristocratic contemporaries are also adorning their homes with spoils from all over the British world. But if there is a sense in which Dorian Gray is a synecdoche for a larger cultural trend, there is also something more that is at work in Wilde's novel. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* caps a nearly decade-long argument Wilde had been mounting that contends that the things Englanders recognize as beautiful is precisely that because they also contain foreign elements. This beauty is not necessarily evidence of "struggle" or even imperial domination; transcultural contact alone suffices. It is an aesthetic rendering of a history repressed, of England's displaced history in the colonies and elsewhere returning once more to its shores and altered by its wandering. This experience of this aesthetic

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[95] In a reading of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* alongside *Venus in Furs* (1870), the novel by masochism's namesake, Leopold Sacher-Mascoh, Rita Felski argues that alternative styles of masculinity that appear effeminate or masochistic are not necessarily subversive to a dominant gender politics (*The Gender of Modernity* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995], 91-114). Similarly, I have been suggesting that Dorian Gray's weariness and decline are more complex than is allowed by readings of Dorian Gray and/or Wilde as either complicit in or subverting late Victorian cultural politics. As Wilde subtly pointed out in calling his novel "an essay on decorative art," much of the offense readers took at *The Picture of Dorian Gray* may owe to its celebration of late Victorian material culture.

encounter might have been figured in a number of ways, but for Wilde its best emblem is in pictures, things that also circulate and in so doing acquire their own meanings that are appended to the identities they purport to display.

To return, then, to Basil's reunion with the picture of Dorian Gray he had painted so long ago, the signs of recognition are as likely to arrive with "horror," "disgust," and "marvellous beauty" all at once (*PDG* 130). Though Basil does not survive to disentangle these simultaneous responses, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* provides several moments at which other characters or readers may have similar feelings. As we have seen, the novel's opening scene, Dorian Gray's acquisition of imported goods, and his own face all provide moments in which the familiar has also pointed beyond itself, as did Wilde's dandyism and his explanation of pictures and the decorative to students at the Royal Academy. But above all is the eponymous figure of Wilde's only novel, the picture of Dorian Gray itself, and it is in the picture where the fixed and familiar should be most readily found and accessed, but which Dorian Gray and Basil Hallward find changed. The frustration that leads Dorian to destroy the picture, and himself, is a frustration we have also seen in Wilde's rearguard audiences and caricaturists: the frustration of wanting to fix an image but not being able to do so. And that is perhaps the grandest statement Wilde makes about recognition: once something is be established, demarcated, and familiarized, it must be reassessed with each encounter because, like Dorian Gray's picture, there is no guarantee that it does not change in the time between.

Chapter 4
Characterizing Photography: Recognition, Type, and Authenticity in Henry James

"[A]rt is nothing if not exemplary."

—Henry James, Preface to *The Golden Bowl*[96]

Among the eminently quotable statements found in James's Preface to *The Golden Bowl* (1909), this innocuous comment will not, I trust, be among the better known. It seems a disappointing, forgettable line, perhaps even a clichéd throwaway unworthy of the Master, particularly in this revered document—the last preface James wrote for Scribner's 1909 New York Edition and the only preface that houses his direct sentiments on both photography and the process of revision.

Yet it is a revealing statement. It comes at the end of a preface that has concerned itself all along with the status of art and the question of how to "view" its examples. Reflecting on revising his fiction for the New York Edition and writing new prefaces for it, James writes that he has found himself concerned with the question of negotiating the universal and the singular. "I have in other words constantly inclined to the idea of the particular attaching case *plus* some near individual view of it" (*GB* v-vi; James's italics). James imagines the view he takes as revisionist as akin to "an imagined observer's, a projected, charmed painter's or poet's" (*GB* vi). However, as he describes it, this view seems to belong to another imagined observer, the photographer. His prefaces "repeatedly" explain "my preference . . . for 'seeing my story'" through the eyes of "some more or less detached . . . though thoroughly interested and intelligent, witness or reporter," a figure James regards as "a convenient substitute or apologist for the creative

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[96] Henry James, Preface to *The Golden Bowl*, in The New York Edition of Henry James, vol. 23 (New York: Scribner, 1909), xxv (hereafter cited in text as *GB*).

power otherwise so veiled and disembodied" (*GB* v). The implicit similarity between revision and photographing betrayed by James's summary of his prefaces supplies further evidence for a claim critics have recently been making about James: that he writes from within a more complex relation to photography than he professes.[97] But it is also a relationship, I would add, that borrows from the language of photography precisely because it allows James to discuss his fiction as exploring the relationship between the general and the example, "the particular attaching case" and the "near individual view of it."

As part of the preparations James was making for the New York Edition of his work, he sent express instructions to Alvin Langdon Coburn (in 1906) as to how he wanted the photographs for the edition to be taken. James hoped that a Coburn frontispiece might be valuable in its own right *and* in relation to the text, "might, by a latent virtue in it, speak of its connection with something in the book, and yet at the same time speak enough for its odd or interesting self" (*GB* xi), and in bringing out an edition that could feature Coburn's photographs alongside James's tales, James brought his readers what he felt was a new means of appreciating how his characters negotiate the general and specific. In his letters to Coburn, James is clear that he wanted the

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[97] James's reservations about photography are well known, and we need only recall that because "[t]he essence of any representational work is of course to bristle with images," he remained deeply skeptical of including pictures of any kind in literary works, for the implication is that they "[relieve] responsible prose of the duty of being, while placed before us, good enough, interesting enough, and, if the question be of picture, pictorial enough, above all *in itself*" (*GB* ix-x; James's italics). Ralph Bogardus claimed (in *Pictures and Texts: Henry James, A. L. Coburn, and New Ways of Seeing in Literary Culture* [Ann Arbor: UMI, 1984]) that James's bristling at photography came to an end when he visited an exhibit of Alvin Langdon Coburn's photographs in early 1906, though he maintained some reservations about the artistic merit of the mechanical medium nonetheless, the evidence for which can be found in James's rhetoric of competition and contest between photography and literature in the Preface to *The Golden Bowl*.   More recently, critics have found James willingly affiliating himself with photography, despite this avowed distaste. See Ira B. Nadel, "Visual Culture: The Photo Frontispiece to the New York Edition," in *Henry James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship*, ed. David McWhirter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) 90-108; Stuart Burrows, "Stereotyping Henry James," *Henry James Review* 23.3 (2002): 255-64; and Wendy Graham, "Pictures for Texts," *Henry James Review* 24 (2003): 1-26.

photographs to serves as examples—"types," James calls them—that could augment his

stories. Charging Coburn to search for "objects that won't be hackneyed and

commonplace and panoramic," James instructs Coburn to look instead for "some view,

rightly arrived at" and "sufficiently bedimmed and refined and glorified," and "especially

not choosing the pompous and obvious things that one everywhere sees photos of":

nothing "merely . . . familiar," please.[98] Though there are particular places he wishes

Coburn to see, James is adamant that these locales will be suggestive as a group. Travel

through these London streets and those Parisian *arrondissements*, he declares, and "once

you get the Type into your head, you will easily recognise the specimens."[99] To

complete the task, as James would later explain in *The Golden Bowl* Preface, James

himself had traveled with Coburn ("my fellow searcher") to do the work James described

as "not to 'create' but simply to recognise—recognise, that is, with the last fineness" (*GB*

xii). If the author and his photographer did not always find "what we were looking for,"

James was nonetheless heartened by another discovery: "that the looking itself so often

flooded with light the question of what a 'subject,' what 'character,' what a saving sense

of things, is and isn't" (*GB* xi).

Subjects, characters, and a sense of things: familiar terms that thrive on the

interplay between definition and exception. James himself declines on this occasion to

define what a subject or character is, withholding those definitions in favor of letting

examples of them in his fiction stand on their own. In so doing, he sides with his

contemporaries here, as when Wilde declares that art aspires not to delimit beauty but to

present it, or, to take a later example and from the opposite direction, when the judge said

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[98] *Henry James Letters*, ed. Leon Edel, 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap, 1974-1984), IV:
417, 428; James's italics.
[99] *Letters*, IV: 417.

he cannot define pornography but he knows it when he sees it.[100] And this is precisely

the point. A sense of subjects, characters, and so much else in modernist aesthetics relies

heavily on familiarity with examples, or, to use James's term once more, a familiarity

with types.

   To say it again: art is exemplary—or, to conflate James with another, so much

depends on the example in art. In the context I have just limned, James's phrase might be

read as asserting that art operates by the logic of the example that the late-nineteenth-

century profusion of photography helped install—a logic which relies on a paradox.

When taken together, examples express similarities that can seem their reigning quality;

when taken out of the chain, however, each example seems to radiate differences that

defy its category. Viewers negotiate this paradox, as James so precisely puts it, by

learning "to recognise with the last fineness" (*GB* xii). Further, if photography is the

technology that allows James "not to 'create' but simply to recognise," this raises

questions for how does such an education comes about? How does photography teach us

to recognize character and type? Correspondingly, how are the ways in which we speak

of character and type infused with the rhetoric of photographs? Though we are

accustomed to thinking of the latter half of the twentieth century and the digital age as the

society of the spectacle, James's preface attests that the question was just as relevant after

the sudden swell of photographic images of the 1850s and 1860s. To be sure, recognition

is, for James, a complex process whose first step is to see, and it is in seeing and being

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[100] "I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that
shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see
it, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that" (Justice Potter Stewart, Concurring Opinion,
Jacobellis v. Ohio, 378 U.S. 184 ([1964]).

seen that James's characters come to acquire both their subjectivity and their sense of things.

There are many Jamesian places we might go to in order to pursue these questions—much too many for the space I have here. "All of James's work, it could be shown," writes J. Hillis Miller, "turns on the undecidable question (which nevertheless urgently needs deciding) of whether the type or idea preexists its representation in picture or word, or is present in something the representation copies, or is generated by the representation."[101] Let us turn, then, to a short and familiar work that distills this question while also offering a better vocabulary than one grounded in representation. "The Real Thing" (1892), James's widely anthologized short story about an illustrator and his down-and-out models who seem to be types precisely because they are "the real thing," will do. The difficulty of writing about "The Real Thing" as well as the question of example in James's work is not just that the ground is well-worn, but that its many travelers have found these matters, to mix my metaphor, rather groundless for precisely the reasons Miller mentions. Which comes first: the type or that which exemplifies it? But to approach "The Real Thing" as a tale James embeds in the representational economy of photography, as I will be doing here, frees us from the undecidability of this question. Far from separating the image from the real, photography, as Nancy Armstrong explains, began cementing the notion that images are reality as early as the 1850s.[102] Keeping that in mind allows this chapter to offer a case for adding the concept of recognition to our historicized accounts of the problems photography posed for character,

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[101] J. Hillis Miller, "The 'Grafted' Image: James on Illustration," *Henry James's New York Edition*, ed. McWhirter, 141.
[102] Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3-4 (hereafter cited in text as *FAP*).

type, and authenticity at the turn of the twentieth century. Doing so will, I believe, help

navigate around the undecidability found in the representational vocabulary of

authenticity that often asks us to side with reality or imitation, original or copy,

authenticity or inauthenticity.

In making my case I am drawing from Susan Griffin's claim that "the interactive,

creative process of Jamesian perception provides an alternative model for a literary

historicism, one that recognizes James as both written by, *and* writing, history." If James

tropes the recognition of historical moment and the process of history as perceptive, it is

surely visual, for "his descriptions of visual interplay between self and environment, we

can trace the making of these historical identities." [103] In another foundational study,

"The Jamesian Lie," Leo Bersani remarked that the ability to use sight as a tool of critical

judgment is what James's characters cherish most—though often to their detriment—and

yet sight is what most allows James to usher forth their character, particularly where

recognition is involved.[104] Many critics since have followed Griffin's and Bersani's lead

in tracing how vision operates in James's texts, most recently by reading James's

attention to visuality as a tool for encoding or decoding (depending on how it is used)

national or ethnic identity.[105] But I want to return to the sense of recognizing identity has

historically constructed that Griffin and Bersani suggest. In particular, I want to claim

that photography is, for James, the medium that frames how identities are recognized. To

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[103] Susan M. Griffin, *The Historical Eye: The Texture of the Visual in Late James* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 5.

[104] "'I see. I see.' Apparently nothing is more stimulating, more exhilarating for James's characters than that act of recognition which they constantly and somewhat breathlessly confirm," Bersani writes. See Leo Bersani, "The Jamesian Lie," in *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1976), 133.

[105] See Kendall Johnson, *Henry James and the Visual*. Similarly, Sara Blair points us to observational practices of ethnography as James's source for type (*Henry James and the Writing of Race and Nation* [Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 26).

say this is also to make a claim for the historical construction of recognition itself.

Pursuing the procedures of recognition will allow this chapter to contribute to my project

by moving toward a more refined notion of what we mean when we speak of types and

authenticity in modernity and modern fiction alike.

The Jamesian Eye

It is difficult to exaggerate James's attention to vision, or the attention readers

have lent to James's descriptions of vision. Critics since James's contemporaries have

understood sight as a burden James and his characters carry. The contributors to the

"Henry James Number" of the *Little Review* (August 1918), which included T. S. Eliot,

Ezra Pound, and A. R. Orage, repeatedly describe James's fiction as visual ("definitively

visual," Eliot claimed) in a way that created difficulties for James or his characters. Ethel

Coburn Mayne describes in that issue a photograph of the young James that appeared on

the cover of *A Small Boy and Others* (1913; Fig. 3.1) as a figure for James's own visual-

psychological investments:

> you catch already the apprehension, humorous and mournful, of all that he
> could 'see.' I never beheld, for my part, any creature who struck me as to
> his degree assailed by the perceptions. The grief, heavy-lidded eyes, upon
> my word were more alarmed than piercing. They *were* piercing, but it was
> as if he wished they weren't, for dear life's sake.[106]

If Mayne confirms James's "piercing" powers of sight as a burden he had to shoulder

from an early age, she also writes of the photograph of the young James as the medium

capable of conveying that sense. Thus when Mayne writes of "beh[o]ld[ing]" the boy

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[106] "Henry James Number," special edition of the *Little Review* (August 1918), 3. The quotation from Eliot
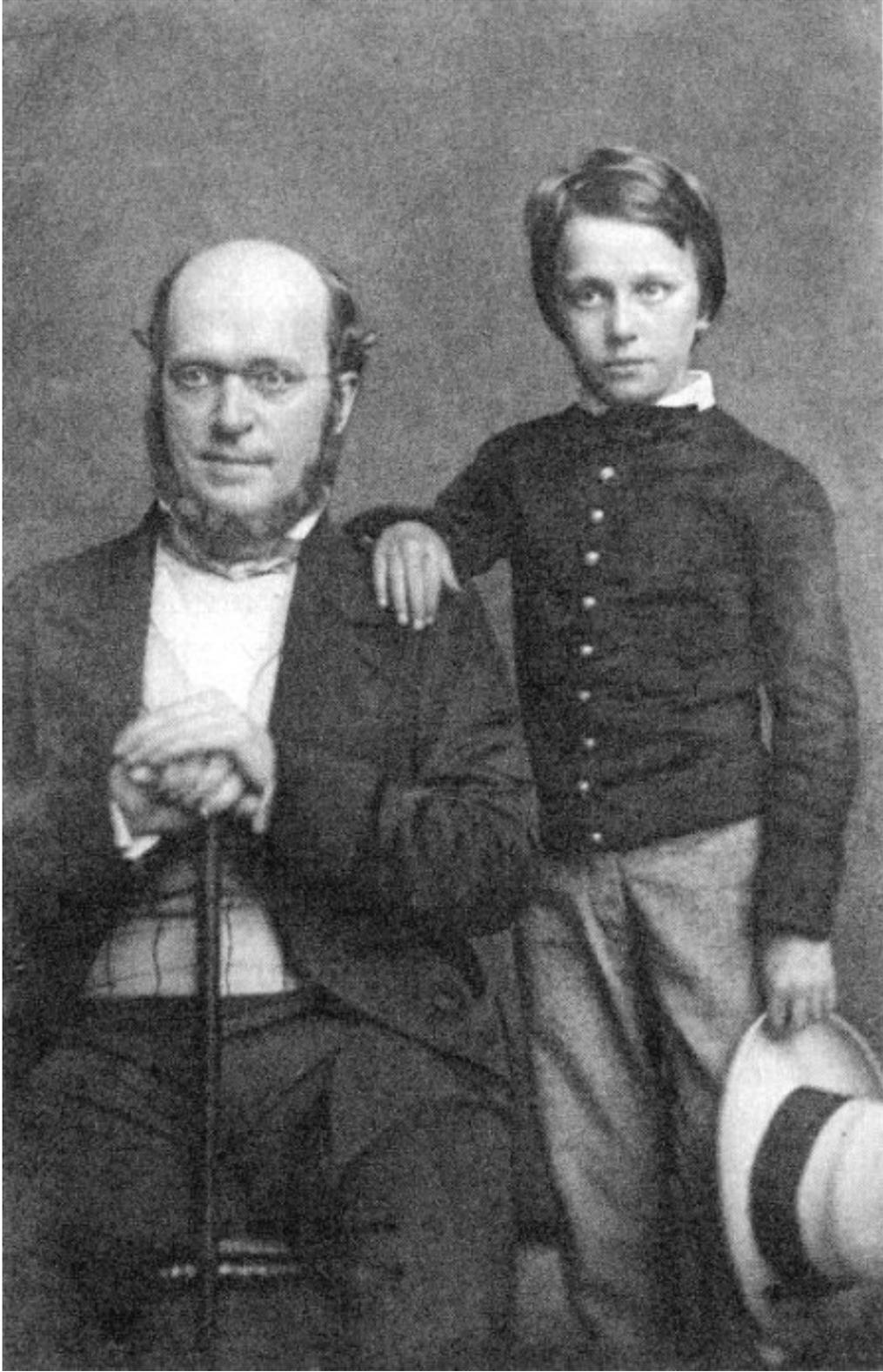appears on p. 50.

Figure 3.1. Frontispiece to Henry James's *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), daguerreotype of James with his father, Henry James, Sr., by Matthew Brady, 1854.

"assailed by the perceptions" who would become the author, she both accedes to and defies James's conception of photography. She defies it by acknowledging photography to be a medium that can convey depth with surface, but she accedes to James's sense that photographs can offer new forms of recognition.

As James suggests in the Preface to *The Golden Bowl*, recognition is a critical process for negotiating singularities from general contexts, including character from type. While James and his characters often affirm the necessity of type, what will make "The Real Thing" invaluable to our discussion is that its narrator acknowledges the relationship between type and character to be a mutually constitutive one. This is unusual in James. Though the term "type" appears throughout his fiction and nonfiction alike, it is sometimes discussed but more often taken for granted. Absent throughout "The Special Type" (1900), for instance, is any discussion of what type is.[107] James yields more ground when writing of visual artists.[108] Painters in James's fiction are often "much interested in types,"[109] and the term is a regular feature of James's own art criticism of the 1880s and 1890s, where James praises artists who, like John Singer Sargent, could find "the types which strike us as made for portraiture (which is by no means the way of all)."[110] More disturbing is when James has national or ethnic stereotypes in mind, as when he concludes from Sargent's treatment of French models that the painter "has studied the physiognomy of this nation so attentively" that the features of French faces

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[107] Henry James, "The Special Type," *Complete Stories 1898-1910*, ed. Denis Donoghue (New York: Library of America, 1996), 287-305.

[108] There are exceptions. James gives readers every reason to believe that when the painter in James's tale "The Liar" (1888; in The New York Edition, XII: 311-88) "bring[s] everything out" in a portrait meant to show the "inner man" of the subterfuging Colonel Capadose (360), he does in fact successfully render his subject the type referred to in the story's title.

[109] Henry James, "The Beldonald Holbein," 1901, in The New York Edition of Henry James, vol. XVIII, 384.

[110] Henry James, "John S. Sargent," 1887, *The Painter's Eye*, ed. John L. Sweeney (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 218.

cling to portraits "represent[ing] other types."[111] James's complex relationship with stereotypes, which others have thoughtfully explored and demonstrated that James's compositions, particularly where issues of visual recognition are involved, appropriate the logic of racial, ethnic, and national stereotyping.[112] If such scholarship means we take for granted that James borrowed from the logic of stereotype, the question remains how he understood the depth and richness associated with character to emerge from flatness and inauthenticity of type, and—perhaps more pertinently—what kind of response such writing demands from readers today.

In an 1882 gallery review James exalted Sir Hubert von Herkomer's portrait of Archibald Forbes, subtitled *War Correspondent* (Fig. 3.2), as "one of those fine pictures which, besides representing an individual, represent a type—raise the individual to the significance of type. This is the roving Englishman, the man of energy and adventure, who has left his solid footprint in every corner of the globe, and has brought back from his furthest peregrinations a fund of good spirits and good stories."[113] The individual and the exemplar are not opposed to one another here. Rather, James upholds a relationship by which character and type bolster one another, and by extension he presents the process of figuring character as a dialectic with the type. If type is of higher "significance" over and above "the individual," it is because the category allows a picture of a singular individual to be immediately recognizable as a type ("the roving Englishman," in this case) and as somehow departing from the generic template.

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[111] James, "Sargent," 225.

[112] On James and stereotypes, see Blair, *Writing*; Burrows, "Stereotyping"; and Johnson, *Visual*.

[113] Henry James, "London Pictures," *The Painter's Eye*, ed. John L. Sweeney (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 214.
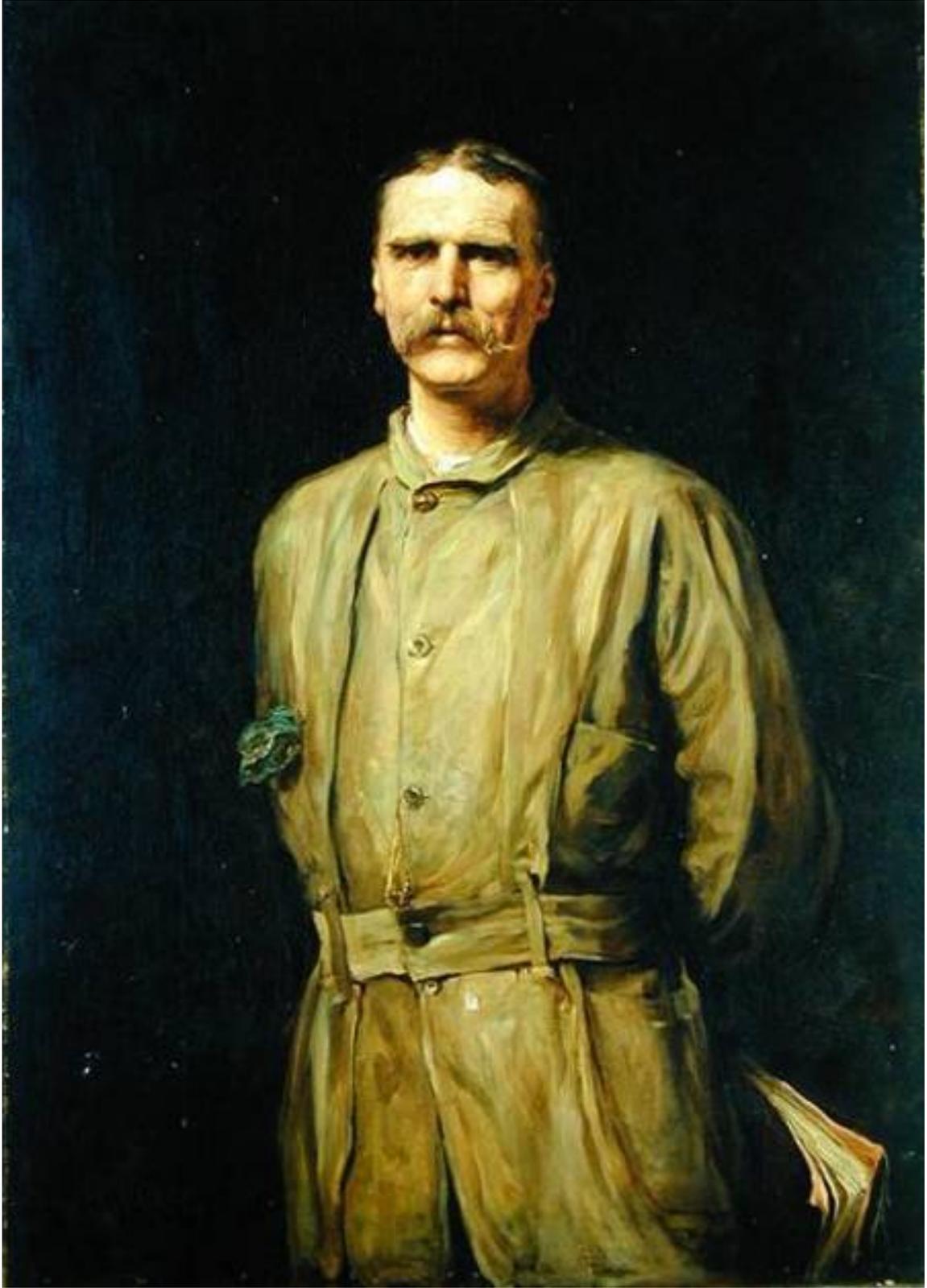
Figure 3.2. *Portrait of Archibald Forbes, War Correspondent* by Sir Hubert von Herkomer, 1881.

Though he speaks of a painting here, the image to which James refers has no indicate of which "corner of the globe" its subject stands, leaving only the khakis and posture to suggest "war correspondent." The other signs to which James refers must be inferred from elsewhere. By the 1880s, in fact, it was not painters but photographers who were following "roving Englishm[e]n" on their "furthest peregrinations" to capture their images. A large segment of the popular photography of the period circulating in London—where, in 1882, James resides and writes this gallery review—dedicated itself either to pursuing English explorers in Africa, China, and the Indian subcontinent, or to following in their "footprint[s]."[114]

Further, just as James praises Herkomer's painting of the roving Englishman for its display in a London gallery, so, too, did many of the photographers who chronicled explorers and cultures abroad find work in helping chronicle London's more remote corners. As we saw in Chapter 1, a number of English photographers chronicled London, some of whom, like John Tompson, did so after making photographic expeditions all over the world. Tompson's *Illustrations of China and Its People* appeared in 1874, four years before his images of *Street Life in London*, pictures that individuals while also portraying a general sense of London's impoverished denizens. It seems quite likely that James had a similar photographic logic of type in mind when he affirms, in the Preface to *The Golden Bowl*, photography's "best consort" to be the "hunt for a series of

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[114] On Victorian photography that traveled to the colonies and beyond, see Peter Osborne, *Traveling Light: Photography, Travel, and Visual Culture* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000); and James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

reproducible subjects," such as the hunt on which he and Coburn went as they scoured

"certain inanimate characteristics of London streets" for frontispieces (xi).

But what does it mean to be able to capture characteristics in a photograph? Does

this procedure change when "the hunt" goes from being for "inanimate characteristics" to

searching for people? These questions point us to the authenticity, that concept that "The

Real Thing" manages at once to address and elude.

Picturing the Monarchs

As both a way of being and a way of explaining connections between people and

the material culture that surrounds them, questions about the authenticity of the subject

have been raised since the deep holds of capitalist economies placed on Anglo-European

social life in the nineteenth century. Though authenticity does not always mean the same

thing for everyone, a few broad contours hold for many. Classically, authenticity is

opposed to imitation; it is a way of being that asserts the singularity of the individual, of

expressing something unique and intrinsic to her alone. Authenticity in this sense is

haunted by a Romantic notion of the self challenged by the market and machine forces of

the modernist era.[115] It was during the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth

century, Orvell claims, that being authentic began to take on the valence of recovering

something that had been lost in the connections between people and the things they

bought or could buy. The impulse toward the authentic was a move away from "a culture

of types, stylizations, of round generalities" and toward "the creation of more 'authentic'

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[115] In *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) and *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), Lionel Trilling and Charles Taylor, respectively, frequently refer to Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a foundational figure for their conceptions of authenticity.

works that were themselves real things."[116] There is an ethical dimension to authenticity

as well, which Charles Taylor summarizes like this: "There is a certain way of being

human that is *my* way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation

of anyone else's. But this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I

miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for *me*."[117] If the primary task of

western subjects since antiquity has been to articulate itself for itself and everyone else,

Lionel Trilling, Orvell and Taylor suggest that task takes on greater sharpness in the

modern era as the vocabulary of authenticity emerges to distinguish someone who acts

according to a will or desire that emerges from deep within from someone who flatly,

uninterestingly, and perhaps disingenuously imitates others.

What makes "The Real Thing" particularly relevant to the topic of modernist

authenticity is that James destabilizes this very premise. The trouble readers of "The

Real Thing" face immediately is that the dichotomy between authenticity and imitation is

not taken for granted: "real" refers in the story both to things that seem to be true

expressions of the self *and* to imitations of others. To complicate matters further, the

language of character and type in "The Real Thing" holds to the dichotomy while the

story's logic does not. The narrator of "The Real Thing" seems at first to express a

concern for type in a well-known passage.

> I wanted to characterize closely, and the thing in the world I most hated
> was the danger of being ridden by a type. I had quarreled with some of
> my friends about it—I had parted company with them for maintaining that
> one *had* to be, and that if the type was beautiful (witness Raphael and
> Leonardo), the servitude was only a gain. I was neither Leonardo or
> Raphael; I might only be a presumptuous searcher, but I held that
> everything was to be sacrificed sooner than character. When they averred

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[116] Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), xv.
[117] Taylor, *Ethics*, 28-9; Taylor's italics.

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that the haunting type in question could easily *be* character, I retorted, perhaps superficially: "Whose? It couldn't be everybody's—it might end in being nobody's."[118]

Here, this narrator seems to insist that type does harm, that it inflicts the violence of flattening or distorting character. Yet there is clearly something more at work as James's narrator utters these words amid a complaint about the futility of using the Monarchs as models for his illustrations. Mrs. Monarch, who seemed from the beginning to look "singularly like a bad illustration ("RT" 312), now appears "insurmountably stiff" with "no variety of expression," of no use to this artist who "adored variety and range" ("RT" 326, 327). "The case was worse with the Major—nothing I could do would keep *him* down" ("RT" 327). As Stuart Burrows points out, the artist reads the Monarchs' stiffness as embodying a stereotypical aristocratic Englishness, a mode of self-presentation that seems too flat and uninteresting to bother representing.[119] The long passage above that seems to suggest an antimony between character and type actually points to a dynamic relationship between them. Eager to present themselves as the aristocrats they can no longer claim to be, the Monarchs show no sign of possessing a character noticeably different from the type with which they want to associate themselves. The narrator's task is to illustrate a limited, deluxe edition of a revered English novel; to do this, he must "secur[e] the best types," not the types the Monarchs present themselves as ("RT" 319).

The narrator also associates the Monarchs' inflexible appearance with something else. "I could see she had been photographed often, but somehow the very habit that made her good for that purpose unfitted her for mine. . . . [D]o what I would with it my drawing looked like a photograph or a copy of a photograph" ("RT" 326). Most readings

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[118] Henry James, "The Real Thing," in *The New York Edition of Henry James*, vol. 18 (New York: Scribner, 1909), 327 (hereafter cited in text as "RT").
[119] Burrows, "Stereotyping," 260.

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of "The Real Thing" frame the narrator's conflict in terms of representation. Revising a reading popularized by F. O. Matthiessen, Susan Bazargan argues that James's tale is not about an opposition between professional and amateur but about how "ideology [is] realized in the practice of representation itself."[120] The presence of photography in "The Real Thing" supplies further evidence for the Monarchs status as subjects caught in a system of identity formation over which they have no control because their status as photographed subjects renders them as "inauthentic" as photography itself.[121] In approaching this story from another angle, I want to begin by retracing a potential problem for authenticity that photography poses in "The Real Thing," but this will turn out not to be a problem of representation but one of recognition. If it is the case, as Thomas Otten argues, "that painting *makes* its viewers, that viewing painting is a physically intimate, almost immediate process that shapes and forms and frames the body of the viewing subject,"[122] I want to suggest that other mediated images, including photographs, are no less capable of participating in the process of creating subjectivity.

If the problem of authenticity is present in scores of James's tales, not least of which in "The Real Thing," as many have suggested or implied, authenticity in these tales is often pursued by a nuanced notion of recognition. In "The Real Thing" is a story told by a narrator whose professional aspirations turn on his ability to recognize others. James's narrator is an illustrator whose "'illustrations' were my pot-boilers," a means of

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[120] Susan Bazargan, "Representation and Ideology in 'The Real Thing,'" *Henry James Review* 12.2 (1991), 134.

[121] Julie Grossman, "'It's the Real Thing': Henry James, Photography, and *The Golden Bowl*," *Henry James Review* 15 (1994): 309-328. For George Monteiro, the Monarchs are James's attempt to do precisely what others have found photography to do, "to define a social type of his time: the down-at-the-heels British 'gentlefolk' without the skill it takes to *earn* a living." See Monteiro, "Realization in Henry James' 'The Real Thing,'" *American Literary Realism* 36.1 (2003), 41-2; original emphasis.

[122] Thomas J. Otten, "Slashing Henry James (On Painting and Political Economy, Circa 1900)," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 13.2 (2000), 295; original emphasis.

income until he can earn enough as a portrait artist to pursue that career full-time ("RT" 310). Indeed, the narrator fancies himself quite adept at recognizing even the most subtle gestures. When the Italian model-to-be Oronte arrives at his studio, the narrator hears "a knock which I immediately recognised as the subdued appeal of a model out of work" ("RT" 331). Yet what propels the narrative of the "The Real Thing" is the artist's inability to recognize the other principal characters of the story. The Monarchs are an aristocratic couple whose fortune has dwindled in recent months, so much so that they, too, have turned up at the artist's door hoping to be hired as models. The famous opening lines of "The Real Thing" constitute a scene that prefigures the story's recurrent themes of misrecognition.[123]

> When the porter's wife, who used to answer the house-bell, announced 'A gentleman and a lady, sir,' I had, as I often had in those days—the wish being father to the thought—an immediate vision of sitters. And sitters my visitors in this case proved to be; but not in the sense I should have preferred. There was nothing at first however to indicate that they mightn't have come for a portrait. ("RT" 307)

When the embarrassed couple reveal their intention to be hired as models for illustration, the narrator registers his disappointment of not being able to portray them, "for in the pictorial sense I had immediately *seen* them. I had seized their type—I had already settled what I would do with it. Something that wouldn't absolutely have please them, I afterwards reflected" ("RT" 310). The narrator's friend, a fellow artist, also fails to size up the Monarchs when he sees them as bourgeois, or perhaps *nouveau riche*: "they were a compendium of everything he most objected to in the social system of his country. Such people as that, all convention and patent leather, with ejaculations that stopped conversation, had no business in the studio" ("RT" 340). "I don't know," the friend

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[123] The narrator's inability to recognize the Monarchs recurs, for example, each time they appear at his door, each time "they always reminded me of" "country-callers" (341).

bristles; "I don't like your types" ("RT" 338). The failure of recognizing the Monarchs

owes to the narrator's friend seeking to recognize the Monarchs by the social type they

present rather than the rather atypical one they occupy: "atypical" not because theirs was

an uncommon situation, but because it was a type that had no name (who speaks of the

nouveau pauvre?). That he wants to, or at any rate believes he can, identify them with

their social standing suggests a way of seeing well outmoded by the end of the nineteenth

century.

Yet the consumerism that lies beneath the narrator's friend's judgment is on point.

As the narrator continues his tale, it becomes clear that an uncanny desire animates this

pair, and much of James's short story is spent describing how familiar and yet unfamiliar

this desire is. At first, he tries to put his finger on it by imagining how the Monarchs

must have lived before they had lost their capital. "I could see the sunny drawing-rooms,

sprinkled with periodicals she didn't read . . . I could see the wet shrubberies in which she

had walked . . . I could see the rich covers the Major had helped shoot and the wonderful

garments in which, late at night, he repaired to the smoking-room to talk about them,"

and so forth ("RT" 316). The narrator envisions the smallest but most telling details

about them: how they tipped, how fastidiously they dressed, "how even in a dull house

they could have been counted on for the joy of life" ("RT" 317). "It was odd how

quickly I was sure of everything that concerned them," the narrator reports before

plunging into the two lengthy paragraphs of these perfectly plausible-sounding

speculations about the Monarchs' private lives in better times ("RT" 316). "But

somehow," he continues, "with all their perfections I didn't easily believe in them." ("RT"

317).

The myriad details about the Monarchs that the narrator is able to spin seem to source from their from their appearances, conversations, and small gestures. "It was in their faces, the blankness, the deep intellectual repose of the twenty years of country-house visiting that had given them pleasant intonations" ("RT" 316). But these things cannot be read in their faces, of course, and in the end the narrator knows he is only connecting plausible details of *an* aristocratic life with *these* former aristocrats, using their preferences and tastes to "divine" what their favorite possessions were, how and where they were kept in the Monarchs' estate. The story he imagines seems "sure," but this is a story created by an artist. The Monarchs themselves have not told it and do not know how to, at least not in the way a professional would. The tragedy of the story is in their clumsy grasping at explaining themselves. Each time they speak they can't help but evoke the desperation of their new and unfitting financial straits rather than the depth of their humanity, which the narrator does with the quick and apparently effortless ease of the studied artist.

I want to suggest that the narrator invents this background as part of his much professed "preference for the represented subject over the real one," a preference that can be traced the fact that he wants to uphold the crafts of representation (storytelling, painting) over the instrumental, unapprenticed acts of representation (stereotype, photography) ("RT" 317). This is the straightforward view of representation and authenticity so often repeated in James studies. It is the preference for "things that appeared; then one was sure. Whether they *were* or not was a subordinate and almost always profitless question" ("RT" 317-8).

This interpretation follows the narrator in not paying nearly enough attention to the Monarchs, for whom profit is hard to come by and whose knock upon the artist's door has much greater purpose than he realizes. Caught up in the mix-up of thinking that they are portrait sitters when in fact they are not, the artist never puts together the story with which he provides his readers piecemeal. The Monarchs came to this illustrator at this time because they were recommended by his friend, a landscape painter who "had told them of the projected *édition de luxe* . . . planned by a publisher of taste" that the narrator has recently been commissioned to complete. "Major and Mrs. Monarch confessed to me they had hoped I might be able to work *them* into my branch of the enterprise" ("RT" 318). As we have seen, using the Monarchs as models proves a spectacular failure, but the equally significant point is that while the narrator complains of that they seem too much like photographs to be illustrated, the Monarchs spend the rest of the story trying not just to be working models but to be illustrated in this deluxe edition. Major Monarch's final complaint, the one that sets the narrator over the edge ("I can't be ruined for *you!*") is using the Italian Oronte to illustrate "an English gentleman" ("RT" 342) for an edition whose illustrations were intended to be an "homage of English art to one of the most independent representatives of English letters" ("RT" 318).

An important clue to this reading emerges as the Monarchs explain an important part of their past, and as the narrator explains the demands illustration exacts on its models.

> "Of course I should want a certain amount of expression," I
rejoined.
> "Of *course!*"—and I had never heard such unanimity.
> "And then I suppose you know that you'll get awfully tired."
> "Oh we *never* get tired!" they eagerly cried.
> "Have you had any kind of practice?"

They hesitated—they looked at each other. "We've been photographed—*immensely*," said Mrs. Monarch.

"She means the fellows have asked us themselves," added the Major.

"I see—because you're so good-looking."

"I don't know what they thought, but they were always after us."

"We always got our photographs for nothing," smiled Mrs. Monarch.

"We might have brought some, my dear," her husband remarked.

"I'm not sure we have any left. We've given quantities away," she explained to me.

"With our autographs and that sort of thing," said the Major.

"Are they to be got in the shops?" I enquired as harmless as peasantry.

"Oh yes, *hers*—they used to be."

"Not now," said Mrs. Monarch with her eyes on the floor. ("RT" 314-5; James's italics)

This passage is significant in part because, just as James spoke of his creative process as beginning with a *donnée*, this narrator's story-within-James's-story owes its germ to this moment. Thus begins the narrator's speculation about the pair: "I could fancy the 'sort of thing' they put on the presentation copies of their photographs, and I was sure they wrote a beautiful hand" ("RT" 316). But there is something of still greater importance. What should not go overlooked here is the fact that the Monarchs have been associated not just with photography in general but with photographs of themselves that bear their signatures, images that now summon the loss of capital and social standing. But a deeper dimension to this loss that appears when we read the Monarchs' history with photography as a narrative of entropy. The energy that begins this passage ("Oh we *never* get tired!") and which at first is channeled through the demand of their images in the new medium ("they were always after us") quickly abates, concluding with the melancholy of rejection ("they used to be;" "Not now"). To the Monarchs these pictures, at once photographs and autographs, can still seem tidy, autonomous and autoreflexive emblems of themselves.

The collapse of self-image with photographic image is enlivening because the photographs seem to give form to the intrinsic value of their identity—that is, until they must at last recall that their photographs carry market, not intrinsic, value.

The narrator misreads the lesson the Monarchs take from this, and, although it is a lesson drawn directly from modernism's aestheticist roots, it is a lesson many readers of "The Real Thing" also misrecognize. Because the Monarchs associate themselves with mass culture's favorite reproducible technology, the narrator confidently sees them as right for advertisements. But if the Monarchs have little desire to be in advertisements, it is only partly to do with their embarrassing social standing. What the Monarchs want is to ratify their personal identities by duplicate the image of their bodies in expensive objects. Further, they desire to be rendered not just any object but new, unsullied commodities—something like their own things, for one of the hallmarks of the Monarchs (this statement literally refers to their calling cards) is, even in poverty, "their appurtenances were all of the freshest" ("RT" 311). This is a desire that the Monarchs have great trouble articulating, and which even now we would not begin to capture with understandings of authenticity as opposed to imitation. From one side, it is easy to imagine someone identifying with an object, and our current critical vocabulary has ways of working through relationships between people and the things they cherish whether that relationship emerges from repression, powerful memories, or a sense of playfulness. Yet the Monarchs do not identify with things they themselves enjoy, or with things that evoke personal memories, or with talismans that carry special power, or fetishes that give shape to their desires. Nor could their desire be called commodity fetishism, for they do not

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pine for new things. What the Monarchs want more than anything is *to be* new,

expensive images that help compose a cherished cultural narrative that is not their own.

The Monarchs' desire to become mediated images is the desire to reverse the

exhausting metonymical game of keeping up the freshest things for the best appearances

that makes them easily mistakable for the bourgeoisie, the wealthy, or as celebrities. No

longer able to seize the means for keeping up with expensive, limited things which will,

in the end, be parted from them anyway, the Monarchs now want to become cherished

commodities of the market—things that can circulate from one place to another, granting

the appearance of wealth and dignity the all those hands that will come to possess and

exchange them.

Caught at that liminal moment of the fin-de-siècle, the Monarchs seem to embody

the desires of both Victorian and modernist fiction. Their desire to be the illustrations of

the deluxe, limited edition of a highbrow novel seems to wed the dual desire to take

possession of and be possessed by commodities that Jeff Nunokawa diagnoses in high

Victorian fiction, and perhaps prefigures the modernist yield one's subjectivity by

becoming an object or a machine.[124] But what separates the Monarchs—and perhaps a

handful of other of James's characters—from this pack is that they do not seek to become

the artifice for artifice's sake. At bottom, they want the validation conferred by a cultural

narrative bigger than themselves. In other terms, they want to be recognized in several

senses of that word—acknowledged, validated—as legitimate subjects. David Shumway

comes closest to articulating this sense of authenticity when he writes of certain kinds of

celebrity as giving birth to a "conception of authenticity [which] entails not the embrace

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[124] Jeff Nunokawa finds this notion of possession at work in Dickens's *Dombey and Son* in *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), chap. 2.

of surfaces but the location of depth in culture rather than in personality."[125] But then this, too, may erroneously direct us to another of the narrator's misnomers for the Monarchs, who seem to have an air of "celebrity" about them, but too much of that air, "look[ing] too distinguished to be a 'personality'" ("RT" 307).

Lacking an adequate critical vocabulary for authenticity that captures the complexities of "The Real Thing," we return once again to James's own comments on photography and the Preface to *The Golden Bowl*. The Monarchs' desire, we might say, seems akin to James's descriptions of the photographs meant to accompany his works— something that does not traffic in imitation but which is more aptly described as "discreetly disavowing emulation," just as Coburn's photographs were "optical symbols or echoes" of James's work, "expressions of no particular thing in the text, but only of the type or idea of this or that thing" (*GB* xi), and yet the thing itself. To recognize such a type is, at last, not a fixture but a point of departure, a beginning to invention, imagination, and meaning-making.

Typicality after Photography

"The Real Thing" thus draws a distinction between illustration and photography that has less to do with their representational differences than with what kinds of consumers to which cheap photographs and expensive illustrated novels were marketed. It is a distinction that brings to mind how moderns thought of property as a signifier of class. While it would not be fair to speak of modernism and marxism as possessing the same motives or aims, there is no doubt that marxism is a species of modernist discourse

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[125] David R. Shumway, "Authenticity: Modernity, Stardom, and Rock & Roll." *Modernism/Modernity* 14:3 (2007): 528.

and that some strains of modernism are devoted to sounding the depths of the ethic of

consumption and consumerism that had already been firmly in place in Europe and

America for generations by the late nineteenth century. For Jonathan Freedman, the

defining feature of Jamesian modernism is James's appropriation of aestheticism without

ever claiming to participate in that movement. Freedman finds James just as devoted as

his aestheticist contemporaries to

> at once registering, shaping, and critiquing a society whose cultural
> institutions are increasingly devoted to inciting, celebrating, and inducing
> the act of consumption—first finding that its critical impulses are wholly
> subsumed within its celebratory function, then discovering a way to
> reassert them from within the confines of the historical moment.[126]

"The Real Thing" contributes to James's anatomizing of a consumer ethos by exploring

how mediated images offer themselves as possessions. As the Monarchs know,

illustrations and photographs alike can be possessed by any who purchases them, but they

also lay implicit claim to being able to possess the identities they represent.[127] If one can

possess and yet be possessed by a picture, as the Monarchs claim to be, this dual notion

of possession complicates questions about the authenticity of images—how faithful they

are to the people and things they purport to represent—as well as about the authenticity

of identity—whether or not one is true to oneself.

This rhetoric of possession and property would suggest that a marxist line of

inquiry seems warranted here, but Nancy Armstrong offers another way of thinking

through these matters in *Fiction in the Age of Photography.* For Armstrong, it is deeply

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[126] Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 58. Many studies implicitly place marxism within modernism's umbrella, but Freedman makes a sinuous argument that reads theorists such as Max Weber and Theodor Adorno as responding to contradictions that aestheticism and modernism were the first to take up. For another comparison in this vein, see Michael North, "Eliot, Lukács, and the Politics of Modernism," in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 169-90.

[127] Nunokawa, *Afterlife*.

important to avoid recourse in a marxist interpretation of images when we talk about how

realist representational economies after photography work. She lends focus to the

general critique others have leveled at marxism's precapitalist nostalgia (its yearning for

relationships between the social and material worlds that are not mediated by capital) by

showing that nostalgia to have given rise to an "iconophobia" after capitalism (*FAP* 28).

In Marx, Lukács, and Baudrillard, she uncovers "indications that real things and authentic

feelings have, for some time now, been receding behind a successive veil of images"

(*FAP* 29). This iconophobia can be traced to Marx himself but gained its greatest

currency in literary studies with Georg Lukács, who dated the year of realism's decline

1848. The year Louis Napoleon came to power and almost immediately betrayed the

working classes that had helped install him also witnessed what Lukács felt was a second

betrayal on the part of the novel. A rash of unwelcome visual rhetoric in realism made

the novel irresponsible to what Lukács felt was its mission of exploring communal bonds

and social practices in which money and commodities played limited roles. As

Armstrong explains, "Lukács blames this failure on a sudden infusion of 'ornamental

detail,' 'immobile background,' 'pictorialism,' 'picturesque atmosphere,' and

'photographic authenticity' which fiction slipped in between readers and the social world

around them" (*FAP* 5).[128]

    The chief aim of *Fiction in the Age of Photography*—the notion of which

Armstrong so fervently and, I would say, rightfully seeks to disabuse us—is not just a

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[128] Armstrong quotes from "The Crisis of Bourgeois Realism," in *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983) 171-250.
With that latter phrase of Lukács's, "photographic authenticity," Armstrong comes to place marxism too close to modernism. Though Lukács was one of modernism's most acerbic opponents, his outright rejection of realist imagery comes to seem a great deal like the impulse "to embrace a post-photographic notion of authenticity that modernism conjured up retrospectively," and the marxist iconophobia Armstrong diagnoses at the beginning of her study finds its corollary in what she calls "the logic of modernism": "that images per se are bad" (*FAP* 276, 275).

specifically marxist iconophobia, but a notion that underpins spectacle since Marx: that

spectacles must, almost by nature, be presentations of capital. A good many spectacles

do, of course, display glitzy commodities or demonstrate wealth or testify to the grand

possibilities of money and all that it can buy. But even so, that will not be all that such

spectacles display. They will also continue to instruct us in the ways in which we might

understand our visible—which is to say, corporeal—selves, "[t]he body on which we

stake our sense of futurity, individuation, rights, and community" (*FAP* 276). It is the

essence of photography, whether in popular photography or the notoriously essentialist

composite photographs of degeneration theorists, to suggest that its viewers conflate the

image of the body with identity. In so doing, photography would also assert itself as a

system for interpreting and classifying bodies into types.[129] It was this very system of

reducing images of people to types that helped photography lay claim to unrivaled

accuracy and, for Armstrong, not to purport to lead us away from the real but to "[*tell*] *us*

what is real" (*FAP* 3; Armstrong's italics).[130]

With this conclusion in mind, I want to return to a claim Armstrong makes on her

way to arriving at these statements. Though she clearly has the above critique in mind

when she writes that marxism might at least offer "valuable insight into the whole notion

of 'authenticity' that came to stand for the world as it was before these images usurped

the place of objects in mediating human relationships," I want to pursue another insight

that her critique allows (*FAP* 29). If marxism is the discourse that arose to analyze the

social construction of authenticity under capitalism, and if marxism renders that

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[129] Armstrong delineates the different ways in which popular photography and the photography of social scientists achieved these aims in her introduction.

[130] "Our remarkable ability as modern individuals to move in the world and carry the categories we inhabit with us hinges, I believe, on our ability to understand almost anyone and anything in terms of just those categories" (*FAP* 3-4).

authenticity a surrogate for more properly authentic but now irretrievable relationships, then it is worth asking whether marxism is always iconophobic and, if not, what else it can tell us about how images possess identity.

While a full investigation of this question would stray too far from the aim of this chapter, a good starting place is Fredric Jameson's classic gloss of Lukács's account of literary realism's typed characters.[131] Jameson notes that Lukács takes up the issue of the type (in *Theory of the Novel*, 66-9) as an enabling figure in realist literature precisely in order to explain how representational forms work. Though we have seen Armstrong observe Lukács speaking of realism as exchanging thick descriptions of non-capitalist relationships with "photographic authenticity," Jameson wants to be clear that "for Lukács the typical is never a matter of photographic accuracy."[132] If types in literature as Lukács describes them cannot be likened to photographs, Jameson declares, then we come to understand types not as ossified, abiding stickmen but as representatives of social positions that change over time. Thus, types, and "the notion of the *typical*" itself, are the places in which literary realism most readily historicizes itself by drawing attention to that change: "realism itself comes to be distinguished by its movement, its storytelling and dramatization of its content; comes, following the title of one of Lukács's finest essays, to be characterized by narration rather than description" (*MF* 196). Even if realist authors of the nineteenth century learned a great deal from photography about types, as Armstrong insists, Jameson contends that analogizing types in literature to

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[131] Another starting place, better known but which I cannot take up here because it would lead us too far afield, can be found in W. J. T. Mitchell's analysis of the visual rhetoric Marx uses to distinguish commodity fetishism from other human-object relationships. See in the final chapter of Mitchell's *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

[132] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 194 (hereafter cited in text as *MF*).

photography is inaccurate because it implies stasis, immobility—frames of arrested time. By contrast, types in literature offer "rather an analogy between the entire plot, as a conflict of forces, and the total moment of history itself considered as a process" (*MF* 195). Martha Banta makes a similar claim when she writes, "the attention paid to 'type' by artists, literary and art critics, psychologists, and philosophers of the late nineteenth century is one of the more helpful ways we today have of threading the path between the *isms* of art's genres and life's modes of conduct."[133]

The problem of locating authenticity in the age of photography that I read Armstrong and Jameson to be working through in their discussions of Lukács is the same problem with which we have seen the narrator wrestle in "The Real Thing," and much the same problem we have seen J. Hillis Miller attribute to James's *oeuvre*. Does the authentic emerge from remaining true to realist representation, or is its proper source outside of representation altogether? James's late views on photography direct us to a more useful vocabulary that suspends that question, allowing us to embrace both possibilities and, as Freedman would argue, allowing James the aestheticist pose of embracing the possibility that authenticity is born not of one or the other but the irreconcilability of the contradiction. In part, James's suggestion that we attend to the general and particular might seem to follow the maturation of aestheticist criticism into deconstruction that Freedman traces. Indeed, deconstructive procedures that critics of virtually every stripe continue to find valuable are its means for ferreting out singularity, of identifying the particulars of difference, of taking note of how the individual departs from the category or categories ascribed to it. If there is such thing as a deconstructive

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[133] Martha Banta, "Artists, Models, Real Things, and Recognizable Types," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 16.2 (1983), 33.

ethic, it would be what Jeffrey Nealon calls the imperative that compels us to reread even the most mundane example for differences unacknowledged so far. "Such an iterative siting (or, perhaps, a *citing*) calls for a radical rereading of the example, an attempt to open up a reinscribed future of response rather than merely settling for or on a representative past."[134]

Not to layer too many puns, but, for James, the issue of rereading is inseparable from *sighting*, too. James's discussion of photography in the Preface to *The Golden Bowl* is interwoven with his remarks on revision and rereading, twin acts that James regards as "a *living* affair" (*GB* xix; James's italics). The entire purpose of rereading, James continues, lies in "seeing the buried, latent life of a past composition vibrate, at renewal of touch . . . and break through its settled and 'sunk' surface" (*GB* xx).[135] The suggestion is that those things which keep to the surface only, like a photograph, are not worthy of the deep attention art receives. There is, he asserts, no life in surfaces alone, nor in surfaces which, like painting, do not call upon viewers to imagine a depth of story or character.

The unfavorable comparison here serves to suggest something implicit in the discussions of type I have outlined in this section. The quality we most readily attribute to types seems to be their banality, and yet the Monarchs' defining quality for much of

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[134] Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 117.

[135] As he continues in this vein, James goes on to "the vast example of Balzac," whose fiction "intensif[ies] for me the interest of this general question of the reviving and reacting vision," and thereby discusses rereading and revision in terms of negotiating the general and the particular, an act that requires acknowledging what one has already seen and known as well as what one learns from the latest encounter with the text (*GB* xx-xxi). Here, too, James borrows from the rhetoric of photography: just as "any representational work" should "bristle with images" (*GB* ix), James finds the unrevised text "bristling with a sense of over-prolonged exposure" (*GB* xxi).

"The Real Thing" is their persistent boringness.[136] Indeed, that is the quality that this

narrator most easily attributes to the Monarchs: their sameness, their ungeneralizability,

makes them seem walled off from the rest of humanity, pocketed in an enclosure all their

own that makes him represent them as simply themselves, unlike anyone else he knows.

Trying to create illustrations with these models proves tedious work. "When I drew the

Monarchs, I couldn't anyhow get away from them—get into the character I wanted to

represent;" "There were people presumably" like the Monarchs, but "I found myself

trying to invent types that approached [their] own;" ("RT" 334, 335, 327). After trying in

vain to work with them, the narrator at last admits, "They bored me a good deal" ("RT"

339).

But out of this emerges something of a revelation: "the very fact that they bored

me admonished me not to sacrifice them—if there was anything to be done with them—

simply to irritation" ("RT" 339). In other words, "The Real Thing" suggests that the

narrator's not seeing the Monarchs' humanity becomes a reminder to him that they are, in

fact, human. This seems deeply inauthentic. The authentic might be a lot of things, but it

is not hackneyed—for how could authenticity refer to anything unoriginal? (Recall

Taylor: "Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is

something only I can articulate and discover"). Yet, the status of the authentic in "The

Real Thing" demands at every turn a vocabulary for addressing the very possibility that

authenticity may be rooted not just the everyday or quotidian, but in the banal. The

narrator gropes for it, cannot find it, but insists that such things do exist. If James hoped

to write a story that authentically represented the situation Du Maurier relayed to him,

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[136] The exception would be at the end of the story, when the Monarchs have let down their guard in
desperation. Having ceased to pretend to appear like aristocrats (offering to wash the narrator's dishes in
lieu of sitting as models), they finally inspire his full pity.

then he was hoping to be authentic to one of "oddity and typicalness," which might be better understood as the authenticity of the oddity *of* typicality.[137]

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[137] *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 55.

Chapter 5
Structures of Irony: Curiosity and Fetishism in Conrad, Forster, and London's Colonial Exhibitions

"London, that wonder city, the growth of which bears no sign of intelligent design, but many traces of freakishly sombre phantasy[.]"

—Joseph Conrad

"You can make India in England apparently, just as you can make England in India."

—Cyril Fielding in *A Passage to India*[138]

"The general tone of novels is so literal," declared E. M. Forster in the Clark Lectures later collected in *Aspects of the Novel*, "that when the fantastic is introduced it produces a special effect; some readers are thrilled, others choked off; . . . [it is] like a sideshow in an exhibition where you have to pay sixpence as well as the original fee. Some readers pay with delight, [for] it is only for the sideshows that they entered."[139] (160). In this lecture, called "Fantasy," Forster explains that readers come to know experimental fiction like *Ulysses* (1922) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) by extending their "[c]uriosity for the story" to its narrative frameworks (*AN* 158). Forster's lightly-treated analogy (where experimental fiction is the sideshow within the grand exhibition that is the history of the novel) makes these lines difficult to read without imagining the arched eyebrow that Forster must have shown to lecture attendees at Cambridge in this moment.

If regard for curiosity is critical for the appreciating new and inventive literature, as Forster suggests in this lecture, he raises questions about how curiosity operates when it is housed within the kind of self-conscious, ironic frame in which Forster presents it

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[138] Joseph Conrad, "Poland Revisited," 1915, *Notes on Life and Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1922), 152; E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, 1924 (New York: Harcourt, 1984), 78 (hereafter cited in text as *PI*).
[139] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 1927 (New York: Harcourt, 1954), 160 (hereafter cited in text as *AN*).

here—a question that has perhaps become only more acute over time as irony has become

enshrined as one modernism's favorite modes. That question becomes even more

complex in the context of exhibition. By 1927, when Forster delivers this lecture,

exhibition would almost certainly have meant a particular kind of exhibition. Grand

public fairs and shows that unmistakably highlight empire had become a staple in

London's Olympia, Earls Court, and Shepherds Bush in recent decades.[140] As Harold

Hartley, one of the directors and designers of exhibitions in London during this period,

described it, the goal of these exhibitions was to present visitors with imperial ideology

that appealed to fantasies of looking upon colonial domination.

> Our aim was always to provide for our visitors a great variety of attractive
> amusements, in addition to those termed side-shows, for which extra
> payment had to be made. The Indian city [created for the Empire and
> India Exhibition (1895)] contained all the ingredients that go to make up a
> realistic picture of Asiatic life; its many shops with Indian and Cingalese
> craftsmen actively at work at their various callings; the elephants and
> camels carrying people about, and the tiny zebu drawing his load of happy
> children—all made it an instructive object-lesson.[141]

If curiosity for innovative writing could be analogized to paying extra beyond the charge

of story and plot, it is important to note that Forster, no stranger to the issue of

colonialism, raises the very specter of what makes curiosity potentially harmful. As

Hartley explains it, entrance into a colonial exhibition's sideshows preyed on the

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[140] Annie Coombes and Peter Hoffenberg offer sweeping surveys of London's colonial exhibitions, which were in their prime between 1886-1925, the period considered here (though, as we shall see, the presence of the British Empire at exhibitions goes back at least as far as the Great Exhibition of 1851). John MacKenzie, a pioneer in the arena of empire and Victorian and Edwardian popular culture, has also recently authored a brief essay on that topic that discusses colonial exhibitions. See Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); and John M. MacKenzie, "The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 5 vols., ed. Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 4: 212-31.
[141] Harold Hartley, *Eighty-Eight Not Out: A Record of Happy Memories* (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), 87.

curiosity of visitors who want to see their own sense of cultural superiority rendered back to them in "an instructive object-lesson." Taken together, Forster's and Hartley's comments reveal a great deal of traffic shuttling between points that we typically imagine as having distinct boundaries—including narrative and exhibition, London and the colonies, and, above all, irony and curiosity—for it is only by gazing upon "the Indian city" temporarily erected within London that one could understand that city to be "a realistic picture of Asiatic life." Following the rhythms and patterns that briefly join such entities in the early twentieth century clearly means being attentive to how the aesthetics of modernity could inspire both curiosity and irony at the same time while also, it sometimes seems, preventing either from overcoming the tightly-closed grasp of imperial ideology.

In this chapter I want to respond to Forster's injunction to take curiosity seriously by pursuing narratives that thematize curiosity itself, and which, moreover, do so with regard to the "fantastic" space of colonial exhibitions. This pursuit helps provide deeper insight into how modernist fiction responds to Britain's metropolis as contact zone. I ask what can be learned from the detachment two of modernism's best-known ironists, Joseph Conrad and E. M. Forster, cultivate in their responses to early-twentieth-century London. Specifically, I wish to ask: What happens when we read Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent* (1907), Forster's exhibition review, "The Birth of an Empire," and his novel, *A Passage to India* (both 1924), as ironic responses to London as they knew it? And what further responses might those texts call for now?

Setting, then, will figure prominently here, but equally significant will be visual metaphors of space and structure that abet irony's role in these texts. I will argue that

Conrad's attention to what he calls London's endless vistas—the windows, doors, and

apertures that could mark points of passage but in Conrad tend instead to be sealed

thresholds between spaces—enables a presentation of London as an imperial capital so

needful of its colonial entanglements for its own identity as to warrant the powerful ironic

distancing found in *The Secret Agent*. Often recognized as a high achievement of

modernist irony, *The Secret Agent* in fact goes a step further, inviting its readers to trace

the limits of irony as a responsive (and responsible) style. Tracing those limits as closely

tied to Conrad's confrontation with London's endless vistas will put us in a better

position to understand how Forster deploys irony while asserting that metaphors of

circulation within and between intimate spaces, resulting in a strategy of ironic

detachment from metropolitan imperial culture that seeks productive forms of

reattachment. Conrad's impenetrable vistas and Forster's hospitable locations—the

"structures of irony" of this chapter's title—prove to be spaces designed for ironic

presentation that also disclose the role of curiosity as irony's dialectic shadow. In *The

Secret Agent*, curiosity is the element whose conspicuous absence burdens irony with the

obligation to respond alone to the late imperial culture Conrad characterizes as governed

by fetishism. By contrast, curiosity appears in Forster's review not as irony's naïve

opposite but as that which learns from the distance irony produces, and as the occasion

for testing tentative styles of reattachment to the metropole.[142]

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[142] As a category of inquiry, curiosity has been pursued quite a bit in relation to Renaissance literature and culture (see, for example, see Justin Stagl, *A History of Curiosity: The Theory of Travel 1550-1800* [Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995]; and Barbara Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002]), but largely ignored in relation to modernity. A fantastic exception is Ross Posnock's study of the James brothers in *The Trial of Curiosity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Part of my aim here is to pursue an alternative knowledge of curiosity's role in response by considering it within the paradigm of modernist irony where, I argue, it appears as a "reparative" device in Eve Sedgwick's sense of that term, a tactic that can "surrender the knowing, anxious, paranoid" position for

Modernist Irony and Colonial Exhibitions

Of the many expressions of London's global reach in the early twentieth century,

Forster responds expressly to the "high imperial vision" of colonial exhibitions.[143] *The*

Secret Agent, too, demands to be approached in this vein, setting itself against the

fascination with pseudo-scientific narratives that colonial exhibitions helped

popularize.[144] Recent work in modernist studies also invites us to be attentive to colonial

exhibitions in order to understand London's modernism as emerging from a city that was

the British Empire's cultural and economic center *and* one of its contested locations.[145]

One could productively read literary modernism, as Scott Cohen does, as responding to

the spatial and geographical conditions of colonial exhibitions. But this approach may

overlook the significance of visuality in the development of metropolitan modernism.[146]

Taking a different tack, Andrew Thacker describes the displays, exhibits, and the gazes

they inspire as rendering colonial exhibitions "visual contact zone[s]."[147] The close

attention Forster and Conrad turn toward the processes of sight and the conditions of

space calls for just such a model that regards visual experiences at exhibitions as

one that finds it "necessary to experience surprise." See Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Pedagogy, Affect, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 146.

[143] E. M. Forster, "The Birth of an Empire," 1924, *Abinger Harvest* (New York: Harcourt, 1964), 44 (hereafter cited in text as "B").

[144] See Joseph McLaughlin, *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000). McLaughlin's excellent reading of *The Secret Agent* regards it as most properly belonging to a metropolitan scene in which colonial exhibitions figure prominently (see especially 154-5). So, too, do I want to restore *The Secret Agent* to just such a context in order to measure its response to a city that sometimes seemed "a frontier space . . . an urban heart of darkness" (20, 23).

[145] In addition to those cited below, see Kurt Koenigsberger, *The Novel and the Menagerie: Totality, Englishness, and Empire* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), 149-81; and Mark Wollaeger, *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900-1945* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 71-119.

[146] Scott Cohen, "The Empire from the Street: Virginia Woolf, Wembley, and Imperial Monuments," *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.1 (2004): 85-109.

[147] Andrew Thacker, "'Mad after Foreign Notions': Ezra Pound, Imagism, and the Geography of the Orient," in *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (New York: Routledge, 2005), 33.

mediating "the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect" that defines a contact zone.[148]

In the decades surrounding 1900, tens of thousands of Londoners annually invited such intersections by devoting immense segments of their capital to the colonial imaginary. Exhibition guidebooks make it clear that exhibitors sought to satisfy a widespread desire for publicly displaying systems for classifying and representing the vastly diverse peoples, territories, and commodities which appeared under the sign of empire. At a time "when the gospel of Imperialism is being so widely preached and when men's minds are naturally interested in records of national achievement and the statistics of national progress," reasons the author of an 1899 exhibition guide, the era enjoins "a colossal and comprehensive display of the growth and development of the British Empire."[149] Here the guide discloses a common feature of colonial exhibitions: their attempts to cater to, and drum up, curiosity for empire's stories, and to manage that curiosity with displays and guidebook narratives. Though Walter Benjamin famously declared that exhibitions succeeded in funneling visitors' curiosity to "places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish," they did more than dupe the feeble-minded: colonial exhibitions also introduced their spectators to a quasi-scientific method for interpreting alterity that coincided with the pleasures of purchasing souvenirs (like

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[148] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 7. Thacker's modifier "visual" before "contact zone" may be redundant. Though the notion of the contact zone has been particularly useful to approaches that consider the geographical conditions and spaces that literature addresses, we do well to recall that vision was a significant component of Pratt's conception of contact zones. Her approach in *Imperial Eyes* leads to reconsiderations of "what in European culture counts as a purely passive experience—that of seeing" (204).
[149] *The "District Railway" Guide to the Greater Britain Exhibition* (London: Boot and Son, 1899), 10.

official handbooks) at the event.[150] If we imagine exhibition visitors as subjects

enmeshed in prefabricated conditions but also involved in the construction and

reconstruction of those conditions, [151] we might say these visitors arrived to Earls Court

and Olympia precisely in order to enter spaces where the colonial world could be visually

consumed in tidy, orderly displays. These displays invited a detached scientific gaze that

does not empathize with who or what one looks upon, but instead encourages exhibition

visitors to imagine themselves as something like amateur social scientists touring in the

colonies. This is the gaze of distance.

As a result, although commodity display and consumer culture figure prominently

in London exhibition culture, it might be misleading to follow Benjamin in speaking of

the gaze colonial exhibitions solicit in terms of commodity fetishism. That term proves

too coarse a sieve for sorting out the complexities of exhibition culture. We may be

better off with the more general understanding of fetishism that had wider currency

among Victorians and Edwardians than either commodity fetishism or nascent theories of

sexual fetishism.[152] As Peter Logan explains, throughout the second half of the

nineteenth century and for at least the first decade of the twentieth, fetishism was as

significant for its connotation as its denotation. It denoted the act of projecting agency

onto an inanimate object while connoting savagery, primitivism, and all that was alleged

to be part of cultures that practiced religious fetishism—that is, all that was counter to the

idea of civilized, enlightened society. "During these years," writes Logan, "fetishism

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[150] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 7.

[151] Anthony Giddens, who calls such subjects "knowledgeable agents," masterfully explains this rich sense of being in the world in *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 54.

[152] Though sexologists began theorizing fetishism in the nineteenth century, not until 1927 (two years after London's final colonial exhibition) did Sigmund Freud's theory of sexual fetishism appear.

defined ideas about culture through difference, not by describing what culture was but by defining what it was not."[153] These associations began attaching to fetishism in the mid-nineteenth century owing in no small part to the Great Exhibition held in London's Crystal Palace in 1851. Though exhibitions were not new to Victorians, the Great Exhibition offered an unprecedented display of cultural artifacts and peoples that intended to represent the entire world for the purpose of cultural comparison. Not incidentally, the terms of that comparison—demonstrations of scientific and technological achievement—were arranged so the British clearly surpassed all the rest. Visitors walked through passageways and corridors that followed a teleological narrative of cultural progress which "emphasized the place of Britain's culture in the overall range of advancement."[154] This model of visual comparison was not only a supremely successful formula but powerfully influential for British exhibitions in the decades that followed. Nearly sixty years later, the Imperial International Exhibition held in London in 1909 measured itself against "the great exhibition of 1851, which was virtually the parent of these undertakings" by seeking cultural comparisons again in terms of scientific advancement. "In those mid-Victorian days, science, as it is understood to-day, was in its application of electricity to illumination was unknown," the official guidebook explains. This guidebook reproduces a familiar narrative found in Edwardian colonial exhibition culture. The brisk pace of "the milestones of progress" in Britain since 1851 explains the accumulation, arrangement, and array of that country's machinery, textiles, and domestic

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[153] Peter Melville Logan, *Victorian Fetishism: Intellectuals and Primitives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 4. As Logan goes on to note, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* defined fetishism in 1911 not in terms of economics or sexology, but as a practice that exists outside of culture. And though the term soon became controversial, fetishism in this sense continued to circulate in evolutionary anthropology and ethnography as late as 1925 (6).

[154] Logan, *Victorian Fetishism*, 5.

products, all of which are placed among "the choicest products of the earth . . . for our inspection."[155]

This exhibition aesthetic, which lays claim to direct presentation as a means of cultivating knowledge about the observable world, finds its opposite in modernism's self-reflexivity, fragmentation, and ironic detachment. In tracking the changes in European social life and literary history over the course of empire's expansion and contraction, Edward Said has noted that disenchantment with empire reached critical mass just as irony was being granted unprecedented authority as a style of response toward European metropolitan culture. This is the irony endemic to modernism, "the irony of a form that draws attention to itself as substituting art and its creations for the once-possible synthesis of the world empires."[156] The purpose of submitting an aesthetic solution for political problems is, of course, to produce new knowledge about the nature of those problems, distancing and depersonalizing them so that they may be contemplated anew. In order to respond to London as a visual contact zone that colonial exhibitions helped produce, it made sense for modernism to build on the irony that had become central to nineteenth-century realism. If modernism's ironists were to reorder the world in new views from imagined spaces, they would need to seize upon a device "within which everything is seen as many-sided," as Georg Lukács found to be the recompense of irony: "within which things appear as isolated and yet connected, as full of value and yet totally

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[155] *Imperial International Exhibition London 1909: Official Guide* (Derby and London: Bemrose & Sons, 1909), 2-3. The 1909 Imperial International Exhibition took the comparison a step further by recreating a village in the West African kingdom of Dahomey, an exhibit that imported African fetishists as well as fetishes (49-50). (A postcard depicting the Dahomey fetishists featured at the exhibition appears in Wollaeger, *Modernism*, 85.)

[156] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 189.

devoid of it, as abstract fragments and as concrete autonomous life, as flowering and decaying, as the infliction of suffering and suffering itself."[157]

The shift from realist to modernist irony resulted partly from a change in how each generation approached perception, particularly sight. Fredric Jameson offers a helpful articulation of this transition in judging the turn of the twentieth century as a moment in which authors were revaluating how literary aesthetics is "dependent on the very ideology of the image and sense perception and the whole positivist pseudo-scientific myth of the functioning mind of the senses."[158] Modernist texts present immediate sense information, particularly visual information, without paying tribute to explanatory theoretical frameworks, deepening a broader skepticism of metanarratives that will be amplified in the latter half of the century. But what Jameson also explains about modernism in *The Political Unconscious* is that its response to its culture sometimes emerges not from a place of irony, but out of wonder and curiosity as well. For a writer like Conrad, the reluctance to accept grand "positivist pseudo-scientific" theories of perception meant "a rejection of the conceptual in favor of the two great naturalistic psychic and narrative texts of daydreaming and hallucination. Where Conrad marks an 'advance,' if that is the right term to use about this historical process, is in *his own mesmerization by such images and such daydreaming.*"[159]

Pursuing a finer history of this moment requires us to alter Jameson's terms slightly to understand what might be meant here by "mesmerization." To be mesmerized may mean to be deeply enthralled by a work of art, subject, or event: to give oneself over

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[157] George Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 75.
[158] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 212.
[159] Jameson, *Political*, 212-3; my emphasis.

to fascination for something absorbing or difficult. But it may also mean (as it did during the period in question) to be hypnotized, to be locked under conditions of perception dictated by another. Jameson's phrasing preserves both readings, allowing modernism to issue from deep, self-aware interest *about* the visual grammar of compelling spectacles as well as from writing *from within* their grip. But let us divide these experiences into two different terms: "curiosity"—meaning an approach that self-consciously seeks attachment with something or someone else—and "fetishism"—meaning an approach that seeks such attachments unselfconsciously, indeed unknowingly.

Exploring modernism as emerging from the fetishism and curiosity I take as residing within a mesmerization of images allows for a fuller understanding of how Conrad's treatment of reveries in London and Forster's daydream at a colonial exhibition each sound the limits of irony as a counterstrategy against a culture saturated with spectacles of progress in the form of imperial dominance and scientific advancement. Irony begins a responsible stance toward the late imperial metropole by seeking to draw knowledge out of metropolitan spectacles through procedures of distance and disidentification. Yet irony must also sometimes remain a partial alternative that cannot reengage with the flawed object of its critique. For Forster and Conrad alike, the wound inflicted by a knowing irony on London's spectacles is partial without the accompaniment of a device that allows for the unexpected reattachments that tend to develop in irony's wake. Curiosity may serve as irony's accessory in this very way, making possible a much broader and richer response to a culture of fetishized spectacles than either irony or curiosity could alone. Taking irony and curiosity into consideration in this way will help guide a response mindful of the perils of recognition. Rather than

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being beholden to simply rebuking the exhibitions for "exoticizing difference," we can be attentive to what is at work "when histories and cultures overlap" in a single, contested space.[160]

The View from Conrad's Windows

On the first page of *The Secret Agent* Adolf Verloc leaves his home, which is also the Soho pornography shop he runs with his wife, Winnie, and brother-in-law, Stevie: "Mr. Verloc, going out in the morning, left his shop nominally in charge of his brother-in-law."[161] But this turns out to be something of a false start. Not until the beginning of the second chapter, when we begin to follow Verloc on his journey away from home and to an unspecified eastern European embassy—"Such was the house, the household, and the business Mr. Verloc left behind him on his way westward at the hour of half past ten in the morning" (*SA* 10)—does the novel begin in earnest. This double opening allows Conrad to provide necessary background for Verloc's story right away, and perhaps serves as an elementary instance of what Ian Watt called Conrad's delayed decoding,[162] but more importantly this return to the beginning initiates a pattern of repetition and obsession that will become familiar over the course of the novel. It will be invoked each time Verloc and Stevie leave and return from their walks through Greenwich Park to their Brett Street home; in the visits made by Chief Inspector Heat and the assistant commissioner of police to the Verlocs' shop after the bomb attack; and repeated once more when Winnie returns with Comrade Ossipon to the Verlocs' home after she has

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[160] Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 40.
[161] Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale*, 1907 (New York: Modern Library, 2004), 3 (hereafter cited in text as *SA*).
[162] Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 175.

murdered her husband. Moreover, as the murder of Adolf Verloc reveals, such obsessive

returnings focus not only on locations but on visual information as well. Only when

Winnie "thought in images" was she also "governed too much by a fixed idea" that led

her to murder her husband (*SA* 204, 215).

Just such patterns of repetition and obsession concern Vladimir, the embassy

official who has summoned Verloc away from his home and shop on the morning the

novel begins. Vladimir has called upon the failed agent provocateur so that he may

provide Verloc with a scheme that could believably be pinned on zealous anti-

government insurgents. "You anarchists," Vladimir bristles, "should make it clear that

you are perfectly determined to make a clean sweep of the whole social creation. But

how to get that appallingly absurd notion into the heads of the middle classes so that there

should be no mistake? That is the question" (*SA* 27). To that question, Vladimir offers a

reasoned reply: the target must be unthinkable, not heads of state, houses of worship,

theaters, public squares—for all of these have been rendered cliché by "ready-made

phrases [used] to explain such manifestations away"—but instead "something outside the

ordinary passions of humanity" (*SA* 27). This reasoned argument, it turns out, targets

reason itself. "What is the fetish of the hour that all the bourgeoisie recognize—eh Mr.

Verloc? . . . The sacrosanct fetish of today is science. Why don't you get some of your

friends to go for that wooden-faced panjandrum—eh" (*SA* 25, 26)?

That Conrad's anarchists and counterrevolutionary plotters should respond to

London in the language of fetishism is not particularly surprising, nor it is surprising that

The Secret Agent should itself conduct its response under the maneuvers of irony that

reveal anarchist plots against London's fetishes to be "hopelessly futile," as Conrad was

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fond of calling them (*SA* 43; cf. xxxv). More noteworthy is that Conrad's ironic narrative

procedures should so closely approximate the obsession, repetition, and visual fascination

Vladimir attributes to London's bourgeoisie. If readers of *The Secret Agent* have not

taken note of this before, perhaps this is because the novel's "thick fog of irony," as

Irving Howe had it,[163] is so thick that it impedes readings of the culture to which the

novel addresses itself, leaving irony to be treated as a theme in its own right rather than as

a mode of response—despite the fact that even the novel's author insisted that *The Secret*

Agent can be "traced to a period of mental and emotional reaction" to "feel[ing] . . . lost

in a world of other, of inferior, values" (*SA* xxxiii, xxxv). As "a perfect illustration of the

ironic theme,"[164] *The Secret Agent* throws one of irony's tendencies into high relief:

namely, that when its distancing operations work most efficiently, irony can seem an

aesthetic of self-enclosure. But we do well to press on this aesthetic. As Amanda

Anderson reminds, "detachment, whatever form it takes or predominantly allies itself

with, is always situated—it is always detached from a particular mode of experience, a

social situation, or a form of identity."[165] The trouble *The Secret Agent* gives readers

who wish to regard it as a response to its particular situation is twofold. First, how does

this novel suggest the concept of fetishism is circulating in turn-of-the-century London?

Second, what can the novel's detachment and relentless repositioning from the Londoners

who populate Conrad's narrative tell us about irony as a mode of response?

Directed not only at the broad category of "science" but specifically at the

Greenwich Observatory, the language of fetishism in *The Secret Agent* posits fetishism as

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[163] Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (New York: Horizon, 1957), 96.
[164] Robert D. Spector, "Irony as Theme: Conrad's *The Secret Agent*," in *Conrad:* The Secret Agent: *A Casebook*, ed. Ian Watt (London: Macmillan, 1973), 166.
[165] Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 175.

the fixations with and attachments to technologies of colonial domination (the

observational knowledge that in different ways undergirds cartography, topography, and

institutionalized racism) as well as the disavowed knowledge of how investments in the

colonies produce domestic wealth. ("Any imbecile that has got an income believes in

[science]. He does not know why, but he believes it matters somehow," Vladimir

declares [*SA* 27].) In Conrad's African fiction, fetishism proves to be European

modernity's colonial unconscious. Reading *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Simon Gikandi

argues that fetishism goes unnamed throughout that text precisely because of its powerful

hold over Marlow. Unable to decouple his European subjectivity from his African

locality, Marlow fails in the fundamental narrative act of arranging events sequentially—

"the enabling condition of epistemology and consciousness in the Western tradition"—

and ultimately "temporality in *Heart of Darkness* is haunted by fetishism, which the

narrative compels to function as the radical opposite of knowledge and consciousness."[166]

Written within a decade of *Heart of Darkness*, *The Secret Agent* is heir to the same

conflicts of colonial contact but is also far more aware of its fetishistic design, making its

center not an ungovernable, unknowable alterity but the West's fetishization of science

itself. "Science" here denotes little more than the thinnest veil of scientific evidence

conveniently laid over a predetermined politics, much like the Lombrosoism embraced by

Comrade Ossipon, or science as it was displayed at the colonial exhibitions. If the

Greenwich Observatory emerges in this text as London's fetish for "learning" and

"science," as Vladimir says (*SA* 28), its fetishists would doubtless have patronized the

annual extravaganzas that offered "a spectacle constituted as simultaneously scientific

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[166] Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 176.

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exegesis and as mass entertainment" held in west London between 1886-1925,[167] a time

encompassing the novel's 1894 setting and the 1906-7 period during which Conrad

composed and published *The Secret Agent*. It is precisely London's exhibition culture,

and the fetishistic modes of seeing it encourages, that provide the most productive basis

for understanding *The Secret Agent*'s ironic posturing.

Against these annual events, which Paul Greenhalgh calls ephemeral vistas, are

the vistas Conrad embeds in *The Secret Agent*.[168] During the scene in which Vladimir

unfurls his plot to destroy the Greenwich Observatory, Verloc elects to demonstrate his

authority by opening a window and calling out to a distant policeman on the street. But

what is meant to be a show of Verloc's "usefulness" (*SA* 20) Vladimir dismisses by

explaining that his embassy requires Verloc's action, not his voice. In the context of the

novel, the significance of this dismissal lies less in this distinction between action and

words than in the kind of action Verloc's words have failed to perform. Verloc succeeds

in startling the constable down the street, but his own situation does not change; he

remains inside the embassy awaiting Vladimir's instructions. Such moments recur

throughout *The Secret Agent*—so often, in fact, that it would not be difficult to find

among the novel's obsessive patterns similar scenes in which characters approach

openings that promise emancipation only to discover themselves circumscribed once

more. This reading would begin with the novel's first vista, the Verlocs' shop window,

which does not entice with glitzy identity-enhancing products but offers only dimly lit,

"nondescript packages," "closed yellow paper envelopes" (*SA* 3), and other "nondescript

things" (*SA* 124), a window that lights onto "the comfort of obscurity, not the seduction

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[167] Coombes, *Reinventing*, 63.

[168] Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The* Expositions Universelles*, Great Exhibitions, and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

of display," as Rishona Zimring reads it.[169] The pattern proceeds to Verloc's interview at the embassy and his return home to Soho, where other "windows shone with a dark opaque luster" (*SA* 12). That night Verloc will watch the reflection in his bedroom window transform into a terrifying vision of Vladimir's face, "a pink seal impressed on the fatal darkness" outside (*SA* 47). Standing before the same window after she learns of Stevie's death, Winnie will discover her "freedom" exists in name only (*SA* 208). At last we would arrive at the final vista to appear in the novel: the open space atop the cross-channel steamer from which Winnie, full of "furious anguish," throws herself (*SA* 251).

Repeated encounters with portals that promise access only to present obstruction instead seem as much a part of Conrad's sense of the city in which he wrote as they are features of his novel. When Conrad returned to *The Secret Agent* to write his author's note in 1920, he explained the process of writing the novel as at once ignited by his fascination with London and inhibited by the responsibility of writing such a vast space. "Irresistibly, the town became the background for the ensuing period of deep and tentative meditations. Endless vistas opened before me in various directions. It would take years to find the right way! It seemed to take years! . . ." (*SA* xxxvii; Conrad's ellipsis). To be sure, generations of scholarship have found Conrad's retrospective reconstruction of writing *The Secret Agent* to be imperfect, but, as Geoffrey Galt Harpham argues, the author's note reveals Conrad's sense of the act of composition, an act he situates throughout this text as closely associated with the dynamism of London itself.[170] If we can read "endless vistas" as Conrad's metaphor for "infinite possibilities," then the problem of writing the swelling and heterogeneous metropole seems quite

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[169] Rishona Zimring, "Conrad's Pornography Shop," *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 43.2 (1997), 334.
[170] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Abroad Only By a Fiction: Creation, Irony, and Necessity in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*," *Representations* 37 (1992): 79-103.

similar to the problem exhibition visitors reported whenever they sought to record all that they saw there. "Who can describe that astounding spectacle?" asked one visitor to the Crystal Palace in 1851. "Lost in a sense of what it is, who can think what it is like?"[171] In the context of Conrad's author's note, these questions raise others. What are the consequences of setting a novel amid London's appetite for overwhelming spectacles that the Great Exhibition inaugurates? How do we read Conrad's report that the very feature that inspires his curiosity about London—the city's seemingly ceaseless variety of singularities—is also what makes it a daunting setting for works of fiction? And, finally, what are the consequences of figuring London's heterogeneity as "endless vistas" in a novel whose vistas unflaggingly curb, confine, and close down?

These questions presume that exhibitions disclose a great deal about the cities they host, a premise that can be traced at least as far back as Conrad's German contemporary, Georg Simmel. Simmel understood exhibitions as the constructions of a collective sense of how a metropole wished to imagine its place within a global scheme. As he put it in 1896, one of an exhibition's purposes lie in demonstrating that "a city can represent itself as a copy and a sample of the manufacturing forces of world culture." "Nowhere else," Simmel continues, "is such a richness of different impressions brought together so that overall there seems to be an outward unity, whereas underneath a vigorous interaction produces mutual contrasts, intensification, and lack of relatedness."[172] More recently, Timothy Mitchell's penetrating analysis of exhibition culture has explained that exhibitions impose a sense of unity over culturally disparate materials in much the same way that cities fashion their sense of identity. "Exhibitions

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[171] Quoted in Hoffenberg, *Empire*, xx.

[172] Georg Simmel, "The Berlin Trade Exhibition," 1896, in *Simmel on Culture*, ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, trans. Sam Whimster (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), 256.

were coming to resemble the commercial machinery of the rest of the city. This machinery, in turn, was rapidly changing in places such as London and Paris, to imitate the architecture and technique of exhibition."[173] If, as Mitchell suggests, exhibition-going was becoming more like city-strolling as the nineteenth century drew to its close, it isn't surprising that both activities were represented according to the same logic. The exhibitions' maps, placards, guidebooks, and the narratives cued by scientific displays suggest that the city outside may be organized along the same lines, creating what Mitchell calls "the world organized and grasped as though it were an exhibition" ("OEO" 296). According to this argument, the infrastructure of exhibitions forms a system of accessibility that can be more widely applied: the diverse spaces of London can themselves be imagined, mapped, and experienced as if they were part of a carefully planned and ordered exhibition. But what seems at first to offer a universally applicable system of signs for comprehending globalizing modernity soon seems far more stifling because the system of signs must be maintained even where maps, placards, guidebooks, and scientific narratives are unavailable. Just as the sprawling exhibitions themselves made it difficult for exhibition-goers to find their way out, the reality effect produced by the exhibition genre also encloses. The city and exhibition alike appear "organized as a system of commodities, values, meanings, and representations, forming signs that reflect one another in a labyrinth without exits" ("OEO" 300). The taxonomized presentation of heterogeneous global contents that had made the exhibitions commercially successful in the first place also exposed them to the same girded, autoreferential limits of any representational system of signs.

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[173] Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 299 (hereafter cited in text as "OEO").

The Secret Agent conducts its critique of London along these lines, detaching itself from an urban reality effect to reveal that that aesthetic is dominated by popular constructions of science and spectacles of imperial metropolitan culture. Put another way, what secures characters' access to the real are also, by necessity, the agents of fetishism. In winding the circle of metropolitan imperial culture as tightly as it can, *The Secret Agent* discloses an essential fact about discourses of fetishism. When modern western thinkers interpellate fetishism as such, they do so partly in order to distance themselves from fetishistic thinking, seeing, and material relations—and yet acts of fetishism remain acts that modern rationality represses but can never entirely banish. When Vladimir locates London's sacrosanct fetish in the Greenwich Observatory, he reveals not just that this building and the scientific practices for which the institution stands have been fetishized—the same scientific practices exhibitors deploy to assert western cultural dominance over animist cultures—but that the tendency to fetishize representational systems may govern more forms of modern seeing and thinking than we sometimes realize. Indeed, as *The Secret Agent* confirms many times over, Edwardian London became a city of vistas that *promised* scientific and cultural advancement but which more readily revealed *a deep obsession with* displays and narratives that promised scientific and cultural advancement.

In such a frame where representation itself cannot be trusted but must be relied upon nonetheless, Conrad's novel pursues a self-conscious technique of distancing from cultural values that means to call into question the self-aggrandizing distancing from "primitive" cultures that characterizes the fetishism of science found in the exhibitions. To engage any further with this culture, Conrad suggests, would be irresponsible. Rather

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than affirming any value or value system found in this London, what *The Secret Agent* instead most cherishes are the countervaluations—distance, detachment, and the disengagement that calls all else into question—of irony itself.

But, one wants to ask, aren't there always possibilities for renewed engagement, even in a narrative space as constricted as *The Secret Agent*? There are, in fact, a handful of moments in which Conrad's characters find themselves under the spell not of fetishism but of curiosity. The best case to take up would to be the unnamed "lady patroness of Michaelis" (*SA* 86), the one character in *The Secret Agent* expressly described as "curious at heart" (*SA* 87). The assistant commissioner recalls this patron fondly, having been a frequent guest of the drawing room she has lately been providing for Michaelis (a benign and recently paroled anarchist, also called "the ticket-of-leave apostle") to write his autobiography. As a "temple of an old woman's not ignoble curiosity," the patron's drawing room has been fashioned into something resembling an exhibition space where, at a given gathering, one could observe and mingle with the "notabilities or even the simple notorieties of the day" (*SA* 87). And an exhibition space it has become, for on the day the assistant commissioner recalls, he stood in her drawing room among "groups of people" and "beheld the ticket-of-leave apostle filling a privileged armchair," at work on his autobiography "in semi-privacy within the faded blue silk and gilt frame screen . . . in the light of six tall windows" (*SA* 87, 89, 87).

Why an aristocratic socialite should turn her curiosity, and her patronage, toward an anarchist who prophesies the end of wealth, the narrator reports, owes to the "lofty simplicity" of her class, the very quality which makes her curiosity possible (*SA* 87). The patron's, then, is an empty curiosity, a means of preserving her reputation as a worldly

personality whose other use for her drawing room is to pontificate on the scandal *du jour* (such as the circumstances of Michaelis's imprisonment) before "banal society smiles" (*SA* 91). While one is tempted to assign more significance to the curiosity of the novel's detectives, the patron's disingenuous curiosity actually reappears in the register of police detection.[174] Like Chief Inspector Heat, whose interest in surveying London's underworld is largely only a safeguard for his proud professional reputation, and like the assistant commissioner, for whom metropolitan detective work is most interesting when it reminds him of "tracking and breaking up certain nefarious secret societies" in the unnamed colony where his career began (*SA* 82), Michaelis's patron cares less about his politics than the controversy his presence in her drawing room is sure to stir. In short, curiosity surfaces in *The Secret Agent* only to be co-opted by the rewards of a fetishizing gaze prompted by exhibition display. Rather than providing a point of departure for inquiries that may fracture disciplining social practices, curiosity merges with fetishism under the genre of exhibition display that has been carefully arranged in the patron's drawing room.

Vladimir's instruction to marshal an attack "against learning—science" (*SA* 28) turns out to express a close association between the apparent acquisition of knowledge and the actual reaffirmation of staid positions and perceptions. The absence of genuine curiosity in this narrative reflects the sense that London has been closed off, a massive labyrinth without exits that completes the reciprocal relation we have seen Timothy

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[174] In *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), Rebecca Walkowitz writes that *The Secret Agent* "presents 'curiosity' as a crucial attribute of both spies and of detectives" (49). But while this emancipatory sense of curiosity—which, for Walkowitz, culminates when detectives and others recognize "belonging as a social process" (37)—aids Walkowitz in an important reading of modernist culture, this use of the term *curiosity* differs widely from what the novel's use of the same word.

Mitchell identify between cities and exhibitions. Where Karl Marx was able to formulate

a theory of commodity fetishism by examining London's capitalist production from

numerous perspectives—moving quickly "from one 'window' to another in the first

chapter of *Capital*," as David Harvey so aptly describes it—Conrad encountered just such

a continuous chain of vistas in London only to feel the delirious sense that none open

after all, and that the only way to access London was through ironic, multiperspectival

presentation.[175] Though he avers he was finally able to write the novel after he could

imagine the city "reduced to manageable proportions" (*SA* xxxvii), it seems more

apposite to say that Conrad simply displaced the problem of London's endless vistas into

the narrative itself, and with it the problem of the indeterminacies of curiosity for which

those endless vistas stood. Generations of critique bear this out. Irving Howe, the first to

offer a powerful and nuanced reading of the irony in *The Secret Agent*, felt that the novel

"forces one to conclude" that "irony has turned in upon itself" (*SA* 96), and for all the

revaluations Howe's reading has received, professional readers in the half century since

have only sharpened the sense of claustrophobia he attributes to Conrad's irony. For

Mark Conroy, *The Secret Agent* shades forth a London social order designed according to

a panoptic scheme. For Joseph McLaughlin, Conrad's characters find their way into

seductive metropolitan spaces only to discover that they cannot escape, for "Conrad

offers no sense of an outside to this commodity culture." And to read Conrad's "harsh

ironies at the characters' expense" is, for Mark Wollaeger, to encounter characters

"imprisoned" within a monologic dark comedy.[176]

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[175] David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Oxford: Blackwell; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 16.
[176] See Mark Conroy, "The Structure of Suspicion in *The Secret Agent*: The Panoptical City," in *Modernism and Authority: Strategies of Legitimation in Flaubert and Conrad* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University

Yet the yearning for an outside that so often comes with reading *The Secret Agent* is not the novel's limit point, and what sounds at first like a bleak Frankfurt-School-style assessment *avant la lettre* turns out to be something more. As we have already begun to see, this narrative incites readers to feel curiosity's absence acutely, for it is by reading a London where curiosity seems entirely evacuated that we may come to appreciate its value. That value lies nested within the novel's irony and can only be extracted by readings like those I've just mentioned which point bidirectionally: toward the limits of irony as a responsible way of seeing the fetishes that adorn Conrad's London, and toward the productive powers of curiosity. Rebecca Walkowitz articulates perhaps the most enduring lesson that *The Secret Agent*'s immuring irony can yield: "that interpretation is limited by the meanings that characters and readers are able to recognize."[177] If what one recognizes is detachment itself, it becomes deeply important to read this detachment as a limited response. Not doing so is tantamount to Chief Inspector Heat's mistaking Winnie's ignorance of the observatory bombing for her "detachment" from his questions, a detachment which "whetted his curiosity" for what he erroneously imagines she is withholding (*SA* 167). That these characters fail to rise to the possibilities inherent within curiosity only serves to place the burden more heavily on readers, as the novel's most careful readers are likely to discover.

That burden can be characterized in this way. Conrad not only affirms in the author's note that "perverse unreason has its own logical processes" (*SA* xxxv); the narrative of widespread fetishism that follows also reveals that unreason exercises its secret agency over a world from which one cannot retreat. Instead, one must find tactics

Press, 1985), 141-55; McLaughlin, *Writing the Urban Jungle*, 163; and Mark Wollaeger, *Joseph Conrad and the Fictions of Skepticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 145, 163.
[177] Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan*, 49.

for working from within that world—"tactics" precisely in Michel de Certeau's sense as a provisional method for resisting dominant ideologies by making do with whatever is at hand.[178] Irony is one such tactic, but curiosity emerges here as another, a shadow partner to irony itself. As Conrad's narrator declares, "[c]uriosity" is "one of the forms of self-revelation" (*SA* 194), a responsive mode whose revelations about oneself and one's culture can supplement irony's lessons. If irony calls for one to remove oneself from a situation or circumstance, curiosity can offer a return to that situation with the insights acquired from ironic distance.

Conrad's response to London in the heyday of colonial exhibition culture would certainly have qualified as the modernist response Said explained as structured "not oppositionally but ironically, and with a desperate attempt at a new inclusiveness."[179] That is, Conrad's is a resisting response, but not a chiding one. Enunciations that wish simply to close down the reprehensible not only repeat the violence of the past by revisiting and reiterating it; in passing once more by the ghastly only to condemn it, they offer little to illuminate why these corridors were ever traveled in the first place, let alone how one might find different ways of passing through them now. As the visual culture theorist Annie Coombes urges, "it is only by coming to terms with the heterogeneity of responses" to representations of colonial subjects and cultures proffered by exhibitions "that we can fully comprehend the insidious appeal of colonial ideology, even amongst those philanthropic and humanitarian liberals who were its most ardent critics."[180] *The Secret Agent*, I have been suggesting, calls for just such a reading, which turns away from

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[178] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), xix, and 29-42.
[179] Said, *Culture*, 189.
[180] Coombes, *Reinventing*, 2.

London's exhibition culture but not without leaving enough of its faint contours for others to trace within the novel's ironic frames. If this is the bid for the rearticulated inclusiveness that Said says marks modernist irony, one of its inclusive gestures is to stage an absent curiosity that implies that there may yet be windows in London that do more than look inward. To be sure, curiosity's ambivalence is not necessarily immune to imperial ideology's advances; a response born out of curiosity might easily become a fetishistic gaze at exhibition spectacles, and Conrad leaves open the question of how curiosity might be enlisted as a tactic for transforming late imperial metropolitan culture. It is in search of a more fully articulated explanation that we now turn to Forster.

The Magic of the Real

During the summers of 1924-5, exhibitors held at Wembley what turned out to be London's last grand spectacle of imperial dominance, an exhibition which, perhaps unsurprisingly, has gone down in history as inadvertently emblematizing conflicted domestic public opinion on empire at its height.[181] On the one hand, the British Empire Exhibition was a desperate bid to revitalize an imagined community of Britain and its colonies, a fact not lost on journalists and satirists of the day. On the other, it was enormously popular, and its success largely rested on perfecting the art of staking a colonial exhibition's identity on its spectacles of cultural and technological superiority. The Wembley exhibition was particularly adept at fusing commodity display and technological prowess, a fusion best illustrated when thousands gathered to see George V

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[181] The 1924-5 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley was the last colonial exhibition held in London, though colonial exhibitions continued to appear elsewhere, notably in Paris (1931), Johannesburg (1936), and Glasgow (1938). In addition to other materials cited below, my account of the Wembley exhibition draws from MacKenzie, "Popular," and A. N. Wilson, *After the Victorians: The Decline of Britain in the World* (New York: Picador, 2005).

open the exhibition by pressing a golden globe that acted as the simultaneous symbol of

the global flow of British capital and the mechanism for telegraphing British colonies

around the world the king's official announcement that the exhibition had begun. But the

event's greatest technological feat was to construct in a short period a number of

buildings and pavilions modeled after those found in the colonies. Wembley's twenty-

seven million visitors—four times as many as the Great Exhibition of 1851—could walk

through a fantasyland made to suggest the sweep of British colonial acquisitions, from

South African coalmines to East Asian pagodas. For one of these visitors, the Prince of

Wales (who also helped design the event), such structures rendered the British Empire

Exhibition London's greatest vista in Conrad's sense of the term: it was, as Prince

Edward succinctly put it, "the Empire's shop window."[182]

A visitor with a different view was E. M. Forster. As the correspondent for *The

Nation and Anthenaeum*, Forster arrived on 15 April 1924. As befits the author of novels

of great muddles, he proceeded through "the wrong entrance, or at all events not the right

one, which I could not find, and I feared to be turned back by the authorities, but they

seemed a bit lost too" ("B" 43). The confusion may be excused, however, for the king's

grand opening to the public would not take place for another week, and much of what

Forster relays in "The Birth of an Empire" are the final preparations in advance of that

opening. Even still, it is tempting to read Forster's review today—"full of fine irritation,"

as Lionel Trilling noted—as auguring Wembley's dubious successes.[183] Playing down

the engrossing features of the exhibition, Forster instead affirms experiences of standing

in a barrage of hollow spectacles and empty entertainments: "beauty always does have a

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[182] Quoted in Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 338.

[183] Lionel Trilling, *E. M. Forster* (New York: New Directions, 1965), 142.

rough time at these shows—even rougher than in the actual world" ("B" 47). Where

official guidebooks promise interesting spectacles and grand amusements, Forster's eye

falls on the artificial, undemanding, and underwhelming. After passing through one of

the exhibition's large collections buildings (and finding it unimpressive), he at last

reaches his destination at the section devoted to British India where he cannot resist a

backhanded compliment of the section's realism. "Indians smiled charmingly, and gave

incorrect information. It was all delightful; indeed, nothing was wanting except a few

more exhibits" ("B" 46).

     Yet amid this very scene something unlikely happens. Strolling past a series of

Indian exhibits, Forster finds himself caught off-guard by a miniature of a famous site in

Lahore, the Wazir Khan Mosque, a structure Forster likely saw for himself in 1912.[184]

As he writes in his review, the small object "was so lovely and stood so incidentally and

accidentally upon a table, that it had all the magic of a real building, met by chance

among squalid or pretentious streets" ("B" 46). Though he might have commented on

the craftsmanship or verisimilitude of the miniature, he writes instead that the artifact

seized his attention because of its accidental, careless placement—a quality Forster knew

would not survive the exhibition's opening, and perhaps not the hour. "When I see it

next," he laments, "it will probably be glassed, docketed, and have lost its preternatural

charm" ("B" 46). But it is clear that what excites Forster has as much to do with the

object's "lovel[iness]"—its unaffected, arresting beauty—as with its "magic"—its

uncanny ability to mimic the excitement of a discovery outside an exhibition because of

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[184] Forster visited Lahore in November 1912, and though he never mentions the Wazir Khan in his letters or in the travel journals collected in *The Hill of Devi* (New York: Harcourt, 1953), he would have likely have seen it when friends living in Lahore took him site-seeing. P. N. Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life* (New York: Harcourt, 1977), 1:228-33.

its artless display. For the moment the solicitous staging that characterizes the genre of exhibition display is yet to come. The miniature mosque has been set aside where it awaits its careful placement within the armature of display whose very absence permits Forster his imaginative encounter with the model's referent. The impact of this absence for Forster becomes more clear when compared to the collections building he has just mentioned passing through on his way to the British Indian exhibits. Though the immense concrete structure has been designed to impress visitors with its magnitude and swelling collection of artifacts, for Forster it was "so large that it failed in the normal immunities of an interior" ("B" 44). It is as though the vastness of the space and the depth of the collections that had been calculated to make the structure appear imposing have instead rendered the space contrived and unreal.

On the one hand, we can read Forster as turning the affective force of his imaginative sojourn against the exhibition that sponsors it. This misplaced miniature stands out because the rest of the exhibition's artifice draws unwelcome attention to itself. The immense exercise of pulling the Wembley exhibition together, Forster suggests, is but little compared to the extraordinary cultural labor demanded of turning representations of empire's grisly entanglements into amusements and rationalizations. All this work cannot help but make the very opposite point that the exhibition's planners sought to advance: rather than being dazzled by the representational power of the exhibition, Forster responds to the magic of a small, cast-aside object. But on the other hand, the exhibition proves more effective, and affecting, than Forster gives it credit. Though he crosses the thresholds of the collections building as a journalist, he becomes a visitor to an imaginary Lahore during his encounter with the small mosque. For all the

underplayed liberalism of Forster's article, the exhibition has had its intended effect, albeit in a limited sense, when he imagines himself a tourist in a colonial city. This raises questions about what kind of curiosity Forster's narrative confesses. If this magic arises from the unexpected sense of the real, as Forster suggests, one wonders if this "real" is meaningfully different from the claim made in the exhibition's official guidebook that the miniatures of northwest India intend to demonstrate that "the interest in realms lying over the borders of civilization is very real."[185]

In writing of the small mosque, Forster perhaps unwittingly echoes one of the principle characters in the novel he had completed earlier the same year. We need only turn briefly to *A Passage to India* (1924) to recall why Adela Quested repeatedly pleas at the beginning of the novel, "I want to see the real India" (*PI* 22, 25), and to note the implications of such a plea for Forster's Wembley exhibition review. As a number of the novel's readers have noticed, casting Adela as an English tourist in India restages Forster's own travels there in 1912-3 and 1921-2, a repetition that invites us to note the resemblances and disparities between the author and his character.[186] Like Forster, Adela arrives in India with more than idle interest, for as the fiancée of a colonial official she is aware that she is likely to remain there for some time; she is, in her own words, not "just a globe-trotter" (*PI* 27). But Adela's earnest interest manifests itself as the naïve will to understand a culture by gazing upon an archive of alterity that includes Indian people, artifacts, and locations, a naivety that will eventually, and tragically, lead her to the local tourist destination of the Marabar Caves. Leading up to that visit, Forster captures

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[185] *The British Empire Exhibition 1924: Official Guide*, ed. G. C. Lawrence (London: Fleetway Press, 1924), 63.
[186] See, for example, Ian Baucom's discussion of *A Passage to India* alongside Forster's Indian travels in *Out of Place* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 101-34.

Adela's credulity in her willingness to mistake Dr. Aziz, literally the first Indian she

meets, as the embodiment of the colony itself. "In her ignorance, she regarded him as

'India,' and never surmised that his outlook was limited and his method inaccurate, and

that no one is India" (*PI* 76). Such ignorance is hardly idiosyncratic, and Forster's novel

carefully traces just how difficult it can be even for the well-intended to break from the

long history of institutionalized of racism, purported cultural superiority, and imperial

ideology that supplies colonial rule its authority. It is in her eagerness "to see the real

India"—that is, in her belief that its essence could be visually consumed if only she could

shove aside the obscuring infrastructure of British colonial rule—that Adela elides Aziz

with what Forster's narrator dubs the reduced, homogenized "India" that lives only

between quotation marks. Put another way, we might say Adela mistakes India for

Aziz's exhibition of Indianness.

In performing a kind of Indian subjecthood, Aziz is also, for the moment, willing

to oblige his English visitors with what they want, and in seeking to supply the view

Adela hopes to find, he invites her to visit his home. This invitation, which Aziz extends

at a significant early scene in *A Passage to India*, is more polite than earnest, and one he

immediately regrets. No sooner is his invitation spoken than Aziz and Adela are led into

Fielding's eighteenth-century garden house, a home that makes Aziz recall his own as "a

detestable shanty near a low bazaar" (*PI* 73). In lieu of rescinding the invitation to his

bungalow, Aziz begins to praise Fielding's garden house as one Chandrapore's most

impressive private interiors. But a tourist as inquisitive and persistent as Adela will not

settle for an Anglo-Indian abode, whether or not Aziz assures her that when one is in

Fielding's home "you are in India; I am not joking" (*PI* 74). When she promises once

more to visit his home, Aziz makes his final bid. "He thought again of his bungalow with horror. . . . What was he to do? 'Yes, all that is settled,' he cried. 'I invite you all to see me in the Marabar Caves'" (*PI* 79).

In the space of a few pages, Forster's novel announces a strategy it will adopt throughout for negotiating its sense of the real by shuttling between three sites offered to fulfill Adela's quest. By moving from Aziz's "shanty" to Fielding's splendid garden home and arriving, finally, at the caves that must substitute for both homes as a location for a tourist's inspection of "the real India," Forster plots a course through Chandrapore that moves from the common to the stately and ultimately to what is outside the city and only partly comprehensible. Adela's curiosity might have been disappointed by Aziz's home (had she visited it) just as it was piqued by Fielding's, but it certainly finds its limits in her horrifying encounter in the caves. Rather than marking any single location as a synecdoche for the real, the text assigns significance to mobility between and through these locations, a point Forster underscores both by making these the locations to which his narrative will frequently return and by dividing the novel into three distinct parts: "Mosque," "Caves," and "Temple." In this way, *A Passage to India* does more than suggest that meaningful experience sometimes stands in excess to an accessible, readable, and viewable reality; the novel also traces a cautionary tale for liberal humanist curiosity.[187] Forster acknowledges Adela's curiosity as rooted in genuine interest in, and concern for, India's colonial subjects and yet simultaneously reveals her curiosity to be doomed by the form it takes: the detached tourist's gaze that cannot begin to capture the

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[187] Curiosity comprises one quarter of Forster's conception of humanism, whose three other characteristics—"a free mind, belief in good taste, and belief in the human race"—Forster also invests in Adela (quoted in W. J. H. Sprott, "Forster as a Humanist," *Aspects of E. M. Forster: Essays and Recollections for His Ninetieth Birthday*, ed Oliver Stallybrass [New York: Harcourt, 1969], 75).

complexities of a contested and plural India that the novel presents as a journey through distinct Indian locations.

As we have begun to notice, Forster rehearses a similar three-part tour in his review of the Wembley exhibition, reporting by turns in "The Birth of an Empire" from the exhibition's London address, the ersatz India temporarily installed there, and the India of Forster's memory. In this text, however, Forster cannot duplicate in London the passage between discreet boundaries that the novel plots through India. On the contrary, his walk through the exhibition becomes most interesting for him precisely when all three locations are intertwined, when he stands in a fabricated colony in the middle of London pretending to be in India as he recalls it. However, Forster follows his comments on the miniature mosque with a conclusion that seeks to disentangle these spaces once more by redrawing the boundaries between exhibition and reality. "Well, it is a show to suit all tastes. Millions will spend money there, hundreds will make money, and a few highbrows will make fun. I belong to the latter class. Rule me out; go, think your own thoughts, don't forget your spats, and don't expect an Empire to be born too punctually" ("B" 47). Despite his lighthearted tone, Forster's language discloses an eagerness to stride out of the exhibition's gates and secure his return to a London largely untouched by exhibitors. Inhering in these statements is the muted awareness of the networks connecting the exhibition and London that are more penetrating than Forster willfully acknowledges here, for his ironic posture intensely seeks to dismantle the fact that there exists little difference between the kind of seeing demanded within the exhibition and the gaze called upon by spectacles elsewhere in London. Not only is the Wembley exhibition simply the latest in several decades of exhibitions to exalt colonial power and

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technology; not only does it take place in London in order to intensify that city's status as empire's center; and not only are London's hugely successful colonial exhibitions buoyed by widespread interest to inspect the evidence of British imperialism. In addition to all of this, the attraction to spectacles of scientific authority and cultural alterity that London already fosters forms the basis for the genre of display at colonial exhibitions. The exhibitions simply refine that form of seeing, elevating what is ordinary and normalized elsewhere. Harold Hartley and other exhibitors may strain to present unified and diverting visions of empire, but Forster's own straining to represent "these shows" as apart from "the actual world" ("B" 47) cannot help but uncloak London's presence within the exhibition itself. But even without Forster's acknowledgement, *A Passage to India* has offered a template for reading the exchange of such spaces and the views Forster records there as beginning in detachment only to conclude in a gesture of curiosity.

What we learn from Forster's trip to Wembley, and his imaginative sojourn to Lahore, is that although the self-conscious aims of curiosity may not easily be divested from the unconscious gestures of fetishism, their codependence proves instructive. Forster's curiosity emerges from the knowledge acquired by his ironic stance against the exhibition. By treating the miniature mosque not *as if it were magical* but simply *as magical*, he writes of the small model as doing the work of a fetish, containing the affective power of that for which it stands as substitute and which is glaringly absent from the exhibition itself—the vibrant and irreducible spaces, buildings, and cultures of colonial India. It is only in ironizing the exhibition that Forster permits himself to experience (and later, to disclose) curiosity for one its artifacts.

If irony in Forster's hands is the device of distance *and* return, detachment *and* reattachment, abandonment *and* resituation, it is because his texts reserve space for curiosity in irony's company. Or, to be more precise, more than one space: for it is in the plural locations of *A Passage to India* and "The Birth of an Empire" that Forster's irony permits and, indeed, encourages the tentative gestures of curiosity, gestures inspired by the urgency of adapting to all that is uncertain and unanticipated in acts of arrival, passage, and departure. That is, it is not simply an act of recognizing the familiar standards of British high culture imposed on exhibition culture (an affirmation of personal taste), nor a moment of recognizing what is laudably different between London and Lahore (a celebration of multiculturalism).[188] Though both of these acts of recognition are at work here, Forster's description of the miniature mosque more forcefully suggests that he is not content with either, and that he seeks something more. This bid for curiosity reaches less for what is to be seen at the exhibition than for what is *not* on display there.   Simply put, it is a request to know more: more about the Wazir Khan, Islam, Lahore—more about the versions of British India which lie beyond relations with London or empire. And it is also a request to know more about London at the zenith of empire, this rich and strange place where Lahore can appear in England just as England has fashioned itself in Lahore. Irony is Forster's means for demarcating the exhibition from the surrounding city, and curiosity the name for the endeavor to see beyond both locations and their boundaries toward the space where each may yet have something more to show, to narrate, and to offer.

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[188] For a discussion of recognition in this sense, see Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-73.

Chapter 6
"Savages Watching the Pictures": Impersonal Intimacy and the Cinema in Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot

"All you read a novel for is to see what sort of person the writer is," complains the aspiring novelist Terence Hewet to Rachel Vinrace at the edge of a scenic South American view in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915).

> As for the novel itself, the whole conception, the way one's seen the thing, felt about it, made it stand in relation to other things, not one in a million cares for that. . . . But there's an extraordinary satisfaction in writing, even in the attempt to write. What you said just now is true: one doesn't want to be things; one wants merely to be allowed to see them.[189]

Terence seeks to bridge with these statements an impasse between his view of art, which privileges literature, with Rachel's, which prefers music's ability to go "straight for things. It says all there is to say at once" (*VO* 195). At issue is which art form possesses clear and direct access to experience. Terence implies in this exchange, as Woolf herself would also imply in other writings, that such seemingly unmediated access to experience can only be imagined in the terms of visibility. As she would explain later, near the conclusion of *A Room of One's Own* (1929), the experiences of daily life are "very erratic, very undependable," but a reader who encounters masterfully composed texts "sees more intensely afterwards; the world seems bared of its covering and given an intenser life."[190] These lines help Woolf explain in *Room* that this piercing of the veil follows from the freedom to construct textual subjectivities that had not existed before, but the reason why such rhetoric should be suggestive of unmediated experience comes not from Woolf's lectures but from Terence's conversation with Rachel. If writing and reading are imaginative experiments with alternative forms of experience ("one doesn't want to be

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[189] Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 204 (hereafter cited in text as *VO*).
[190] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, 1981), 110.

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things; one wants merely to be allowed to see them"), it is because the terms of knowledge and contact share so much with the terms of sight. Because seeing something implies having been in its presence, when saying we have "seen" something means we have known it, Terence confirms, we allow vision to denote a metonymic sense of closeness. For her part, Rachel remains unconvinced—not because she does not believe that sight stands as a proxy for experiential knowledge, but because Terence's attempt at bridging the gap between them feels abstract and remote. "As he talked of writing he had suddenly become impersonal. He might never care for any one; all that desire to know her and get at her, which she had felt pressing on her almost painfully, had completely vanished" (*VO* 204). His accusations place Rachel in a camp of readers with the wrong kind of vision—"you read a novel . . . to see what sort of person the writer is" when you ought to be trying better to understand "the way [the author's] seen the thing"—remarks which appear to put intimacy and intellectual inquiry at odds.

Though the tension between Terence and Rachel in this scene might mirror a contest between forms of art like literature and music, I have opened with this scene in order to focus instead on how it suggests vision mediates between impersonality and intimacy. Both characters seek in this scene a closeness with the other, but as one feels s/he approaches it, the other feels more removed. This is in no small way related to the novel's bildungsroman tendencies that seek to trace Rachel's subjecthood and the strictures enforced by the "men of 1914," for whom Terence, St. John Hirst, and others stand as emblems.[191] The objectivity T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and, most notoriously, T. S. Eliot prescribed in essays on literature demanded that subjectivity be banished and

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[191] Ann Ardis makes this case in the opening pages of *Modernism and Cultural Conflict* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and traces such tensions throughout her study.

emotions depersonalized. Only in so doing, so the argument went, could readers find a stable access point from which to critique literature and assign literary value, consolidating and esteeming cultural interests over smaller, idiosyncratic concerns. Rachel's disappointment at such language exposes impersonality's most noticeable flaw: namely, that it must be constructed by individual personalities whose political aims are masked by aesthetic decrees for how to read a novel or look at a picture. For Rachel and others like her, intimacy is a far more attractive approach, for only in holding things closely, rather than at arm's length that value can emerge. Only then, as Woolf suggests, may we come in contact with life's most meaningful intensities.

Yet while they are opposed as to how to go about it, both Terence and Rachel seek the same thing. Both want to be able to bridge gaps, to come together, to pass through seemingly impossible barriers. They hope to kindle their intimacy by talking about the possibilities of literature (for Terence) and music (for Rachel) because both believe that if a medium can access direct experience, it will bring together people who might otherwise misunderstand one another. However, when they feel closest to one another, at the edge of being able to express direct experience, Terence and Rachel think not of language or melody, but sight.

Thus the tension between the pair in this scene also distills a broader cultural desire that appears throughout *The Voyage Out* and which Woolf's narrator has limned at the beginning of the chapter from which this scene is taken. When the walking path Terence and Rachel follow during their conversation reaches its end at the edge of a cliff, they look back on the terrain they have covered, a "vast expanse of land" which seems like "no view, however extended, in England," but remains powerfully resonant of the

familiar red territories on maps "where famous cities were founded, and the races of men

changed from dark savages to white civilized men, and back to dark savages again." This

view feels "uncomfortably impersonal" to the pair and causes them to turn their heads in

the other direction. In the Atlantic they find another vast expanse, but this one, they can

imagine, "eventually narrowed itself, clouded its pure tint with grey, and swirled through

narrow channels and dashed in a shiver of broken waters against massive granite rocks.

It was this sea that flowed up to the mouth of the Thames; and the Thames washed the

roots of the city of London" (*VO* 194).

The acts of looking in this complex scene would have been familiar to London

cinema-goers of the 1910s. The South American panorama that begins the passage

dissolves, giving way to a host of other views: shots that cut abruptly from one location

to the next, close-ups of details, and images presented simultaneously as if side-by-side

("here the view was one of infinite sun-dried earth . . . widening and spreading away and

away like the immense floor of the sea"). Images of a land that is emphatically not

England communicate the traces of British imperial expansion nonetheless. The sea that

crashes against cliffs in Santa Marina (the novel's fictional British colony) must also,

finally, lap against the banks of the Thames. Above all, this chapter in *The Voyage Out*

appropriates the quintessential cinematic technique of montage in creating meaning by

juxtaposing images, in particular images of the immediate and the distant. Santa Marina

and London appear almost alongside one another in ways that seem discomfiting to

Terence and Rachel. What makes this scene "uncomfortably impersonal" is not that it

feels abstract or unrelated to these characters, but that, on the contrary, it feels sharply

close. Like Terence's "impersonal" ideas of novels and their readers that uncannily

supplements his longing to be close to her "which she had felt pressing on her almost

painfully," the colonial history of Santa Marina is not a history Woolf's characters have

had a hand in making, but it is their own history nonetheless, and is a history that renders

them empire's beneficiaries as well as its culprits. Woolf's appropriation of film

techniques at this point in the novel is one of her earliest modernist flourishes, but it is

also more that. It is an attempt to make readers aware of their "positionality" in a

globalizing world, a way of asking audiences to come to terms with their relation to the

things they encounter by imagining what we have already seen Terence call the "relation

[of the novel] to other things." As Rey Chow observes, because so many of film's

techniques suggest movement, even film's earliest audiences felt transported when

watching film. As a result, audiences were constantly revaluating their conceptions of

what they saw and from what vantage they saw it. "[T]he modes of identity construction

offered by film were modes of relativity and relations rather than essences or fixities." In

other words, "from the very earliest moments" of film, audiences have faced a medium in

which everything moves, shifts, and changes, and a basic fact that encourages audiences

to consider identities as forged by such movement.[192]

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[192] Rey Chow, "Film and Cultural Identity," *The Rey Chow Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 86. The issue of "positioning"—of what might be understood as a perspective and an awareness of where a perspective emerges—is a frequent topic in theories of film and cultural identity. For the Vietnamese filmmaker and theorist Trinh. T. Minh-ha, western films too frequently offer images of otherness dependent upon stasis and essentialism ("Outside In Inside Out," *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Philip Simpson, Andre Utterson, and K. J. Shepherdson, 4 vols. [London and New York: Routledge, 2004], 3:375-85). In his essay on Caribbean cinema and cultural identity, Stuart Hall fears that when film represents cultural identity as an established product, it occludes the fact that "cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all . . . but a *positioning*. Hence there is always a politics of the position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of history'" ("Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," *Film Theory*, Simpson et al, 3:389; italics in original). I want to follow Chow in suggesting here that such positioning was not always fixed at certain moments in film's history, and that the teens and twenties were one such moment, and, further, that the desire to absorb images projected onscreen into one's identity inspired the sensibility of impersonal intimacy under investigation here.

If sensations of movement, transport, and travel are built into film's techniques, so, too, are the activities of reflecting on how one sees from changing and unpredictable vantage points.[193] The sense of multiple perspectives seems to trump subjective viewpoints. By aggregating limited views into a single aesthetic presentation, a sense of reality emerges. But at the same time that an objective, impersonal knowledge of the world was projected onscreen, film also connoted closeness between its images and its viewers. This not only brought the larger world into cinema houses, but brought to light the paradox at the center of film techniques: that the impersonal presentation of multiple shots and a variety of techniques filmmakers were developing in the teens promised audiences a privileged sense of intimacy with what they saw. In fact, the more impersonal the presentation—the more images seemed simply recorded by a machine and not guided by a director—the more intimate the glimpse seemed.

In this final chapter, my chief argument will be that impersonality and intimacy are modernism's twin strategies for coping with modernity's fragmentation and divisions and, as such, have more in common than is often realized. I will make that case by considering how modernist literature bears close relation to film. Both art forms have suggested to some critics a distancing between content and audience, and, for others, closeness between content and audience. The extremes between these views are most evident in film studies. Film has been criticized as suggesting the powerful distance of mechanical reproduction that separates the camera from the audience, as when Stanley Cavell contended that one of film's constitutive and most affectively charged features is

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[193] Cf. Chow, who continues the quotation above to say "[f]ilm techniques such as montage, close-ups, panoramic shots, long shots, jump cuts, slow motion, flashback, and so forth . . . result in processes of introjection, projection, or rejection that take place between the images and the narratives shown on the screen," and in the process, alter "audiences' sense of self, place, history, and pleasure" ("Film" 86).

that "movies allow the audience to be mechanically absent."[194] As we turn from the

enormity of outdoor exhibition grounds to the relatively small and intimate spaces of the

cinema, we find a renewed, if unexpected, affinity between metropolitan and colonial

bonds. Though imperial propagandists made use of both exhibitions and cinema, I am

more concerned here with a feature of early film that bears subtler relation to the colonial

imaginary: the powerful connection audiences felt to mechanically produced images.[195]

It is no accident, I will suggest, that the early years of film only slightly predate the

moment at which the modernist posture of impersonality reaches its apex, nor that

"impersonality" almost always brings its dialect opposite, intimacy, along with it. My

hope is that this chapter opens an investigation into how modernist literature and theories

of readership were inflected by an understanding of film and film audiences, particularly

metropolitan audiences.

Early Film and the Colonial Unconscious

In modernist writings on film by contemporaries as heterogeneous as Vachel

Lindsay, Dorothy Richardson, H. D., Gertrude Stein, and Siegfried Kracauer, the

audiences watching cinema received more attention than films themselves.[196] As Laura

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[194] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (New York: Viking, 1971), 25. This view has fallen out of favor more recently as feminist film scholars began borrowing from psychoanalysis the notion of suture to suggest the inextricable bind between audience and the films they watch. But see also Rey Chow's critique of the metaphor of suture, which argues that suture too readily suggests that film audiences falsely recognize themselves in what they see onscreen ("Film" 87).
[195] For this reason, my discussion of Woolf in this chapter considers *The Voyage Out* and "The Cinema" rather than the better known novel, *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Whereas *To the Lighthouse* has been considered in light of the cinema and filmic techniques, *The Voyage Out* has not received such sustained treatment; critics of late have instead read *The Voyage Out* in terms of its colonial contexts. Part of the aim of this chapter is to consider *The Voyage Out* along these lines while also bringing it into discussions of Woolf and film in order to provide a richer sense of Woolf's literary development leading up to her essay on the cinema.
[196] See Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture*, 1922 (New York, Modern Library, 2000); Siegfried Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces," *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and

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Marcus explains in her study of modernist-era film, when particular films were discussed, early film critics almost always charged themselves with the task of explaining not simply the film but how to interpret the medium itself, "not so much *explaining* the visual as *redefining* the images according to an alternate set of rules" legislated by film.[197] Discussions of Robert Weine's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) and Carl Theordor Dreyer's *Joan of Arc* (1928) yielded above all opportunities to generalize how film techniques taught audiences to interpret them. Thus, continues Marcus, "the writings of many early film critics and commentators revealed an acute awareness not only of the relationships between filmic motion and the modernity that they inhabited, but also of the need to articulate new understandings of vision and identity in a moving world."[198]

The paradox early film critics encountered was the need for explaining something for which no adequate vocabulary had yet been found. Film seemed to divulge visual information about the flows and rhythms of experience, but that information could not be fully accessed without a capable framework for discussing film itself. This may be difficult to imagine now because our vocabulary for early film now is practically synonymous with modernism itself. Unlike caricature, photography, and colonial exhibitions, film and modernism, we are often reminded, come of age at the same time. So many of the terms that have been taken to be modernism's buzzwords for generations now—fragmentation, dislocation, mechanization, speed, restlessness, anomie—are also the recurrent themes of early film. Yet, if we are guided by the way moderns sometimes

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trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 323-30; and contributions by Richardson, H. D., and Stein to the film journal *Close Up* (in James Donald et al, eds., *Close Up, 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* [London: Cassell, 1998]).

[197] Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 181.

[198] Marcus, *Tenth*, 5.

wrote of film, perhaps film's modernism has no less to do with the longing to visualize the modern world's wide expanse that film sought to satisfy.

For many, film's most fundamental quality is its representation of movement, a quality which manifested itself as a twin fascination (shared alike by filmmakers, audiences, and early film critics) with time and space. A number of excellent studies explain the cinema's implications for modernist senses of time;[199] far less often treated is the question of film's relation to space and place, and in particular to how it helped negotiate a sense of identity in the metropole by appealing to imperial reach. Yet at the turn of the century, Britain's first filmmakers were already expanding the locations of film's stories to satiate the appetite for films about colonial stories whose afterlives could be felt in London. One early British filmmaker, James Williamson, found he could film his melodrama about the Boxer Uprising (1900), *Attack on a China Mission* (1900), without traveling to Asia at all. In fact, Williamson discovered he could make the film in England—quite literally in his own back yard.[200] But the dominant trend of the period was not melodrama but actualité films like those made by the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company's William Dickson, who was one of several who traveled five thousand miles to film British troops involved in the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) in South Africa (in sometimes contrived scenarios). Film and the spectacle of modern warfare, especially imperial warfare, seemed to go hand-in-hand. As Nicholas Daly

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[199] For considerations of film and modernist conceptions of time, see Gilles Deleuze's foundational *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); and Mary Ann Doane's more recent and historically grounded *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[200] James Chapman and Nicholas J. Cull, *Projecting Empire: Imperialism and Popular Cinema* (New York: Tauris, 2009), 1-2.

writes, "whatever its importance for British imperial history, the [Anglo-Boer War] acted as a stimulus to the still very fragile emergent film industry."[201]

In the epilogue to "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (1935), Walter Benjamin diagnoses the pleasure afforded in filming "imperialistic war" as the logical endpoint for a certain kind of modernist aesthetics.[202] For audiences who had been trained since the fin-de-siècle that sublime aesthetic experience existed in the cult of beauty and ironic presentation, the aesthetic distance provided by technologically reproduced art offers "the consummation of '*l'art pour l'art*' . . . . [Humanity's] self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as supreme aesthetic pleasure" ("WOA" 3:122).[203] Though Benjamin seeks to score a point for liberal politics in his anti-fascist epilogue, earlier in the Work of Art essay he, too, finds it difficult to separate the pleasures of film from the pleasures of the self-destruction that characterize a strain of colonial politics.

> Our bars and city streets, our offices and our furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris. ("WOA" 3:117)

During the height of European imperial control and the early phases of globalization, even those things most associated with movement and the benefits of commercial and imperial networks seem inadequate to the task of satisfying curious eyes. That task

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[201] Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 62. Daly also has an excellent reading of Rudyard Kipling's short story "Mrs. Bathurst" (1904), which is set in South Africa, as part of a Boer film aesthetic (56-75).
[202] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," trans. Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Marcus Bullock et al (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996-2003), 3:121 (hereafter cited in text as "WOA").
[203] For Benjamin, these are the circumstances that make watching the depredations of the aura its own aesthetic compensation. "*Imperialistic war is an uprising on the part of technology, which demands repayment in 'human material' for the natural material society has denied it. . . . in gas warfare it has found a new means of abolishing the aura*" ("WOA" 3:121-2; Benjamin's italics).

would be left for film, which, Benjamin suggests, appears in the midst of Europe's

metropolitan ruins (its "far-flung debris"), a wasteland of its own making. It is as though,

for Benjamin, the new medium of film was not just part of this era, but could not possibly

have preceded it. It is further as if the changes wrought by global commercial and

imperial traffic have not only found their best representations in film, but that in

producing these representations the cinema completes the implosion of Europe's

decadent decline. Though one of Benjamin's famous claims about the cinema is that it

offered a glimpse into the optical unconscious ("WOA" 3:117; meaning, the many small

movements that are perceived but not entirely apprehended),[204] his essay persistently

testifies to modernism's colonial unconscious, its awareness, without full

acknowledgement, of the centrality of the colonial for Europe's self-definition.[205] Film

not only changes movement (accessing "a vast and unsuspected field of action" ["WOA"

3:117]) by destroying prefilmic notions of time; it liberates the "prison-world" of the

European city by facilitating travel to points beyond railway terminals.

A decade earlier, a writer in London had considered film in much the same way as

Benjamin would, but with a reversal of the metaphor. Woolf's essay "The Cinema"

(1926) opens by considering film's impact on metropolitan audiences by associating that

impact, like Benjamin, with what is geographically distant from the metropolis. But

where Benjamin's avowed ambivalence toward film slips into the language of destruction,

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[204] Benjamin first mentions the optical unconscious in his "Little History of Photography," 1931, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, in *Selected Writings* 2:507-30

[205] For explorations on the links between modernism's aesthetic aspirations and the colonial cultures from which it drew inspiration, and, as a result, tended to reinscribe all the more powerfully as outside modernity itself, see, for example, Adam Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion* (London and New York: Routledge 1988), and Victor Li, *The Neo-Primitivist Turn: Critical Reflections on Alterity, Culture, and Modernity* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

Woolf regards film as one of the generative forces of the machine age—though, again, the language is telling. "People say that the savage no longer exists in us," she begins:

> But these philosophers have presumably forgotten about the movies. They have never seen the savages of the twentieth century watching the pictures. They have never sat themselves in front of the screen and thought how, for all the clothes on their backs and the carpets at their feet, no great distance separates them from those bright-eyed naked men who knocked two bars or iron together and heard in that clangour a foretaste of the music of Mozart.[206]

If the challenge film poses to the cultural critics ("philosophers") is the problem of covert proximity Woolf describes—where clothes and carpet hide the closeness between civilized and uncivilized, and between the cultivated sense of self and the unsophisticated minds of "bright-eyed naked men"—it makes sense that Woolf should want to turn from interpreting films themselves and focus on its audiences instead. The subterranean connection Woolf lights onto here remains hidden but not inaccessible, she suggests. The film onscreen is significant as a form that in some crucial sense remains obscure to viewers and, as a result, unmasks its audiences, even its most blasé viewers, as something not unlike colonial subjects.

As Woolf's essay continues, its comments about film always work in the same direction, explaining the techniques of film as a form that reveals something about its audiences. Film emerges for her as uniquely suited for reflection on modern metropolitan life, capturing the ephemera lost in ordinary perception. "Watching crowds, watching the chaos of the streets" in person means being inundated with more information than one can process. With film, "it seems sometimes as if movements and colours, shapes and sounds had come together and waited for someone to seize them and convert their energy

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[206] Virginia Woolf, "The Cinema," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols., ed. Andrew McNeillie (vols. 1-4) and Stuart Clark (vols. 5-6) (London: Hogarth, 1986-2010), 4:348 (hereafter cited in text as "C").

into art; then, uncaught, they disperse and fly asunder again" ("C" 4:352). What film grants audiences, that is, is what we sense but do not see without the mediation of the camera's eye: or, in Benjamin's terms, film reveals the optical unconscious. But for Woolf this does not mean that film's greatest contribution to knowledge will be in the arena of psychological processes; nor does Woolf find film to be aestheticism in full bloom, as Benjamin does. Instead, the world rendered onscreen has for her "become not more beautiful, in the sense in which pictures are beautiful, but shall we call it (our vocabulary is miserably insufficient) more real, or real with a different reality from that which we perceive daily life" ("C" 4:349).[207]

Concerned as both Benjamin and Woolf are with film's aesthetic and social dimensions, the difference between their assessments is surely the difference of writing in Paris as a German-Jewish émigré fleeing from Nazism in the 1930s, and writing in London as the beneficiary of the world's largest empire in 1920s.[208] For Benjamin, film is the fruition of a politics of oppression for which decadent aesthetics had laid the groundwork; writing about film as a means of traveling abroad that destroys the metropole is a byproduct of that understanding. But for Woolf, film is not the culmination of the cult of beauty and irony but the arrival of a form that promotes widespread urban anthropology and ethnography. By making it possible to "see life as it is when we have no part in it," to "behold [images of the city] as they are when we are

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[207] Where Woolf felt that language would catch up with filmic technology in 1926, unlocking film's most hopeful potential for self-reflection and aesthetic production, Benjamin was afraid that even before Woolf's essay was written humanity's most basic tendencies were toward war, and that technology would always be conscribed by conflict. The futurists' call for speed and destruction in the early teens, and the world war that soon followed, convinced Benjamin as much: "the destruction caused by war furnishes proof that society was not mature enough to make technology its organ, that technology was not sufficiently developed to master the elemental force of society" (Benjamin "WOA" 3:121).

[208] Marcus takes up the issue of differing national traditions of film theory and their points of intersection in *The Tenth Muse*, chap. 5.

not there" ("C" 4:349), the cinema becomes a place where Londoners gain access to their

city's rhythms, architecture, and customs, elements that audiences may consider, perhaps

for the first time, without thinking about their place in that urban milieu. Techniques like

close ups, montage, and slowed time provide audiences with a critical, depersonalized

context that exists nowhere elsewhere ("[a]s we gaze, we seem to be removed from the

pettiness of actual existence, its cares, its conventions;" "C" 4:349). In this way, Woolf's

image of film audiences as "the savages of the twentieth century watching the pictures" is

not an image of the anxieties of decadence or "reverse colonization," but of the beginning

of an engagement with a new medium of expression that, unlike the scene Woolf

describes, can be observed, documented, and studied from its beginning—by film

spectators themselves.

Both Woolf's essay and Benjamin's share a tendency to operate on a hinge that,

swung one way, makes audiences the spectators of film and, swung the other, makes

them students of their own cultures. And this is the final lesson that comes in comparing

two of modernism's best-known essays on film, for while Woolf and Benjamin would

seem to be at odds on number of issues, both find common ground in deploying the

rhetoric of cultural difference as a means for explaining how film affects its audiences.

To think about one's culture as an anthropologist almost always means appropriating the

techniques and terms of ethnography.[209] When Woolf and Benjamin write of film in

these terms, they remind us that to understand modernist self-consciousness, including

how one's art might be received, requires a concomitant understanding of modernist

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[209] Both Marc Manganaro's *Culture, 1922: The Emergence of a Concept* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Jed Esty's *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) carefully plot modernism's "anthropological turn" and modern writers' interest in ethnography.

conceptions of cultural alterity. As Simon Gikandi and Marianna Torgovnick have

shown, definitions of modernity and anti-modernity (including primitivism, fetishism,

and tribalism) are not binaries but mutually constitutive constructions.[210] Indeed, as we

saw in the previous chapter on colonial exhibitions, such antimodern notions coexist

within modernity itself as the muted awareness of the colonial and as the defining "other"

of metropolitan culture.

Contemporary film critics caution against presupposing modernism's favorite

self-fashioned narratives of clean breaks and making it new when considering the

development of the new medium.[211] Because Benjamin and Woolf do point to a

genuinely new feature to appear in modernist culture, the film audience, we must proceed

carefully so as not to reinscribe these myths in the course of studying what film audiences

meant for modernist writers. Like all audiences, a film audience is a loose, temporary

collective with differing tastes, backgrounds, and social positions who are at other times

also members of other audiences (visitors to museum, patrons of music halls, and readers

of poetry, for instance). Rightly or wrongly, early film audiences tended to regard film as

singularly new,[212] and early commenters on cinema preserve that regard in choosing to

write about audiences—sometimes more often than films themselves. Part of this

newness results from repeated utopian claims for film as a "visual language" that could

span diverse locations and cultures to augur a "new humanity" whose "language will be

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[210] Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and Simon Gikandi, "Picasso, Africa, and the Schemata of Difference," *Modernism/Modernity* 10.3 (2003): 455-80).
[211] See, for example, Laura Marcus, "Film," in *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, ed. David Bradshaw and Kevin J. H. Dettmar (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 250-7.
[212] The most familiar iteration of film's newness belongs to Rudolf Armheim's claim (in 1931): "For the first time in history a new art form is developing and we can say that we were there" (*Film Essays and Criticism*, trans. Brenda Benthien [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997], 13).

cinema," as the poet Blaise Cendrars declared in 1917.[213] Prufrock pines for just such

communicability in the face of the impossibility "to say just what I mean! / But as if a

magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen."[214]

As Prufrock's anxious tones suggest, audiences seldom forgot that such human

fantasies were the phantasmagoric work of machines, and that fact tended to obscure the

role of the filmmaker. Even a film as self-conscious about the human element in

filmmaking as Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929) announced itself in its

opening credits as an "experimental work [that] aims at creating a truly international[,]

absolute language of cinema."[215] The terms of that language are unmistakable. The

narrative of *Man with the Movie Camera*, in which a camera follows a cameraman

shooting a film about a city, is framed by the narrative of an automaton: the relentlessly

mimetic camera. For the moment, the yearning to be outside of culture seems not only

possible but actually unfolding before audiences. With few exceptions, audiences

willingly suspended better judgment. Machines, it seemed, made films.

One reason moderns longed for the camera to provide a universal visual language

may have been that such a language could have provided impartial, impersonal access to

cultural differences. Spectacles delivered by cameras, so it was hoped, might fuse the

gap between signifier and signified by bringing together that which verbal metaphors and

analogies could only intimate by comparison. At the same time the language that

modernists grafted onto film was inescapably a language which carried with it the

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[213] Quoted in Marcus, "Film," 250. For a broader discussion of imperial complications with the utopian project promises of modernist visual culture, see Michael North's *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern*, chap. 3. North also takes up the issue I take up below (mechanical reproduction as a utopian aim for representation without mediation) in *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word*.

[214] T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, 1967), 6.

[215] Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera* (VUFKU, 1929), 35 mm film, 68 minutes, streaming video, http://www.netflix.com.

hegemonic binary of observer/observed upon which anthropology and ethnography relied, and often continue to rely.[216] That such language should turn out to deconstruct itself is no new insight (deconstruction's foundational text is a reading of Claude Levi-Strauss, after all), but this particular displacement of a system of visual signs has something important teach us about filmic modernism's colonial unconscious, its recourse to the colonial to define metropolitan modernity.

During the teens and twenties, British modernism's close associations with non-western cultures was part of broader series of projects that yearned to understand Anglo-European cultures from the outside. If the language of cinema turned out to be circumscribed by the discourses of anthropology and ethnography, the language of interpreting culture from an outside, objective position was, at least for some practitioners of modernism, inflected by the techniques of film. The language of anthropology and ethnography, which relies on firm boundaries between object/subject and observer/observed, was built into film from its inception. At the same time, the procedure by which films communicate to audiences destabilizes the ease with which such rhetoric characterizes these relations. Film, Woolf and Benjamin explain, produces narrative continuity out of techniques of discontinuity. Montage, close-ups, slow motion, and other techniques reveal that the perception of continuity arrives as the aggregate of an infinitely divisible series of smaller, unconscious perceptions which, when considered individually, disrupt continuity with "the dynamite of the split second" ("WOA" 3:117). Because it strikes at the center of filmic story and audience response, the fluidity between continuity and discontinuity in turn disrupts the binaries of anthropological distance.

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[216] Rey Chow demonstrates this shared reliance in the final chapter of *Primitive Passions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), which attempts a consideration of film "the visualist epistemological bases of disciplines such as anthropology and ethnography" (195).

Accounting for modern audience's positionality demands, then, a taking note of

impersonal object/subject, observer/observed relations while also problematizing the

psychoanalytic models which would suggest total identification with the impersonal,

objective observer. Such a model emerges, I will now propose, when we consider the

traffic between another apparent binary, modernist impersonality and intimacy.

Impersonal Intimacy

Impersonality is one of modernism's perennial themes, though just what

impersonality meant for modernists has been a subject of considerable debate. That

debate has found that impersonality appeared in various modernist contexts, revealing a

broad desire to which different modernists felt attracted for different reasons. Without

doubt, the figure most closely associated with modernist impersonality is T. S. Eliot, who,

in a series of essays published in the teens and early twenties, established what came to

be known as the doctrine of impersonality. The best known of these essays, "Tradition

and the Individual Talent" (1919), argues that artistic expression is a matter of

apprenticeship. "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual

extinction of personality," Eliot declares, and without the broader frame of a tradition in

which to consider a poet, audiences had no standard for evaluating what they read.[217] To

safeguard from purely idiosyncratic criteria that measures only how well this poet speaks

to that reader's thoughts, feelings, and experiences, Eliot recommended—by notoriously

borrowing analogies from chemical processes—reading a poet as a link in a chain of

succession. The tradition Eliot has in mind is sometimes pan-European, and sometimes

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[217] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt, 1975), 40 (hereafter cited in text as "TT").

national (it slips between the two: "[The poet] must be aware [of] the mind of Europe—

the mind of his own country—a mind which he learns in time to be much more important

than his own private mind" ["TT" 39]). In either case, Eliot assembles throughout his

doctrine of impersonality a chain that unmistakably connects the celebration of a poet to

his national tradition and, by extension, his nation: "his appreciation is the appreciation of

his relation to the dead poets and artists" who precede him ("TT" 38). As Maud Ellmann

forcefully argued, the rhetoric of scientific objectivity and ahistorical, universal value

provides cover for an Anglo-European, masculine politics that has made impersonality

unpalatable for some time.[218]

As cogent as some of Ellmann's connections are between Eliot's prose and poetry

of this period may be, for many the experience of reading Eliot's early poetry has not

been so clearly ideological. "For a poet who had such success, in his heyday, in

importing the yardstick of impersonality into criticism," declares the South African

novelist and literary critic J. M. Coetzee, "Eliot's poetry is astonishingly personal."[219]

Indeed, a half-century before Coetzee made this remark, a number of postcolonial writers

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[218] Maud Ellmann, *The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987.

[219] J. M. Coetzee, "What is a Classic? A Lecture," *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays 1986-1999* (New York: Viking, 2001), 3. Other readers have expressed similar responses. Jewel Spears Brooker explains that Eliot associated Pound, Joyce, Conrad, and Yeats with attempts to curb personal feelings in order to create "art emotions"—latent affect for readers to access—as a way of negating the autonomous, Romantic poet that allows poetry to be successful (see "Writing the Self: Dialectic of Impersonality in T. S. Eliot," in *T. S. Eliot and the Concept of Tradition*, ed. Giovanni Cianci and Jason Harding [Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 41-57). For Charles Altieri, the speaker of Eliot's "Preludes" (1917) "has no personal characteristics. . . . Yet even this minimal first-person condition stages the possibility that all this description can lead to sympathy, and hence the image can evoke personal responsiveness" (*The Art of Twentieth-Century American Poetry* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006], 57-8).

As I mean to make clear, it is important to note here the difference between these kinds of argument and Maud Ellmann's. Though Eliot's impersonality seems very likely to have latched onto scientific objectivity in order to conceal its author's reactionary politics, as Ellmann claims, it does not follow that Eliot's readers chose to respond to those politics.

were appreciating Eliot in ways that postwar English poets were not.[220] As Edward

Kamau Brathwaite famously recalls, he and his fellow midcentury Caribbean poets felt a

strong connection to recordings of Eliot's voice reading his poems: "the 'riddims' of St

Louis (though we did not know the source then) were stark and clear for those of us who

at the same time were listening to the dislocations of Bird, Dizzy and Klook." More

specifically, this connection was most powerful when such a dialect voice spoke in

evocative images: that is, when listening to "natural, 'riddimic' and image-laden tropes"

spoken from the Anglo-American past to Brathwaite's West Indian present.[221]

Brathwaite's account concerns "mainstream [Caribbean] poets who were moving from

standard English" to dialects that reflect their own local traditions, like Brathwaite

himself. His rhetoric here testifies to a powerful attraction images may have in writing as

well as the unpredictable connections they sometimes help sponsor between audiences

and authors with widely divergent personal *and* political views.[222]

In the context of modernist literature, film, and audience, these responses have

much to offer as a reminder of the complex relationship between impersonality and

intimacy. Indeed, the line separating the two was not always distinct for Eliot himself.

In the same year that Eliot called for reading poets in "relation to the dead poets and

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[220] For the turn away from Eliot's poetics in midcentury England, see Clive Wilmer, "The Later Fortunes of Impersonality: 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' and Postwar Poetry," in Cianci and Harding, 58-72.
[221] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Roots* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 286 n34.
To be clear, the second quotation speaks of a favorable comparison Brathwaite makes between Eliot and the voice of a BBC cricket commentator's "natural, 'riddimic' and image-laden tropes in his revolutionary Hampshire burr" (286 n34).
[222] See, for example, Brathwaite's express call for understanding Caribbean literature in terms of tradition and individual talent in *Roots* (37). Such high-culture affiliations between an established modernist garde and writers who immigrated from the Caribbean in postwar London are the subject of Peter J. Kalliney's "Metropolitan Modernism and Its West Indian Interlocutors: 1950s London and the Emergence of Postcolonial Literature," *PMLA* 122.1 (2007): 89-104. For readers schooled in feminism, gender studies, and queer theory, the masculine dimension of Eliot's politics appears no less stable upon closer inspection. See, for example, the essays collected in *Gender, Desire, and Sexuality in T. S. Eliot*, ed. Cassandra Laity and Nancy K. Gish (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

artists" that precede them in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" ("TT" 38), he also

explained, in "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry" (1919), that the bond between poet

and tradition is "a feeling of profound kinship, or rather of a peculiar personal intimacy,

with another, probably a dead author." [223] As Eliot describes the relationship here, even

apprenticing poets should not be understood as cathected to their predecessors ("[w]e do

not imitate, we are changed; and our work is the work of the changed man; we have not

borrowed, we have been quickened" ["RCP" 400]), but the relation is a profoundly close

one based on "this secret knowledge, this intimacy, with the dead man. . . . [I]t is

certainly a crisis" ("RCP" 399).

Though the influence of earlier writers "is certainly a crisis" for the poet, it is less

Bloomian agon than a crisis of intimacy—a which term saturates "Reflections on

Contemporary Poetry" (along with the similar language of "kinship," "friendship,"

"passion," and "love"). The crisis is not only to do with aesthetic maturity but with

nothing short of the process of self-actualization: "imperative intimacy" legitimates the

emergence of a self "from a bundle of second-hand sentiments into a person," yet the

relationship on which this self depends for its definition, while "ineffaceable," "probably

will pass" ("RCP" 399). Such is the crisis that comes with the assault on personality,

which Eliot regarded as the price of admission for entering the social world, only to find

that the social is, by definition, the composite of innumerable points of view that

interrogate one another, a process that challenges one's existence, as he explains in his

philosophy dissertation.[224] This crisis is concerned with the fact that, as the social

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[223] T. S. Eliot, "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry [IV]," *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Harcourt, 1996), 399 (hereafter cited in text as "RCP").
[224] T. S. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*, 1916 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 148, as elsewhere.

theorist Niklas Luhmann would later observe, individuation is dependent upon the construction and maintenance practices that play on the perceived differences between a self and an other.[225] As Luhmann puts it, "no personal identity is distinct from social identity."[226] National cultures, particularly when they can be found to be homogenous and located in a fixed place, can quieten such crisis by leveling differences. As Eliot explained in a letter to a correspondent (in 1919), "[c]ulture, if it means anything decent, means something personal: one book or painter made one's own rather than a thousand read or looked at."[227] The cultivation of the personal happens within a national tradition of art.

How are we to reconcile these sentiments of impersonality and intimacy? The chief problem with defining those terms in statements like these is their movement. At one moment, Eliot declares that a poet enters into a national tradition by surrendering his personality while, at another, culture itself is personal. At one moment a poet seeks to mimic dead poets, but at another the living and dead poets are like "great lovers" ("RCP" 400). Yet perhaps Eliot's writings do not point to the impossibility of stabilizing these key terms so much as they suggest that audiences' responses can fluctuate between them. Perhaps the reason that impersonality seems to have a fixed meaning for Eliot within singular works, like "Tradition and the Individual Talent," but seems interchangeable with intimacy when placing quotations from other works alongside it is because, taken together, these writings reveal Eliot to be a reader whose position changes depending on

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[225] Niklas Luhmann, "The Individuality of the Individual: Historical Meanings and Contemporary Problems," *Reconstructing Individualism*, ed. Thomas C. Heller et al (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 322-5; cf. Eliot, *Knowledge*, 118-21.

[226] Luhmann, 324.

[227] *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume I: 1898-1922*, ed. Valerie Eliot (New York: Harcourt, 1988), 318 (hereafter cited in text as *LOTSE*).

how different texts affect his sensibilities. How, then, might we understand Eliot's

elaborations of modernist impersonality and intimacy?

Recently, Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips have considered a variety of contexts of

intimacy from antiquity to the present and have found that it is often rooted in little more

than each party's narrative of selfhood.[228] Memory, desire, and disposition for example,

provide the basis for connection so that our closest and most cherished social bonds seek

almost entirely to strengthen likenesses with others rather than exploring differences, not

unlike the uniform national culture for which Eliot longs. This renders intimacy a form

of narcissism that extends the self by finding reflections of one's identity in others who

share the same or similar memories, desires, or dispositions. Rather than constituting a

connection that overcomes the challenges of otherness, intimacy in this sense is merely

the path of least resistance and greatest gratification of egos.

A productive alternative exists, however, in relationships based on what Bersani

and Phillips call "impersonal intimacy," or the acceptance of the self and other as

provisional, changeable positions. This is "an exchange in which, through a reciprocal

attentiveness to the other's becoming what he potentially is, both partners move beyond

what turns out to have been a provisional distinction between the lover and the

beloved."[229] What makes impersonal intimacy "impersonal" is that, rather than

furthering each party's preexisting sense of self, it seeks an unforeseen result in the

encounter with another. What makes impersonal intimacy "intimate" is that, once

differences emerge in this encounter, it searches for new knowledge about self, other, and

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[228] Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2008). *Intimacies* is a book written in dialogue; the chapters alternate authorship and each author reflects on and responds to the ideas of the other. My summary of the notion of impersonal intimacy that emerges from this text draws largely from Bersani's conclusion, the book's final chapter.
[229] Bersani and Phillips, 121.

categories of identity. If we were adhering strictly to etymology, we might simply call

this relation "intimacy," for it is a relation that seeks new knowledge that comes with

establishing and maintaining profound closeness with another and which can change the

self rather than reflect it. This is impersonality that directs a posture of selfhood so that it

can be responsive to the world in which it finds itself by making and breaking

attachments depending on the needs of the other and the exigencies of a given situation.

Thus, impersonal intimacy seeks to avoid the metaphor of suture, of an unremitting   It is

a way of changing identity by creating attachments, and constructing selfhood in a way

that is fueled by the unknown rather than defined by a lack.

    If we were reading Eliot as simply an impersonal poet, it may be with some

surprise that we may recall the deep vulnerability in these lines from near the end of

"What the Thunder Said," the final section of *The Waste Land* (1922): "My friend,"

consoles a voice,

> blood shaking my heart
> The awful daring of a moment's surrender
> Which an age of prudence can never retract
> By this, and this only, we have existed
> Which is not to be found in our obituaries
> Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
> Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
> In our empty rooms[230]

Like so much of what is spoken in Eliot's long poem, we must read these lines without

knowing to whom, exactly, we are listening. Even in the case of the poem's many

traceable allusions, its cacophonic voices work both as a patchwork of literary history

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[230] T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, in *Complete Poems*, 49 (hereafter cited in text as as *WL*). It may be with greater surprise that we find that Ezra Pound, who excised much in the original drafts of *The Waste Land* because they were too personal, did not recommend that Eliot delete the words "My friend" (*The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, ed. Valerie Eliot [New York: Harcourt, 1971], 87).

that serves as the elegy for so many fitful fragments from that history that want nothing more than to be returned to their own times and left untouched by modern dissociated personalities.[231] Having passed through the halls of literary history, Eliot has allowed many disconcerting remarks to be directed at least partially at his readers, from baleful warnings ("Fear death by water" and perhaps "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME") to angry shouts ("You! hypocrite lecture! —mon semblable, —mon frère!"). By the time we reach the end of the poem, it is far from clear who this speaker is and why s/he turns and speaks to us—reaching across the divide of time and against the fearful anomic images of lean solicitors and the empty rooms we own even after death—to address readers in the language of friendship.[232]

The language of intimacy and friendship usually refers to immediate bonds but, as we have seen, Eliot invokes it when speaking about a poet's relationship with the past. To be sure, though, this concern with dead poets discloses a concern that sometimes expresses itself as full-blown urgency to address a future, and hence an unknown and unknowable, readership. The conclusion of *The Waste Land* is one such moment. This speaker's turn toward the reader invokes all three temporal dimensions, but only the future left implicit (past and present both get direct verbal treatment: "we have existed" and "blood shaking my heart"). The fact of the future is just as certain as that future's unknowability. These lines insist that identity is determined not by memories (neither my

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[231] I am invoking, of course, Eliot's famous claim that at some point "[i]n the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered" in "The Metaphysical Poets" (*Selected Prose* 288).

[232] I should acknowledge the skeptical reader's claim that the friend in this quotation may not be the reader. I take it to be an address to the reader for a number of reasons: (1) it comes near the end of "What the Thunder Said," *The Waste Land*'s most inquisitive section and the one that most often directs itself to the reader (soon after these lines the poem will ask "Shall I at least set my lands in order?"); (2) the allusion in the line immediately preceding this quotation ("DA / *Datta*: What have we given?") is to the Lord Creator in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Prajapati, who speaks to humanity his command to give.

own nor the memories others will have of me) but by the only thing one can do when faced with the uncertainty of the future: to consent to "the awful daring of a moment's surrender / Which an age of prudence can never retract." From a poet so concerned and so deeply thoughtful about the tradition that precedes him, this is a strange and unexpected admission.

Indeed, as a text asking to be read, *The Waste Land* extends a strange invitation to its readers for at least two reasons. The first is that it enacts the fragmentary dissociation of sensibility Eliot broached in "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921) at the same time that it nostalgically pines for the unified English culture that Eliot claimed saturated the seventeenth century. This is nostalgia in its strictest sense: a longing to return home, passing the St. Louis where Eliot never felt at home and returning to the ancestral home of the Elyots of Somerset in western English countryside and to enshrine his reclaimed place among them in *Four Quartets* (1935-42). Such a view of culture is also elaborated in Eliot's contributions to social thought, particularly in *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes toward a Definition of Culture* (1948), the latter of which claims "it would appear to be for the better that the great majority of human beings should go on living in the place in which they were born."[233] Indeed, Jed Esty makes a powerfully

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[233] T. S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, 1948, in *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Houghton, 1960), 125.
While Eliot rarely writes of the future, his commitment to tradition can be understood as an implicit concern for how future readers will regard him within that tradition. Eliot speaks only explicitly of the future in relatively late essays. "What is a Classic?" (1944) is haunted by a concern for reverence for the past. "If we cease to believe in the future, the past would cease to be fully *our* past: it would become the past of a dead civilization" (*Selected Prose* 126). This line of thinking reaches its culmination in a passage in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* that uses the family as a trope for understanding how national cultures change over time:

> when I speak of the family, I have in mind a bond which embraces a longer period of time. . . [namely,] a piety toward the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote. Unless this reverence for past and future is cultivated in the home, it can never be more than a verbal convention in the community. Such an interest in the past is different from the vanities and pretensions of genealogy; such a

persuasive claim in *A Shrinking Island* that this "antidiasporic" thread, the insistence

upon an Englishness united by racial and local particularities, runs throughout the fabric

of Eliot's poetic and critical writings alike and is the defining project of Eliot's career.[234]

The Waste Land attests to the sense that to live in late imperial London was to be buffeted

by confirmations of discordant metropolitan culture, to be continuously reminded of the

loss of a unified English culture. In Esty's reading of Eliot's career, *The Waste Land*,

"[a] classic example of metropolitan perception," seeks to reflect and compensate for "a

fallen aesthetic for the imperial age," "mix[ing] urban vignettes with source materials

from alien cultures in the service of its own self-authorizing aesthetic." Further, the

"anthologizing and anthropologizing dimensions of the poem enable a formal synthesis

based in large part on imperial knowledge—including, for example, the worldwide

mythic correspondences of Frazer's *Golden Bough*"—in order to evince Eliot's

"dissatisfaction with the broken culture and broken sensibilities that [*The Waste Land*] is

constrained to feature."[235]

Yet even as Eliot's poem does all the work Esty ascribes to it—marshaling

cultural fragments as a way of exploring metropolitan anomie in the last decades of

empire—there is another dimension of *The Waste Land*'s strange invitation to its readers

that can be sensed by exploring how Eliot delivers metropolitan anomie in the language

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> responsibility for the future is different from that of the builder of social programmes.
> (116-7)

[234] This is not to demonize Eliot but to restore him to his interwar political situation, for an important part of Esty's argument is to shift undue attention away from Eliot's politics and toward a broader view of the English landscape that widely nurtured such views:

> Eliot's conservatism and especially his anti-Semitism have tended to obscure the fact that antidiasporic thinking ran across the political spectrum of the 1930s. Indeed, I take the emergence of a wider discourse of insularity on both the left and the right to indicate not just the political stripes of one or another segment of the educated classes but rather a broader structural shift associated with the contraction of empire and the collapse of interwar cosmopolitanism. (Esty, *Shrinking*, 109-10)

[235] Esty, *Shrinking*, 115-6.

of friendship. The questions I have raised about the speaker(s) of the lines above and how we might receive their words ought to be answered, I think, in terms of the ethics implied in the lines immediately preceding the above quotation: "DA / *Datta*: What have we given?" One strong candidate for this "we" are the plural authors and images that have been exhumed from the past to appear in the poem. In that case, their question could be one of defeat in an era of cultural decline (and when imperial projects appear increasingly fragile), meaning: "what part have we played in helping create this disjointed cultural landscape?" But it could also be an affirmative question that asks what they may offer readers of Eliot's time—readers who, as Eliot makes clear in "The Metaphysical Poets," could not have been anticipated by Dryden or Marvell (to say nothing of Petronius or Sappho).

What I want to suggest here is that while Esty's reading of Eliot as modernism's champion of conservative, antidiasporic poetics is accurate, Eliot's language further requires us to examine that reading against the terms and gestures of friendship and intimacy that appear in *The Waste Land*—and indeed throughout Eliot's so-called impersonal poems—which expresses a sense of impersonal intimacy as "'a process of becoming,' or, in other terms, [as] evolving affinities of being."[236] The gestures of friendship and intimacy I have in mind rely almost exclusively on Eliot's use of images. By presenting images as the hallmarks of modernity's social breakdown, Eliot's personae seek to establish a connection with readers: they seem to say, "I, too, feel the alienation

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[236] Bersani and Phillips, *Intimacies*, 124.

of empty cups, sawdust restaurants and cheap hotels." This gesture is intended as much

for Eliot's future readers as his contemporaries.[237]

Eliot, Automatism, and Silent Film

It is significant that one of the forms Eliot's alleged distaste for film takes is a

running joke that appears in letters to his cousin, Eleanor Hinkley during the winter 1914-

5—the year war broke out in Europe and the poet's year at Oxford. In these letters Eliot

lampoons American westerns (already establishing itself as a genre) by wryly pretending

to be planning one of his own, "my great ten-reel drama, EFFIE THE WAIF," which will

pit hero Spike Cassidy against the sinister Seedy Sam on the desert plains of Medicine

Hat, Wyoming (*LOTSE* 62). Eliot's parody underscores that national identity can be so

attractive for some that it can be built from flimsy film types and cultural illiteracy.

Every western needs "a red Indian or an East Indian," Eliot snickers, so his faux film will

include "Traihi Sheik, the maharaja," who meets Effie's mother after she discovers that

the Indians who kidnapped her infant daughter were not American but Kashmiri (*LOTSE*

71-2).

These are parodies of the kinds of plots and stock characters that could have been

found in Edwardian stage melodramas, but Eliot's letters also demonstrate a keen

awareness of the conventions of silent film by parodying intertitles and film's

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[237] In *The Politics of Friendship*, Jacques Derrida is also concerned with the political dimensions of "friends seeking mutual recognition without knowing each other" (42). Though Derrida has the peculiar dimension of intimacy shared between readers and authors that we also find haunting Eliot's writings on tradition and impersonality, Derrida finds that models for friendship writ broad might be traced back to Cicero's word for the friend: the "*exemplar*, which means portrait but also, as the *exemplum*, the duplicate, the reproduction, the copy as well as the original, the type, the model. The two meanings (the single original and the multipliable copy) cohabit here; they are—or seem to be—the same, and that is the whole story, the very condition of survival" (4). Like Bersani and Phillips, Derrida feels that such friendship is little more than a "narcissistic projection of the ideal image [of the self], of its own ideal image (*exemplar*)" onto another and needs reconsideration (3).

arrangement of images. In one of the 1914-5 letters to Eleanor Hinkley, Eliot reports that

as one character in *Effie the Waif* travels "westward up the Erie he turns and gazes at the

Statue of Liberty disappearing on the horizon (not strictly accurate geography, but a fine

scene)" (*LOTSE* 63). For David Trotter, this moment marks Eliot as a more canny

viewer of film technique than even Eisenstein. If the Russian director staunchly insisted

on montage as a technique for disjunction and dislocation, he would miss Eliot's joke,

Trotter insists, because such a view is incompatible with the narrative continuity Eliot

describes here.[238] But it seems accurate to say what makes the scene a "fine" one for

Eliot is that this juxtaposition of images creates a narrative with precisely the kind of

discontinuity of Eisensteinian montage, an almost-but-not-quite seamless fusion an iconic

national image from the coast with the equally iconic image of a cowboy journeying into

the American western interior, making a play for sentiment that one can imagine actually

appearing in film. By making the shores of Liberty Island contiguous with the banks of

the Erie Canal, Eliot's joke only slightly exaggerates the way in which a cinematic

narrative of an American imagined community could be reaffirmed. In fact, film's chief

advantage over language, as Woolf saw it, was its ability to harness "some of the residue

of visual emotion" leftover from verbal narrative ("C" 4:351): "All those terrible

dislocations which are inevitable" in literature "could be bridged by some device of

scenery. We should have the continuity of human life kept before us by the repetition of

some object" ("C" 4:352).

Without doubt, Eliot's parody of the genre of the western targets America as the

Anglo-European world's cultural backwater. In one of the letters that continues the story

of *Effie the Waif*, Eliot also tells his cousin he has recently been to a debate on "the

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[238] David Trotter, "T. S. Eliot and Cinema," *Modernism/Modernity* 13.2 (2006), 249.

threatened Americanisation of Oxford," where, he reports, "I pointed out to them frankly

how much they owed to Amurrican culcher in the drayma (including the movies)"

(*LOTSE* 70), drawing attention to the imbrication of film and national culture. If *Effie the*

Waif lets us know that Eliot had a working knowledge of film's conventions as early as

1914, it reveals in particular an awareness of the conventions of the western. From this

early point, Eliot associated film—especially its editing, angles, and ability to assemble

scenes with fragments of locations—with a kind of modern mapping that develops the

tensions of a national unity based on locality and ethnicity. As Eliot saw it, the humor of

Effie the Waif is in using a white American indifference to the particularities of otherness

("a red Indian or an East Indian") to manufacture a unified sense of national identity.

The irony is that the joke became a training ground for learning to deploy filmic

fragmentation as a means of reporting and expressing the longing for national cultural

continuity found in Eliot's poetry. Accordingly, Susan McCabe reads *Effie* as a jab at

Eliot's home country that "provided an imaginary space where he could articulate

anxieties over the shifting matrices of class, race, gender, and sexuality" in ways that

prefigure *The Waste Land*, "the modern montage poem par excellence," into which "Eliot

transcribes . . . his anxieties over racial and gender identity."[239] These anxieties, I would

suggest, were part of Eliot's complex relation to gender and racial politics alike in which

Eliot straightforwardly embraces the masculinity, English, and western European (as

opposed to Semitic) whiteness in his essays and lectures while coterminously expressing

oblique but palpable affinities with femininity, ethnicity, and the nonwestern, usually

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[239] Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 40.

Asian, world in his poems.[240] Those affinities Eliot maps in his poetry's appropriation of cinematic techniques, and with the figure of the automaton.

Automatism has been part of western visual experience for some time. In his early account of visual perception, René Descartes wrote of automata as instruments which may possess, or seem to possess, human qualities but which can be distinguished from the human because they do not think or emote; they simply imitate.[241] The distinction was an important one because of the model of vision Descartes was advancing, which preferred to imagine the eye as disembodied and objective. This Cartesian eye became the default for conception for understanding sight during and after the Enlightenment. But imagining vision as though it were perceived by an impersonal eye, as though sight was a curiously evacuated of personal content, created a deep contradiction in a mode of perception that was increasingly being thought of as individual and subjective by the time of modernism. As Karen Jacobs explains, from Cartesian sight to modernist optics, "we can trace a trajectory of crisis in the belief in subjective transparency, *one increasingly cast in relational terms* in which the repressed embodiment of the observer becomes the displaced embodiment of the observed, finally returning, as it were, to reassert its material presence in uncertainly valued forms."[242] Film provided a means of negotiating this crisis by bringing together automatic images

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[240] There is, of course, chauvinism and anti-Semitism in the poems as well. But rather than drawing a bright line between Eliot's politics that neatly divides his critical and imaginative writings, I read Eliot's poetry as one of the places where we find coded experimentation with affinities for femininity and ethnicity that contrast some of his other discursive positions.

[241] This appears in in Part V of *Discourse on Method* (1637), where Descartes explains that a machine resembling a human could be identified by its lack of meaningful speech and imitation. See Descartes, *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*, ed. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 72. Later, in *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), Descartes identifies an automaton simply as "a machine that moves by itself" (in *Philosophical Essays*, 299).

[242] Karen Jacobs, *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* (London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 13; my emphasis.

that call to attention their audience's relational positions. For early writers on film, the

new medium seemed something like an automaton: a representation of the human that in

its most successful form makes us suspend our belief, if not forget, that we are

encountering is not another subject. Modernist writers often wrote of film as the

apotheosis of mechanical reproduction. This has been one of the legacies of modernist

film writing, lasting as late as 1945 for André Bazin, who sensed the screen's presence as

"the instrumentality of a nonliving agent."[243]

I want to be careful not to make too much of the comparison of film to

automatism—there are certainly negative consequences to conflating the two—but I want

to highlight this parallel for two reasons. The first is that writers of film in the modernist

period often likened film to an automaton because of its strong mimetic capacity, and

they responded to it as such. There the fusion of aesthetics and automatism is closest,

and yet the result was not that these writers found film to be inhuman or unresponsive.

On the contrary, they demonstrated that audiences often felt fused to it, a connection born

not in spite of film's impersonal presentation but because of it. The second reason I wish

to point up this association is because readers since antiquity have been suspicious of

texts for precisely this reason.[244] A text, like a film, indifferently repeats the same

gestures before each audience and at each viewing. Though different audiences and

audience members will yield diverse interpretations, the autonomous work of art seems

indifferent to them. But to regard art's aim, in text as in film, as "impersonal

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[243] André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* ed. and trans. Hugh Gray, 2 vols., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967-71), 1:13. Cf. Cavell above. Trotter discusses similar comments by Bazin and Cavell on film's automatism (239, 241). Finally, automata appear throughout Laura Marcus's study of early film, *The Tenth Muse*, which collects comments by a range of other writers who equate film with automatism, including Jean Epstein, Alexander Bakshy, Arnold Hauser, and, more recently, Gilles Deleuze.
[244] I am thinking, of course, of Plato's famous condemnation in the *Phaedrus* of all writing as a kind of automaton whose record of knowledge is only a shadow of the real knowledge that may only be acquired in dialogue.

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intimacy"—the unforeseeable relation produced by the merging of two entities, such as art and audience—is to regard art even in its most automatic, mechanical instantiation as sensitive to, even calling out for, audience responses. In fact, this impersonal intimacy only becomes clear in the machine age. Trotter's brilliant central claim is that Eliot's poetry does not reject filmic automatism, but, on the contrary, anatomizes the desire to be both human and automaton. Eliot's poetry leading up to *The Waste Land* seeks to present "what it feels like to (want to) behave automatically."[245]

This is a point worth exploring more fully. Indeed, automata—lingering, waiting, muttering, and sputtering—pervade Eliot's early poetry, from his early apprenticeship poems up to *The Waste Land*. Many spring immediately to mind: the "women [who] come and go" in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917), the talking streetlamp in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" (1917), the staring daffodil bulbs of "Whispers of Immortality" (1917), "the human engine" idling in *The Waste Land* are just a few.[246] Appearing at key moments in Eliot's poetry, automata counterbalance figures of restlessness, wandering, longing, trauma, and the waning masculinity and cultural authority that characterize Eliot's poetry of the teens and twenties. Eliot's abandoned early volume *Inventions of the March Hare* (1909-17) opens with "Convictions (Curtain Raiser)," a poem which introduces those that follow it as "marionettes" who think, feel, and speak on their own, and concludes with "The Engine," a "deliberate, and alert" machine powering a ship on a long, presumably transatlantic, voyage.[247] Automata in Eliot not only speak and move; they travel.

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[245] Trotter, "Eliot and Cinema," 241.
[246] Eliot, *Complete Poems*, 4, 14, 32, and 43.
[247] Eliot, *Inventions*, 11, 90.

One of the earliest examples of automata in Eliot's poetry appears in "On a Portrait" (1909), an apprenticeship sonnet Eliot composed and published in *The Harvard Advocate* while still an undergraduate. The portrait in question is Édouard Manet's *La femme au perroquet*, which Eliot encountered in a book while at Harvard.[248] Eliot writes as a viewer who regards the woman with a parrot as in an enviable position of autonomy that allows for her contemplation. What will make "On a Portrait" valuable to this discussion of film is its willingness to class both the woman and parrot in the painting as automata whose sight Eliot's speaker wishes he could access—figures not unlike movie cameras.

Because this short poem is not well known (it is not included among the Harcourt's *Complete Poems* or Faber's *Collected Poems*), it is worth reprinting in full:

> "On a Portrait"
>
> Among a crowd of tenuous dreams, unknown
> To us of restless brain and weary feet,
> Forever hurrying, up and down the street,
> She stands at evening in the room alone.
>
> Not like a tranquil goddess carved of stone
> But evanescent, as if one should meet
> A pensive lamia in some wood retreat,
> An immaterial fancy of one's own.
>
> No meditations glad or ominous
> Disturb her lips, or move the slender hands;
> Her dark eyes keep their secrets hid from us,
> Beyond the circle of our thought she stands.
>
> The parrot on his bar, a silent spy,
> Regards her with a patient curious eye.[249]

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[248] Frances Dickey, "Parrot's Eye: A Portrait by Manet and Two by T. S. Eliot," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 52.2 (2006), 112.

[249] T. S. Eliot, "On a Portrait," *Poems Written in Early Youth*, ed. Valerie Eliot (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1967), 21.

Eliot's poem presents a speaker wrestling with the inaccessibility of the figure in the portrait and his desire to close the unbridgeable gap between them. This speaker seeks not to project a supposed subjectivity onto the figure in the portrait, but rather to adumbrate the contours of the known so as to express the nearness of knowing her as well as the impossibility of doing so. "On a Portrait" preserves a fascination in the danger of regarding the woman in the painting as a lamia, a figure Eliot no doubt borrows from precursors such as Keats, Baudelaire, and Swinburne. If Eliot inherits in these lines a Romantic, decadent, or symbolist feminine image of the kind which serves "as a powerful symbol of both the dangers and the promises of the modern age," he also adds an unexpected turn.[250] Why a "pensive lamia?" Why a grotesque, threatening half-female, half-animal body in a nonthreatening posture?

The inscrutability of Manet's woman and her parrot that this speaker suffers has led Frances Dickey to read Eliot's poem as struggling to apprehend a figure who appears both a subject and an automaton—a struggle, as she points out, between surface and depth in which Manet's contemporaries also found themselves. But if the woman in the painting remains a mystery, as Dickey contends ("The question for viewers of *Woman with a Parrot*, then as now, is whether she has an inaccessible mind and interior, or nothing to access at all. Is she absorbed in her thoughts, or incapable of absorption?"), the figure of the parrot most suggests automatism for both Manet and Eliot:

> The automaton may be deceptive, but not because his exterior conceals a radically different interior. Rather, an automaton would have no interior at all in the Cartesian sense. Manet and Eliot represent this alternative by the figure of the parrot. Parrots can 'speak,' and sometimes they are credited with using language appropriately, yet we do not think they have minds like ours, if at all. Their behavior puts the lie to the idea that

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[250] Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 4.

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language exteriorizes thought, brings the inside into contact with a social world. It is pure imitation without expression.[251]

The deep attention Eliot records in "On a Portrait" is close to the experience of wonder as Stephen Greenblatt describes it in an essay on the display of art and artifacts in museums. This is the experience of arresting viewers before the display in an "act of attention [which] draws a circle around itself from which everything but the object is excluded, when intensity of regard blocks out all circumambient images, stills all murmuring voices."[252] The experience Eliot's speaker has before this portrait is clearly similar to what Greenblatt describes, but unique to the genre of portraiture. What concerns this speaker is that the portrait is compelling because its subject lies "[b]eyond the circle of our thought." The affective circle surrounding viewer and portrait, in other words, becomes more intense when the viewer stands alone within his circle of knowledge, left to refigure this woman as a "pensive lamia" of his own "immaterial fancy."

Wonder is not part of the catalog of affective modes or intellectual postures we associate with early Eliot (modes like restlessness and yearning, as I've said, are more typical), but wonder in this poem indicates this speaker's desire to inhabit the world of this inscrutable figure, to know what it is like to be a pensive lamia. This is a peculiar form of wonder, one that comes at a moment of respite from modern life but which results in an epiphany about the conditions of Eliot's own speaker as a privileged but not puissant interpreter. Such epiphanies mark so many of Eliot's speakers as persons who stand in the privileged nexus of whiteness, masculinity, and cultural capital while fearing

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[251] Dickey, "Parrot's Eye," 119; the quotation in parentheses appears on p. 117.
[252] Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 49.

that they possess no legitimate claims to such positions. This is wonder stirred by an encounter with something greater than the self but also inscrutable—rousing while also frustrating closeness and the objective knowledge that the impersonal automaton may otherwise deliver. Yet the compensation is unmistakably impersonal intimacy: while the poem seems only to reflect what Eliot's speaker knew before he saw the poem (namely, that the feminine and antimodern are enframed and closed off from masculine modernity), the boundary the poem draws between its speaker and its painting, "the circle of our thought," is what the speaker longs to break. In so doing, "On a Portrait" places its weight on what its speaker does not, and cannot, know. There is something to the genre of the portraiture, then, that promises communion by presenting the image of another and which becomes more affectively charged by withholding that possibility.

And here is perhaps where the category of gender becomes most useful in aiding our reading of this poem, for part of why this speaker has this reaction before this particular portrait is because he envies the figure of "a pensive lamia" and not what I take to be its contrast in the poem, "a tranquil goddess." The latter connotes quiescence (goddesses in classical art are beautiful but benign images elevated for viewing, sapped of their own power). A pensive lamia, however, thinks and exists apart from human life without seeking to intervene in it, and retains its own power in its threatening image. As with the parrot, then, Eliot's speaker is less interested in what this automaton has to say than with having direct access to what she sees, for she may possess an accessory visual knowledge unimaginable to this speaker and this poet. It may impart the knowledge of a visual language heralded in film later. It is that otherness that inspires Eliot's poem, that particular identification with the feminine that Eliot uses as a portal of discovery.

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Taken in light of the automata who will soon be moving and traveling in the poetry Eliot will write beginning in 1909, "On a Portrait" will teach us one more thing. The reproduction of the painting that Eliot encounters in a book outside of Boston becomes the occasion for imagining an encounter with the painting itself in a Parisian salon, where, in turn, the presence of the parrot evinces a circuit connecting Europe and the tropics. The real and imagined journeys that were required to capture the image of Eliot's speaker gazing at Manet's painting are not incidental. Such commercial and imperial traffic leading out of and back to Europe's cities supplied those metropoles with their cultural and financial capital, and, moreover, remained invisible until the age of mechanical reproduction could bring global images to local spaces. Eliot's speaker claims the advantages of a Parisian because of the picture Eliot saw at Harvard, but his speaker cannot know what the parrot's "patient curious eye" has seen in the course of its travels. The desire for that knowledge remains latent in "On a Portrait," but bears strong similarities to the movie camera, another automaton and "silent spy." Evidence of whether Eliot had seen films prior to 1914 is not extant in his published materials, but that is to some extent beside the point. "On a Portrait" is notable not because it conveys the impressions of film but because it reveals a desire in Eliot from an early point to possess the kind of visual knowledge films provide: images generated automatically that provide object access to different cultures and unimaginable differences.

The automatic images of film that Eliot's speaker longs for in 1909 did not complete that desire by allowing its audiences suture with it. Rather, film emphasized its audiences' positionality by encouraging identification with filmed images while reasserting the distance between the cinema house and the places and people projected

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onscreen. Benjamin characterizes the process in this way in a later version of the Work of Art essay: "the audience [takes] the position of a critic, without experiencing any personal contact with the actor. The audience's empathy with the actor is really an empathy with the camera. Consequently, the audience takes the position of the camera."[253] If impersonality and intimacy are modernism's compensations for modernity's fragmented experiences, as I have been suggesting, and film provides both impersonality and intimacy, we might ask the question implied in what we have seen in Woolf's "The Cinema," Benjamin's Work of Art essay, and Eliot's writings of the teens and early twenties: how is the compensation of impersonal intimacy complicated by the specter of anthropological distance that appears in writings by Woolf, Benjamin, and Eliot? A response that can attend to the deep complexities in this question is beyond the scope of this chapter, but I want to suggest a path forward by way of conclusion here.

While few would disagree that early film's audiences often left cinemas with a different sense of themselves and the world around them as shaped by the medium they had just seen, we ought to recall that film, too, was altered. The Poundian mantra "make it new" might seem to suggest that film's newness leaves audiences astonished, bewildered, or amused rather than as critical spectators of what they see, and that is surely not always the case. Rather, the myth of film's inception as a scene of such astonishment (where audiences rushed to make way for the arrival of a filmed train) tells us more about the tenacity of modernist outlooks even within criticism that believes itself

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[253] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Third Version," 1936-9, trans. Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings* 4:260. Though this is the last written version of the Work of Art essay, and the version translated as "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin scholars have grown to prefer the second (1935) version because, unlike this version, it was published in Benjamin's life time.

to have shed its modern shrouds than it tells us about film's origins themselves.[254] The arrival of the train suggests another key element of the modernist mythos: speed. Though it makes sense to investigate the immediate impacts of art and media, we ought not forget the longer span that includes developments in genres, topoi, and techniques.

Woolf's own mythologizing of film's audiences as savages watching the pictures conflates the very different registers of place and time, imposing the temporal scope of modernity and premodernity over the geography of London and colony. That this map and this clock were also present in *A Voyage Out*, a decade and a half before Woolf's essay on the cinema, indicates a deeper commitment on her behalf, and found in other modernists as well, for defining modernism by inventing its own primitive origins. Nothing intrinsic about film meant that its audiences had to be explained as "savages watching the pictures," but in writing about it that way Woolf deploys the familiar modernist trope of rendering urban dwellers inadequate to the task of comprehending all that surrounds them. Distance and defamiliarization become not just aesthetic choices but requirements for learning to cope with a social sphere that seems replete with images but driven largely by invisible forces.

The longing for distance that Woolf fills by borrowing the rhetoric of ethnography is not unlike the longing we have seen elsewhere in this dissertation. The most malicious have been in caricatures of racial stereotypes and in colonial exhibition displays, but others have come in the form of Carlyle's heroic visuality, Conrad's irony, and Eliot's impersonality. Despite their differences, each of these impulses to define oneself or one's culture share a withering effect, allowing first-stage recognition its place but not

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[254] On this story as a myth, see Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator," *Film Theory*, ed. Simpson et al, 3:78-95.

providing space for further engagement with the unknown and unfamiliar. Though their

practitioners do not wish to acknowledge it, these gestures point to something more that

has been left for others to trace, and what we learn from reading such texts includes not

just the ways in which London's inhabitants sought identification, but also guidance for

our own ways of reading and seeing as well. As theory refines its approach to images,

texts, and the relations between the two—developing more precise ways of understanding

the social ramifications of recognition, the subtle ways images and texts call for

responses that are not always modeled after one another, the ways that images and texts

deploy, modify, and alter the flows of power in social life—we need to be particularly

careful in how we characterize the emergence of modernist literature alongside visual

media and technologies. Because critics throughout the twentieth century have supplied

us with carefully crafted vocabularies for discussing concepts predicated on distance,

such as irony, defamiliarization, and parallel structures, we need now to relax our grip a

bit—though not entirely—on those concepts so that we might turn more fully toward

developing a more precise set of terms for discussing categories such as reattachment,

codevelopment, mutual influence, and affective reactions.

Chapter 7
Conclusion

In a chapter outlining the approach he takes in *What Do Pictures Want?*, W. J. T.

Mitchell advocates for a way of viewing that can account for our affective and

intellectual responses to pictures. To accomplish this, Mitchell recommends consciously

regarding pictures partly as objects (inanimate, made things), and partly as subjects

(enlivened by irrational but persistent projections of subjectivity made by viewers). As

he cogently explains, the reason we ought to adopt such a critical program is because we

already unconsciously look at pictures in this way.[255] In order to address pictures on

these terms—and to "shift the question from what pictures *do* to what they *want*, from

power to desire" (*WDPW* 34)—Mitchell advances what he calls the "subaltern model of

the picture" (*WDPW* 33), a hermeneutic that grasps for a way to recognize in a silent

surface the possibility of a voice. In the figure of the subaltern, Mitchell means to remind

us that we sometimes see pictures "as complex individuals occupying multiple subject

positions and identities" (*WDPW* 47). His point is not to personify pictures, "but to put

our relation to the work into question, to make the *relationality* of image and beholder the

field of investigation" (*WDPW* 49; Mitchell's italics). Ultimately, Mitchell aspires to

make picture-gazing that which it cannot be, but which he believes ought to be reached

for nonetheless: "an intersubjective encounter," a conversation with the subaltern

(*WDPW* 39).

Mitchell's approach deserves much more sustained treatment than I will be able to

give it here, but there are a few features that I wish to point out in order to offer some

closing remarks to my preceding pages. Let me begin with my last quotation from

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[255] W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2006), chap. 2; hereafter cited in text as *WDPW*).

Mitchell: regarding pictures as subalterns may offer "an intersubjective encounter." The

question surrounding the subaltern is, of course, whether the subaltern can speak. In

borrowing the term from Gayatri Spivak, Mitchell notes that when Spivak poses this

question, her answer "is no, an answer that is echoed when images are treated as the

silent or mute sign, incapable of speech, sound, and negation (in which case the answer to

our question might be, pictures want a voice, a poetics of enunciation" (29 n2). Though

we might take issue with Mitchell's answer to the question—that the subaltern *might*

speak—the larger point is that he wants to avoid making the same mistake with pictures

that have been made with subalterns in the past. Let them speak; see what they say; find

out what they can teach.

   To be sure, this approach at once sounds strange and yet makes sense. I raise it

here because I want to suggest that there is much in common with Mitchell's subaltern

model of the picture and the procedures of modern recognition I have been tracing here,

which also holds out the hope of communication, of a meeting with another who is

familiar but never quite the same. Like Mitchell, Wilde, James, Conrad, Forster, Woolf,

and Eliot attend to rational and affective responses to images. And, like these modernists,

Mitchell is interested in exploring identity, though for him it is the identity viewers

project onto the image. The reason he selects the model he does owes everything to the

fact that the figure of "the minority or subaltern that has been so central to the

development of modern studies in gender, sexuality, and ethnicity" (*WDPW* 29). In this

way, the subaltern is meant to add depth to these identity positions, and to allow them to

be recognized in all of that term's complexity—to appreciate what is known and left

unknown as well. Or, as Mitchell says elsewhere, to attend to "an inevitable topic of

visual culture": "the recognition of gender, race, sexual orientation, class, tribal or subcultural identity, etc."—identity categories that have some sway over pictures and people alike.[256]

But argument I have been tracing here also suggests that for over a century mediated images have seemed to British subjects to possess uncanny ties to nonwestern peoples, occupied territories, and the connections linking these people and places with metropolitan westerners. The figure of the subaltern haunts Dorian Gray's décor, Conrad's London, and Woolf's cinema. And if images taken from within England's boundaries in James and Eliot that connote British identity resonate with global connections that are not properly subaltern, they certainly depart from customary senses of Britishness. I have been suggesting throughout this project that to understand the kinds of witness Wilde, James, Conrad, Forster, Woolf, and Eliot bear, and the connection between modern and (post)colonial vocabularies for seeing on which their texts report, it helps to give the name *recognition* to the conjoined nature of modernist visual modes, forms of seeing that include stereotype *and* invention; "authentic" types *and* character; fetishism *and* curiosity; impersonality *and* intimacy. Indeed, such is the nature of recognition: it is a process that happens continuously in daily life and in which art forms are particularly adept at coaxing out of us. Surprise is fundamental to recognition, for even when we encounter something familiar for what seems like the hundredth time, the singularity of the encounter itself may yet point toward something unfamiliar and worthy of our attention. And because moments of recognition are moments of bringing prior knowledge to bear on present circumstances, taking note of

[256] Margaret Dikovitskaya, "An Interview with W. J. T. Mitchell," in *Visual Culture: The Study of Culture after the Visual Turn*, (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2005), 245.

recognition itself allows us to revisit those earlier beliefs. "Prior knowledge" is an ambivalent category to a generation that was, on the one hand, highly suspicious of its predecessors and, on the other, interested in constructing modern mythologies.

In the ironic, autoreflexive, and highly self-conscious aesthetics of modernism, recognition became a perennial theme as well as a problem to be systematically analyzed, particularly as a visual mode operating in the fashioning and refashioning of metropolitan identities. To read Oscar Wilde on the global accumulations of the British aristocracy, Henry James on the artist's dilemma of portraying types in a globalizing world, Joseph Conrad on the fetishization of science, E. M. Forster on curiosity at a colonial exhibition, Virginia Woolf on cinema as a myth of civilization's origins, and T. S. Eliot on European civilization as fragmented images—to read these is to encounter a series of literary aesthetics that urge us to reformulate our conceptions of how identities literally appeared to late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Britons. This is not to say that modernism reflects a trend that can be spotted elsewhere—in, say, British art history or the records of colonial exhibitions. Rather, as I hope to have demonstrated, literary modernism captured the texture of everyday existences shaped by imperial expansion as well as new visual media and technologies in order to acquire a deep understanding of this phase of British modernity. One cannot grasp the changes of this period without also reading its literature.

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