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Doctoral Dissertation

Twentieth-Century Poetry and Visual Culture:
Transatlantic Perspectives of
European and American Modernism

Leticia Pérez Alonso

Departamento de Filología Inglesa

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The work presented in this doctoral dissertation is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The work in this dissertation has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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To
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is entirely dedicated to the memory of my father, Hermenegildo Pérez Hernández, who left this world before he could see me achieve my PhD title. I could not thank him enough for his genuine interest in my doctoral accomplishments. He showed more enthusiasm than me in this project, and I will never forgive myself for not having finished it earlier to make true his dream of seeing me defend. To him I dedicate every single word of this dissertation in the hope of honoring his memory.

Twentieth-Century Poetry and Visual Culture: Transatlantic Perspectives of European and American Modernism

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of modern visual culture on avant-garde poetry from a perspective that considers transatlantic exchanges between European and American Modernism. My argument is at the brink of twentieth century images were part and parcel of a highly technologized and capitalist society. Sensitive to the methods employed by mass culture and the advertising industry, Modernist poets relied upon the potential of optical experience not only to promote their works but also to appeal to eyesight as the fastest and most effective way to provoke a reaction in the viewer. Therefore, I pay heed to Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, German Expressionism and French Surrealism as a means of exploring the origin of avant-garde aesthetics and their bearing on the British and American experimentalism. In Great Britain, Imagism and Vorticism relied upon the disciplines of painting and sculpture to articulate a poetic language that reproduced the artifice of promotional culture. In the U.S. poets and artists such as Williams, Crane, Stevens and the Precisionists, utilized visual imagery to envision American city life and natural landscapes. Other Modernists such as Stein, Eliot and Pound conveyed their displacement from their homeland by engaging in an epic poetry that reproduced cross-cultural perspectives thanks to the collage effect. Likewise, the emergence of cinema and photography makes a direct impact on the poetry of Moore and H.D., whose mechanized image might be interpreted in terms of the democratization and expansion of art.

The study of visual culture thus helps connect popular or low forms, such as media, with high forms in line with the fine arts and poetry. The interrelation of the literary genre with plastic and mechanical forms is significant because it invites us to think over the original thing and its duplicates as well as the tension between art and truth in modernity. All in all, early twentieth-century aesthetics participates in visual structures, opening up models that emulate the free circulation of commodities, whether they are tangible or intangible.

Introduction

This investigation looks into the effects of modern visual culture on the development of European avant-garde movements and their impact on the Modernist poetic production of Great Britain and the U.S. I focus on the tendency towards visuality in poetry since it is the most representative genre that lends itself to radical experimentations on the level of form and content, while registering the shock value of the advertising industry and modernity-related topics: attraction for the frantic rhythm of the city, the psychological perception of speed as experienced through the automobile and the airplane, rejection of institutions and moral codes as well as a fascination with cinema and photography. This dynamism of the modern world requires messages to be processed more rapidly, and pictures were more advantageous than words to awake the interest of the passersby. Apart from the proliferation of images in early twentieth-century society, abstraction in painting is also part of modern visual culture and contributes to the innovation of poetry. This is evident in Modernist poets' readings and writings on non-representational strategies as well as in their friendship and collaboration with various artists. Abstraction became fashionable, a supreme commodity within avant-garde circles, that opposed mimetic practices anchored in mainstream culture. The poet thus takes advantage of mental or visual imagery, given that pictures capture the attention of the reader more swiftly and efficiently than rational discourse.

In order to build a transatlantic framework, I consider the visual strategies utilized by European experimental movements and their subsequent development, adaptation and

transformation in the London-based Imagist and Vorticist schools as well as manifestations of American Modernism. European vanguardism coincided with a moment of crisis, namely, the outbreak of World War I, unique technological progress, and the emergence of socioeconomic inequalities brought about by an unprecedented increase in population that called for the consumption of commodities on a larger scale than in previous times. As a result of these sociocultural factors, the individual experienced a sense of alienation and skepticism, which led to the adaptation of nonconformist attitudes. These traits are shared by a series of experimental movements that proliferated over the first decades of the twentieth century, namely, Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism, Dadaism and Surrealism, the purpose of which was to renew the theory and practice of art. These Continental avant-gardes acted as centers of power that dictated the aesthetic canon, taking precedence over other less prominent movements such as those originating in Great Britain and the United States. Although Anglo-American writers assimilated the innovations of the avant-garde, they also developed a local poetry that needs to be considered. Bringing Anglo-American aesthetic tradition in contact within European High Modernism can also help perceive the main Continental avant-gardes as highly dogmatic trends that camouflage other minor artistic manifestations. For this reason, each movement, whether it be more or less influential, can be considered to take the visual medium as the political banner of aesthetics.

The poets that will be considered in this study are those dealing with visual culture in Anglophone Modernism. In England and the United States, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Hart Crane, E.E. Cummings, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, the Imagist and Vorticist Schools apply visual strategies in their poems. The compositions of

these poets engage in the sensuous interplay of words and images,¹ whether these be visually materialized in the text or mentally suggested. The aim of this cross-cultural framework between Europe and the U.S. is to rethink the word-image opposition and the implications of the visual turn in Anglophone avant-garde.

Scholars in many fields have acknowledged the importance of studying modern visual culture. W. J. T. Mitchell is explicit when he announces the complexity of interpreting images in our society:

Whatever the pictorial turn is, then, it should be clear that it is not a return to naive mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial "presence": it is rather a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality. (16)

Mitchell rightfully remarks that the visual shift responds to questions of power that are at the heart of the state apparatus and discourse practices. Images create new forms of spectatorship that divide subjects and objects, becoming a political issue that reveals the hierarchy of the view.² In line with this tendency, John Berger analyzes practices intrinsically associated with

¹ Martin Heusser in *The Pictured Word* (1998), *Text and Visuality* (1999) and *On Verbal / Visual Representation* (2005) proves the prevalence of words and images in modern textual production as well as their complex relationships.

² In his analysis Mitchell takes advantage of Panofsky's iconological model and Althusser's ideology. In *Studies in Iconology* (1939), Panofsky distinguishes three strata that correspond to the understanding of images in the Renaissance. The first level is the *pre-iconographic* recognition, which is attributed to the mental connections we establish between the image we receive and a past experience. This is what Panofsky refers to as *primary meaning*, which contrasts with *iconography* as the *secondary* or *conventional* level of signification that concerns itself with intellectual interpretations of social acts. Lastly, *iconology* stands for the symbolic values attributed to the images produced in a particular sociocultural and historical period. As for Althusser's theory of ideology, he uses the term interpellation to refer to the fact that individuals are not independently produced identities. Instead, their existence is contingent on the social forces and institutional discourses of the state that name the subject. For a further view, see Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)." Through these approaches, Mitchell calls attention to the fact that iconology responds to a

the culture of capital, those being mass and artistic media, advertising, cinema and the culture industry. According to him, publicity offers a product that creates a glamorous image of the buyer (132). Visual culture is thus the product of a new subjectivity that privileges the sense of eyesight as the most effective to process messages and cause an immediate reaction.

Within the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer, Theodor F. Adorno and Walter Benjamin have all criticized the role of mass culture in reducing artistic creation to capitalist exchanges. By the same token, Clement Greenberg claims that avant-garde and Modernist art distances itself from commodifying tendencies, yet the artist has no other option than to remain attached to the marketplace or the state. Meanwhile, Renato Poggioli and Peter Bürger have respectively centered on the study of the avant-garde in terms of social activism and its rupture with bourgeois' judgments of taste. In contrast to these critics of modern visual culture and avant-garde theory, in my research I find that experimental poetry and art are better understood by examining the interconnection of ways of seeing in modernity with a highly technologized capitalist society and their impact on the tendency towards abstraction.

The fact that art is a social phenomenon and participates of the marketplace might be perceived in the usage of abstraction and figuration, which became trendy within avant-garde circles and appealed to cultured businessmen or art connoisseurs. The rise of mass-produced objects also made it possible to create a type of art that reacted to the museum institution, such as the readymades by Duchamp and Picabia. Likewise, the emergence of cinema, where the proletariat and the bourgeois meet, reveals novel relationships, spaces and patterns of behavior that make a direct impact on the democratization of culture and art forms. Poets were aware of the prevalence of modern visual culture and they availed themselves of the opportunities provided by the advertising industry and the free market to disseminate their

"social encounter with an Other," whereas ideology runs the risk of dissipating into iconology due to "the mirrors constructed by the sovereign subject" (*Picture Theory* 34).

work. In the same vein, abstraction allowed them to address topics at the heart of modernity, namely, the perils of excessive mechanization, the relationship between the past and the present and the sense of place derived from urban or rural spaces.

History of Ekphrasis and its Transformation in Avant-Garde Poetry

Ekphrasis³ is a rhetorical device that presents plastic, poetic or theoretical questions. In Greek *ek* signifies ‘out’ and *phrasis* ‘speak,’ and thus *ekphrasis* points to the literary description or interpretation of a visual work of art. This concept aids in the formulation of a liminal discourse that rethinks the boundaries between the visual and the verbal fraught with the aesthetic and the social, the ethical and the political. The avant-garde ekphrastic poem discloses the philosophical dimension underlying language and its referent. Whereas in Classical Antiquity imaginary or real aesthetic objects were described, Modernist poetry deals with abstract painting and sculpture as well as the new mechanical arts of photography and cinema. The distancing effect between the word and the sign becomes even greater, given that these poems are not usually faithful descriptions of artworks but rather recreations, elaborations or reinterpretations. Ekphrasis lends itself to a series of mediations between the verbal and the visual sign, the mechanical image and the world, thereby distancing reality and aesthetics from one another. In short, the moderns generate a greater separation between the referent and poetry that complicates the access to the sign, which mixes imaginary elements

³ Murray Krieger in *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (1992), Norman Bryson in *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation* (1991) and Mieke Bal in *Reading ‘Rembrandt’: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (1991) consider ekphrasis as a semiotic exercise of interpretation that brings language closer to the natural sign, thereby bridging the gap between objects and linguistic codes. However, the turn towards abstraction in the visual arts complicates the ekphrastic reading of poetry, as artworks are independent of the outside world and recognizable forms of representation.

that are reminiscent of real objects. This gives rise to tensions that evidence the tenuous limits between art and life to the extent that they confront the viewer or reader with theoretical questions that expand our comprehension of inter-art discourses.

The ekphrastic principle has radically evolved from its early stages of Classical Antiquity to the early twentieth century, when the revolution of poetic language ties in with societal transformations that especially point to the psychological significance of eye-oriented perception. According to Plutarch, Simonides of Ceos was the first poet who defined poetry as a speaking picture, and the picture as mute poetry, which represents a type of aesthetic interaction. In order to reach an in-depth understanding of inter-art discourses in the avant-garde, a review of the traditional context of ekphrasis helps explain what Krieger refers to as a desire for and rejection of the natural sign.⁴ In general terms, the Classics argue that, if anything, literature needs to find its model in the visual arts, as they reproduce reality in a more faithful fashion than words. Ekphrasis as such can be pinpointed in the so-called description of Achilles' shield in Book 18 from the *Illiad* or in Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn". In both cases, the reader is faced with an imaginary object that does not exist in the real world. In the tradition of word-image relations, the epigram also plays an important part. Made out of a dedication posited on a sculpture or a gravestone, the epigram recognizes the subservience of words to the plastic artwork. Language can act as a tautology that reproduces in writing what the natural sign stands for. In other cases, it evokes the permanence and stillness of the material object as opposed to the transitoriness of human life. Both ekphrasis and epigrammatic writing respond to the Platonic and Aristotelian assumptions on mimesis

⁴ As Krieger remarks in *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (1992), the natural sign can be interpreted as an attempt to "capture the world in the word" (11). In literary tradition from the ancients to the moderns there has been a "desire for the natural sign" and a rejection of it. The former corresponds to an ekphrastic urge that harmonizes with its referent and the there-ness attributed to "spatiotemporal possibilities in the poetic medium" (9).

and the so-called Horatian *ut pictura poesis*, also known as sister arts. These literary techniques center on the faithful representation of the world.

In Book 10 of the *Republic*, Plato discusses ekphrasis by referring to the representation of a bed from three different perspectives. For the Greek philosopher, God is the creator of the genuine and original bed outside the world of appearances, yet the carpenter produces a type of bed that imitates the former. Finally, the painter represents a bed that removes twice from the ideal bed of God. In Plato's view, painting is the sensuous representation that creates a false impression of truth in the observer. Meanwhile, poetry is invested with the mimetism of painting. As Plato suggests, poets such as Homer are skilled at reproducing the image of the thing, not so much at tapping into the idea. Poetry, in the same manner as painting, is an illusion based on the superficial knowledge of the object that veils truth. In fact, the verbal work distances twice as much from the referent. In his criticism of verbal art, Plato argues that poets are not to be taken as role models to govern a state, as they arouse passions and vices that impair our ability to exercise clear judgement. According to Krieger, Plato privileges visual motifs that evoke natural signs over the deceptive character of verbal topics, as “the immediacy of the picture” is closer to “a tangible, ‘real’ referent that would render the sign transparent” (“The Problem of *Ekphrasis*” 6). As an arbitrary sign, language is deficient in capturing the substance of reality. Heretofore, poetry is to reproduce the *enargeia* of the visual arts, that is, the vividness that characterizes its spatial constituency, rather than its temporal medium.

In his *Poetics* Aristotle also theorizes on the conception of mimesis, which he articulates around *anagnorisis*, “a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune” (1452a). This crucial discovery is relative to signs, an invention of the poet, the reactivation of memory or events that have an emotional impact on the protagonist. In this fashion, Electra in *The Oresteia*

realizes that her brother Orestes has returned when she pays a visit to her father’s grave and comes across a lock of her brother’s hair. The concept of *anagnorisis* is key to understanding Aristotle’s engagement in mimesis, as he expects the audience to identify with the events that illustrate the action as a unitary object. In a similar fashion to Plato’s discussion of ekphrasis, Aristotle believes that *anagnorisis* succeeds in bridging the gap between the audience and the artwork. Unlike Plato, the art privileged in his discussion is drama, rather than painting, as actors’ voice, gestures and circumstances are animated on the stage, which enables higher degrees of identification with the performed work.

If Plato and Aristotle argued for the vividness of the natural sign, otherwise termed *enargeia* by Krieger, Longinus is interested in a type of writing that transcends ordinary reality and pursues the greatness of the soul by moving the listener to ecstasy and an ethical comportment in the world. At this point, the tendency of poetry towards pictorialism is changed by the affective features of language. In *On the Sublime*, Longinus distinguishes between several forms of sublimity such as “great thoughts, strong emotions, certain figures of thought and speech, noble diction and dignified word arrangement” (136). As he remarks, Sappho’s *Ode to Jealousy* is a sublime poem, because it is further concerned with arousing powerful emotions than with persuasion. This is precisely what enables one to reach out for perfection in daily life.

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, philosophical conceptualizations on language gather importance over those of the visual arts. Nonetheless, renowned figures such as Leonardo in his *Treatise on Painting* still believe in the prevalence of painting over poetry given its alliance with the divine power of Nature rather than with the arbitrary signs of written or spoken language created by men. The precepts of Simonides and the Horatian theme of *ut pictura poesis* define the poetry of Garcilaso de la Vega, William Shakespeare and Francisco de Quevedo. Known as “correspondence of the arts” or “the sister arts,” this

idea proposes bringing poetry closer to painting. Poets such as Sir Philip Sidney in “An Apology from Poetry” (1579) apply the motto of the “sister arts” so as to insist on the interdependence between the visual and verbal arts. Emblem poetry is another artistic manifestation that conjoins words and images by posing an enigma that needs dispelling. This tendency in the Renaissance reveals the long-lasting influence of Platonic philosophy, although thinkers such as Marcillo Ficino, Giordano Bruno and Dante Alighieri rely on the potential of the mind to convey an ontological and phenomenological experience that enables one to transcend sensory perception and have access to the intelligible world. Poetry and the verbal arts, in general, bring together the real and imaginary as a means of transcending the natural sign. Given the absence of a concrete referent that we can see, the poetic image has a different impact from the plastic arts in allowing individuals to create a world that responds to the subjectivity of their imagination.

With the inception of Cartesian rationalism and empiricist philosophy, the mimetic tradition of *ut pictura poesis* is still present in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An illustration of this is Alexander Pope’s “Epistle to Mr. Jervas” (1715). Nonetheless, it is generally believed that poetry can deepen the ability of the mind to reach a visionary state of consciousness. Joseph Addison is an outstanding illustration of this move. Although he respectively acknowledges sculpture and painting to be on top of the mimetic hierarchy of art, he shows concern for the ample spectrum of creative possibilities offered by poetry. In that respect, he continued Longinus’s theoretical postulations on sublimity. According to Addison, the sublime is the delight the spectator takes in an overpowering natural phenomenon or incident, especially in a text that awakens passions. This pleasure, as Addison puts it, “does not arise so properly from the description of what is terrible,” but rather “from the reflection we make on ourselves at the time of reading it” (89). In other words, only by setting the menacing object apart from the observing subject, can we enjoy

the experience of terror, as we feel safe with such distance. Addison explains this idea as follows:

When we look on such hideous objects, we are not a little pleased to think we are in no danger of them. We consider them, at the same time, as dreadful and harmless; so that the more frightful appearance they make, the greater is the pleasure we receive from the sense of our own safety. (89)

In view of this, there exists a relation of proportionality where the more horrendous the object is, the greater the distance the viewing or reading subject requires. Our mind is unsettled before such a spectacle without our physical integrity being threatened. The verbal arts are thus the perfect artifact to convey the experience of the sublime, as they possess abstract properties that allow for the incursions of imagination.

Addison’s line of thinking is continued by Burke and Kant, both of whom focus on the contemplation of overpowering events from a safe position. For Edmund Burke, the dichotomy between the beautiful and the sublime is anchored in language. As he remarks, the visual image allies itself with the beautiful, as it respects the limits of the object and the lucidness of a concept. Poetry represents the sublime, as it points to affect and imagination as two forces that approach unrepresentable aspects of human experience such as emotions and ethics. As Burke puts it in *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757):

The proper manner of conveying the *affections* of the mind from one to another, is by words; there is a great insufficiency in all other methods of communication; and so far is a clearness of imagery from being absolutely necessary to an influence upon the passions, that they may be considerably operated upon without presenting any image at all. (101-2)

Burke considers language the ideal medium to convey affect, given that words transfix the opaqueness of the pictorial sign. In his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (1790), Kant goes even further by distinguishing between the experience of the beautiful and the sublime.

Whereas the beautiful is pleasure fixated within the limits determined by the form of the object, the sublime is an indication of its infinitude and indeterminacy. As Kant writes,

the beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime, is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness. (90)

The beautiful responds to the containment of the figure within its contours; the sublime, on the other hand, acts out a compelling desire for expansion. This aesthetic division corresponds respectively to the visual and verbal arts. The former are contained in the limits of the frame, whereas the latter respond to the force and incommensurability of imagination. Poetry points to the sublime, as Reason sets in to mediate between the discord generated between judgement and imagination.

Burke and Kant’s dichotomy between the beautiful and the sublime is the counterpart of *Laokoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), where Lessing argues that visual forms of representation are based on space, while verbal art hinges on temporality. For the German author, art and literature are not connected and should be analyzed from a perspective that focuses on the possibilities each discipline can perform in its medium.⁵ On the other hand, the Romantics thought about the retrieval of the carnal nature of the word. It is as if language had incantatory properties that would lead to the reincarnation of the linguistic sign. According to Krieger, “the romantic quest” lies in the recovery of “an original, pre-fallen language of corporeal presence, though our only means to reach it is the

⁵ In the context of the avant-garde Clement Greenberg argues for the medium specificity of each art, returning to Lessing’s theorizations. In “Modernist Painting” (1961), the American critic defines medium specificity as the capacity of exploiting the properties rooted in every discipline. For instance, painting is to insist on the qualities of the raw material, those being flatness and abstraction rather than figuration. Once the imitation of nature was relinquished, abstract artists also shied away from taking sculpture as a model to register three-dimensional space. Instead, they take advantage of the opacity and surface of painting in their search for innovation.

fallen language around us" (*Ekphrasis* 10). However the efforts to bring language closer to the referent, the carnality the Romantics looked for was a failure.

The English Romantics also theorize on sublimity but from a perspective that privileges language over spatial arts, given its potential to convey unrepresentable emotions and states. This is noticeable in the multiple theorizations of sublimity. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes the expansion of the lyrical voice before an overwhelming phenomenon and its eagerness to overpower its force, whereas for Keats and, to a lesser extent, for Coleridge, the sublime consists of the disappearance of the self. The attitude of Wordsworth is an egotistical one that posits man as the measure of all things. Keats, on the other hand, shows the acceptance of the unknown as an act of generosity towards an otherness that goes beyond human constraints. The interconnection of sublimity with affect and ethics is discussed by Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry* (1821). For the English poet and essayist, artistic creation does not rely upon the similarity to the external object, but upon the way in which signs are capable of expressing the subjectivity of human mind.

At this point, the Classical conceptions on the ekphrastic model are overturned. Rather than giving priority to a mimetic view, poets engage in expressing the subjectivity of the self. In Romanticism, it is precisely personal experience that is privileged over external reality. As such, language accesses the individual's psychic life more fittingly than the visual arts, becoming a more unmediated means to express the inner world. As Krieger argues, the ekphrastic principle shows the strained relationship between visual and verbal rhetoric that lies at the heart of temporal and spatial signs. Despite the efforts of language to access the natural sign, it ends in the disappointment of its inability to produce the same effects as the object in reality. In his words:

What is being described in ekphrasis is both a miracle and a mirage: a miracle because a sequence of actions filled with before and after such as language

alone can trace seems frozen into an instant's vision, but a mirage because only the illusion of such an impossible picture can be suggested by the poem's words. (xvi-xvii)

Poetry mediates between visual art and the natural sign, creating a meta-aesthetics that considers the implication of distancing oneself from actual life by utilizing the ekphrastic discourse. We thus live in a mediated world and images have come to be our reality: "the consummate example of the verbal art, the ultimate shield beyond shields" (xvii).

In addition to the attraction to verbal forms of expression, the Romantics were interested in examining interartistic phenomena from an outlook that included all the arts. Richard Wagner is an exemplary illustration that shows this combinatory effect. His theorizations of *Gesamtkunstwerk* or a total work of art set the precedents for an interdisciplinary aesthetics that breaks the boundaries between pictorial and literary creation. This metaphorical conception undermines the divide between aesthetic categories, while it merges several art forms that include visual and verbal signs. The tendency to go beyond the boundaries of artistic disciplines was shared by Romantic and Symbolist writers, and it contradicted the Neoclassical principles postulated in Lessing's *Laokoon* (1790). Nineteenth-century poets such as the Symbolists Stéphane Mallarmé and Charles Baudelaire, as well as the literary critic Walter Pater not only admit that each art seeks to resemble music but they also claim that there exists a transgression of boundaries between aesthetic disciplines. Baudelaire particularly remarks that arts are not conceived of as individual compartments but as a web of cross-disciplinary associations that allow for the exchange of forces. Whereas to the Neoclassical sensibility, in general, music is the means of union of the diverse

disciplines,⁶ twentieth-century painting is the quintessence of the avant-garde and becomes the paradigm of aesthetic practices.

The collaboration between the visual arts and poetry lays out the project of the avant-garde.⁷ Modern poetry complicates the relationship with painting and sculpture given that they are dominated by abstraction, which does not bear any resemblance to reality. The decoding of this poetry needs to consider techniques of displacement from one sign or meaning to another, similar to what Michael Riffaterre named hypogrammatic derivation.⁸

⁶ The poststructuralist and psychoanalytical precepts of Bakhtin, Barthes, Foucault, Lacan and Derrida have set precedents for the study of images and textual relations. For Barthes, art, objects and people can be read in terms of textual signs, but not the opposite way. Lacan was mainly concerned with the prevalence of a symbolic language that manifests the supremacy of phallogocentric discursive practices. In line with this thinking, Derrida centers on the importance of the signified as a means of articulating a rational and sequential writing. In opposition to the linearity of patriarchal linguistic patterns, Kristeva argues for a pre-Oedipal language that rescues the figure of the mother as a transformative force that channels the pulsations of the signifier into the text.

⁷ The avant-garde synthesizes visual and literary codes that define the lines of an aesthetics that points to a moment of crisis in which artists seek to break free from the constraints imposed by social institutions, and thus challenge traditional and mainstream art as an analogy of freedom. At this point, materialist philosophy comes to light as a result of different industrial and economic practices. Unlike the idealist system especially propounded by Hegel, this thinking renders spiritual processes material, and interprets the world as existing matter irrespective of, and yet outside the psyche. Likewise, whereas idealism deals with the mental activity of consciousness, materialism fundamentally concentrates on the study of matter. On the one hand, avant-garde aesthetic production allies itself with dialectical materialism, in that it reifies ideas, as is noticeable in Marcel Duchamp's readymades and Raoul Hausmann's photomontages. On the other hand, art manifests itself as an abstracting force that shies away from sensuous concerns. Wassily Kandinsky, Constantin Brancusi, Kazimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian and Paul Klee are illustrative cases that adopt this tendency to spirituality. As an extension, poetry projects the tension between matter and ideas by manipulating the layout of the page and challenging mimetic messages.

⁸ In *Semiotic of Poetry* (1978), Michael Riffaterre provides a structuralist approach based on the decoding of poetry. His most celebrated notion is his hypogrammatic derivation. As he puts it, this mechanism is relative to the fact that "*a word or phrase is poeticized when it refers to (and, if a phrase, patterns itself upon) a preexistent word group*" (23). Although Riffaterre's semiotic model refers exclusively to literary texts, this approach lends itself to poetry constituted by pictorial and linguistic signs. Techniques of displacement emphasize a fluctuation from one word or meaning to another, just as in metonymic or metaphoric practices. The French critic also suggests gaining insight into effects of distortion based on ambivalence or nonsense to be

For that reason, ekphrasis is transmuted into an interpretive device that recreates the object at hand. As Mitchell puts it, "the image is the sign that pretends not to be a sign, masquerading as (or, for the believer, actually achieving) natural immediacy and presence," thereby causing the viewer to establish a connection with the outside world. On the other hand, "the word is its 'other,' the artificial, arbitrary production of human will that disrupts natural presence by introducing unnatural elements into the world—time, consciousness, history, and the alienating intervention of symbolic mediation" (43). The deception embodied by the image and the artificiality of language in the avant-garde ekphrastic poem produces an effect of estrangement that, rather than face the reader with a commonplace object, defamiliarizes our perception of the world. The verbal sign mediates through the visual so as to interpret an image that does not resemble reality. In other cases, ekphrasis might be noticed in poems on photographs or films, which complicates the relationship with the referent. The text mediates with those mechanical arts, and the duplicates of the represented thing, whether they be negatives or multiple filmic projections, raise questions about the idea of originality. This leads one to reconsider the relation between art, truth and deception in modernity, given that the similarity of the object reproduced by these technological artifacts bears a striking resemblance to our reality, but in fact it is a simulacrum.

In addition to this transformation of ekphrasis as such in avant-garde textual production, poets also toy with the typographical design of the page, which focuses on the visuality of the text as a method that destabilizes sequential writing and reading. This practice transgresses traditional forms and invites the reader to approach the poem as a perceptual rather than rational device. Along these lines, the poetic experimental text is to build bridges

able to synthesize and make sense of those contradictions, which may be part of ironic processes. His last method implies translating patterns of creation by systematizing the meaning of linguistic signs.

with modern visual culture as a means of investigating the philosophical and cultural implications of images in the twentieth century.

Chapter Summary

This dissertation is divided into six chapters that explore the constituency of the poetic image in early twentieth-century aesthetic expression. Chapter one surveys the most significant European avant-garde movements that made an impact on the consolidation of American and British Modernism thanks to fruitful transatlantic exchanges. This theoretical framework looks into the interconnection of capital with modern visual culture and the realm of art. In other words, modern aesthetics is influenced by relations of production and distribution underlying the fundamental principles of the marketplace.⁹ The advertising industry is successful in promoting the product and making it accessible to the public. Imitating the commercial apparatus, the avant-gardists appeal to the eye of the viewer to gain visibility in the domains of art. In this sense, the theories of Clement Greenberg, Renato Poggioli, Theodor F. Adorno and Peter Bürger help reach an overarching knowledge of European vanguardism.

The chapter begins with the analysis of the role of the market in the articulation of Cubism, as young and cultured entrepreneurs became highly interested in this artistic movement, investing large amounts of money in exhibits and purchase of works. This is noticeable in Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler, who launched and even purchased the artwork of Pablo Picasso, George Braque and Fernand Léger, among others, so that they could make their ends meet. Kahnweiler also made interdisciplinary collaboration possible between Pablo Picasso and Max Jacob in addition to André Derain and Guillaume Apollinaire.

⁹ In *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (2004), John Cooper states that Modernist practices participate in capitalist culture. Art thus is turned into an object to be consumed by the masses and alienated from the artist.

As a continuation of Cubism, Futurism¹⁰ was significant to the extent that it participated in processes of modernization as well as the speed and visual constituency of the city life. Its attack against the establishment and engagement in social reform is symptomatic of an agonistic state of affairs. According to Poggioli, this conflicting attitude can be understood in terms of the avant-garde activism, “the sheer joy of dynamism, a taste for action, a sportive enthusiasm, and the emotional fascination for adventure” (25). But this energetic attitude might be used to turn against any authority that is considered to be oppressive or erroneous. Therefore, collective action adopts an antagonistic position against the status quo, even taking a nihilistic urge to destruction. Marinetti’s expression “war, the only world’s hygiene”¹¹ illustrates this tendency towards the eradication of the maladies of the present. As opposed to Marinetti’s glorification of technology, Russian art and literature take advantage of primitivism to return to the innocence of a past arcadia and criticize the excess of mechanization in modernity. This tendency is not only present in Russian art, but also in Cubism, Expressionism and Dadaism. However, this chapter considers the faction of Futurism in Russia to visualize a tendency within the same avant-garde movement that made a critical response to Marinetti’s eulogy of machinery.

¹⁰ Studies that have spelt out the interpretation of the avant-garde are Krzysztof Ziarek’s *The Historicity of Experience: Modernity, the Avant-Garde and the Event* (2001) and Marjorie Perloff’s *The Futurist Movement: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (2003). The common point of departure that these critics propose bears upon the significance of avant-garde visual production and its relationship with the machine culture. Ziarek examines the avant-garde poetry of Getrude Stein, Velimir Khlebnikov and Susan Howe by making reference to philosophical critiques of modernity that revolve around concepts such as technology, everydayness, event, and sexual difference. His theoretical engagement with Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Jean-François Lyotard, and Luce Irigaray serves to understand technological experience in modernity from a philosophical viewpoint. Similarly, Marjorie Perloff proposes an insightful reading of the prose, visual art and manifestos of Futurism in Italy and Russia. This study is important given the impact of Futurism on the avant-garde as well as its cross-disciplinary interpretation.

¹¹ See Marinetti’s “Manifeste du Futurisme” published in the journal *Le Figaro* on February 20th, 1909.

Expressionism was critical with the apparatus of capital, especially regarding its potential to generate a bellicose conflict that would end in millions of deaths. Apart from these forceful attitudes, the Dadaists in Switzerland, Germany and France demonstrated a nihilistic sense that claimed for the destruction of art and the avant-garde itself. This attitude is developed by Peter Bürger, who in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984) attends to the ability of the avant-garde to synthesize aesthetics and life, while challenging the institution of art. The avant-gardists, in general, advocated an art for the future, as they were conscious that their paradigms would not find acceptance in the present moment, but rather in later generations.

Finally, New York Dadaism and Surrealism, with its immersion in the culture industry and forms of provocative performance attacked the frivolous consciousness of the bourgeois, thereby revealing the deficiencies of a society governed by the law of supply and demand. Clement Greenberg, Theodor W. Adorno and Peter Bürger are useful to understand the relationship between Dada and Surrealism to the marketplace. In “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939), Clement Greenberg contrasts the profit-oriented motifs of kitsch against the avant-garde resistance to commercialization. By the same token, Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970)¹² unravels the reciprocity between art and society. In his view, the excess of

¹² In his *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) Adorno argues that art gained autonomy once it broke free from past religious or imperial purposes. This proliferation of the autonomy of art is linked to societal commentary, yet avoiding political propaganda. The notions of the new and the experiment are central to understanding the autonomy of abstract art. The new relies on the negation of tradition and the link between the individual and society. In the process of reaching out for the new, the artist needs to experiment, especially because of the loss of “security in forms or content” that tradition provides (23). At the same time, the new art “is bound with the commodity character,” given that it is in the service of “the exploitation of capital, which if it does not expand, if it does not—in its own language—offer something new, is eclipsed” (21). For this reason, modern artworks run the risk of losing their critical force when they are reduced to commercial transactions. “Nothing remains of the autonomy of art,” as Adorno states, “other than the fetish character of the commodity” (17). In the face of this situation, the German critic argues for “truth content,” otherwise termed *Wahrheitsgehalt*, which he posits in the

reification in early twentieth century leads modern art to disclose the inauthenticity of society, yet without changing anything.¹³ This type of art that distances itself from society reveals that which mass culture lacks. Abstraction appears to respond to what Adorno defined as "truth-content," given that it "is unable to bespeak what has yet to be, and yet must seek it, protesting against the ignominy of the ever-same" (22). This art points to the repressed socio-historical element by utilizing complex secular forms that oppose ritual or royal functions and hint at such lack in the present moment. The abovementioned critics were the precursors of a line of thinking that began to take into account aesthetics and its relation to social transformations from a perspective that rely on figuration and abstraction.

Chapter two, "Imagism, Modernity and Antiquity: The Phenomenology of the Image," defines poetry in terms of the aesthetic postulations developed by the philosophy of perception¹⁴ and pictorial movements such as Impressionism and Cubism.¹⁵ The main

object itself rather than in the beholder. Truth content is artworks' ability to generate a utopia based on what society lacks and to open an imaginary space for hope and freedom.

¹³ Adorno appears to claim that the negativity of society is precisely concealed by deceiving forms of entertainment: "What the enemies of modern art, with a better instinct than its anxious apologists, call its negativity is the epitome of what established culture has repressed and that toward which art is drawn. In its pleasure in the repressed, art at the same time takes into itself the disaster, the principle of repression, rather than merely protesting hopelessly against it." (19)

¹⁴ At the brink of the nineteenth century, images in aesthetics, psychology and philosophy convey an epistemology rooted in sensorial impressions, which challenges the abstract knowledge provided by ideas. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the vitalism of Henri Bergson and the empiricism of John Locke illustrate the significance of phenomenology in decoding the meaning of images. Perceptual experience, synonymous with Panofsky's perspective, is key to decipher the mental and imaginary potential of visual aspects in poetry. Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot familiarized themselves with this philosophical tradition of images developed especially by French Symbolist poets such as Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud and Stéphane Mallarmé. Despite their common philosophical background, Symbolism and Imagism differed in their approach to poetry. Whereas Symbolism thought art should reach absolute truths through indirect and ambiguous means, the Imagist School claimed for the directness of presentation and economy of language, which entailed a return to Classical values. For Pound and Eliot, the image, rather than the symbol, was the most effective vehicle in capturing an inner vision with the help of the elements encountered in the real world.

premise is that poetic image is based on the interaction between the world, the perceiving subject and the phenomenal thing. Of remarkable importance is that the observer perceives the object at a certain moment in time. Exposed to a plurality of viewpoints, the thing manifests itself by presenting a wide range of possibilities that transcend our view. The tendency towards directness and immediacy is thus based on the perception of the phenomenon from different outlooks, not on the correspondence with reality. The manifestation of the phenomenon establishes reality, inciting the viewer to describe its observation in aesthetic language. Like Classical thinkers, the poets of Imagism were firm believers in the unmediated, direct and objective potential of images. Their assumptions could be right, if we take into account that artistic expression is no longer mimetic. Nevertheless, their dependence on the visual potential of Cubist art and the perceptual experience of a specific observer entails another form of mediation in poetry. In other words, the Imagists could not help mediating between the referent and the poem as they made use of painterly strategies, which simultaneously were mediated by words. Their desire for concreteness and immediacy was thus impossible. Despite their attempts at objectivity, their expressive language is more accurately understood by appealing to the appearance of phenomena and their subjective transformation in the poetic domain. Imagist poetry was circulated in influential periodicals, taking advantage of the advertising industry to promote its theory and practice. The British movement benefited from the advantages that the free market offer to promote its poets and, in turn, journals such as *Poetry*, the *Egoist*, the *Little Review*, to name a few, advertised mass-produced objects for a wide public. On other occasions, they circulated ideas of the countercultural sphere—feminism, anarchism,

¹⁵ Ortega y Gasset's *La deshumanización del arte* (*The Dehumanization of Art*, 1925) distinguishes between photographic field of vision and the dehumanizing perspective of vanguardism, of which Impressionism and Cubism are representative. Whereas mimetic methods identified with the world, avant-garde art distanced itself from it as a means of pervading the inner life of the object.

syndicalism—as a means of advancing their social concerns. In order to explore the novel contributions of Imagism, the Classical Antiquity of Greece and China plays an important role in terms of the return to the origin, understood as the source of inception and originality. Ezra Pound and H.D. are two representative examples of this trend. Regarding modern themes, some of the poetry of Amy Lowell, F.S. Flint and Richard Aldington revolves around the emergence of metropolitan centers and processes of industrialization. Their poetry and writing further the understanding of phenomenology in Imagism.

Chapter three, “Vorticism, Mass Culture and Machine Aesthetics: Politicizing National Vanguardism,” looks into the impact of mass culture on the Vorticist aesthetic program as opposed to European influence. Although Vorticism shared elements of the machine aesthetics with Cubism and Futurism, they adapted them to the London-based context. The sculptor Jacop Epstein is an extraordinary case study that reveals the problematic relationship of the Vorticists with technology. If he believed the machine to have contributed to the furtherance of our daily life, he also adopted a critical attitude towards its alienating effects. The circulation of *BLAST*, as the ideological Little Magazine of the movement, was also a significant propagandistic medium that helped give visibility to the Vorticists, who made use of the image in their works to define their cross-disciplinary identity. The originality of Vorticism precisely lies in its effort to couple the visual arts with literature from a perspective that reflects on the alliance between abstraction and the machine. The interdisciplinary collaborations shared by its members prove their interest in creating a technological imagination that could be equally applied in the visual and verbal arts. This is noticeable in Wyndham Lewis, as he was both a painter and a writer concerned with the dilemmas derived from the usage of machinery in World War I. By the same token, Ezra Pound took advantage of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska’s conception of “masses in relation” to create a poetry based on the plastic properties of sculpture. As for Alvin Langdon Coburn, he

invented his vortographs, original photographs that experimented with abstraction. Coburn's role was essential in promoting transatlantic exchanges with the U.S. that provided Vorticism with an international scope. In opposition to the masculinist aesthetics in Vorticism, the androgynous image of Jessica Dismorr's and Helen Saunderson's literary and visual works helps reflect on their manipulation of male models to react to strict Victorian gender roles and morality as well as to gain visibility in the field of the avant-garde. Bearing in mind the emphasis on the machine at the outset of the twentieth century, the Vorticist image appears to be a critical product of modernity that shows its political implications.

Chapter four, “The Aftermath of Vorticism: Feminism and the Ekphrastic Poems of Mina Loy,” discusses the transformation of Cubist and Futurist vocabulary into the feminist poetics of Mina Loy, as it emphasizes the revolutionary potential of women. Loy appears to be fascinated by the paintings and sculptures of Vorticist artists such as Wyndham Lewis and Constantin Brancusi, as they focused on primitive aspects that revealed the importance of fertility rituals and reproductive abilities, some of the characteristics that distinguish women from men. Along these lines, Loy's feminist manifesto leads to the definition of a space that considers the vision of femininity in her ekphrastic poems.

Chapter five, “Transatlantic Modernisms and American Visual Identity,” investigates the impact of European vanguardism on the vernacular aesthetic expression of American Modernism.¹⁶ Movements such as Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism, Dadaism and Surrealism were embraced in the U.S. due to their rupture with tradition and those mimetic tendencies that had prevailed over the centuries. These avant-garde trends manipulated form

¹⁶ Charles Altieri's *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry: the Contemporaneity of Modernism* (1989) and Peter Halter's *The Revolution in the Visual Arts and the Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (1994) examine American poetics from a perspective that combines verbal and visual strategies. These groundbreaking critical studies set early twentieth-century American poetry in context to analyze the rejection of representational strategies in painting in favor of abstraction.

in order to reflect on a series of social practices that were taking place at the brink of the twentieth century. American Modernism aligned itself with capitalism and processes of modernization in that both phenomena entailed a profound change of the state of affairs. Owing to the irrationality of the marketplace and the impossibility of controlling its movements, American Modernist art and poetry made use of European abstraction to overpower the reality of the twentieth century. As a result of these societal transformations, man felt estranged in a world that appeared to have lost its sense of community in favor of individualistic behavior. Abstraction and figuration were seen as methods that assisted the artist in either illustrating the absurdity of the world and the self or as a vehicle to clearly see the essence of things. Events such as the Armory Show, Stieglitz's gallery 291 and the magazine *Camera Work* shaped the American artistic scene. Visual artists such as Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler, Marsden Hartley, Alfred Stieglitz and Paul Strand emancipated from European influence by celebrating American rural and urban landscapes that allowed them to create an aesthetic expression based on the sense of place, that is, the native soil of the U.S. In this fashion, William Carlos Williams and Hart Crane focused on urban architecture and industrial landscapes, which ties in with the visual art of Precisionist painters such as Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler and Joseph Stella. The sense of place was also encountered in typical natural spaces of the American geography. Wallace Stevens focused on Florida, Robert Frost wrote on the scenery of New England and Marianne Moore composed “Octopus” after her experience at Mount Rainier. In the visual arts, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley and Georgia O’Keeffe also reflected on the sense of place derived by sublime landscapes encountered in Long Island, Main and New Mexico. Both the Precisionist and Modernist artists utilize painting as a medium to promote urban and natural spaces of the U.S., thus participating in the apparatus of modern visual culture. As opposed to the search for a national consciousness in terms of the local, Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound

manifested their displacement from their native land engaged in the recovery of faraway places as a means of thinking over their alienation from the U.S. and its debt to cultures and histories obliterated by discourses of power. This sense of place and displacement is thus important to consider two divergent views in the evolution of American aesthetic expression.

Chapter six, “American Modernism, Poetry and the Mechanical Arts: The Ekphrasis of Light and Movement,” explores the impact of the photographic and cinematic image on Modernist poetry. The Precisionist movement of Alfred Stieglitz and Paul Strand, which organized around the magazine *Camera Work* and Gallery 291, aided in the visualization of photography as art. These photographers concerned themselves with the urban reality of the U.S.: machines, skyscrapers, natural elements or cities with geometric shapes. William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore are poets that present the material world in such a way that recalls photographic snapshots. Their ekphrastic poetry of photography is of foremost importance to speak about the congealment of time in the poem. Likewise, the cinematographic experimentations of filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray and Fernand Léger, among others, emphasize the importance of light and movement. Techniques such as the “close-up” and the “montage” are the equivalent of the poetic image, in that they disrupt the sequential order of narration in favor of the oneiric world of the unconscious. Ekphrastic poems based on films, just as those of Hilda Doolittle, Hart Crane and Mina Loy are exemplary of the connection between light and movement in the creation of a new composition that greatly distances itself from the original filmic source.

The transatlantic perspectives between European and U.S. Modernism looks to offer a global understanding of the international avant-garde as well as its adaptation and transformation in Anglophone national backgrounds. In order to formulate a supranational framework the interrelationships of plastic and poetic languages is emphasized. This will lead

to a comprehension of the avant-garde phenomenon and its impact on British and American poets.

1. European Vanguardism, Capital and Modern Visual Culture

This chapter explores the origin and dissemination of European experimentalism as well as its reception and transformation in British and American artistic contexts. In order to reach an overarching comprehension of Continental vanguardism, I look at specific plastic and literary strategies that broke with photographic mimetism and were representative of movements such as Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism, Dadaism and Surrealism. In the poetic domain the most significant achievements are *calligrammes* and sound poetry. In the visual arts, some of the most representative compositions I will target include collages, montages, rayographs, *frottages* and readymades. The first two techniques concern themselves with fragmentation and juxtaposition as a means of destabilizing the consistency of an image, even when it develops photographic effects as the rayograph does. In the *frottage*, the artist rubs a surface leaving a trace that makes us wonder about the original object. As for readymades, these industrial objects are given a title unrelated to their appearance. Other experiments at the crossroads between the plastic and the verbal arts are *poèmes-objets* and Surrealist games, which integrate different literary and material elements so as to create an image or a text.

These creations in Surrealism are subversive acts that eradicate the difference between life and art, as they incorporate real-life elements in the artistic domain that confound the viewer. In addition, these experiments reflect upon ongoing social antagonisms, as they appear to critique capitalist power structures by exhibiting disposable and functional

material, while belonging to such a rebuked system. The presence of mass-produced objects in art invites us to think over forms of social and economic alienation in society. As Marx states in *Capital* (1867), the bourgeoisie control labor power to compete against industrialists by owning the means of production and obtaining the maximum value from the proletariat. The resulting product becomes alien to the worker who invests effort in its manufacture. Social relations are thus dictated by things rather than by the interaction of individuals expressing their human nature. This is what Marx defines as "commodity fetishism:"

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. (320-321)

Men's labor is imprinted in the product they bring about, and is symptomatic of the commodification of human relations and the humanization of objects. In this context, art is the privileged medium to reveal these social relations and economic exchanges, as it has become a commercial activity that renders an aesthetic value into a commodity that responds to business transactions. Avant-garde art is produced within capitalist structures and participates of these exchanges in a critical fashion.¹⁷ It does so to gain visibility in the artistic superstructure by rejecting the very genre of art and reacting to the consumption of fads and copies that turn aesthetics into a superficial activity devoid of critical comment. In European experimentalism, the fragments of reality that enter the aesthetic domain make the viewer wonder about the impact of mass-produced objects on our lives. At the same time, we

¹⁷ Throughout time art has participated of capitalistic exchanges, but the specificity of the avant-garde is that they promoted themselves through the print culture of manifestos to gain prevalence and become visible. They also formed part of countercultural tendencies that challenged the status quo and the moral codes of the bourgeois.

are led to think over inclusion of new aesthetic categories that challenge conventional genres, once they become part of the museum structure.

As Bürger claims, the avant-garde reacts to the autonomy of the artwork in the tradition of Kant and Schiller, as it attempts to show concern for a life praxis that effaces the boundaries between aesthetics and reality. Attending to the "Analytic of the Beautiful," Kant defines taste as "the ability to judge an object, or a way of presenting it, by means of a liking or disliking *devoid of all interest*. The object of such liking is called *beautiful*" (53). Judgements of taste are to be treated "as if" they followed logical argumentations, although they do not possess the universality of the concept. Therefore, Kant concludes that the "beautiful is what, without a concept, is liked universally" (64). Instead, their assumptions hinge upon disinterestedness and the subjective purposiveness.

In his *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794), Schiller shows his disappointment in the outburst of violence caused by the French Revolution and the lack of success in implementing paradigms of behavior. His letters were an attempt to educate the people in the beautiful as a means of developing a sense of ethics. For Schiller the antagonism between human sensuous nature and its ability to invest the world with a conceptual and moral order results in the felicitous fusion of *Form* and *Sinn*, or the *Spieltrieb*, which goes hand in hand with the idea of artistic beauty in the configuration of an ideal state characterized by freedom and happiness. The artist, then, will immortalize the present momentum in the form of the unchanging unity of his being. Unlike Kant and Schiller's artistic notions, the avant-garde does not imply a question of taste that revolves around values of disinterest and beauty, but rather questions the notion of taste and indifference as necessary conditions to continue theorizing on art.

The visual arts at times oppose mass culture and mainstream values that lead to profit-oriented motives, although they use or manipulate objects that belong to the consumer society

to either celebrate or criticize early twentieth-century reality. In this respect, avant-garde art relinquishes realism and, instead, argues for abstraction as the political banner that helps understand the social and intellectual preoccupations in technology, science and philosophy. Nonrepresentational techniques are used to manifest a crisis with either the referent or long-lasting modes of perception that privilege a univocal and static viewpoint. On a textual level, there are significant changes that entail a rupture with past writing models. Writing is thus conceived as a living material that allows for the experimentation with a plurality of verbal and visual forms. As Bousoño rightfully remarks in *Teoría de la expresión poética* (Theory of Poetic Expression, 1952), with the advent of modernity and the apogee of the marketplace and industry, medieval nominalism and Cartesian credo cede their position to perceptual forms of epistemology. This circumstance coincides with the internalization of the reading process and the increasing power of writing as the quintessential metaphor that confers permanence to the ephemeral character of the spoken word. In this revolutionary context, poetry shifts away from the properties of music to the consolidation of the plastic element. Apollinaire's *calligrammes*, George Trakl's Expressionist poems, F.T. Marinetti's *parole in libertà* and the revolutionary sound poetry of Hugo Ball and Hans Arp, break with the traditional patterns of rhyme and meter. Instead, they argue for free verse to convey their poetic experience without formal restrictions. The visual arrangement is also another characteristic that attacks conventions that argue for reading images rather than words to challenge the prevalence of conceptual language.

In addition to the abovementioned artistic strategies, exhibits and magazines are considered in the present analysis given their potential to circulate the ideas exposed in several manifestos that argued for a sense of artistic community with a will to commit to the renovation of art, not without attacking the current state of affairs and bourgeois morality. In Paris the Salon des Indépendants (1884) and the Salon d'Automne (1903) exhibited the first

Cubist artworks that were the prelude of avant-garde culture. The *London Futurist Exhibition* of 1912 and the *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* (First International Dada Exhibit, 1920) set the precedents of the culture of provocation that will make an impact worldwide. In the same vein, cabarets and literary clubs precisely respond to the intention of provoking an audience desensitized by alienating constituency of modern experience and the devastating effects of World War I. The *Cabaret Voltaire* in Zurich and *Club Dada* in Berlin showed the novel tendency to group in terms of a common sensibility that resist societal structures while taking advantage of the media, and literary magazines were the most significant example of the appropriation of the means of the market. In Paris *SIC* and *The révolution surréaliste* were the preferred mediums for diffusing Cubist, Futurist and Surrealist artists, while in Germany *die Aktion* and *der Dada* popularized both the Expressionists and Dadaists alike. Owing to the convulsive circumstances at the outset of the twentieth century, the avant-gardists strove to contest effects of commodification that turned the artwork into a product of symbolic capital used by consumers to climb their status in society. Their aim was to innovate by utilizing all the productive means offered by the modern apparatus of technology, industry and the marketplace.

Although several important artistic manifestations were taking place in the old continent, I only refer to those that left an imprint on the formation of British and Anglo-American Modernism over the decades of the 1910s and 1930s. Therefore, the object of study revolves around Cubism and Futurism, as their tendency towards abstraction and their celebration of modern life inspired Vorticism, although the latter eventually withdrew from the former so as to develop a national identity that legitimized its originality. Cubism and Futurism were also adopted by the group of the Precisionist painters in the U.S. and poets such as Carlos Williams, as they were engrossed in the frantic rhythm of the city and processes of industrialization. Stein, Eliot and Pound in their self-imposed exile also

exhibited collage effects in their epic poems to reveal several viewpoints and states of consciousness. Meanwhile, the aesthetic distortion of Expressionism pervaded salons and magazines in London and New York. For instance, Edward Wadsworth translated pieces of Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* in *BLAST*, Marsden Hartley and Alfred Stieglitz took trips to Europe, familiarizing themselves with the *der Blaue Reiter* and Expressionist leanings. Lastly, the impact of Dadaism and its emphasis on the culture industry was evident in New York, where European expatriates such as Picabia and Duchamp disseminated their works, influencing the technical innovations of Man Ray, the poetry of Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore. Thanks to the meetings at the Arensbergs', Lola Ridge's apartment and Alfred Kreymborg's household, American artists exchanged ideas and innovated their artistic panorama.

1.1. Theory, Reception and Interpretation of the Avant-Garde

The phenomenon of the avant-garde made an impact on fruitful transatlantic exchanges between Europe and America that led to the understanding of art as life praxis. The twentieth-century produced variegated movements that not only challenged longstanding aesthetic strategies but also percolated into social structures, questioning the role of material exchanges and societal structures. Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism were a few of the movements that reacted against the status quo, and thus pointed to a systemic crisis brought about by a fast developing industrial society. My intention is to present an overview of the avant-garde by taking into account the criticism of Renato Poggioli, Peter Bürger, Theodor F. Adorno and Clement Greenberg. With this backdrop in mind, I will refer in later chapters to the local aspects of English and American Modernism as well as its correspondence with the European avant-garde.

In *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1962), Renato Poggioli explores the event of avant-gardism at the outset of the twentieth century under historical and sociological constructs that tie the phenomenon itself to ideology. The avant-garde is chronologically dependent on historical episodes associated with social dissent and action, namely the Prussian war, the Paris Commune and the revolutions after the 1830s. All these circumstances contributed to disruption of the order in the ancient regime in favor of democratic processes originating in Romantic thinking. In fact, for Poggioli the avant-garde is an extension of the Romantic combative mentality.

At the same time, attention is paid to cultures remote in space and time, emphasizing an increasing interest in aesthetic primitivism. In ancient times, the public belonged to an elite composed by the most educated and intelligent elements of a dominant class. In Classical Athens, Medieval Florence or Paris, amateurs or connoisseurs were part of the *polis*. With the emergence of democracy and nineteenth-century insurrections, the social elite was abolished. A new social category, conceived in-between the margins of higher and inferior strata, identifies with an art that appeals to content rather than to form, in that its main function is mainly political and ideological. Along these societal lines, the dandy and the bohemian are conceived as figures that displayed their antagonism towards bourgeois audience and tradition. This nonconformist attitude towards life ranges from the rejection of God and the universe, through the violence manifested in terms of concrete action or propaganda, to artistic forms of defiance noticeable in either the use of child-like language or the display of an opaque style.

According to Poggioli, these historical facts, among other circumstances, made possible the emergence of schools and movements in the first decades of the twentieth century that defied the state of affairs. Whereas the former points to the weight of tradition

and authority in the creative process, the latter is outside the dominant cultural and aesthetic paradigms. In his words:

[t]he school, then, is pre-eminently static and classical, while the movement is essentially dynamic and romantic [...] The school is inconceivable outside the humanistic ideal, the idea of culture as a thesaurus. The movement, instead, conceives of culture not as increment but as creation—or, at least, as a center of activity and energy. (20)

Schools belong to prevailing social and intellectual manifestations. Conversely, the movement is essentially reactionary and dynamic, the avant-garde art being its most radical expression. Modern artistic signs are generally bound up with the concept of movement, however, on occasions they are closer to the notion of school, as one can notice in attitudes such as the “art for art’s sake” or the myth of the “ivory tower” encountered in Symbolism or Parnassianism.

On another note, Peter Bürger discusses the development of art and literature by contrasting the disparate approaches of Adorno and Lukács. Adorno defines the avant-garde in terms of the culmination of art’s cycle and the class antagonisms derived from capitalist power structures. By synthesizing Hegel’s aesthetic model and Marx’s historiography, Adorno seeks to reconcile the tendency to abstraction in art and the social relationships promoted by the culture industry. He goes even further by asserting that art is the negative other, that is, the activity that opposes the empirical world. In the same way that society reproduces diverse types of alienation—psychological, social, economic and cultural—so has art become alienated from truth in a reified modern world. At times, the artist, then, is conceived by the bourgeois-capitalist society as a consumer and as a worker. However, he or she is dispossessed of the ability to meet the needs of consumer society, which ends up in his or her social estrangement. In turn, Adorno argues for authentic art to vindicate an autonomy

that negates the present while moving towards a future that harmonizes aesthetics and truth. The negation to mainstream aesthetic forms is noticeable in the resistance to technological constructions, such as those illustrated by the totalitarian forces of Soviet Union. Diverging from the official taste, the artist will be accused of quasi-heresy and formalism, as he or she attacks the state's consensual aesthetics. On other occasions, a marked scientism and experimentalism will be used to critique the excess of mechanization, and the unconditional reliance on the power of the machine. Science is not solely rooted in technique and theory but also in empirical observation and speculation, which the avant-garde fully exploits to reach unprecedented levels of creativity.

By the same token, the artwork is characterized by its obscurity and incomprehensibility, as it attempts to display its negative value. Adorno mentions the "We that speaks in artworks," despite being created by a specific individual (167). This is known as the social subject, which discloses the "ruling productive forces and relations of an epoch" (168). Processes of industrialization in the modern world are paradoxically viewed either as symptoms of decay, when dehumanizing existence, or as a celebration, when furthering our standards of living. Clement Greenberg also presents a similar point of view in his essay titled "The Plight of Culture" (1953), where he contrasts the opposing approaches of Marx and T.S. Eliot towards culture. Whereas the former relies upon technological potential to erase class divisions, the latter manifests that industrialism accelerates the decline of culture due to its destructive effects. Despite their opposing views, both thinkers believe industrialization to be central to the development of civilization. Furthermore, Greenberg remarks that just as society changes by virtue of technological progress and the exploitation of economic resources, the role of work and leisure is also affected. In his words:

While it is generally understood that the quality of leisure is determined by its social and material circumstances, it is not understood that its quality is

determined in even larger part by the quality of the activity that sets it off: in other words, that leisure is both a function and a product of work, and that it changes as work itself changes. (29-30)

As he continues, culture of industrialism needs to reconcile the difference between work and leisure, that is, between interested and disinterested ends. If one aspect prevails over the other, our society runs the risk of losing part of its authenticity and becoming empty.

Along these lines, Adorno also criticizes the culture industry and its ability to standardize attitudes and means. According to him, art reflects the negative aspect of empirical reality by making use of strategies that deform the presented image. The distortion of human figure, the use of primitive style and iconoclasm, impersonalism, transhumanization and hyperbolic images are a few of the characteristics that constitute the avant-garde artwork. Cubism and Futurism take advantage of these formal strategies as enactments of the social subject in order to reflect upon the critical aspects of the empirical world. Whereas Cubism entails a form of mental abstraction that leads to a visionary state of consciousness, the second empathizes with the modern world by identifying with a type of mechanical automatism. At times artists show a psychosomatic predisposition to those spiritual and physical traumas that bring about his madness. An illustration of this condition is Baudelaire's "heautontimorumenos," where the poet, seeking a way out of the state of alienation, ends up punishing and caricaturing his own self.

As seen above, Adorno concerns himself with societal structures that are intrinsic to the abstract constitution of the work of art. For Lukács, however, the fact that literature and art distance themselves from the patterns imposed by classical realism is considered to be a symptom of decay. Based on these postulations, Bürger views the avant-garde phenomenon as the self-criticism and the negation of art as institution in bourgeois society, as it is noticeable in Dada practices. On another note, Greenberg analyzes the role played by work

and leisure in our society. This is noticeable in the creation of new categories that defy clear demarcations imposed by traditional aesthetics such as found objects or readymades. By taking advantage of the modern apparatus of industry the existing distinctions between art and life are effaced, in that artworks participate in the manufacturing processes of the marketplace.

These are but a few characteristics that define the direction of European vanguardism. The dialectical approach proposed by Adorno inasmuch as the sociocultural model of Bürger and Greenberg as well as the political analysis of Poggioli contribute to the comprehension of the avant-garde from a multiple perspective. The movements that I will examine in the following sections are illustrations of the theory and practice that these critics put forward. My intention is to specifically focus on those avant-gardes that show the fusion of verbal and visual codes as an extension of visual culture and the tendency to appeal to the eye in the marketplace.

1.2. Cubism (1907-1912): Cubism, Paris and the Art Market

In the early twentieth century, the plastic arts advanced the principles of the avant-garde, in which modern poetics encounters its source of inspiration. In 1908-1914 the dissemination of arts took place thanks to the appearance of private galleries, a wealthy class of educated young consumers and art dealers interested in making profit of the new art. At that time Pablo Picasso, George Braque, Wassily Kandinsky, Juan Gris and Joan Miró had already created non-representational abstract paintings. In 1908, the first Paris exhibit housed a great number of painters that defied the mimetic principle. The most significant artists to be mentioned here are Derain and Braque, whose sense of purity and unity is translated into inhuman forms that retain the traces of the new, and manifest a will to truth. In this moment of creative apogee, Paris became the capital of the artistic avant-garde. The exhibitions

inaugurated in the Salon des Indépendants, the Salon d'Automne and the Salon de l'Ecole Française welcomed diverse artists—Post-Impressionists, Fauvists, Cubists, Futurists—. These exhibits also welcomed avant-garde artists whose experimentations renovated the state of art. Cézanne's paintings with houses, Matisse's chance encounters of lines, Pissarro's modern cityscapes, Laurencine's return to classical antiquity and Picabia's technological innovations set a precedent at the outset of the twentieth century. Félix Vallotton, Henri Rousseau and George Desvallières are other figures that influenced the panorama of modernity and the galleries of the time. As opposed to annual salons promoted by the French government, these private galleries acted as channels of distribution that reacted to the official taste. The promoters of these works were familiar with advertising strategies that appealed to the eye and encouraged spectatorship to participate of avant-garde culture while making a profit out of its dissemination.

Magazines were particularly successful in adopting the mechanisms of capital to create an art market that propagates aesthetic theories and ideas. Among the Cubists *Les Soirées de Paris* (The Evenings of Paris) was exemplary of this tendency. Founded in 1912 by Guillaume Apollinaire, the purpose of the journal was to champion Picasso's art and the most significant exhibits (Kouneni 190). A few years later in 1916 *SIC* (meaning Sons, Idées, Couleurs and “thus” in Latin) came to light. Directed by Pierre Albert-Birot, the journal, in the beginning, acted as the platform of Cubist poets such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob, André Salmon and Blaise Cendrars. One of the issues that gained a wide scope was the première of Apollinaire's *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (The Breasts of Tiresias, 1917), which was illustrated by Picasso and Matisse. With the inception of Futurism, Dada and Surrealism, *SIC* also showcased the work of Louis Aragon, André Breton, Francis Picabia, Pierre Reverdy, Philippe Soupault, Tristan Tzara.

This state of affairs in Paris promoted the appearance of an art market that contrasted with traditional tastes. As a result of the industrial revolution, a new wealthy class of educated young consumers came into the Parisian scene exhibiting their bold acquisitions. Cubism was the first expression of a revolution in aesthetics. Innovation became economically profitable and, although Cubist artists such as Picasso and Braque were critical of the commercialization of art, it is also true that the system made their art known worldwide. Cubism preceded World War I in France, where it developed thanks to the efforts of Pablo Picasso and George Braque and, to a lesser extent, Juan Gris, Fernand Léger and Robert Delaunay. Criticism usually agrees that the events that paved the way for its inception are the 1905 Salon d'Automne, the retrospective exhibit of Cézanne in 1907 and the discovery of African sculpture. The 1910 Cézanne Exhibition opened in the Bernheim Gallery, where his paintings were accoladed by spectatorship. Previously, his paintings were shown in the 1863 Salon des Refusé, where several works were rejected by the jury of the Paris Salon. This gallery refused to display Cézanne's submissions from 1864 to 1869, and not until 1895 did Cézanne exhibit twice with the Impressionists. In fact, the Parisian dealer Ambroise Vollard, who became interested in a number of his paintings, granted the artist his first solo exhibition. He was also in charge of the 1910 Gauguin one-man show, which synthesized both primitivist and avant-garde influences. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler¹⁸ was also significant in promoting the work of promising young artists who did not have economic means to survive, and thus he acquired the work of Fernand Léger, George Braque and Juan Gris. Kahnweiler was also successful in organizing exhibits of Cubism and creating bonds between artists and writers thanks to collaborative publications. It is thus not strange to

¹⁸ See Malcolm Gee, *Dealers, Critics, and Collectors of Modern Painting: Aspects of the Parisian Art Market between 1910 and 1930*.

assume that these art dealers promoted a competitive culture to sell the new artwork, thereby reinforcing the contradictions of the avant-garde, as it reacted to the commodifying effects of art while lending itself to the same methods that consumer society developed so as to obtain economic benefits.

In Cubism, the composition shies away from affective and instinctual faculties only to focus on intellectual abilities that are expressed in a similar fashion to the plastic language of Egypt and Greece. The Cubist artwork breaks down objects and reorganizes them in an abstract form that can be perceived from a variety of viewpoints. This pictorial style is divided into various stages. The first one is known as Analytic Cubism and appears around the years 1910 and 1912. This tendency makes use of neutral colors and dissects objects in different shapes. In 1911 Jean Metzinger, Albert Gleizes, Robert Delaunay, Henri le Fauconnier and Fernand Léger exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants following those analytical precepts. The following year Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* [Fig. 1] scandalized the audience and even the Cubists. One of the most prominent exhibits was the 1912 *Salon de la Section d'Or* at the Galerie La Boétie in Paris, where over 200 artworks that represented the evolution of Cubism from 1909 to 1912 were showcased. By that time, Impressionist tendencies were relinquished in favor of more energetic and new forms preoccupied with painting the inner reality of things. Picasso, Braque, Gleizes, Laurencin and Juan Gris are the most representative figures of this tendency that attempts at rescuing the essence of things and render them great purity. The proliferation of these exhibits, artworks and magazines that circulated analytical Cubism promoted artists without outstanding economic resources. In this manner, Cubist artworks and avant-garde visual culture reached audience by taking advantage of consumer society, since they were discovered by young businessmen interested in the new aesthetics. Nonetheless, they did so with the purpose of conveying the message that art was in need of a radical change so that the

world could also evolve in an original direction. This is exemplary of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, purchased by the lawyer and art dealer Frederic C. Torrey, and later acquired by Louis and Walter Conrad Arensberg. Owing to the reputation and social influence of these personalities, Cubist art had ample outreach in European and American artistic circles.

After the analytical phase of Cubism, Synthetic Cubism came to light in 1913, which coincides with the encounter between Picasso and Gris in Ceret. This phase is characterized by the use of the collage, that is, the juxtaposition of heterogeneous materials on the canvas (Busto Ogden, 96-97). Originating from the French verb *coller*, it means "pasting, sticking or gluing." According to Perloff, it enables a twofold reading: the first of them points to the initial locus of the fragment, while the second to its integration in a new whole (46-47). *Still Life with Violin and Fruit* [Fig. 2.] is illustrative of a cumulative technique that integrates writing, fragments from reality and drawing. Picasso transforms the longstanding concept of the still-life into an expression of modernity that cancels the superiority of a univocal point of view. This composition also points to elements of reality such as food and journals that were at the heart of modern commercial practices.

In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno accounts for the effects of the modern work of art, which can be perceived in the above-mentioned compositions of Duchamp and Picasso. Synthesizing the non-identical and the identical, these compositions become self-identical, in that, pointing towards a paradoxical continuity, they simultaneously disclose their incompleteness and insignificance. Fixated as they may be, their dynamism emerges out of the eloquence that causes the totality of force fields to integrate or disintegrate themselves within a whole. Adorno rescues the Hegelian concept of the "self-identical" or "equal to itself" so as to suggest that the artwork is to strive for no inner contradictions and therefore become abstract and static, generally unrelated to other things. However, Adorno further

argues that “the movement of artworks must be at a standstill and thereby become visible” (176). In connection with these Cubist works explained above, nonidentical elements lack coherence, which produces the effect of motion, of readings that vary throughout time and space.



FIG. 1. Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending the Staircase No 2*, Philadelphia Museum of Art.



FIG. 2. Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Violin and Fruit*, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Cubism is an intellectual art that carried in itself two different approaches: the traditional notions of metaphysical thought and the fourth dimension. This term emerged as a result of the popularization of the "General Theory of Relativity," and affected European art and the American artists gathering around the Armory Show and the magazine *Camera Work*. In Apollinaire's view, the fourth dimension

Elle figure l'immensité de l'espace s'éternisant dans toutes les directions à un moment déterminé. Elle est l'espace même, la dimension de l'infini, c'est elle qui doue de plasticité les objets. Elle leur donne les proportions qu'ils méritent dans l'œuvre, tandis que dans l'art grec par exemple, un rythme en quelque sorte mécanique détruit sans cesse les proportions.

represents the immensity of space eternalized in all directions at a given moment. It is space itself, or the dimension of infinity; it is what gives objects plasticity. It gives them their just proportion in a given work, whereas in Greek art, for example, a kind of mechanical rhythm is constantly destroying proportion.¹⁹

The group of the Cubists led by Apollinaire and Picasso were influenced by the theories of the mathematician Maurice Princet, who introduced Esprit Jouffret's postulations on the fourth dimension to Picasso. In his treatise he explained the reproduction of complex geometric figures on a two-dimensional surface. Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Jean Metzinger and Albert Gleizes were interested in the application of non-Euclidean mathematics to Cubism to explore multivalency of space. This will pave the way for rethinking ulterior realities that escape our senses and Cartesian paradigms. Due to the propagation of this scientific thinking that made an impact on every sphere of our life, art also took on these breakthroughs and attempted at applying them to its creative domain. If

¹⁹ See Apollinaire, "Le peinture nouvelle (notes d'art)," *Il y a*, 111-112; originally published in "Le peinture nouvelle (notes d'art)," *Les Soirées de Paris* 3 (April 1912): 89-90. To contrast the English translation, see Caws, *Manifestos: A Century of Isms*, 120.

technology had not been so prevalent at the outset of the twentieth century, it would have been almost impossible for art to assimilate and synthesize these discoveries.

Relying on the abovementioned theories, Orphic Cubism emerged as a the third variety of this movement. Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Léger, Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp, and Guillaume Apollinaire were some of the most representative examples of this trend who explored the potentialities of combining a profound aesthetic pleasure with signification. Apollinaire defines Orphic Cubism as:

Cette autre tendance de la peinture moderne représente des ensembles nouveaux avec des éléments empruntés non pas à la réalité visuelle, mais entièrement créés par l'artiste et doué par lui d'une réalité très puissante.

the art of painting new structures out of elements which have not been borrowed from the visual sphere, but have been created entirely by the artist himself, and been endowed by him with fullness of reality.²⁰

This variety of literary Cubism synthesized the dominant metaphysical approach and the scientific theories on the fourth dimension. Apollinaire's intention was to reclaim a space set apart from the sensuous vision of the world only to push the intellect to its limits. An example of this Orphic Cubism is *Le Bestiaire ou Cortège d'Orphés* (The Bestiary or the Procession of Orpheus), published in 1911. This painting, originating in sixteenth-century sources, brought together a series of woodcuts by Raoul Dufy and fifteen poems by Apollinaire that accompanied the illustrations. Motifs such as the sun, light and fire appeared in this composition as metaphors for creative and dissolving forces. The artist's intention was to renew tradition while contesting Modernist preciousness. To that effect, scientific methods were useful to pervade the surface and dig into the enigmas of matter.

²⁰ For the definition of Orphic Cubism, see *Les peintres cubistes: Méditations esthétiques*, 69. For an English translation see Caws, 124.

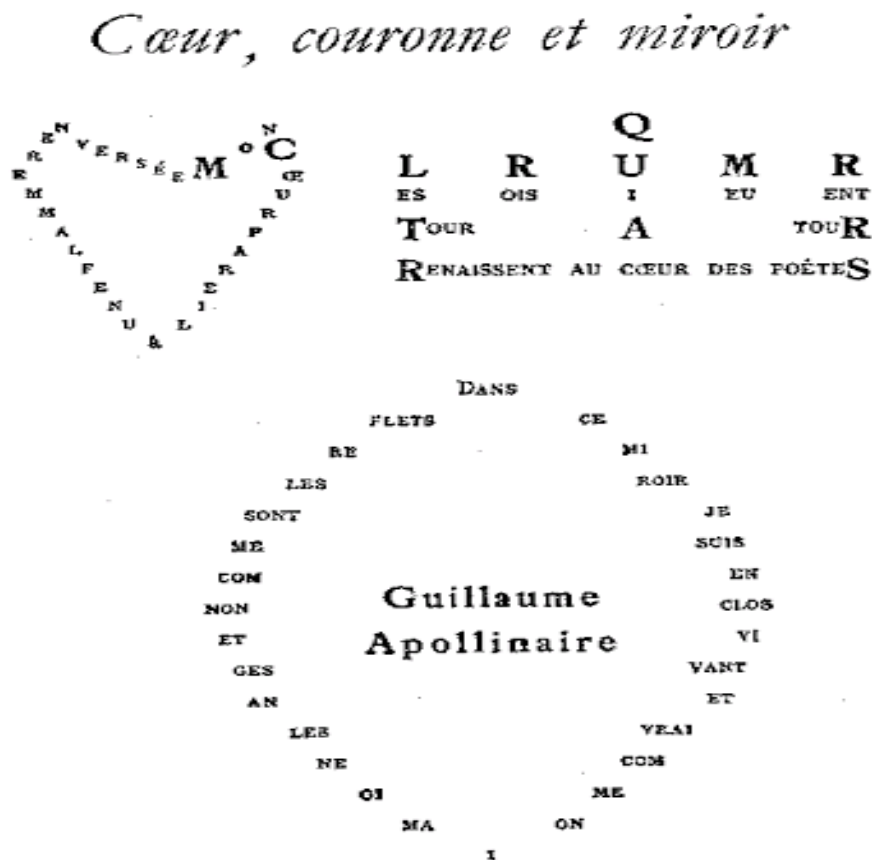


FIG. 3. Guillaume Apollinaire, "Heart, Crown and Mirror," *Calligrammes; poèmes de la paix et de la guerre, 1913-1916*. 56.

Part of his reflection upon modern art led Apollinaire to design his calligrams, that is, poems where the distribution of writing give rise to a picture. These pieces of writing were significant in that they appropriated the visual effectiveness of the image. *Calligrammes* defamiliarize visual and verbal codes by manipulating syntax and using blank spaces, disparate fonts and type sizes that break with linear writing. Some of Apollinaire's most famous calligrams such as "Heart, Crown, Mirror" [Fig. 3] are illustrations of techniques of fragmentation and juxtaposition applied in Cubist collages. This poetry appeals to the

multidirectional reading of the text, which generates polyvalent meanings and interpretations. In fact, the word “miroir” (‘mirror’) might be an allusion to the decadence of mimetic art in lieu of abstraction and figuration. As for “coeur” (‘heart’), the poet might be suggesting the necessity of preserving the emotion before the artifice of novel forms. Only by doing so could the artist be a solid leader. Hence the reference to “couronne” (‘crown’).

To summarize, Cubist plastic and literary practices emulated strategies from visual culture to propagate avant-garde art. In so doing, Picasso and Apollinaire announced a new epistemology of art based on the tactile aspects of sight. Their compositions contribute to the articulation of a reading based on learning how to read painted figures and, by contrast, how to see letters. This sensuousness of the artistic expression paved the way for rethinking the importance of perspective in avant-garde art, which was also the essence of modern philosophical thought.

1.3. Futurism (1909-1929)

Futurism was another avant-garde movement that originated in reaction to Symbolist and Parnassian literature and art. Futurists attacked tradition and elevated modernity to unprecedented heights. In Italy Marinetti celebrated fast-developing urbanization, the automobile, the aeroplane as symbols of a time that entailed a rupture with the past. The Futurists learned how to commercialize their idea of the future as a symbol that overpowers Nature. Men are thus required to ally themselves with the forces of the machine to go beyond anthropomorphic attitudes and exploit their own creativity. The Russians not only welcomed modernity but also primitivist aspects that looked to rescue the original goodness of humankind while relinquishing sophistication. Simplicity as a synonym for authenticity is at the heart of the Hyalean group and the Cubo-Futurists. Both in Russia and Italy, Futurism struggled to create a novel aesthetic language, whether it be called *parole in libertà* or *zaum*.

At stake was the profound renewal of form and content, given the fact that mimetic culture was in the doldrums, and alternative types of expression were needed to inject force to aesthetics.

1.3.1. Italian Futurism: The Capitalization of Future

Futurism was another -ism that made an impact on the international avant-garde. Its manifestos and literary program were circulated in small presses, exhibits and provocative performances that scandalized the audience. The Futurists perceived the decadence of a system corrupted by the hypocritical values of the wealthy bourgeoisie, and thus they set out to destabilize ideologies and the judgements of taste of prior aesthetic currents. Marinetti remonstrated against the literary practices of the Symbolists which he found anachronistic in a society changing at great speed. For the Italian poet scientific and technological progress were intrinsic to the development of art. The Futurists were involved in the capitalization of the future, as they experienced modernity to the fullest instead of evading the world they were living in. They could access the reality of their time and invest in the imagination of a mechanical future thanks to the propagation of magazines, manifestos and performances that considered the symbiotic relationship between machines and men. In Italy, literary journals such as *Lacerba* contributed to the popularization of Futurism. Founded in 1913 by Giovanni Papini and Ardengo Soffici, this literary magazine aims at questioning the principles of *La Voce* (The Voice) directed by Giuseppe Prezzoline. Futurist artist such as Marinetti, Carlo Carrà and Umberto Boccioni published their pieces in this journal. In France, the journals *Le Figaro* and *SIC* advanced the ideas of modernity upheld by the Italian Futurists and their supporters. The capitalist sense of competition was especially noticeable in the law of the supply and demand, as a wide range of magazines emerge.

The Futurists attempted to control the unpredictability of the future as the utmost

expression of civilization. The automobile, the aeroplane and the hectic rhythm of the urban metropolis were inventions that struggled to overpower Nature and secure the future for human purposes. To that effect, man was the source of control in the artwork. Of especial importance was writing about new methods of transport such as the railway and the automobile. As Günter Berghaus conveys, traveling by train is synonymous with "a communal experience" that contrasts with "a sense of personal freedom and adrenaline rush caused by the experience of speed" ("Futurism and the Technological Imagination" 4). In his "Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo" (Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism, 1909), Marinetti eulogizes the racing car as the maximum expression of modernity given its potential to go beyond spatiotemporal limitations and generate novel perceptual modes caused by speed and dynamism. Furthermore, after his first flight in 1910 at the airshow in Milan, Marinetti ended up elevating the aeroplane as the symbol of Futurism that would inspire his "Technical Manifesto of Literature" (Berghaus, "Futurism and the Technological Imagination" 12-13). As a correspondent in the Libyan war, he described the flight of the aeroplane as "the most beautiful spectacle" he ever saw, which led him to produce *La Bataille de Tripoli* (The Battle of Tripoli, 1912).

This sense of *macchinolatria* was represented by Milan as it created a structure composed of different means of transportation such as the automobile or the railway, entertainment industries and the concept of the modern metropolis characterized by its fast urbanization and variety of services. Instead of romanticizing the past, Marinetti proposed a new aesthetics based on the mythologization of technology and industrial development as symbols of a tendency that points to the faith in modernity. For that matter, he considered necessary to market the idea of the future by means of the press and advertising industry to raise awareness of the advantages of a society where the machine shares a symbiotic relation with man. His idea of a mechanical intuition and beauty goes hand in hand with a style that

relies upon the imitation of "ritmo rapido" (rapid rhythm) as well as "diverse forme di comunicazione, di trasporto e d'informazione" (different forms of communication, of transport and information).²¹ The preponderance of the machine had lasting effects on modern living experience, leading to the interpretation of a bidirectional relationship that considers the technologization of humans and the anthropomorphization of machines. In later generations of Futurists, the machine stopped being eulogized. As a result, plays such as *Agnosca delle macchine* (Anguish of the Machines) by the Sicilian Ruggero Vasari emerged as a symbolic alert to an abuse of machinistic behavior. Although Marinetti had began the cult towards technology as the essence of modernity, the devastation at the hands of Fascist forces made him question the positive elements of a mechanized world. At this point he conceived technology as a double-edged sword whose excessive use in daily life could generate detrimental attitudes.

The glorification of modernity paved the way for inventing a new aesthetics that insisted on the transmission of mechanical rhythms on to the text or canvas. Futurism raged against tradition and embraced the cult of youth and modernity, especially the industrial city, the speed of the aeroplane and the automobile, as they were symbols of the power of man over nature. Unlike Cubism, Futurist paintings are characterized by the effort to animate them with movement, as it is a sign of life that strives to absorb subject in the dynamism of his or her surrounding reality. As "Il manifesto tecnico dei pittori futuristi" (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting, 1910) reads:

Per la persistenza della immagine nella retina, le cose in movimento si moltiplicano, si deformano, susseguendosi, come vibrazioni, nello spazio che

²¹ See Marinetti's "Destruzione della sintassi – Immaginazioni senza fili – Parole in libertà" (11 Maggio 1912), Firenze, ed. *Lacerba*, 1914, 133. For the English translation, see "Destruction of Syntax – Untrammelled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom," in *Critical Writings*, edited by Günter Berghaus and translated by Doug Thompson, 120.

percorrono. Così un cavallo in corsa non ha quattro gambe: ne ha venti, e i loro movimenti sono triangolari.

On account of the persistency of an image upon the retina, moving objects constantly multiply themselves; their form changes like rapid vibrations, in their mad career. Thus a running horse has not four legs, but twenty, and their movements are triangular.²²

This emphasis on movement ties in with the Futurists’ desire to render the artwork as part and parcel of life processes. Whether or not they succeeded is to be judged by viewership, but what is significant is the creation of a new art that put an end to the aesthetics of mimetism.



FIG. 4. Umberto Boccioni, *Dynamism of a Cyclist*, Peggy Guggenheim Foundation.

²² First published in the journal *Poesia* in February, 1910. The second version was signed in April, 1910, by Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Dalmazzo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla and Gino Severini. For a further view, see *Archivi del futurismo* by Maria Drudi Gambillo e Teresa Fiori, 65. For the English translation, see Caws, 179.

In *Dynamism of a Cyclist* [fig. 4], Boccioni invests his composition with movement, creating a sensation of simultaneity conveyed by the multiplicity of colors and shapes. The subject matter corresponds to the paradigms of modernity and thus relinquishes traditional motifs of the past. In terms of form, the painting is even more iconoclastic, as it presents a reality that does not adjust to the forms and colors our senses perceive. It is an autonomous creation that only bears resemblance with the familiar reality of the cyclist by referring to it with a title, all the while the scene is defamiliarized in terms of chromatic shades and forms.

As an interdisciplinary movement, Futurist painting and literature were intrinsically connected and the principles applied to one were also dependent on the other. *Zang Tumb Tumb* [fig. 5] reproduces Marinetti’s experience as a war reporter at the Battle of Adrianople. This poem was published in different sections in journals from 1912 to 1914 and it reproduced the sounds of gunshots and bombarding at Adrianople. As Marinetti accounts for in his “Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista” (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature, 1912), Futurist poetry needs to destroy syntax and utilize the infinitive so as to bring to an end the lyricism of the I. Likewise, the adverb and the adjective need to be suppressed as they entail “a pause, a mediation” that oppose a “visione dinamica” (dynamic vision). For that reason, “il sostantivo deve essere seguito, senza congiunzione, dal sostantivo a cui è legato per analogia” (the noun should be followed, with no conjunction, by the noun to which it is related).²³ Other traits highlighted in the manifesto concern the suppression of punctuation and the incorporation of musical and mathematical symbols to create the impression of speed, all the while certain directions are indicated. These strategies are part of what Marinetti called *parole in libertà*, words-in-freedom, which implies the destruction of syntax and punctuation to appeal to our senses and generate an impression of dynamism. This

²³ See Marinetti, “Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista” (11 Maggio 1912) Firenze, ed. di *Lacerba*, 1914, 89. For the English translation, see Marinetti, “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature,” *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. R.W. Flint, 84.

disruption of the logical rhythm of the sentence eventually leads to the *immaginazione senza fili*, that is, (the absolute freedom of images or analogies, expressed with unhampered words).²⁴ According to Marinetti, this estrangement from the usual meaning of words is the essence of creation, as it will lead us to take the position of the explorer before the uncertainty of the blank page:

Collo scoprire nuove analogie tra cose lontane e apparentemente opposte noi le valuteremo sempre più intimamente. Invece di *umanizzare* animali, vegetali, minerali (sistema sorpassato), noi potremo *animalizzare*, *vegetalizzare*, *mineralizzare*, *elettrizzare* o *liquefare lo stile*, facendolo vivere della stessa vita della materia.

As we discover new analogies between distant and apparently contrary things, we will endow them with an ever more intimate value. Instead of *humanizing* animals, vegetables, and minerals (an outmoded system) we will be able to *animalize*, *vegetize*, *mineralize*, *electrify*, or *liquefy our style*, making it live the life of material.²⁵

In other words, Marinetti targets at a model of artist that bears resemblance to the Nietzschean *Übermensch*. (overman). In dehumanizing art and disconnecting it from tradition, the Futurists turn men into supreme creatures invested with brilliance and sense of achievement. Nonetheless, humans are required to distance themselves from their attempt at anthropomorphizing everything and instead reach a supreme state where they familiarize themselves with becoming animal, machine, plant, etc. Marinetti's poetry and manifestos are precisely targeted at selling this futuristic society by availing himself of the freedom of the marketplace. His intention was to transform the world into a technological structure that takes control of Nature and subjects it to the power of the machine.

²⁴ “Destruzione della sintassi – Immaginazione senza fili – Parole in libertà” (11 Maggio 1912), Firenze, ed. *Lacerba*, 1914, 138, and the translation by R.W. Flint, 99.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 139 and R.W. Flint, 100.

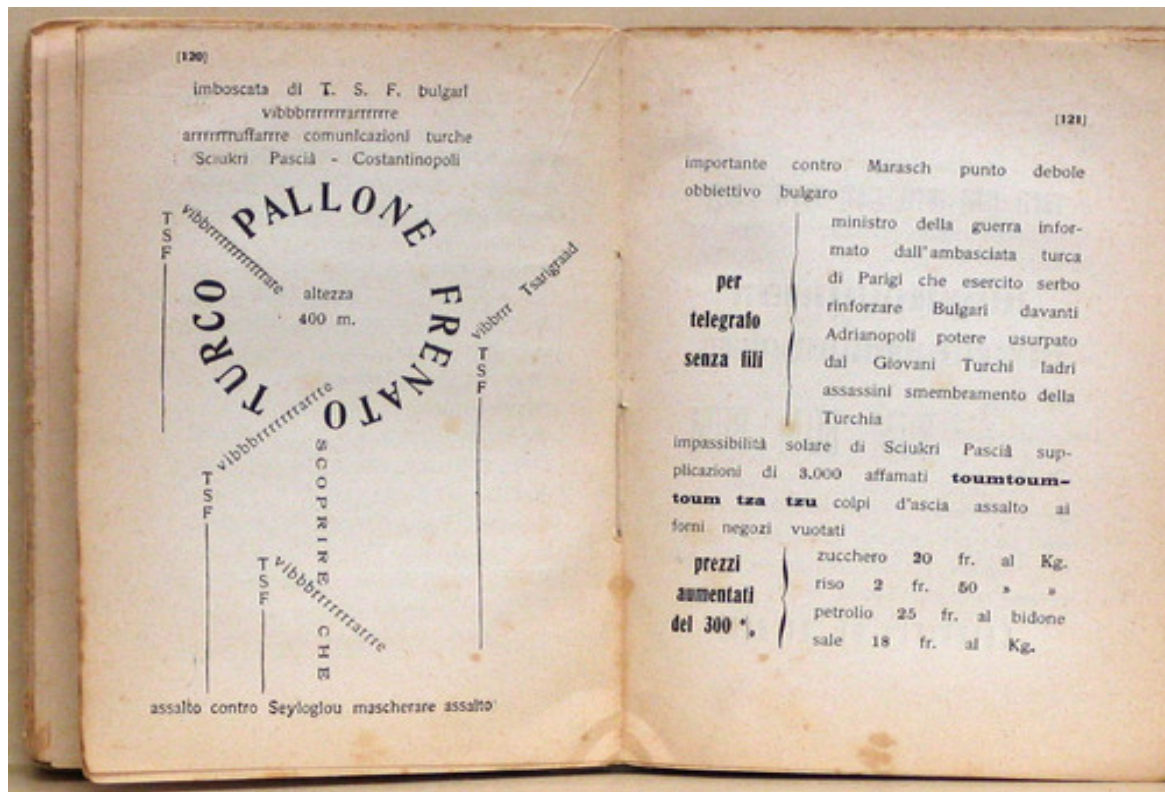


FIG. 5. F.T. Marinetti, "Turkish Balloon," *Zang Tumb Tumb*, MoMA's Collection, 120-121.

In their theoretical and creative writings, the Futurists relinquished the proclivity towards sensuousness, the use of rhetorical devices and classical prosody. The Italian movement was a representation of the processes of modernization and a celebration of the achievements of the New Age ("The Genesis of Modernism and the Avant-garde" 1-26). The usage of a visual typography mimicked the apparatus of cinema and advertising media, which in the 1920s became elements of popular culture. At the same time, Marinetti argued for the use of bruitism in poetry in order to emphasize the frantic rhythm and velocity of modern life.²⁶ A representative poem of the play with sounds and different typesets that appeal to the

²⁶ In his manifestos he spoke of the use of "Noise (demonstration of the dynamism of objects)." *Critical Writings* (111); "the courageous introduction of onomatopoeic arrangements to render all the noises and sounds—even the most raucous—of modern life" (127); "the onomatopoeic orchestration or compendium of noises, [which] will soon give us the opportunity of reaching a psychic onomatopoeic orchestration, the resonant yet abstract expression of an emotion or of pure thought" (131); "Noise is the language of the new mechanical human life" (211).

eye is "Veloci in pioggia" by Escodamé:

Notte fredda scrosciante pioggia
 chiusi nella bassa limosina Lancia tipo Lamda
 si va tra le felci arborescenze d'albe boreali si sfrascano fronde foglie d'argento
 per viali di salici piagenti in stalattiti di pallide luci si recidon rose
 di ghiaccio imperlate di regiada i fare crean esquimesi in bianche pelicce
 fuggenti tra neve cadente su neve strada B R R R R R
 motore in quarta bollire per il tè cruscotto = stufa ben accesa l'orologio ittica
 tra i manometri bocuzza rossa tra chiavette nere
 'sistema Bosch' profumo acuto di benzina nell'orbita di metallo
 bianco la lampadina viola allunga languide ciglia nella chiusa
 intimità femminile di questa calda alcove in viaggio

v v V V craK sssssssss apro tende di fili de perle di vetro di
 pioggia accendo micchie di mine d'echi dò la partenza a treni di
 rombi SCIAAK FRAAK pozzanghere in fiaschi tra molle di
 gomma pugni guantoni boxer massaggiare la note livida affrogata
 allungare un veloce diretto
 RETTIFILO su chiusa mascella
 silenzio campestre

Cold night pelting rain
 snug in the low-lung Lancia limousine
 passing through ferns flora of northern dawns clipping foliage silver leaves
 through avenues of weeping willows' pale stalactites of light pruning glacier
 roses beaded with dew the headlights create Eskimos in
 white furs fleeing among falling snow on snow street B R R R R R
 motor in fourth gear boiling water for tea dashboard = red hot stove
 a clock ticking between the gauges red mouth between black
 switches 'System Bosch' pungent gasoline odour within this intimate
 feminine alcove the white socket's violet bulb extends its
 languid eyelashes

1.3.2. Russian Futurism: Primitivism in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Russian Futurism is an amalgam of disparate trends that shared a series of characteristics with their Italian counterparts, suggesting their engagement with the state of art in the first decades of the twentieth century:

[a]narchic vitalism, rebellion against "passeism" (orientation to ward the past), destruction of academies and museums, urbanism, confidence in the achievements of the technological era, celebration of the machine as a symbol of the new aesthetics, love for the "beauty of speed." (Lawton 2-3)

Despite these similarities, their creative activity took a turn, as they showed an unusual concern for primitivism and its possibilities to regenerate literature and art in an age affected by mechanical and industrial processes. This is noticeable in the Hylaea group, the antecedent of Cubo-Futurism. This word corresponds to the name of a Greek region, where the Scythians used to live, and it is often attributed to the place where Hercules brought his tasks to fruition. The origins of the movement date as far back as the summer of 1910, when the three brothers David, Nikolay and Vladimir Burluk and Benedict Liveshits were vacationing at the Burliuks' house in the region of Kherson, in the southern part of the Ukraine. Soon after, Vasily Kamensky and Velimir Khlebnikov joined the Hylaea and produced the almanac *A Trap for Judges* (1910). In 1912, the members of the movement published a manifesto titled "A Slap of the Face of Public Taste," which announced the principles of the "self sufficient word" as the basis of Cubo-Futurist theory. The manifesto begins by inviting the reader to jettison the past in the following terms:

We alone are the face of our Time. Through us the horn of time blows in the art of the word.

The past is too tight. The Academy and Pushkin are less intelligent than hieroglyphics.

Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity.

He who does not forget his *first* love will not recognize his last. (Caws 230)

With these statements the signatories of the manifesto—David Burluk, Alexey Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Velimir Khlebnikov—remonstrated against an obsolete art and proclaimed their faith in the future as the essence of life. For that matter, they proposed the following principles:

1. To enlarge the *scope* of the poet's vocabulary with arbitrary and derivative words (Word-novelty).
2. To feel an insurmountable hatred for the language existing before their time.
3. To push with horror off their proud brow the Wreath of cheap fame that You have made from bathhouse switches.
4. To stand on the rock of the word "we" amidst the sea of boos and outrage. (Caws 230)

In order to realize these novel principles, Kruchenykh theorized his "transnational language" (zaumnyi illzyk), which he included in his essay "New Ways of the Word" (1913). Conceived in terms of the self-sufficient word, Kruchenykh applied this principle in a poem titled "Dyr bul shchyl," which appeared in his book *Pomade* (1913). As the reader can see, the composition reaches unprecedented moments of extravagance and absurdity. In addition to Kruchenykh, Elena Guro and Vassily Kamensky used transreason in their poems, the latter displaying this language in works such as *Stenka Razin* and the *Heart of the People* (1918). In the same vein, Mayakovsky made use of semantic juxtapositions and transformed sound patterns to such an extent that the meaning of words was profoundly altered.

What is at stake in this new literary form is the necessity to strip the word of its

referent and to deprive it of meaning. In this manner, the sensory components of language are exploited. As Lawton manifests:

Transrational language, rich in sound but devoid of conventional meaning, was organized by phonetic analogy and rhythm rather than by grammar and syntax. The reader was required to restructure his mental processes, from rational to intuitive, in order to grasp the message. (13)

The formulation of a transrational language lay at the heart of primitivism on three levels. If Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh were interested in an infantile language of semantic terms, Kamensky collected children's drawings to potentiate imagination to the fullest. The Cubo-Futurists also engaged in the discovery of prehistory, and poems such as "Slavic Stone Age" by Khlebnikov expressed the naïve and illiterate aspects of Russian language by manipulating romantic poetry songs and ballads. In Khlebnikov's *Ladimir* and *Game in Hell*, primitivism reaches its peak in terms of its reaction against the preponderant ideology of progress embedded in capitalist and industrial societies. Although the Cubo-Futurists yearned for a new world and were willing to take advantage of technological developments, paradoxically they found in the primitive the source that allowed them to foster imagination. Furthermore, the archaic tied in with Rousseau's idea of the "Noble Savage" and the quest for simplicity in contrast to

[t]he discontent of the civilized with civilization, or with some conspicuous and characteristic feature of it. It is the belief of men living in a relatively highly evolved and complex cultural condition that a life far simpler and less sophisticated in some or in all respects is a more desirable life. (Lovejoy and Boas 7)

Hence, a return to primitive states is desirable in a time when civilization has corrupted man to the point of turning him into a creature only moved by economic profit and welfare. The usage of simple geometric forms in painting or childish babble in poetry implied a return to

origins which would to bring man in touch with their most primitive emotions.

Painters of the group Jack of Diamonds and the Union of Youth, namely Mihail Larionov, Natalya Goncharova and Olga Rozanova shared Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh’s taste for primitivist. In Moscow influential artists of the Russian avant-garde exhibited their work under the name “Stephanos,” a group that included David and Vladimir Burliuk, Lyudmila Larionov, Natalia Goncharova, Aristarkh Lentulov, Georgy Yakulov, Nikolai Sapunov and Sergey Yurievich Sudeinkin. After the rupture with some of the members, the Burliuks and Lentulov organized the 1908 “Venok Stephanos” exhibit (The Wreath Stephanos) thanks to the financial support of the magazine *Golden Fleece* and the millionaire N. Ryabushinsky. Later in 1908 Alexandra Exeter collaborated with David Burliuk to launch “Zveno” (Link), an exhibit of scarce success. In the Polytechnic Museum, Goncharova fiercely attacked a recently emerged group called “Oslinyi Khvost” (Donkey’s Tail). In addition, Burliuk delivered his speech “Evolution of Beauty and Art,” where he advocated that the concept of beauty is relative and changes with the passage of time. In terms of aesthetics, he upheld that art is not a copy of reality but rather a distortion, and he formulated three concepts that are to be applied in modern aesthetic expression: disharmony, dissymmetry, disconstruction (Markov 37-39).

Though the Cubo-Futurists participated in different artistic genres, poets and artists collaborated with each other, emphasizing cross-disciplinary relations between the arts. *Pomade* (1913), a book of poetry by Kruchenykh, was illustrated by Larionov, who utilized a primitivistic style akin to the concept of “zaum.” The poem “dyr bul shchyl” is syntomatic of this trend:

Zaum
Дыр бул щыл
убещщур

СКУМ

ВЫ СО БУ

Р Л ЭЗ

Transliteration

dyr bul shchyl

ubeshshchur

skum

vy so bu

r l èz (67)

Imitating Cubist techniques, Kruchenykh conceives the word as a material that has the potential of recreating an Adamic language that strips itself off the shackles of civilized expression. As Janek remarks:

Perceiving the words of the poem as fragments falls into line with the Cubist practice of using word pieces as parts of paintings in collage-like compositions, sometimes with evident origins as scraps of newsprint, labels, or signs. (58)

The return to primitive origins might be interpreted as an effort to find the natural goodness of man. As the visual counterpart, the illustration [fig. 6] shows a similar concern. The abstractness of the concept is revealed as a concrete entity that escapes the possibility of being apprehended by the mind.

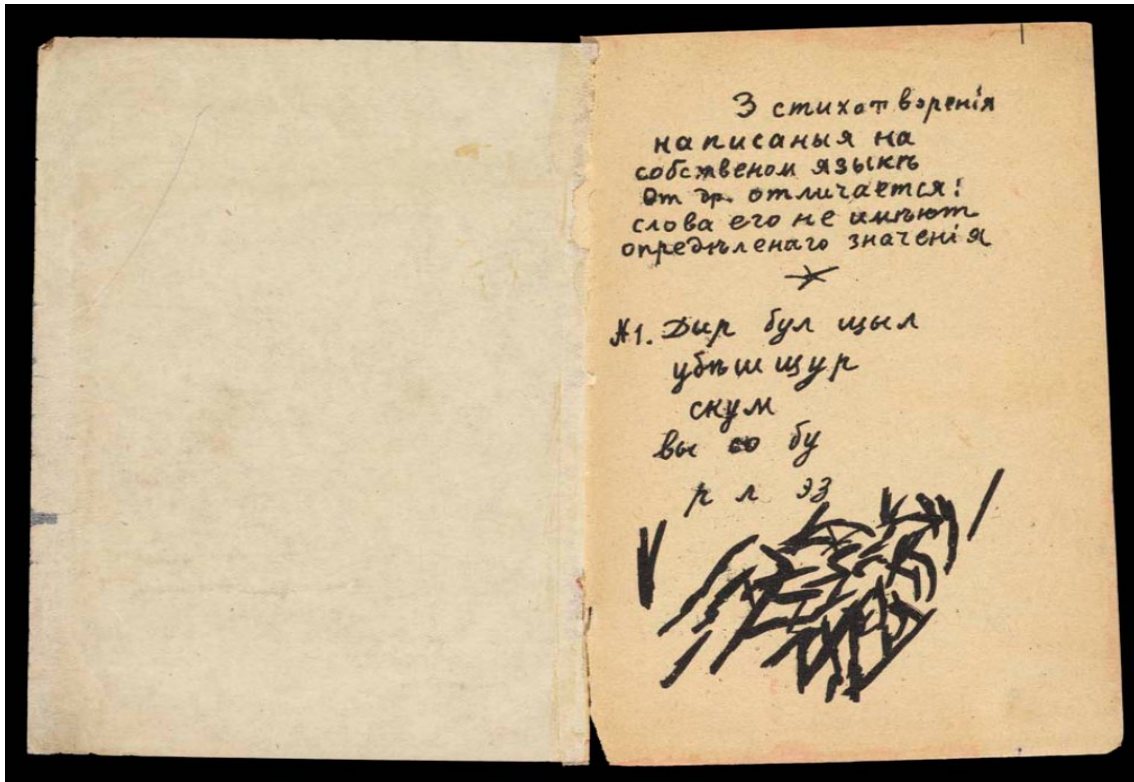


FIG. 6. Aleksei Kruchenykh, "Dyr bul shchyl," Pomade, 1913, illustrated by Mikhail Larionov, 67.

In terms of infamous performances, the Cubo-Futurists emulated Marinetti's incendiary strategies, although they differed from his unusual leaning towards the big metropolis, urbanization and technology. Furthermore, they were interested in distinguishing themselves from the Italians, even falsifying the dates of publication. From this we can infer that the relationship with Marinetti was not precisely cordial. In fact, when Marinetti arrived in St. Petersburg, the Cubo-Futurists intended to boycott his lectures, but they eventually dropped this plan. Nonetheless, Vadim Shershenevich and Constantin Bolshakov, members of the Mezzanine of Poetry, welcomed Marinetti. For the Italian, the Cubo-Futurists committed the error of embracing primitivist attitudes, and he ended up accusing them of living "in *plusquamperfectum* rather than in *futurum*" (Markov 158). One evening Marinetti also claimed that their concept of "zaum" was the equivalent to his "parole in libertà," but the Cubo-Futurists insisted that their concept deepened the ontological nature of the word.

Apart from the Hylaea group and the Cubo-Futurists, other avant-garde movements gained ground in the Russian artistic sphere. Ego-Futurism and the Mezzanine of Poetry²⁸ emerged as a reaction to the Cubo-Futurists. The former was founded by Igor Severyanin in October of 1911 and in January the group issued a manifesto titled "The Tables." The signatories claimed for Nietzschean ideas revolving around "a boundless individualism, intuitivism, madness, pseudomysticism, and lyricism" (Lawton 21) so as to combat the objectivity of Cubo-Futurism. They identified with Futurism in their insistence on speaking about the urban metropolis and technology, yet from a refined perspective that recalled decadent attitudes. These characteristics of the Ego-Futurists are present in *St. Petersburg Herald*, a journal published for the first time in February 1912 by Ivan Ignatyev. It contained pieces of poetry and essays, but ultimately the journal was canceled due to lack of success. Later Ignatyev launched the manifesto titled "Charter" to update the principles of the Ego-Futurists. Nonetheless, this group never achieved the same fame as the Cubo-Futurists.

As for the Mezzanine, it appeared in the summer of 1913, when Vadim Shershenevich published the magazine *Vernissage*. Together with M. M. Rossiyan sky, another member of the group, they launched writings that purported to distinguish their principles of the word from the Cubo-Futurists. For Mezzanine, the word is not a vague abstract entity, but rather it is in stark connection with the sensible traits of the image, those being color, smell, touch. These characteristics relate to the concept of the synaesthesia particularly developed by the French Symbolists. Shershenevich's *Green Street* is illustrative of the tendency to exploit the imagistic effects of the word, especially when addressing the topics that interested the Italian Futurists, such as the city, the automobile, the aeroplane. However, the modern metropolis, swarms with terrible figures such as femme fatales and the

²⁸ For an in-depth analysis of Ego-Futurism, see Petrova, *Russkiy futurizm* (Russian Futurism) and Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History*.

Pierrots that, rather than celebrating the urban setting, shy away from it.

Other movements that deserve to be mentioned are Centrifuge and Company 41.^o The first appeared in the year 1914 and its main figures were Sergei Bobrov and Nikolay Aseyev. Bobrov's poetry was characterized by his scientific approach of poetry, akin to Marinetti's Futurism, and he usually took advantage of mathematical symbols and formulas that annoyed the reader. On the other hand, Aseyev was interested in aspects of the Russian folklore that reminded the primitivism of the Cubo-Futurists. After the Russian Revolution the Company 41^o followed Kruchenykh's transrational language, with Igor Terentyev, Kirill and Ilya Zdanevich as their most representative figures. This movement originated in 1919 in Tiflis, Georgia, and soon enough it spread out after the performances held in the Fantastic Tavern and on the conservatory auditorium. The journal with the same name was believed to suggest the geographical position of Tiflis, although some claim it is none other than an expression of transrational language. Women artists such the poet Tatyana Vechorka and the actress Sofia Melnikova invested the movement with exoticism and sensuality. Even Ilya Zdanevich published a work titled *To Sofia Georgevna Melnikova* (1919). After the Russian Revolution Kruchenykh was active in the field of literary theory and proposed the concept of *faktura* (texture) and *sdvig* (shift) to use the word as an autonomous object hinging upon notions of palpability and distortion (Lawton 33-39). The Company 41^o was successful in synthesizing a conglomerate of tendencies that contributed to the reinforcement of the Russian avant-garde at transnational level.

All these movements developed in the aftermath of Russian avant-garde, generating an extremely original literary and artistic expression that would have profound repercussions on the overarching comprehension of international vanguardism. What is remarkable of the Russian panorama is the conflicting return to the primitive so as to rethink the role of art in its naïve stages, thereby questioning the role of reason and civilization in the advancement of

humankind. Although they welcomed the achievements of the Italian Futurists, the Russians also explored primitivist tendencies as a critique of the pernicious effects that technology also showed.

1.4. Expressionism (1910-1918): Abstraction and Modern Alienation

The origin of the word "Expressionism" was used for the first time in France by Julien Auguste Hervé at one of his exhibits so as to refer to the pictorial characteristics of Cézanne, Matisse and Van Gogh. Around the year 1911 the German philosopher used that term in "Der Sturm," a magazine published by Herwarth Walden. The antecedents of this movement can be found in the group of *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), integrated by Otto Müller, Max Pechstein, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, to name a few. These artists remonstrated against the social evils and man as a corrupted being motivated by barbaric actions and instincts. A few years later *Der blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider) is launched in Munich by Franz Marc, Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee, who set the precedents for abstraction and the visionary image. The members of these movements showed deference for illustrating the personal vision of the subject rather than the external attributes of the object. The artist manipulated the form and color of the objects at hand according to his or her state of mind. Techniques of abstraction and distortion are particularly remarkable to convey the inner world of the viewing subject (Modern, *El Expresionismo Literario* 13-16; *La literatura alemana del siglo XX* 124).

These artistic movements allied themselves with the literary principles of the *Der Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Drive), born two centuries earlier. Likewise, the readings of François Villon, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Claudel and Verhaeren were influential amongst would-be Expressionists poets, namely, Ernst Stadler, Georg Trakl, Georg Heym and August Stramm. These representative poets also found their death under tragic circumstances. Stadler drowned while skating in Berlin in 1912; Georg Trakl was ravaged by

the frequent consumption of drugs and alcohol; Georg Heym, August Stramm and Reinhard J. Sorge died on the front. Others such as Else Lasker-Schüler, Franz Werfel and Paul Zech went into exile and ended their lives far away from their homelands (Modern, *El Expresionismo Literario* 29-30).

Both artists and poets reacted differently to the role of art. Whereas for some art and literature were beyond any means, for others political action was a necessary condition to strive to regenerate a society devastated by the effects of the war. Despite their diverse existential perspectives about life and transcendence, the Expressionists were affected by a profound sense of alienation. At the same time wealth was not necessarily synonymous with happiness, and the reflective subject adopted a position of detachment from a hostile environment. Artists raised awareness of a crisis of consciousness based on their reaction to a business-related society that promoted war to gain political and economic power. The Expressionists showed their sense of disconnection with a world they did not identify with and disseminated their thinking in multiple venues so as to change the state of affairs and the human solipsistic condition. In Vienna the magazine *Die Fackel* (The Torch, 1899), created by Karl Kraus, rethought literature in terms of its revolutionary potential. In Prague Ludwig von Ficker was in charge of *Der Brenner* (The Burner, 1910). German-speaking writers such as Franz Werfeld, Franz Kafka, Max Brod and Franz Blei published in these pages outstanding works of Expressionism. The most representative example was George Trakl, who wrote in these journals some of his last poems. Additional aesthetic and political principles were exposed in several other magazines, the most representative of which are *Der Sturm* (The Storm, 1910), run by Herwarth Walden, and *Die Aktion* (The Action, 1911), edited by Franz Pfempert. In Zurich *Die Weisse Blätter* (The White Pages, 1913), René Schickele propagated pacifist theories that contrasted with the pre-established dogma and proliferated in German-speaking countries. Other centers that engaged with Expressionist

praxis were Munich, Dresden, Leipzig and Berlin (Modern, *La literatura alemana del siglo XX* 125-126).

Cultural activity in these metropolitan areas was intrinsically associated with an ambivalent attitude towards modernity that could be appreciated in public and private spheres of life. The emergence of capitalism accentuated economic and social disparities resulting in a crisis of power relations and the struggle for resources. In *Philosophie des Geldes* (The Philosophy of Money, 1900), the philosopher Georg Simmel examined the inception of capitalist economy to comprehend the psychological exposure to the contradictions of modernity. As Lloyd puts it, capital “acted as a liberating agent and yet involved, at the same time, alienation, reification, and inhuman rationalization” (vii). If money implied the free exchange of goods, it is not less true that the individual became increasingly alienated in a society driven by economic wealth and comfort. In this sense Expressionism can be understood as a tendency that exposes the negativity of human alienation, especially after World War I, the event that left its imprint on the movement. The leaning toward abstraction and depersonalization of the modern world is one of the basic characteristics that both Expressionist artists and poets take advantage of to illustrate the alienation of man.

The artist Franz Marc and the lyrical poets Ernst Stadler, Georg Trakl and August Stramm believed the outbreak of World War I to be a symptom of the spiritual chaos, while they admitted it could also imply the regeneration of humankind in the face of disaster. These literary and plastic artists concerned themselves with the power of the vision so as to capture the terror and misery brought about by the struggle for resources and geopolitical control, which triggered World War I and the negative effects of modern alienation. Under this moment of existential crisis, the Expressionists developed a mystical attitude towards the world that emphasized the prevalence of universal forces endowed with mysterious and fatidic overtones.

Expressionist paintings are characterized by their ravaging presentation of conflicts that end in the distortion of the image. By deforming reality, the Expressionists sought to destabilize the consistency of the picture as a mechanism to point to the fact that the world was in a state of chaos and thus men became alienated in their known environment and from one another. The world is disunified and the artist embarks on disclosing a catastrophic vision only to restore our sensibility by appealing to a brotherhood of men. Artists such as Christian Rohlfs illustrate the disenchantment with the state of affairs as a result of World War I.



FIG. 7. Christian Rohlfs, *The Prisoner (der Gefangene)*, Museum of Modern Art, NY.

Just as Rohlf's succeeds in illustrating the alienation of the prisoner, Trakl in his poem "Grodek" graphically depicts the sense of estrangement in a world devastated by the human desire to control resources and spaces.

"Grodek"

Am Abend tönen die herbstlichen Wälder
 Von tödlichen Waffen, die goldnen Ebenen
 Und blauen Seen, darüber die Sonne
 Düst're hinrollt; umfängt die Nacht
 Sterbende Krieger, die wilde Klage
 Ihrer zerbrochenen Münder.
 Doch stille sammelt im Weidengrund
 Rotes Gewölk, darin ein zürnender Gott wohnt
 Das vergoßne Blut sich, mondne Kühle;
 Alle Straßen münden in schwarze Verwesung.
 Unter goldnem Gezweig der Nacht und Sternen
 Es schwankt der Schwester Schatten durch den schweigenden Hain,
 Zu grüßen die Geister der Helden, die blutenden Häupter;
 Und leise tönen im Rohr die dunklen Flöten des Herbstes.
 O stolzere Trauer! Ihr ehernen Altäre
 Die heiße Flamme des Geistes nährt heute ein gewaltiger Schmerz,
 die ungeborenen Enkel.

"Grodek"

At evening the autumn woodlands ring
 With deadly weapons. Over the golden plains
 And lakes of blue, the sun
 More darkly rolls. The night surrounds
 Warriors dying and the wild lament
 Of their fragmented mouths.
 Yet silently there gather in the willow combe
 Red clouds inhabited by an angry god,

Shed blood, and the chill of the moon.
 All roads lead to black decay.
 Under golden branching of the night and stars
 A sister's shadow sways through the still grove
 To greet the heroes' spirits, the bloodied heads.
 And softly in the reeds Autumn's dark flutes resound.
 O prouder mourning! – You brazen altars,
 The spirit's hot flame is fed now by a tremendous pain:
 The grandsons, unborn.²⁹

"Grodek" was written by Georg Trakl, after he worked as a doctor for the Austro-Hungarian army at the outbreak of War World I in 1914. The name of the poem evokes the battle at the Ukrainian town of Grodek, where the Austrian army suffered a dreadful defeat at the hands of the Russians. After Trakl witnessed the horrendous scene of wounded soldiers crying in excruciating pain, he tried to shoot himself, but he was stopped from doing it and was hospitalized. Years later he died of an overdose of cocaine in a military hospital of Cracow.

The poem is seventeen lines long and shows a description of a landscape invaded by carnage of the war, which ends in the expression of the meaninglessness of the sacrifice. The naïve conception of the landscape is reminiscent of Romantic overtones, but the reader can notice a sense of alienation, as Nature appears to be hostile to the individual. This can be seen in the "fragmented mouths" of the dying warriors, whose lament appears to be detached from the hardness of the land and the night. Even god is depicted as conspiring against the individuals in the battlefield by impregnating clouds with red shades and roads with dark color. The flutes might be a symbol of panic that announces an unavoidable and agonic death. All in all the poem is an abstraction of the event of the war that argues for the futile

²⁹ See Trakl, "Grodek," *Die Dichtungen von Georg Trakl: Erste Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Karl Röck, Leipzig, Kurt Wolff Verlag, 2009, 201. For a bilingual edition, see *Georg Trakl: Poems and Prose*, trans. Alexander Stillmark, Evanston, Ill: Northwestern UP, 2001, 126-127.

fight as much as for the alienation suffered from mankind in relation to its environment. Man seeks to dominate a landscape that presents itself menacing in a world lacking in sensibility towards one another.

These instances of Expressionist art and poetry demonstrate the conflict the creative subject was undergoing in a convulsive society that presented the first symptoms of decay. By calling our attention to the human detachment from the world and from one another, the Expressionists expected to raise awareness of the adverse effects of modernity. As society was not aesthetically beautiful, they made use of distortion and abstraction to reflect on the grotesque and monstrous to warn us about the possibility of self-destruction on the grounds of the urge for power.

1.5. Dada (1917-1921): Provoking the Market and Marketing Provocation

If Futurism concerned itself with the effects of technology and attempted to create a type of art and literature that dismantled the romanticized idea of the past, Dadaism entailed a radicalized response of some Futurist inventions. In fact, practices such as the *soirée* were modeled on the Futurist *serata*, just as simultaneous and phonetic poetry is an extension of Luigi Russolo's *bruitism*. However, there were extremely innovative practices such as phonetic or simultaneous poems, infamous exhibits and Duchamp's readymades. All these creations reflected a rejection of the institution of art and were especially critical of capitalist structures that supported military action and the empty morality of the middle classes. Dada branched out in Zurich, Berlin, Cologne, Paris, Hanover, Paris and New York, affecting artistic circles and setting precedents as forms of social resistance to the establishment.

1.5.1. Zurich Dada: Resisting Symbolic Power

Dada was the product of a systemic crisis that affected society to the core. Its members opposed the status quo and organized themselves around performances characterized by its resistance to forms of symbolic power in society. According to Pierre Bourdieu, social groups are ruled by relations of cultural dominance in state institutions, wherein individuals are situated in a hierarchy that determines whether they occupy a position of power or submission. This ranking is determined by three forms of capital, economic, cultural and social.³⁰ Zurich Dadaists such as Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings were lacking in material wealth, the moment they fled from Germany on the grounds of the outbreak of World War I. This resulted in their scant influence on artistic circles and segregation from accepted cultural and social forms of capital. Nonetheless, they created the Dada movement so as to resist the authority of moral codes and attempt at regenerating a society devastated by the war and what they believed to be utilitarian attitudes of the bourgeois. Despite their absence of power within institutional structures, the Dadaists developed their own discourse of resistance that eventually affected our understanding of art and poetry. They created an aesthetic language that opposed the linguistic capital of information and journalism, as the latter imposes a vision of the world where certain individuals have the authority to speak,

³⁰ In *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), Pierre Bourdieu defines three forms of capital. Economic capital corresponds to “material wealth in the form of money, stocks, shares, property, etc.” (14). By contrast, cultural capital is connected to “knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions, as exemplified by educational or technical qualifications” (14). This capital can be inherited through family socialization, objectified in terms of owned objects and institutionalized organisms contingent upon the recognition of credentials and qualifications. The last type of capital examined by Bourdieu is social capital, and it refers to networks or connections that allow one to advance in society as well as benefit from economic and cultural capital. Individuals see social differences as occurring naturally and accept them as part of the status quo.

whereas others are only allowed to listen. At the same time, linguistic capital has the ability to censor disagreeable discourses.

To put it in Bourdieu's terms, the Dadaists appear to be fraught with the idea of linguistic capital, as this was pervaded by an excess of reason that paradoxically led to the conception of the world in utilitarian purposes and social disaster. For this reason, they gave priority to sonorous aspects of language so as to explore our affective levels. In this context, the invention of the word *dada* was the object of disputes and controversies. Some critics attribute the origin of the term to Tristan Tzara and Marcel Janco, who apparently used it to indicate an affirmative answer. Nevertheless, Hans Arp and Hugo Ball claimed to have discovered the word while looking up in a dictionary a stage-name for Madame Le Roy, the singer of their Cabaret. Others stated that it was by opening a dictionary that the word was randomly found. Be that as it may, the origins of Dada date as far back as February 1st, 1916, when Hugo Ball founded the Cabaret Voltaire in a bar owned by Herr Ephraim in the Swiss country of Niederdorf. The medium of expression and propagation of aesthetic ideals was the magazine *Cabaret Voltaire*, whose first issue was published in Zurich on March 5th, 1916. The main contributors of the review were Dadaists such as Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp, Richard Huelsenbeck and Marcel Janco. Visual and written works by Cubists, Futurists and Expressionists also found a space in this venue.

The magazine was particularly successful in announcing the first *soirée*, performed by Emmy Hennings, who sang some *chansons*, while Ball played the piano. By making use of the same media the system utilized, the Dadaists reached the bourgeois audience, who soon enough were outraged by their sense of provocation. Four days after the first performance, the Romanians Marcel Janco, Tristan Tzara, Georges Janco, and Hans Arp read some conservative poems that Arp pulled out of the pockets of his coat. An exceptional case

was Ball's piece accompanying Emmy Hennings' voice and the use of Janco's Negro masks, which resembled those of Japan and Ancient Greek rituals. As Ball claimed:

What fascinates us about these masks is that they represent, not humanity, but characters and emotions that are larger than life. The paralyzing horror which is the backcloth of our age is here made visible. (Richter 23)

The usage of these masks went hand in hand with the dithyrambic dance and outlandish movements performed in Dionysian rituals, which might point to the devastating effects and terror generated by World War I.

Influenced by the idea of provocation introduced by the Futurists, the Dadaists appropriated in their poems certain strategies such as Luigi Russolo's discoveries in the field of noise-music or the so-called "bruitism." Hugo Ball's "Karawane" [fig. 8] and Hans Arp's "Bim Bim..." are symptomatic of this poetic radicality, as they are made out of onomatopoeias that remind us of the evocative and primitive power of sound.

Hugo Ball displays a variety of sounds that remind of either a baby talk or those primitive languages from Africa. The context where this poem was composed was at the outset of World War I, when European countries disputed power. Ball appears to suggest that the excess of reason developed over the years in the old continent led to an unfair conflict that only produced death. In his view, it seems natural that we react to informational language and recover our natural instincts, embodied by senseless words, to counterbalance the emphasis that modernity has placed on rational thinking. In Platonic terms, this logicity turns into a Sophistic rhetoric that begins with and ends in cold rationality, meaning that everything is put into question in order to destabilize it. As a consequence, the understanding of the world is based on skepticism and the lack of ethics. The return to unfamiliar words that call our attention to the most simple vocalic sounds of the alphabet involves an attempt to

search for a lost sensibility that supersedes the power of conceptual language. What is at stake is to explore the possibilities of affect and sensuousness in this poetry.

KARAWANE
 jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla
grossiga m'pfa habla horem
égiga goramen
 higo bloiko russula huju
 hollaka hollala
anlogo bung
blago bung
 blago bung
bosso fataka
ü üü ü
 schampa wulla wussa ólobo
hej tatta gôrem
 eschige zunbada
wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu
tumba ba- umf
kusagauma
ba - umf

FIG. 8. Hugo Ball, "Karawane," *Dada Almanach*, 53.

Hans Arp also wrote poems that relied upon onomatopoeias as the main source of creativity. "Bim Bim" is an exemplary case, although it does not reach the level of opacity that Ball achieved in "Karawane."

Bim Bim...

Bim bin ausglim du kurzer kind
 Hinfall der
 Rot is du und du
 Also auch der wensenkampf
 Also auch der monddudu
 Alos auch der adlerstall

Wau wau glirrwirli zirr
Hinfall das
Rot ist das
Rot ist du und du
Also auch das dadahaus
Also auch das muffelohr
Also auch das maskenfleisch

Bim bim ausglim du kurzer kind
Hinfall die
Rot ist die
Rot ist du und du
Also auch die flaschennot
Also auch die Wellenkammer
Also auch die afterlieb

Bim Bim...

Bim bim dim down your short child
Collapse of the
Red is the
Red is you and you
So too the struggle for existence
So too the doo-doo moon
So too the eagle stable

Bow-wow glirrwilddli zirr
Collapse of the
Red is the
Red is you and you
So too the dada house
So too the crucible ear
So too the masked meat

Bim bim dim down you short child
 Collapse of the
 Red is the
 Red is you and you
 So too the need for bottles
 So too the wave chamber
 So too anal love³¹

The variety of syllables and sonic effects of this poem may be interpreted as an attempt to evoke the materiality of the word, which is an extension of the cumulative strategies synthetic Cubism achieved in its collages. Visually speaking, Arp's composition is clearly divided into three stanzas, of which the first and the last repeat the same structure with the exception of a few words. The presence of onomatopoeias destabilizes meaning and recalls an infantile babble that emphasizes the play with sounds. Our surrounding reality collapses to cede to multiple unrelated objects such as the moon, the eagle stable, the masked meat, the crucible ear, etc. The shock we experience as readers is noticeable at the end, when in a comic gesture Arp refers to anal love, which might be associated with the Freudian anal stage. According to Freud, this period, taking place when the child is one to three years old, entails experiencing pleasure with controlling bowel and bladder movements. If children receive improper reinforcement from their parents, they can develop negative reactions, which results in adopting an anal-retentive personality or an anal-expulsive personality. The first individual thus becomes compulsively organized and respectful towards any authority figure, whereas the second tends to be disorganized and rebellious. In a psychoanalytical sense, Arp appears to suggest that the Dada poet is characterized by an anal-expulsive personality that is reflected on the chaos of and challenge to artistic conventions and the

³¹ See Bohn, *The Dada Market: An Anthology of Poetry*, Carbondal and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1993, 22-23.

negation of any sense of order and coherence. The poem in itself resists closure and requires the potential of our imagination to give it an interpretation.

In Ball's and Arp's poems, the linguistic element is endowed with force, energy and humor to counter the excess of rational thinking. These nonsense phonetic poems show their irrational character, in that they relinquish the logicity of discourse by introducing nonsense phrases that insist on the Adornian idea of clownishness in the modern era. They can be viewed as attempts to combat and purify the barren language of journalism, whose forms of verbal and written communication are subdued to semantic operations and to the discursiveness of thinking. The linguistic capital of journalism reaches every sphere of modern life and conditions our degree of visibility in structures of power. Nevertheless, Ball and Arp were more interested in opposing institutionalized expression to unmask its deficiencies.

Other iconoclastic inventions that sought to renovate the rather conventional nature of poetry were simultaneous poems. As antecedents of the Surrealist automatic writing, they manifested a desire to return to the irrational character of myth by taking advantage of the contrapuntal intercalation of three or more voices that sang, spoke, whistled and cursed in different languages. In his diary entry for 30 March 1916, Ball described simultaneous poetry as:

[e]in kontrapunktisches Rezitativ, in dem drei oder mehrere Stimmen gleichzeitig sprechen, singen, pfeifen oder dergleichen, so zwar, daß ihre Begegnungen den elegischen, lustigen oder bizarren Gehalt der Sache ausmachen. Der Eigensinn eines Organons kommt in solchem Simultangedichte drastisch zum Ausdruck, und ebenso seine Bedingtheit durch die Begleitung. Die Geräusche (ein minutenlang gezogenes rrrr, oder Polterstöße oder Sirenengeheul und dergleichen), haben eine der Menschenstimme an Energie überlegene Existenz.

[a] contrapuntal recitative in which three or more voices speak, sing, whistle, etc., at the same time in such a way that the elegiac, humorous, or bizarre content of the piece is brought out by these combinations. In such a simultaneous poem, the willful quality of an organic work is given powerful expression, and so is its limitation by the accompaniment. Noises (an rrrr drawn out for minutes, or crashes, or sirens, etc.) are superior to the human voice in energy.³²

What is remarkable of this type of poetry is its ability to take us to the origins of language, when the first utterance of sounds and noises was reminiscent of magic. In that sense, Ball wants to adopt the “innermost alchemy of the word” to redeem ourselves from a world devoid of meaning (70). Curiously, it is through sound as the basic formal aspect of language that we can have access to content, yet it is necessary to break free from the prevalence of conceptual and informational language. The new dimension of poetry can only be attained by rupturing those constraints that hold in check the creative faculty of the mind. The destruction of conventions is thus essential to produce new art.

On March 30, 1916, Richard Huelsenbeck, Marcel Janco and Tristan Tzara recited the simultaneous poem “L’amiral cherche une maison à louer” (The Admiral in the Search of a House to Rent) [fig. 9] in three languages at the soirée of the Cabaret Voltaire. The blend of voices and languages implies an attack on the dominance of one language or individual over another, thereby cancelling out hierarchies that privilege accepted forms of sociocultural capital. The performance was accompanied by a whistle, rattle and bass drum. Two months later this poetry would appear in the issue of the magazine produced after that event (Berghaus, *Avant-Garde Performance* 43).

As Ball remarked:

³² See Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, München und Leipzig, Verlag von Duncker und Humblot, 1927. For the English translation, see Ann Raim’s *Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary*, 57.

The law of chance was also embraced as result of an increasing preoccupation with the dream world and with causal relationships. Through the primeval magical power, the Dadaists hoped to restore the immediate and noumenal nature to the work of art. In other words, the artwork is the privileged medium to contrast what Kant defined as the thing-in-itself versus the thing perceived by the senses through our phenomenal experience. Art participates of this dichotomy, as it allows the spectator to see what is presented, but later on we are required to do without the superficial aspects of the object and adopt a profound gaze that transports us to another dimension. Nevertheless, the open-ended possibilities offered by chance created a chasm that split the Dadaists into two fractions. Whereas Arp was interested in a balance between the conscious and the unconscious, Tzara privileged the Unknown. This raised a conflict between “premeditation and spontaneity [...]—between art *and* anti-art, volition *and* non-volition” (Richter 60). The Swedish Viking Eggeling was an illustration of Arp’s precepts, as he displayed an “emancipated discipline” in his creations that led him to reach a “balance between heaven and hell” (Richter 62). One of his creations, “Basse générale de la peinture. Extension” [fig. 10], is representative of Arp’s imperative to construct while destroying, as it presents unrelated fragments that attempt at harmonizing while preserving their independence. This is a symptom of tension, where the pieces show the contradictory desire for unity and multiplicity in Dada aesthetic expression. Like sound and simultaneous poems, Eggeling’s image can be considered to be a visual discourse of resistance that defies the sensuousness of the Realistic and Impressionistic painting. It attacks the notions of defined form and color in favor of an abstract dimension that requires an effort on the part of the viewer.



FIG. 10. Viking Eggeling, "Basse générale de la peinture. Extension," *Dada*, 4/5 (15 May 1919): 8.

The visual and poetic creations of Zurich Dada paved the way for progressing in a direction that emphasizes the radicalization of art as a means of innovating. Nevertheless, they were also concerned with rendering life as art and, furthermore, with the ability of breaking free from aesthetic judgements in order to reach individual freedom in a society affected by straight-laced moral codes. Seeing the deficiencies of the system, they created a subversive discourse that destabilized premises of symbolic power, as institutional language privileged socioeconomic relations that did not challenge the establishment. Thanks to their efforts, the reality of their time significantly changed at least in terms of aesthetic expression.

1.5.2. Berlin Dada: The Politics of Action and Reaction

In 1918 Richard Huelsenbeck transported Dadaism from Zürich to Berlin and it was characterized by its political forms of action and reaction targeted at integrating creative expression into the social affairs of modernity. For that matter, it was necessary to commit to the reality of the time by taking an attitude of action and reaction to the status quo. The convulsive historical situation Berlin was living at the outset of the twentieth century made the Dadaists engage themselves in a series of events that shaped the political dimension of the movement. Of special importance were the fall of the Second German Empire, the November Revolution, the Spartacus uprising of 1919, the instauration of the Republic of Weimar and the murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. These precarious circumstances motivated the appearance of a political consciousness based on the fact that "the individual subject has to erase its individual self and to subjugate itself to the external reality in every respect" (van den Beg 48). By doing so, they acted, as they concerned themselves with the problematic events of Berlin. Likewise, they reacted to the establishment by promoting events such as soirées, journals and galleries meant to break the system. These methods were propagated by capitalist structures such as print and promotional culture, but the Dadaists availed themselves of the mechanisms of the establishment to act and react against the economic and social deficiencies occasioned by the Republic of Weimar. Political activism was channeled by the visualization of venues that exposed the systemic crises. "Club Dada" was particularly remarkable in creating a new state of mind that differed from its Zürich counterpart. Precisely, Richard Huelsenbeck took advantage of the possibilities offered by this circle to launch his *Dadaistisches Manifest* (Dadaist Manifesto) in 1916 so as to declare his staunch critique against movements he believed to be essentially aesthetic. In the same vein, journals contributed to the propagation of the main ideas and events. *Der Dada* (Dada) and *Almanach der neuen Jugend* (Almanac of the New Youth)

acted as means of expressions characterized by their satirical standpoints and their interest in interfering with government activities. The articles by Johannes Baader and John Heartfield as well as the collages by Hausmann illustrate their communist leanings and their desire to break with the state of affairs. On another note, exhibits such as *Die Erste Internationale-Dada Messe* (The First International Dada Exhibit, 1920) showed their reactionary purposes against military and capitalistic institutions that tended to inflict violence upon minority groups.

Under these circumstances, Berlin Dada was integrated by antiwar activists with a strong Expressionist background. A few of the Dada members included the brothers Wieland Herzfelde and John Heartfield, who directed the magazine *Neue Jugend* (New Youth), Franz Jung and Raoul Hausmann, who edited *Die Freie Strasse* (The Free Street), the poet and artist Georg Grosz and the architect Johannes Baader. The speech that Huelsenbeck delivered in the *Saal der neuen Sezession* (Salon of the New Secession) of Israel Ber Neumann at the Kurfürstendamm argued against the language of advertisement and journalism, while forging an art that appealed to the essence of an integral man. In this gallery he cursed international artistic movements such as Expressionism, Impressionism, Cubism and abstract art, because their ideas were devoid of contentious strife. As Huelsenbeck maintained, "we hated nothing so much as romantic silence and the search for a soul: we were convinced that the soul could only show itself in our own actions" (Richter 103). In his view, those movements were not compromised with reality, as they entailed a return to inwardness that escaped the problems of the time. This event was followed by the publication of the Dada manifesto and thereafter, several artists joined the *Club Dada*, namely George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, Johannes Baader, John Heartfield and Hannah Höch. In April 1918 Huelsenbeck attempted to sell the Dada manifesto, but owing to a series of altercations, the police confiscated several objects utilized to provoke the audience and Raoul Hausmann was eventually imprisoned.

The Dadaists harshly opposed the government of the Weimar Republic as well as the military forces that years earlier contributed to the outbreak of World War I. During this period, the Dadaists launched the pamphlet *Dadaistischen Zentralrat der Weltrevolution* (Dadaist Central Union for World Revolution) that showed their discontent with the League of Nations, all the while they began corresponding with politicians so as to defend the need for an anarchist revolution. Fond of disruptive actions and provocative performances, Baader threw copies of leaflets onto the delegates at the German National Assembly at Weimar in 1919 screaming: "Dadaists against Weimar" (Konzelt 206). On March 12, 1919, Baader launched the "Anational Council of Unpaid Workers" at the Café Austria, where he scoffed at the attempts of both capitalism and communism to defend the rights of German workers and postwar artists' lack of initiative to transform German society (Biro 63). Although *Club Dada* did not have any political affiliation, George Grosz and John Heartfield became members of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (the German Communist Party). After the Spartacist uprising³³ (Spartakusaufstand), which ended the life of the Communists Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the Dadaists released *Jedermann sein eigener Fussball* (Everybody their own Football). This magazine was eventually illegalized by the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party of Germany), as they were under the impression that they were severely criticized by Dada.

In the summer of 1920, the *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* (First International Dada Exhibition) held an exhibit in two rooms of the *Galerie Dr. Otto Burchard* in Berlin-Tiergarten, where hundred seventy-four objects were showcased. In order to anticipate the critical opinions of the press, Hausmann wrote parodies of the reviews in the catalogue that

³³ The Spartacist uprising (*Spartakusaufstand*) was a general strike that took place in Germany from 4 to 15 January of 1919 as a result of the ideological struggle between the Social Democratic Party of Germany, ruled by Friedrich Ebert, and the Communist Party of Germany of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. These two leaders were also the founders of the Spartacist League (*Spartakusbund*).

basically dissuaded the reader from attending the exhibit. The visitors at the gallery were shocked by the *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe*, especially by the *Preußischer Erzengel* (Prussian Archangel)—a dummy wearing military uniform and a pig’s mask. Heartfield and Rudolf Schlichter, the creators of this piece, were accused of insulting the army, just as Georg Grosz, Johannes Baader and Otto Burchard were denounced for their troublesome objects. Only Grosz and the publishing company he worked for were convicted and forced to make payments. The critiques that followed the *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* were the prelude of Dada’s decline. According to Kurt Tucholsky, the movement exceeded noise and provocation, becoming too superficial in their performance. In order to continue shocking their audience, the Dadaists were forced to exaggerate their statements, which eventually led each of them to go their separate ways. The Malik-Verlag, the publishing house that promoted Dada, even came to a stop owing to the lack of organization in *Club Dada*.

While the Dadaists were actively engaged with the movement, they produced outstanding contributions. The photomontage was one of their most significant creations and it was considered to be an extension of the photo scrapbook, where photos were changed by randomly cut and pasted fragments. For the Dadaists meaning was not fixed, but rather arbitrary and able to be manipulated for any political or aesthetic purpose. Likewise, the reliability on the power of photography to convey truth was relinquished in favor of a multifarious reading that emphasized the importance of perspective. Indeed, photomontage succeeded in utilizing pieces of print culture to visualize and critique sociopolitical issues. The highest exponents of Dada photomontage were Hanna Höch and Raoul Hausmann who, influenced by the anti-art Dada concerns of Huelsenbeck, Arp and Jung in regards of challenging the museum institution and rational language, celebrated the new art with iconoclastic compositions. Hanna Höch’s *Cut with a Kitchen Knife Through Germany’s Last*

Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch [fig. 11] involves a reinvention of the reality of Weimar by overlapping unrelated images of German culture. This disparate juxtaposition of elements is a critical response to a time of popular dissent and political turmoil. Unlike Picasso's and Braque's collages, Höch shies away from any intention to impose coherent meaning based on a central unity. Her collage entails an attempt at distancing itself from the symbolic order only to enter the semiotic realm. According to Kristeva, the former principle is regulated by linguistic codes of signification that allow for an access to social laws. The semiotic, on the other hand, responds to the preverbal stage of the drive that leaves a trace in language without fully being represented. In this sense, Höch undoes meaning by scattering visually unrelated fragments that block any possibility of interpretation. It appears that the artist is interested in rethinking the instinctual forces that lead an individual to randomly cut and paste rather than having access to a feasible reading.

If Höch appears to rethink the process of the drives in her photomontages, Hausmann in *Tatlin Lives at Home* [fig. 12] makes case for the usage of Tatlin's Constructivist art. By doing so, he challenges the bourgeois's sense of the beautiful so as to embrace the condition of the machine as the emblem of modernity. The Herzfeld brothers also reacted to the taste of the middle-classes adopting a left-wing ideology in their publications. Helmut Herzfeld changed his name to its American equivalent, John Heartfield, to speak out against the position taken by Germany in World War I. George Grosz was another Dadaist that also chose Grosz as his last name. His main activities revolved around his participation in a demonstration against the German state and, in particular, the Weimar Republic. Heartfield created highly confrontational designs in *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (The Workers' Pictorial Newspaper) that attacked Hitler and the Nazi regime, which ultimately forced him to abandon Germany and seek asylum in Great Britain.

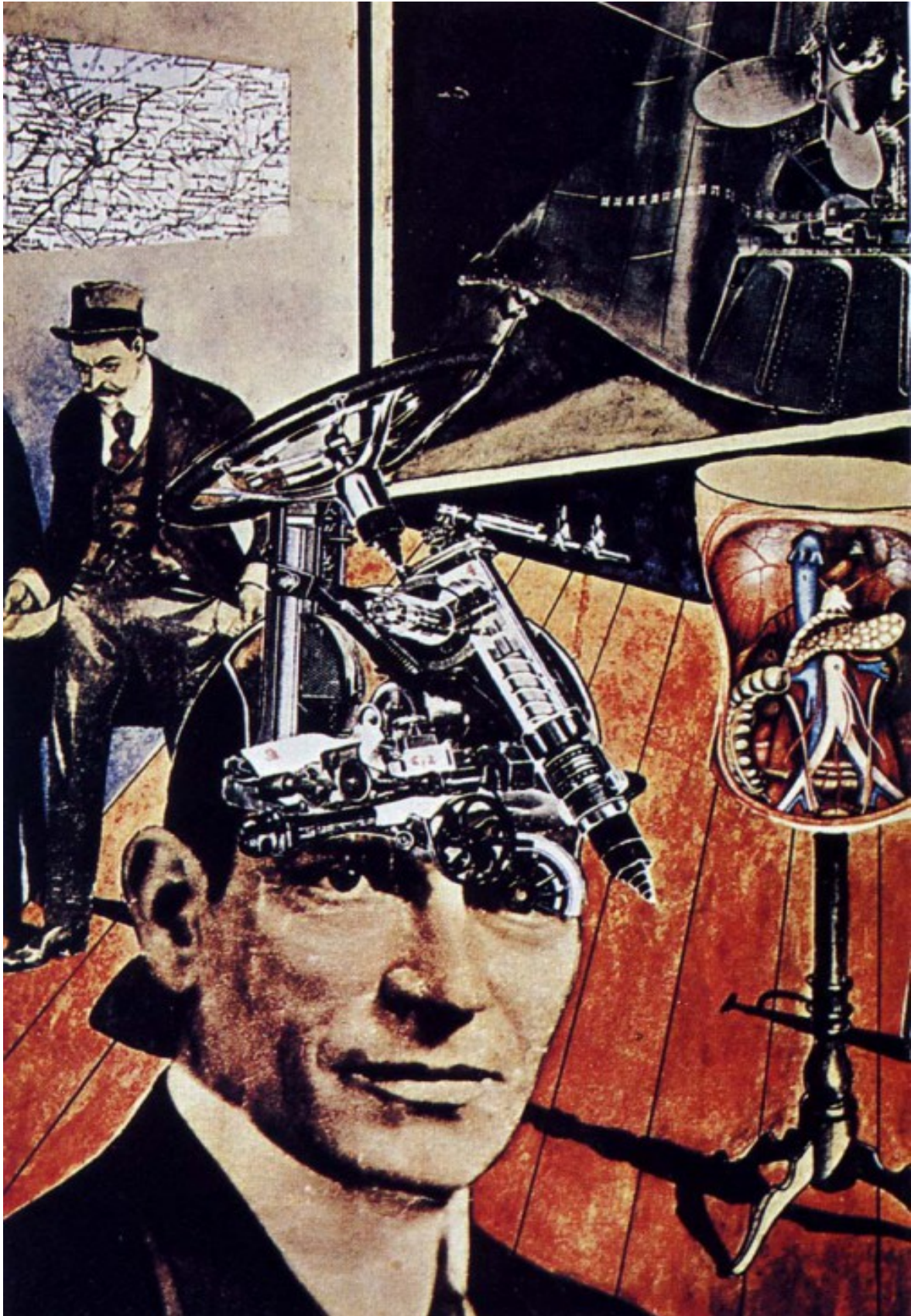


FIG. 12. Raoul Hausmann, *Tatlin Lives at Home*, Moderna Museet.

Other Dada creations on a literary level are *optophonetische Gedichte* (optophonetic poems), invented by Raoul Hausmann around 1918. These poems included methods that made use of the graphic and acoustic dimension of words. The reader was supposed to go beyond Saussure's notions of the significant and signified in order to reach a subjective interpretation that depends on our perceptual experience of graphemes and phonemes. Inspired by a reading of August Stramm in 1915 and by Futurist typography, Hausmann came to the conclusion that "reading or the communication of sound can only take an effect as an optical impression" (183). Relying on the visual layout of the poem, the reader needed to dispel the musical structure conveyed by the optical presentation of syllables, letters and punctuation. Our memory is thus set to establish mental connections that tie images and sounds in order to simulate a synaesthetic experience that transports us to an imaginary world disclosed by the subjectivity of our mind. "kp'erioum" is an illustration of what Hausmann conceived of as a case of "optophonetic poetry." Written around 1918, the poem imitated the constructed process of the *parole in libertà*, through which the Futurists conveyed loudness by reproducing vowels and consonants in larger sizes and fonts. This is noticeable in "kp'erioum" [fig. 13], a poem characterized by the combination of different sizes and apostrophes that disrupt or slow down the flow of narration. The alphabetic selection is similar to the sounds emitted by children in their early years, when they express their emotions only by way of inarticulate moans. As far as the visual presentation is concerned, the poem shows letters in different fonts and alignments, which invites the reader to direct his or her sight in the desired direction, whether this be vertically or horizontally. All these graphic and acoustic experiments point to the necessity of rethinking the notion of writing and language. By doing so, we are also led to consider the question of freedom as the banner of aesthetic creation, which also ties in with the importance of shaping our selves according to our vision of the world. In other words, ethics and aesthetics are part and parcel of a

Dadaist project that takes into account the concept of art as life praxis where the individual is required to take action and respond to the circumstances of his or her own time. The optical design inspired by advertising strategies of commercial nature draw the viewer's attention to the problematic manipulation of journalistic language and informational practices. Through these means the Dadaists sought to raise awareness of a society in decline.

These challenging experimentations in Dada with poetry and art invest the avant-garde artwork with obscurity that annuls a possible synthesis between the part and the whole. For Bürger, whereas the organic work of art acts out of a syntagmatic pattern that connects the whole with its fragments and vice versa, in the nonorganic work of art, the parts emancipate themselves from the whole. Similarly, Adorno goes even further by posing the question of unity and the multiplicitous:

The unity of artworks cannot be what it must be: the unity of the multiplicitous; in that unity synthesizes, it damages what is synthesized and thus the synthesis. Artworks suffer from their mediated totality no less than from their immediateness. (147)

Unity emerges from multiplicity, and demands the multifarious in order to negate the monotonous or undifferentiated. The organizing force of the artwork strives to harmonize the tensions derived from unity and multiplicity. Intentions are to be true, otherwise the artwork will be deprived of truth content. Conversely, the denial of meaning is an extension of formal discord.

This dissonance is precisely the dominant note of the first decades of the twentieth first century in Berlin. The convulsive events that took place at that time made the Dadaists question the role of art and render it a political dimension that showed its concern for both action and reaction as means of creative expression. Rather than adopting an introspective attitude that reflected the artist's inner world, Berlin Dadaists appealed to external reality

from a perspective that destroyed mimetic tendencies only to emphasize their sense of rupture and revolt with institutions. For that matter, an insight into modern promotional culture provided them with mechanisms to revolutionize the state of affairs.

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FIG. 13. Raoul Hausmann, "kp'erioum," *Der Dada* 1 (June 1919): 1

1.5.3. Cologne Dada: Nonsense and Anti-Bourgeois Leanings

Cologne Dada was well known by its anti-bourgeois leanings, and they made sure to advertise their disgust and revulsion towards the middle class by means of different journals. For instance, Baargeld delivered his journal *Der Ventilator* at several factories in Cologne as a reaction to bourgeois defense of military nationalism. Even more significant was *Die Schammade*,³⁴ a journal produced in April 1920 by Max Ernst, Johannes Theodor Baargeld and Hans Arp. Its only issue contained essays by Ernst, Baargeld, Arp and Huelsenbeck, as well as poems by would-be Surrealists such as Francis Picabia, Louis Aragon, Andre Breton and Tristan Tzara's "Proclamation sans Prétention" (Proclamation of Intent) and "Bulletin." Although this publication did not have such a wide scope as other venues in Dada, it contributed to reinforce the international perspective of movement after the war. The cover shows an abstract woodcut by Hans Arp. Inside appears a mechanical drawing by Angelika Hoerle and a photograph by Baargeld titled *Anthropophile Tapeworm*, which combines found objects such as a frying pan, springs and a bell on a piece of wood. Picabia also designed *Round Eye*, a drawing composed of disparate mechanical parts.

Apart from these Dada journals, Ernst and Baargeld founded the Gruppe D, which provoked scandals affecting the moral of wealthy middle class. For instance, the 1920 exhibition *Dada-Vorfrühling* (Dada-Early Spring) in the brewery Bräuhaus Winter caused an uproar that forced the police to take action and close it. During the show the public had to enter through the men's toilet, where they found a young lady in a communion dress reciting obscene poems. The promoters of the show also encouraged visitors to demolish certain objects exhibited in the brewery. At the main entrance, for instance, Max Ernst created a wooden sculpture with an axe that invited the viewers to destroy it. Another object titled *Fluidoskeptrick der Rotwitha van Gandersheim* was also torn down. Ernst and Baargeld were

³⁴ See Hage's "Die Schammade," in Ade's *The Dada Reader. A critical Anthology*.

accused of fraud for making spectators pay for a ticket that, according to the police, was unrelated to art. Nevertheless, both artists defended themselves on the grounds that they had never claimed Dada to be art, and thus they were released. This anti-systemic act is nothing but a harsh critique of capitalism and its tendency to commercialize everything, including art. Cologne Dadaists attacked the economic superstructure, but ironically they participated of its advantages to make their art known and even make a profit out of its exhibition.

These infamous performances added to the experimentation with unusual techniques. In collaboration with Jean Arp, Max Ernst and Johannes Baargeld produced what they called “Fatagagas” (in French, fabrication de tableaux garantis gazométrique). These are collages characterized by their potential of linking extremely opposed realities and investing intensity to abstract figures. Max Ernst juxtaposed unrelated images to create a visual poetry that emulated the procedures of the collage. As Ernst maintained, his technique can be defined as

the systematic exploitation of the chance or artificially provoked confrontation of two or more mutually alien realities on an obviously inappropriate level—and the poetic spark which jumps across when these realities approach each other. (quoted in Elger 74)

His collages were characterized by its hybrid beings that were equipped with violent artillery utilized in the war. An illustrative example of his composites is *The Chinese Nightingale* [fig. 14], an artwork that shows a bird-like figure that evokes the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen. The story is about an emperor who loses interest in the chirping of the nightingale, once he receives a mechanical bird covered with jewelry. After some time, the imitation breaks down and, as a result, the Emperor falls ill. On his deathbed, the real nightingale returns to the palace and begins to sing, which restores his health. If in the tale, the authenticity of the real nightingale was privileged over the flamboyance of the copy, this

photomontage appears to be concerned with the latter. The fan on top of the figure might correspond to the crest of the bird, whereas the human arms might be the wings. The pastiche of body parts and objects might be considered as a symptom of decay in modernity, as humans' life revolves around commodities and the urge to purchase derived from an excess of capital. Ernst might be suggesting that it is necessary to reunite ourselves with our human nature so as to avoid depending on materials that prevent us from living to the fullest.

Similarly, Jean Arp availed himself of the laws of chance to create *Collage of Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance* [fig. 15], where he cut pieces of paper and dropped them onto a sheet. Following the laws of chance, he pasted each fragment in any place where it fell. What is striking is the harmony the viewer can perceive in such random arrangement. It looks as if those shapes have been governed by a cosmic force that simulates the order of the universe. The selection of blue and white squares gives the impression of balance, stasis and fixation, while inviting us to think about the immutability of those forms against the perishability of our existence. Added to the chromatic spectrum of blue and white, this composition evokes feelings of depth and stability, purity and wholeness. The viewer is confronted with a peaceful reflection that allows for the experience of total openness to the other and the world, which is the sign of creativity.

Cologne Dada entailed a fleeting moment in the history of Dadaism, but it is undeniable that the experiments carried out by Baargeld, Arp and especially Ernst contributed to the development and consolidation of the international avant-garde. Their usage of chance was particularly remarkable in breaking with the privileged position rational discourse had found in Western thinking. For these Dadaists, a return to chance encounters can provide humans with the energy and sensibility they are lacking in an era dominated by the excess of capital and war.



FIG. 14. Max Ernst, *The Chinese Nightingale*, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

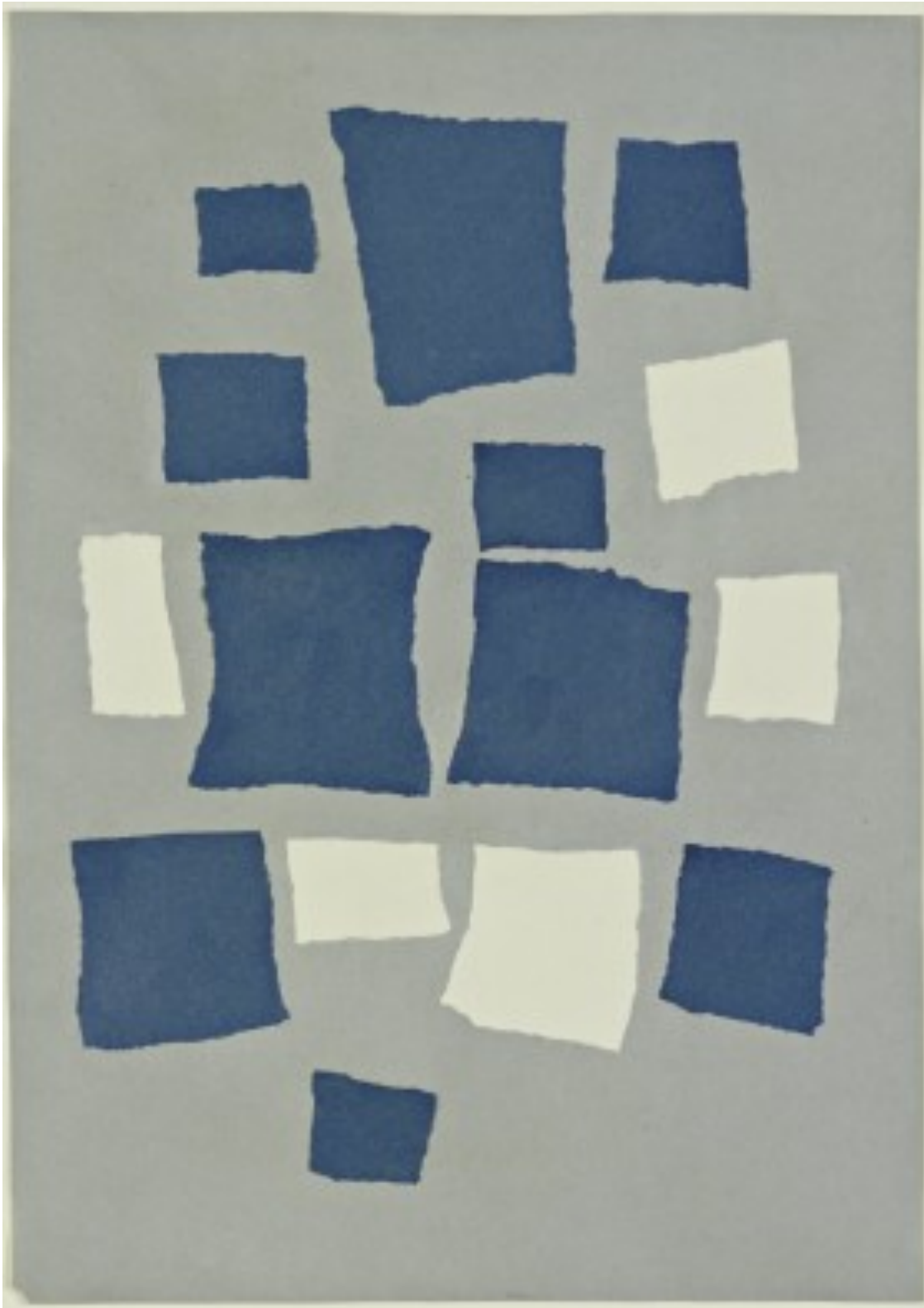


FIG. 15. Jean Arp, *Untitled (Collage of Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance)*, Museum of Modern Art.

1.5.4. New York Dada and the Culture Industry

New York was a center of dynamism characterized by the mass-production of goods that belonged to the apparatus of what Horkheimer and Adorno called the culture industry. In the chapter "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the Frankfurt School critics define the term as the ability of popular culture to trick consumers into purchasing a product under the assumption that their lives will be significantly improved. The Dadaists paid heed to the psychological behavior of consumers, and thus they used their art to register the tendency towards materiality in the aftermath of capitalism. Their readymades and *objet-trouvés* are artistic pieces that reflect on the social condition of art by revealing its contradictions, that is, their condition of functional objects and their integration into the artistic institution. In addition, these objects question the traditional meaning of art, yet they are exhibited in magazines and museums.

The origins of New York Dada found its roots in Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia's disenchantment with the Paris artist scene, which was mainly Cubist. In the year 1911, both artists attended the play by Raymond Roussel titled *Impressions d'Afrique* (Impressions of Africa), which made an impact on the future career of Duchamp and Picabia. The work presented a machine that with the aid of sunrays manages to paint an artwork. Influenced by Roussel's absurd humor, they began experimenting with disparate objects and play on words. In the year 1915 they departed for New York and soon enough they met Man Ray, with whom they promoted anti-art activities in the United States. Their focus of action revolved around Alfred Stieglitz's gallery 291 and Walter and Louise Arensberg's residence. Although New York Dadaists did not issue manifestos, they published dissident magazines such as *The Blind Man*, *Rongwrong* and *New York Dada*,³⁵ where they reacted to the museum

³⁵ For a further view, see Ades' "The Blind Man and New York Dada," in *The Dada Reader. A Critical Anthology*.

culture of America with their particular sense of humor and irony. The last journal was produced in 1921 by Duchamp and Man Ray, and it contained Duchamp's readymade titled *Belle Haleine: eau de voilette* (Beautiful Breath: Veil Water) with his portrait as Rose Selavy. Tristan Tzara also printed his letter in response to Gabrielle Buffet to the Dada organizer in Paris.

During the 1910s Duchamp began to exhibit his readymades and so Man Ray proliferated found objects with artistic ends. These iconoclastic artworks illustrate the Adornian notions of the new and the experiment in that they break with past tendencies in order to open up different aesthetic possibilities. The new shows the evolution from the past to the present by linking the individual's creativity with societal transformations. Its indeterminateness is precisely what the artwork revolves around. The new is an embodiment of the alienating constituents of the marketplace: "If in accord with its model, the fetish character of the commodity, the new becomes a fetish, this is to be criticized in the work itself, not externally simply because it became a fetish" (22). At the same time, the aesthetics of the new centers on the notion of experimentation, whose technical procedures lead to unpredictable results. As Adorno upholds, the modern artwork not only accounts for the critique of tradition and its insistence on aesthetic pleasure. Thus, readymades and found objects are conceived as an antidote to the retinal art initiated by Impressionism, since they place emphasis on sensations by exploring the possibilities of materials, colors and textures. According to Octavio Paz,

the equipment that "retinal" painting uses to signify is insignificant: it consists of impressions, sensations, secretions, ejaculations. The "readymade" confronts this insignificance with its neutrality, its non-significance. For this reason it cannot be a beautiful object, or agreeable, repulsive or even interesting. (84)

Its categorization is not based on judgments, since the object does not appeal to any aesthetic reaction. In that sense, Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* runs parallel with Kant's conceptualizations on a disinterested pleasure that elevates art to an objective category. Man Ray's and Duchamp's daily items, devoid of aesthetic value, are elevated to the dignity of an artwork by the will of the artist. As the French artist states,

you have to approach something with an indifference, as if you had no aesthetic emotion. The choice of readymades is always based on visual indifference and, at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad taste. (De Duve 104)

Ultimately, readymades become objects of mockery, as they are displaced from their natural environment, and also invested with alternative meanings, which reflects Duchamp's sense of irony, humor and ambiguity. By questioning the status of art with their mere presence, these practices are part and parcel of the anti-art tenet that European Dadaists argued for in Switzerland and Germany.

Of remarkable importance for readymades and *objet trouvés* are the Adornian theorizations on semblance and apparition, which are representative of modern artworks. Known as an expression of empirical and illusory elements, semblance manifests itself through the antithesis between reality and appearance (Adorno 101). According to De Duve, three conditions are essential in the formation of the semblance character of readymades. Firstly, the choice of the object, based on visual indifference is key to the readymade. Thus, Duchamp selected a series of items—the snow shovel, the bottle rack, the urinal—encountered in daily reality and devoid of aesthetic pleasure. Duchamp's readymades and Man Ray's *objet trouvés* also respond to Adorno's idea of apparition, which goes beyond mere appearance and invests the nonexisting with traces of the existing (Adorno 83). These works, when exhibited for the first time, were believed to be a failure in that, rather than

dissemble the component they aspire to become, they were an exact presentation of the object itself. Despite their absolute correspondence with reality, readymades are not *trompe l'oeil*, since they refute their own formal characteristics as objects, and by way of their inscription, they are transmuted into something else. The *Fountain* [fig. 16] can be conceived as a tour de force in that it goes beyond the limitations imposed by the functional object, as is the urinal, by pointing to an aesthetic ideal. As Adorno mentions, "if it is essential to artworks that they be things, it is no less essential that they negate their own status as things, and thus art turns against art" (175). The *Fountain* is a representative illustration of this situation. This urinal, converted into a fountain by will of the artist, appeared for the first time in April 1917 as an artwork created for the American Society of Independent Artists. Although the institution claimed that the exhibit would not depend on a jury that gave awards, a board of directors was constituted only to reject the *Fountain* on the grounds that "it may be a very useful object in its place, but its place is not an art exhibition, and it is, by no definition, a work of art" (Campfield 68). The transformation of this urinal into a *Fountain* by attributing it a name that does not correspond to its function, questions the constituency of an artwork as well as the institution of art. Given the interaction of the title and the object, interpretations centering on the similarity to a Madonna and Buddha have emerged to complicate its meaning. According to Adorno,

[i]f a work opens itself completely, it reveals itself as a question and demands reflection; then the work vanishes into the distance, only to return to those who thought they understood it, overwhelming them for a second time with the question "What is it?" (121)

This is precisely what is at work in Duchamp's *Fountain*, the fact that the readymade, by manifesting itself as a functional object, unsettles our view and demands further reflection.

As Adorno continues, “artworks are enigmas” that, however, “contain the potential for the solution,” which, in any case, “is not objectively given” (121).

Thus, the *Fountain* is not only perceived as a mystery to be solved, but as a new conception of art that challenges aesthetic tradition. The enigmaticalness of modern artworks such as readymades and *objet trouvés* seems to be their form itself, since it is an extension of language. They actually say something. However, this enigma is effaced the moment one completely takes a part in the work. Distance, then, is necessary to preserve that mystery. The more obvious an artwork presents itself, the more enigmatic it becomes. It presents a riddle in which the hidden and the visible intersect. In this, the solution is contained, and the viewer has the potential to solve it. However, the enigmatic power of the artwork can turn into connoisseurship, when the material is comprehended but not the true nature of the enigma. The purpose, then, consists in “the determination of the indeterminate,” that is, in the answer of the enigma. In line with this is the comparison of artworks with *écriture*, as their code has been lost and it needs to be recovered.

This importance of writing is especially noticeable in Man Ray and Duchamp’s creations, where writing allows for the interplay between form and content, and it is ultimately writing the factor that opens up the enigma and its possible solution. Linguistic strategies such as tautology, metaphor, synecdoche, allegory, anagrams and acrostics were utilized by Duchamp and Ray to establish a wide network of stylistic connections between the object and its given name.

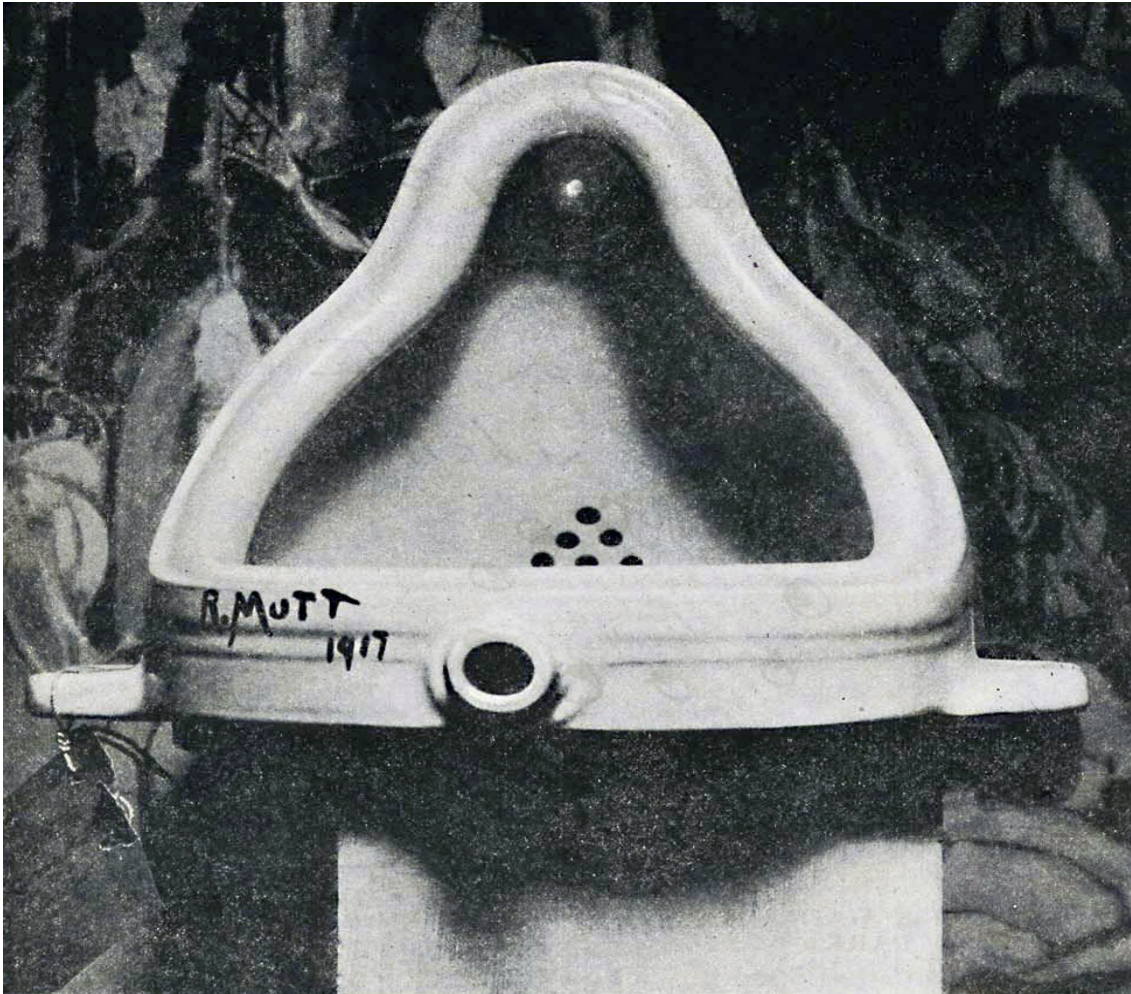


FIG. 16. Marcel Duchamp, *The Fountain*, lost photograph by Albert Stieglitz.

Some of their creations are based on these rhetorical devices: Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* [fig. 17] is a bicycle wheel mounted on a stool and his *Bottle Rack* [fig. 18] uses tautology to refer to the object. The *Fountain* is a urinal that relies on a metaphorical relation and *In advance of the broken arm* [fig. 19] consists in an allegory that refers to a snow shovel. Similarly, *Collage ou l'âge de la colle* (*Collage or the Age of Glue*, 1935) is the collection of a T-square, tape measure, rulers, snapshots that Man Ray accumulated in a period of time. The alignment of these objects ordered by Man Ray's maid, acquired such importance that he ended up gluing all the items and punning on the word collage. In French, *colle* means glue, *âge* stands for age, and thus the title comes to be "Collage or the age of

glue” (Schwartz 157). Man Ray is thus concerned with the layout of objects as part of an imaginary activity that expands the limits of art, while paying heed to the enigmas created by those manufactured items that entered the domain of art. Readymades and *objet trouvés* are expressions of the materialization in which modernity has imbued us. As Breton manifests in his article *Marcel Duchamp*, “is there anything that can do us more harm than a *materialization?*” (Motherwell 210). With their ironic language and subversive gestures, Duchamp and Man Ray criticize our reliance on objects given their ability to commodify human relations.



FIG. 17. Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, Replica, Museum of Modern Art.



FIG. 18. Marcel Duchamp, *Bottle Rack*, Philadelphia Museum of Art.



FIG. 19. Marcel Duchamp, *In Advance of a Broken Arm*, Replica, Museum of Modern Art.

Another encounter between the object and the artist is the signature. Rather than attribute a special value to his authorship, Duchamp multiplies the signatures through pseudonyms such as Rose Sélavy for *Fresh Widow* [fig. 20] and Richard Mutt for the *Fountain* (104-107). At times those readymades have vanished, as is the case of the *Fountain* and *Bottle Rack*. Their existence is only registered by photographs, thus opening the interval between the original object and the images disseminated by techniques of reproduction. According to Poggioli, if this aesthetics is only possible in a bourgeois and democratic society, it is no less true that it defies its precepts. In other words, owing to antagonisms created by class and the distribution of wealth, art exists as a social phenomenon. At this point, Poggioli and Adorno seem to agree, as for both of them the artwork in the era of mechanical reproduction manifests both cultural contradictions and reacts to all those forms of entertainment and mass culture. Through a dialectical process, Adorno reflects on the paradoxes of modern artworks, in that they are rooted in society, but they also bring into existence what is outside its boundaries. If tradition is historically dependent on socioeconomic structures, contemporary art entails a reflection on the negativity of the present situation stemming from excess of capital and its superficial market culture. Adorno pays heed to the forces of production and the social relations within the marketplace. For him, aesthetic creations have the ability to reveal that which mass culture conceals. In his words, "the communication of artworks with what is external to them, with the world from which they blissfully or unhappily seal themselves off, occurs through noncommunication; precisely thereby they prove themselves refracted" (5). As part of twentieth-century mass production, readymades are an embodiment of the domination of the culture industry in our lives to the point of instrumentalizing our existence in terms of our dependence on those objects.

Thus, as products of social labor, artworks communicate with the outside, but they also, in an indirect fashion, disclose its negativity, that is, the ability of commercial practices to anesthetize our understanding and critical thinking.



FIG. 20. Marcel Duchamp, *Fresh Widow*, Replica, Museum of Modern Art.

New York Dada was the maximum expression of the revolution of art that followed criteria that went beyond any sense of taste and aesthetics. The practices I have pointed to in this section respond further to an intellectual exercise than to a pleasurable contemplation of an artwork. To that end, the American version of Dada embraced irony as a defense mechanism against a fast-developing society that was experiencing the first symptoms of crisis as a result of the excess of capital and the focus on material wealth.

1.5.5. Paris Dada: Anarchism and Anti-Performance

Since its gestation in Zurich, Dada took on a series of activities that bore a striking resemblance to anarchic violent activism and acts of public disorder. This was noticeable in their most radical creations, those being collages and photomontages, automatism and sound poetry as well as the propagation of anti-social acts in their manifestos and performances, including the usage of percussion instruments and primitive masks. Preceding the years of World War I, Zurich gave asylum to immigrants from all over the world, thus becoming the cauldron of incendiary theories and practices. Particularly concerned with challenging the principle of reason and elevating existential contradictions to a new dimension, Ball appeared to be influenced by anarchic thinking. This can be traced back to the book he read on Michael Bakunin in the years 1916 and 1917 and his subsequent discussions on Pierre Joseph-Proudhon. Thus, it would not be strange to assume that other Dadaists who spent time in Switzerland familiarized themselves with Ball's writings and anarchist tendencies.

Anarchists and Dadaists reacted to Marx's materialism and the theories of liberal progress propounded by capitalist structures. As Erickson puts it, both movements shared similar concerns regarding society and the state:

[a]ll problems derive from the power structures ruling through abstracting ideologies (church, government, the State and all its representatives, social or artistic), while for the socialist and communist they derive from class. The socialist, in accepting the statist basis of capitalist society, while attempting only to subvert it in order to redistribute its power through the replacement of its procedures of rule, becomes, in the anarchist view, corrupted. (107)

This view is held by Tzara, in whose "Manifeste Dada 1918,"³⁶ he evokes Bakunin by denouncing the church and the state for reducing life to a process of abstraction. In the same vein, Tzara raged against the bourgeois insistence on investing everything with meaning, and thus showed his revulsion at all systems sustained by any type of hierarchical order and interpretation, especially psychoanalysis, dialectic, logic, and science (Erickson 102).

Given his familiarity with infamous performances and manifestos, Tzara played a significant role in the Parisian artistic scene. In 1919 Picabia moved from Barcelona to Paris and contributed to promoting café conversations and making Tzara well known in literary circles. He brought his magazine *391*, where he continued promoting Dadaist anti-art ideas. Picabia's taste for provocation and nonsense was conveyed in both pamphlets and paintings such as *Straw Hat*, which was eventually rejected by the Salon des Indépendants. Equally important were the figures of André Breton, Philippe Soupault and Paul Éluard, who founded the review *Littérature* so as to set the literary precedents of Dada and Surrealism. The Dadaists explored games with language and unusual associations with sounds that were simultaneously meaningful and meaningless. As Richter points out, "the secrets of words, the mystery of grammar, sentences which reverse themselves, opposites that do not contradict each other, syntax, its meaning and not-meaning" (176). These linguistic manipulations can be perceived in Marcel Duchamp's "assisted" ready-mades, works that

³⁶ Read in Zur Meise Zürich and later published in *Dada* 3, Tzara's manifesto resists any attempt at explaining the world.

modify part of renowned illustration for humoristic purposes. An example of this is *L.H.O.O.Q.* [fig. 21] whose inscription reads “Elle a chaud au cul” (She has a hot butt).



FIG. 21. *Marcel Duchamp, L.H.O.O.Q.*, assisted ready-made, Private Collection.

On February 5, 1920, in the Salon des Indépendants, several speakers read manifestoes by Picabia, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Breton, Dermée, Éluard and Tzara. In all of

them, they showed solidarity with anti-bourgeois working class. In the same year Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray built *Rotary Glass Plates*, a machine that simulated the visual effect of a spiral, which led us to question the role of functional objects in art. Dada plastic creations reached their peak in April 1921, in the gallery *Au Sans Pareil*, where Picabia showcased an exhibit of pictures from his 'mechanist' period. Ribemont-Dessaignes also displayed some of his works that evidenced his love of painting and his involvement in literary activity, which is not committed to the political activity expressed in the several manifestoes.

In the second decade of the twentieth century, the so-called Dada-Surrealist *soirées* held in Paris had an impact on the renovation of art. In the première of Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, Breton, Soupault, and Dermée, among others, performed their own plays. On March 27, 1920, at the soirée of the Théâtre de la Maison de l'Oeuvre, Tzara read his *Aventure celeste de M. Antipyrine* (The Heavenly Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine, 1916). Likewise, André Breton and Philippe Soupault performed *S'il vous plait* (If you Please, 1920), which was followed by Picabia's *Manifeste cannibale* ("Cannibal Manifesto"). In this recital, Picabia harshly attacked symbols that the bourgeois used to worship: the Marseillaise, the Russian hymn and the flag. He also ridiculed the capacity of money to make a man honorable and added a series of nihilistic statements that put Dada and middle-class icons on the same footing:

DADA lui ne sent rien, il n'est rien, rien, rien.

Il est comme vos espoirs: rien.

Comme vos paradis: rien

Como vos idoles: rien

Comme vos heros: rien

Comme vos hommes politiques: rien

Como vos artistas: rien

Comme vos religions: rien

DADA doesn't smell anything, it is nothing, nothing, nothing.

It is like your hopes: nothing.

like your paradise: nothing

like your idols: nothing

like your political men: nothing

like your heroes: nothing

like your artists: nothing

like your religions: nothing³⁷

After this infamous reading, the offended audience tossed rotten fruit at the stage as a token of their rage (Richter 180-182). Picabia might have titled his manifesto "cannibal" so as to indicate that Dada devours bourgeois morality, effecting a destructive gesture akin to cannibalistic acts. The manifesto also involves an affirmation of both life and death alike, which stands for a symptom of pure skepticism against all values, including those of Dada. In March of 1920, Picabia also presented "The Dada Manifesto" in his journal *391*, where he distinguishes the ludicrous purposes of Cubism in contrast with Dada's absence of requirements and compromise with its audience. Next, Francis Picabia argues for a new conception art based on the following parameters:

L'art vaut plus cher que le saucisson, plus cher que les femmes, plus cher que tout.

L'art est visible comme Dieu ! (voir Saint-Sulpice).

L'art est un produit pharmaceutique pour imbéciles.

Les tables tournent grâce à l'esprit ; les tableaux et autres œuvres d'art sont comme les tables coffres-forts, l'esprit est dedans et devient de plus en plus génial suivant les prix de salles de ventes

Comédie, comédie, comédie, comédie, comédie, mes chers amis.

³⁷ *Manifeste Cannibale* was originally published by Picabia on March 27th 1920 in the seventh issue of *Dada*. For further view, see page 2. For the English translation, see Caws, 317.

Les marchands n'aiment pas la peinture, ils connaissent le mystère de l'esprit.....

Achetez les reproductions des autographes.

Ne soyez donc pas snobs, vous ne serez pas moins intelligents parce que le voisin possèdera une chose semblable à la vôtre.

Plus de chiures de mouches sur les murs.

Il y en aura tout de même, c'est évident, mais un peu moins.

Art is dearer than sausages, dearer than women, dearer than anything.

Art is as easy to see as God (see Saint-Sulpice).

Art is a pharmaceutical product for idiots.

Tables turn, thanks to the spirits; pictures and other works of art are like strong- box-tables, the spirit is within them and gets more and more inspired as the prices rise in the salerooms.

Comedy, comedy, comedy, comedy, comedy, dear friends.

Dealers do not like painting, they know about the hidden spirit....

Buy reproductions of signed pictures.

Don't be snobbish; having the same picture as your neighbor doesn't make you any less intelligent. No more fly-specks on the walls.

There will be some, all the same, but not quite so many.³⁸

In the lines above, Picabia mocks the degrading condition that twentieth-century art has undergone, as it has become an instrument for lucrative purposes inasmuch as it has degraded into fads that only appeal to snobbish attitudes. Although Dada ridicules the modern state of aesthetic expression, they also account for a type of art that relinquishes any moral constraint that prevents the creative mind from giving free rein to his or her imagination.

On April 14, 1921, Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre was Dada excursion that took place in the Roman Catholic Church of the same name, where the poets Trista Tzara, André Breton,

³⁸ *Manifeste Cannibale* was originally published by Picabia on March 27th 1920 in the seventh issue of *Dada*.

For further view, see page 2. For the English translation, see Caws, 317-318.

Philippe Soupault and the artist Francis Picabia gathered in an effort to make Dada visible. Despite the insults and provocations addressed to the passers-by, they failed to raise the audience's awareness. One month later on May 13, 1921, the mock trial of Maurice Barrès took place so as to address the question between art and morality. The anarchico-socialist writer, who ended up developing an ultra-nationalist ideology, was symbolically tried in relation to a sentence from his book *Les Déracinés* (The Uprooted, 1897) that reflected upon Barrès's inner contradictions. Among those who judged him, Breton was especially concerned with the tension between doubt and negation, as they were the signs of a new morality in France, where anarchic and nationalist ideas were shaping individual and collective action. At the end of this fictional trial, Barrès was sentenced to twenty years of forced labor. This event also involved the disintegration of Dada in favor of the appearance of Surrealism (Peterson 125-127). As Richter claims, through these performances, they laughed at "philosophy, at aesthetics, at ethics, at the established order, at dogmas, at the Absolute which governs all actions, collective and individuals," (181) which was a way of provoking the audience.

These artistic practices and soirées in Paris show the radical tendency of Dada to create a new aesthetic category that dismantled previous models. Their originality not only lies in the Dadaist experimentation with sound poetry and visual effects but also in premiering performances that attempted to shock the audience. These provocative shows were promoted thanks to the circulation of posters and advertisements in magazines. The bourgeois thus felt attracted to these performances, yet they felt outraged when they became aware of the cruel criticism addressed towards the wealthy classes. It is precisely the confrontational relation between artists and spectators what inaugurated an aesthetics of rupture with previous generations, which in due time would mark the inception of Surrealism.

1.5.6. Dada Hannover: Schwitters' Recycling Methods

Dada Hannover was formed by the unique figure of Kurt Schwitters, a German artist and poet known by his literary and plastic works. Despite his efforts to take part in Berlin Dada, he was rejected by its members. According to Raoul Hausmann, Richard Huelsenbeck declined Schwitters's acceptance to Berlin Dada on the grounds of his connection to the gallery Der Sturm and to Expressionist leanings, which the Dadaists did not share (109-110). This incident led Schwitters to create his own version of Dada in Hannover. Schwitters sought to renovate art by managing without conventional media. For his assemblages he utilized waste material such as bus and theater tickets, chocolate wrappers, stamps, bank notes, string and cigarettes. Likewise, his poems were composed of newspaper headlines, advertising slogans and other printed material. He called this activity Merz, a word originating from "Kommerz" (commerce in German), which he applied to his "Merzbilder" (Merz pictures) and to an architectonic construction he titled "Merzbau" (Merz building). Set up in his own house, this structure was demolished during World War II. Owing to the rise of the Nazi regime, Schwitters was forced to move to Norway, where he built another "Merzbau" that was eventually burnt down. After the German invasion of Norway, Schwitters fled to England, where he produced his third "Merzbau," which is held at the University of Newcastle.

Schwitters appropriates useless mass-produced objects to reevaluate them, while considering the artistic potential of recycling. Of course, this aesthetics distances itself from Kantian notions of taste understood in terms of agreeable effects. His objects are illustrations of what Benjamin categorizes as the "dialectical image," as "it justifies its violent expulsion from the continuum of historical process" (*Arcades Project* 475). This movement helps account for the subversive usage of the mass-produced items, as they are considered to be art, yet they respond to the manufacturing processes of the marketplace that do not match the

creative efforts of the artist. In addition, the object reveals the principles of the supply and demand of capitalist societies, as it is circulated, purchased and eventually disposed of. Schwitters' Merz reveals "the undervalued in art as beautiful" (Gale 157), perhaps owing to the fact that old items acquired sentimental value for the owner. They might be considered charms that transport one to a time and a space that no longer exists. By picking up bits and pieces, Schwitters strives to regenerate a world in ruins after two of the greatest war conflicts (Ernst Schwitters 3). At the same time, his works explore the effects of commodification within industrial culture, where objects are popularized by the tastes and practices of the masses. Notwithstanding, these goods are usually discarded, when they stopped serving the purpose they were designed for. Imitating the movement of capitalism, Schwitters has renewed the cycle followed by commodities. Avoiding the depreciation of his items, he appears to have adopted the behavior of an advantageous capitalist that has gained a surplus value when recycling disposable objects and transforming them into art. This profit is mainly symbolic rather than economic, as Schwitters's objects become part of cultural institutions such as galleries or museums.

In Schwitters' creative process, his Merz technique is illustrative of the vital importance of expendable objects belonging to the culture industry. Inside his paintings, matter is devoid of its inherent significance and dissolved in an "abstract" composition. Therefore, the material is not important, but rather the act of giving it shape and opposing it to another divergent medium that discloses secret relations. As he puts it:

The material matters as little as I do myself. What matters is forming it. Since the material does not matter, I take whatever material I like if the picture requires it. Because I balance different kinds of material against one another, I have an advantage over oil painting, for in addition to evaluating color against color, line against line, form against form, and so on, I also evaluate material

against material—wood as opposed to burlap, for example. I call the *Weltanschauung* from which this mode of artistic creation arose 'Merz.'³⁹

The originality of his creations is based on an act of selection, distribution and disassociation (*Entformung*) of the materials, which are unexpectedly distorted, overlapped or painted over (Motherwell 59). His Merz-Pictures and -Drawings are compositions that agglutinate different materials from daily life. The first group is sub-divided into two big-sized categories: two-dimensional *collages* rooted in the principles of Picasso and Braque's Synthetic Cubism, and three-dimensional assemblages.

Merz Pictures 32 A. The Cherry Picture [fig. 22] is a purely two-dimensional work that incorporates fragments of newsprint, torn pieces of cheap wallpaper, cigarette wrappers, labels from matchboxes, playing cards and visiting cards, among others. In the center of the picture we can see a bunch of cherries that relates to the title of the picture. Nevertheless, the cherries are not real but rather a representation that attempts to convey the idea of the fruit. This is even more noticeable if we pay attention to the fact that the dominant colors in the canvas are green and brown, which might reproduce the chromatic tonalities encountered in fields where cherries grow or even the effects of still-lives. Like the rest of the materials of the composition, the cherry is both central and useless, as the viewer cannot enjoy its flavor or texture. Furthermore, it appears surrounded by disposable material, namely, cloths, cardboard and pieces of newspaper that emphasize the idea that after all, the picture is not a usual representation of an object. The various materials cut and pasted in the picture are symptomatic of the desire to integrate art into life. Quotidian fragments such as pieces of paper create a new ontology that calls our attention to the importance of daily-life objects, as only when they stop working, do we appreciate their value. For Schwitters the irony is that these items can also be significant even when they are not usable anymore. Just as a

³⁹ Kurt Schwitters in 1930, quoted in Schmalenbach, *Kurt Schwitters* 96.

businessman shows exceptional abilities to make a maximum profit of sales, so is Schwitters successful in reinventing art by recycling his material and rendering it valuable again. His Merz strategy is not only an innovative aesthetic genre, but also a novel approach to the interpretation of avant-garde art.



FIG. 22. Kurt Schwitters, *Merz Picture 25 A. The Cherry Picture*, Museum of Modern Art.

Another Merz-Picture is *Construction for Noble Ladies* [fig. 23], an assemblage that includes three-dimensional elements of variable size. In this composition we can see wheels, pieces of wood and triangle-like figures laid out in different positions. On the lower right-hand side is a female bust placed on a horizontal position, which contrasts with the rest of the materials of the composition. Schwitters might have intended to create dissonance between the title and the actual image presented in his Merz, parodying what the viewer usually considers to be high art. In other words, noble ladies would be unlikely to purchase this picture on the grounds of its absence of taste, and thus it implies an attack on bourgeois values and sense of aesthetics.

Apart from Merz-Pictures, Schwitters created Merz-Drawings, which are small collages made out of disparate materials—printed, patterned, of a single or many colors—. Schwitters included streetcar tickets, theatre stubs, glossy paper, postage stamps, paper money, calendar pages, envelopes with address, pictures from newspapers and magazines. An illustration of this art is *Merz 50 Composition* [fig. 24], which is composed of paper of white, red, blue and other color shades. There is some writing that might belong to advertisements or newspapers, but the most noticeable information is the number 50, which is located on the right-hand side of the drawing. In addition, we can notice names of places, months and amounts. For instance, Dresden, March and 100 g are combined in the composition, opening up multiple interpretations about the origin and the intention of the painting. Furthermore, this drawing can be seen as a critique of the excess of information in the age of mechanical reproduction. The viewer is bombed with endless news in magazines, newspapers, and billboards. Hence the inability to assimilate all the received information as well as to distinguish between reliable and fallacious messages.

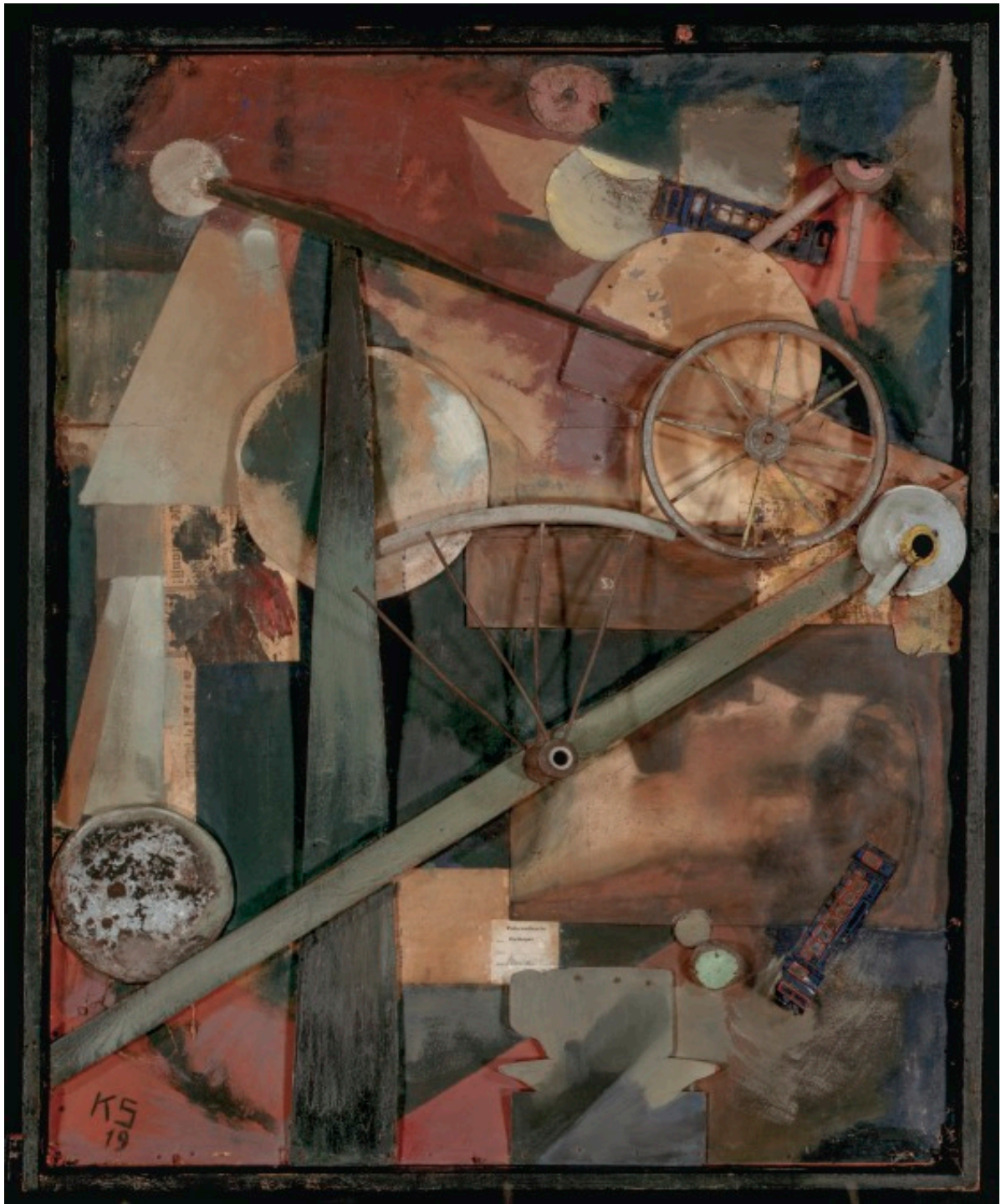


Fig. 23. Kurt Schwitters, *Construction for Noble Ladies*, Los Angeles Contemporary Museum of Art.



FIG. 24. Kurt Schwitters, *Merz 50 Composition*, Private Collection.

Merz-Reliefs are further elaborated Merz-Pictures which, like *Skittle Picture* [fig. 25], are solely comprised of three-dimensional objects attached to a canvas. Highly influenced by Picasso’s wood reliefs and Tatlin’s Constructivist works, these compositions distance themselves from abstract ideas only to open up a palpable and concrete universe. The *Skittle Picture* presents wooden skittles and geometric figures on a brown background. The idea of assembling the puzzle of those shapes ties in with the role of a child moved by the pleasure of playing. This attitude fits in the Dada return to infantile stages that invite us to view art in terms of a game that allows for a different approach to our surrounding world. This skittle subverts the usual rules of bowling, and thus the viewer is encouraged to find new patterns for the game to take place.

Schwitters also experimented with his Merz-Sculptures, that is, three-dimensional collages or assemblages dominated by vertical elements whose recollected bits and pieces are nailed down onto a wooden pedestal. Schwitters’s *The First Day Merz-Column* [fig. 26] is a representative case of sculpture that agglutinates various drawings, figurines, cartoons, a cow’s horn and a twig, among other elements (Gamard 90-91). This sculpture appears to imitate the structure of Greek columns. The base is decorated with images and slogans cut out from magazines, whereas the shaft includes a branch from a tree and a variety of figurines. The capital is formed by a child’s head covered with a twig. This iconoclastic transformation of the Classical Greek column implies a subversive gesture to parody the art from the past. With this piece Schwitters might hint at the fact that the function of daily objects need to be reconsidered so as to explore unknown dimensions in art that challenge pre-established order. This Merz sculpture also invites us to think over the value attributed to disposable items, which are rendered art, yet it is an art that goes against any sense of taste. It also questions genre conventions by blending different categories.



FIG. 25. Kurt Schwitters, *Merz Picture 46 A. The Skittle Picture*, Tate.

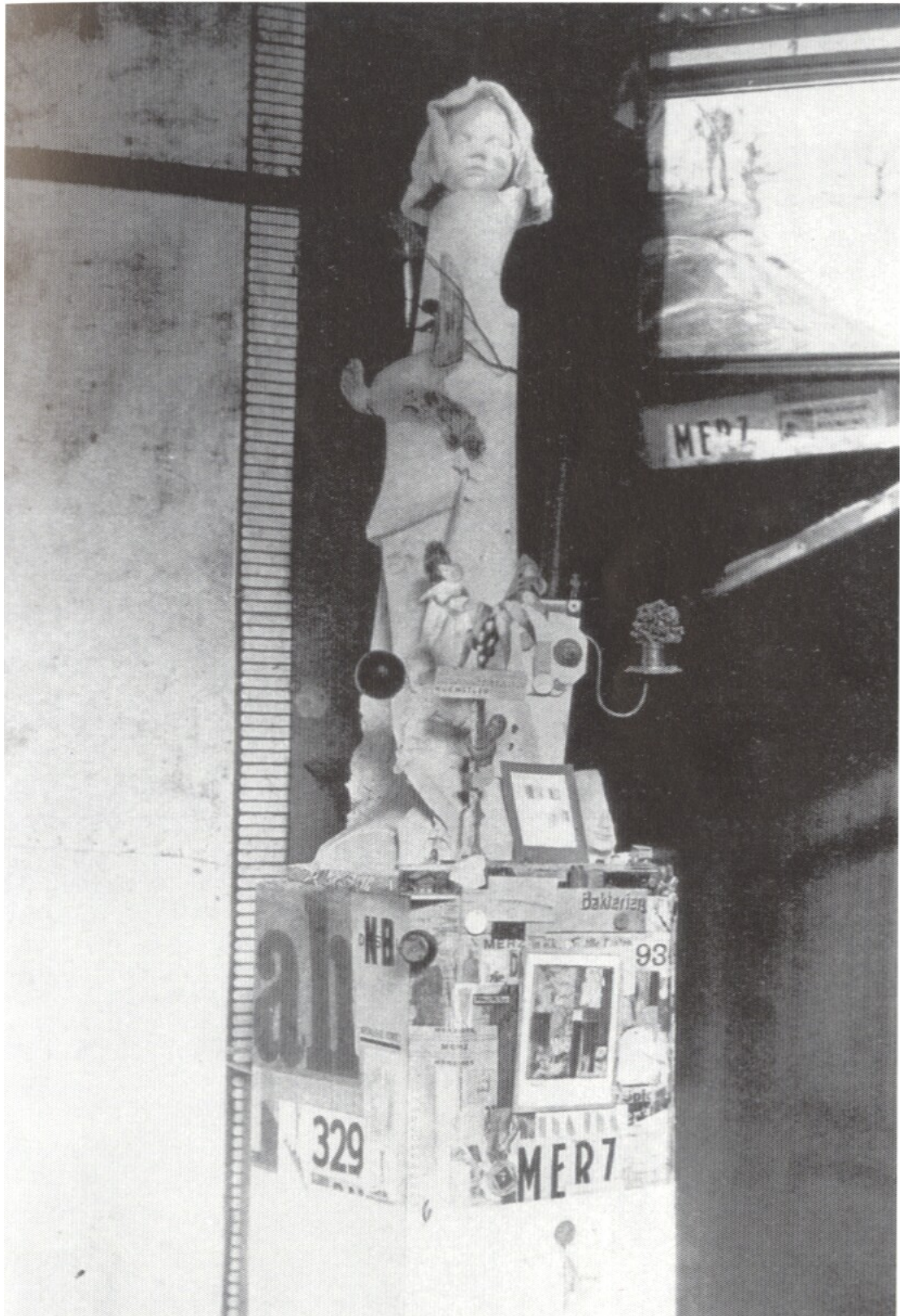


FIG. 26. Kurt Schwitters, *The First Day Merz-Column*, Sprengel Museum Hannover.

Schwitters's last experiment is the *Hanover Merzbau*—also called *Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, or KdeE for short—. Demolished by bombs in 1943, this quasi-architectural construction is not only inspired in Dada tenets, but also in the Constructivism and Expressionism of Dr. Caligari. According to Schlamacher,

had it survived the war, would have become a most singular place of pilgrimage for art lovers: the utopia of an irrational architecture, which, after it had outgrown its Dadaist beginnings, tried to become ever more rational and "objective" in its stylistic means but which never tried to disguise the fact that here an artist was creating a refuge for his most spiritual and artistic needs. (Schlamacher 108-127)

This plastic creation is reminiscent of the alchemical conception of a "spirit in matter" behind inanimate objects like metal or stone. This importance of mystical contents corresponds to Kandinsky's spiritual art. As he asserts: "The artist's eye should always be turned in upon his inner life, and his ear should be always alert for the voice of inward necessity. This is the only way of giving expression to what the mystic vision commands" (Jung 307). This conception acts out the inexplicable enigmas of Schwitters' artworks.

All the abovementioned Schwitters' Merz modalities are conceived as antidote to retinal art by engaging in eccentric experimentations with the object. Likewise, they are elevated to the dignity of an artwork by the will of the artist, whose practices of selection, signature and exhibition are decisive in the creative process. Precisely, the act of appropriating materials is analogous to the activity of research that Marx mentions in the afterword of *Capital*, and that Benjamin evokes later on in his *Arcades Project*:

Research has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyze its various forms of development, to trace out their inner connection. Only after this work is done can the actual movement be presented in corresponding fashion. If this is done successfully, if the life of the material is reflected back as ideal, then it may appear as if we had before us an a priori construction. (465)

In other words, Schwitters acts as a scientist who begins with a hypothesis of how materials are to be distributed, but beforehand he is to study their formal properties to confirm there is an inner connection that allows for such a construction. The creative mind is thus led by the energy of the objects and a desire to form something out of the nothingness of the canvas.

In addition to the abovementioned plastic practices, Schwitters's Merz is also applied in his most subversive poems. Just as in his collages and assemblages he appropriates scraps of paper, in his poetic compositions he collects linguistic components and everyday conversations:

The materials of poetry are letters, syllables, words, sentences, paragraphs. In poetry words and sentences are nothing but parts. Their relation to one another is not the customary one of everyday speech, which after all has a different purpose: to express something. In poetry words are torn from their former context, disassociated (*entformeln*), and brought into a new artistic context; they become formal parts of the poem, nothing more.⁴⁰

These linguistic strategies, analogous to his Merz-Pictures, are also characterized by the tendency towards *Entformung* or the defamiliarization of fragments, as is noticeable in *Die Blume Anna*, where Schwitters pieces together phrases of Goethe, August von Platen and Emmanuel von Geibel. He called this method *Entformung*, which deals with the "desemanticization" of meaning that bears upon the domain of abstraction in the visual arts (Elderfield 87).

⁴⁰ "In der Dichtung werden die Worte aus ihrem alten Zusammenhang gerissen, entformelt und in einen neuen, künstlerischen Zusammenhang gebracht, sie werden Form-Teile der Dichtung, weiter nichts." See Kurt Schwitters, "Die Bedeutung des Merzgedankens in der Welt," *Merz: Holland Dada* 1 (January 1923): 8-11. Reproduced in *LW*, vol. 5, 133-54. For specific information on this quote, see 134. The English translation belongs to Elderfield, 43.

Schwitters’s *Entformung* goes hand in hand with the Adornian views on the transformation of the material. For him, form speaks and affects “truth content,” which he defines in the following terms:

the truth content of artworks is not what they mean but rather what decides whether the work in itself is true or false, and only this truth of the work in-itself is commensurable to philosophical interpretation and coincides—with regard to the idea, in any case—with the idea of philosophical truth. (131)

In other words, any given artwork demands conscientious reflection to resolve its enigma. In view of this, he splits truth content into *Gehalt*, the indeterminate element that makes the artwork hold together; and *Inhalt*, the formal constituent that sediments content. For Adorno, the traditional notions of content and form seem to be interchangeable and confounded in the creative process. Furthermore, the form is an artifact of coherence that contributes to the organization of the artwork. Its eloquence unfolds truth by investing the existent with traces of the nonexistent. Thanks to form, content gains depth in that it points to the irreconcilable and antagonistic. Schwitters’s Merz can be read as paradoxically originating from the real world, while reacting to its untruth. Examining concepts, found words or phrases, cultural and literary codes against one another, *An Anna Blume* (To Anna Blume, 1919) is an illustration of the modern artwork’s conflicting nature. In this poem, certain conventional techniques coexist with unusual visual signs:

An Anna Blume

Oh Du, Geliebte meiner 27 Sinne, ich liebe Dir!
 Du, Deiner; Dich Dir, ich Dir, Du mir, - - - wir?
 Das gehört beiläufig nicht hierher!

Wer bist Du, ungezähltes Frauenzimmer, Du bist, bist Du?
 Die Leute sagen, Du wärest.

Laß sie sagen, sie wissen nicht, wie der Kirchturm steht.

Du trägst Hut auf Deinen Füßen und wanderst auf die
Hände,
auf den Händen wanderst Du.

Halloh, Deine roten Kleider, in weiße Falten zersägt,
Rot liebe ich, Anna Blume, rot liebe ich Dir.
Du, Deiner, Dich Dir, ich Dir, Du mir, - - - - wir?
Das gehört beiläufig in die kalte Glut!
Anna Blume, rote Anna Blume, wie sagen die Leute?

Preisfrage:

- 1.) Anna Blume hat ein Vogel,
- 2.) Anna Blume ist rot.
- 3.) Welche Farbe hat der Vogel.

Blau ist die Farbe Deines gelben Haares,
Rot ist die Farbe Deines grünen Vogels.
Du schlichtes Mädchen im Alltagskleid,
Du liebes grünes Tier, ich liebe Dir!
Du Deiner Dich Dir, ich Dir, Du mir, - - - - wir!
Das gehört beiläufig in die - - - - Glutenkiste.

Anna Blume, Anna, A - - - - N - - - -N- - - -A!
Ich träufle Deinen Namen.
Dein Name tropft wie weiches Rindertalg.

Weißt Du es Anna, weißt Du es schon,
Man kann Dich auch von hinten lesen.
Und Du, Du Herrlichste von allen,
Du bist von hinten und von vorne:
A - - - - - N - - - - - N - - - - -A.

Rindertalg träufelt STREICHELN über meinen Rücken.

Anna Blume,

Du tropfes Tier,

Ich - - - - - liebe - - - - - Dir!

To Anna Blume

Oh you, beloved of my 27 senses, I love your!

You, yours, you, your, I your, your mine.—we?

Who are you, uncounted lady, your are, are you?

People say, you might be.

Let them talk, they don't know how the church tower stands.

You wear your hat on your feet and wander on your hands,

On your hands you wander.

Hello, your red dress, cut up into white pleats,

Red I love Anna Blume, red I love your.

You, yours, you, your, I your, you mine. —we?

Incidentally this belongs in the chilly heat!

Anna Blume, red Anna Blume, what do people say?

Prize Question:

1) Anna Blume has a bird,

2) Anna Blume is red.

3) What is the bird.

Blue is the color of your yellow hair,

Red is the color of your green Bird.

You simple maiden in ordinary dress,

You dear green animal, I love your!

You, yours, you, your, I your, you mine.—we!

Incidentally this belongs in the—heatbox.

Anna Blume, Anna, A - - - - N - - - -N- - - - -A!

I let your name fall in drops.

Your name drips like soft tallow.

Do you know it, do you already know it,

One can also read you from behind.

And you, you the most magnificent of all.

You are the same from behind as from before:

A - - - - - N - - - - - N - - - - -A.

Tallow drops CARESSINGLY on my back.

Anna Blume,

You dripping animal,

I- - - - - love - - - - - you!⁴¹

Repetitions and nonsense devices are brought into play to subvert the customary patterns of love lyric that parody Stramm's overtly symbolic language: "You, yours, you, your, I your, your mine.—we?" (2). In the poem morphological elements, namely pronouns and possessive adjectives merge to cause the confusion of identity. In the same manner body parts are associated with clothing items or functions that do not correspond to them, creating a subversive image that defies any sense of logic: "You wear your hat on your feet and wander on your hands, / On your hands you wander" (6-7). Likewise, literary, popular and spoken codes manifest the ambivalence of poetic language that speak about love:

You are the same from behind as from before:

A - - - - - N - - - - - N - - - - -A.

Tallow drops CARESSINGLY on my back.

Anna Blume,

You dripping animal,

⁴¹ See Bohn, *The Dada Market*, 192-195.

I- - - - - love - - - - - you! (30-34)

This poem is reminiscent of the Cubist collage, in that it agglutinates diverse elements that generate unusual associations and suggestive narratives. Words only preserve their signifier, that is, matter, which corresponds to the sensuous potential of sound. Paired off with unrelated terms, the poem is devoid of meaning, resulting in a nonsensical composition that defies traditional lyric. This subversive gesture implies an attack on exaggerated sentimentality as their fossilized values emulate the symptom of mental and social stagnation.

Another illustration of Schwitters’ Merz literary pieces is the phonetic poem *Ursonate* [fig. 27], which bears resemblance to a music sheet divided into four movements, plus an introduction and a conclusion. This composition, halfway between spoken poetry and sung music, is characterized by its intensity—strong, weak—, sound volume—loud, soft—, and spacing—tight, loose—, all of which follows the motives of a conventional sonata (Schlamacher 198-214). As if it were a spell, the sequential repetition of phonemes is analogous to the unexpected transformations of an object within the physical world. The words in the sonata dismantle rational and discursive modes of thought in favour of subjective impressions that appeal to sensuous faculties, which evokes the magic ritual of exotic civilizations or childish language. This return to irrational attitudes appears to be a necessary condition to revitalize an art ossified by conventional tastes and attitudes.

All the above-mentioned plastic and poetic creations embody the forces of commodity fetishism, as they belong to mass-produced forces in capitalist structures, all the while they can be interpreted as a critique of a system based on profit-making. Schwitters’ collection of goods in his Merz transfigures the physical qualities of the element at hand by virtue of the dislodgement from its natural medium and its immersion into a creative realm. Benjamin, in his essay “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” accounts for the temporal dislocation of the object as a fabricated commodity and its incidental discovery:

It first came across the revolutionary potential that appeared in the ‘outmoded,’ in the first iron constructions, in the first factory buildings, in early photography, in the objects that are just becoming extinct, the grand pianos, the clothes of five years ago, mundane gathering places after the *vogue* begins to retreat from them. (*Selected Works* 210)

With this statement, Benjamin seems to point to the revolution of the object in the industrial era, as it undergoes a series of transformations, ranging from its form and texture to its perceptual experience. Similarly, Schwitters’ gathering of waste materials or common words is an expression of their fetish character. In other words, relationships with objects are humanized and rendered valuable, whereas humans are objectified and displaced to a second position. Ingrained in the capitalist notions of use- and exchange- values, these items not only respond to a utilitarian and materialist philosophy, but also to the powers of the fetish of primitive cultures.

The practices commented here—Merz-Pictures, Merz-Drawings, Merz-Reliefs, Merz-Sculptures and Merz-Poems—penetrate into social relations of a widely objectified culture. Hence, for Schwitters, objects converse and engage with one another in a reified universe of fantastic connections. His Merz places emphasis on the Marxist notions of commodity

fetishism as a way of delving into the object’s social influences on individuals. In so doing, the different aesthetic fields—poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture—that Schwitters explored prove the prominence of matter over ideas as well as the intersections between visual art and language.

1.6. Surrealism (1924-1945): Surrealist Objects and Kitsch

Surrealism was an avant-garde movement created in the year 1924 by André Breton. In his *Surrealist Manifesto*, Breton defined the term as “Psychic automatism in its pure state,” meaning that thought is “exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern” (26). The Surrealists found modern society excessively controlled by rational thinking, and thus reacted by taking advantage of the dreamworld and the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud. One of the artistic creations that reflected the essence of automatism were found objects, which at times were confused with practices of popular culture resulting in kitsch.

In his 1939 essay titled “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” Clement Greenberg postulates that every art period has an avant-garde and a rear-guard, of which the kitsch would correspond to the latter. This means that aesthetics reaches its peaks and lows, insofar as kitsch is an expression of consumer culture involving a decline of taste, whereas the avant-garde resists any attempt to commercialize art. As Greenberg argues, kitsch acts as commodity that circulates according to the demands of the market, creating an ersatz culture adapted to the masses. In his own words:

Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of its profits. Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the

life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money—not even their time. (19)

As part of industry and the marketplace, kitsch is deceptive because it erases the difference between values of good and bad art. Owing to the penetration of consumer society into modern aesthetics, the avant-garde runs the risk of being taken for kitsch, when in fact the avant-garde is not moved by profit-oriented motives.

Breton's Surrealist *poèmes-objets* or Man Ray's assemblage photographs embody this conflicting relationship at the crossroads of the avant-garde and kitsch. These artists were definitely not interested in taking part of capital structures focused on the laws of supply and demand. They precisely counteract the state apparatus by utilizing the same industrial means to reveal the decline of modern culture. Nevertheless, the viewer might be unable to distinguish the difference, and thus the objects the Surrealists utilized for their creations are trapped in a murky area that only the educated observer can discern. Owing to its counter-cultural attitude, it is not strange that Surrealism reacted to kitsch. Coined for the first time by Apollinaire in *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* (Tiresias's Breasts, 1903), this movement gathered strength after Breton, who worked as a psychiatrist during World War I, returned to Paris and inaugurated his journal *Littérature* with the help of Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault. A few years later, the movement grew and took advantage of the advertising possibilities offered by periodicals such as *Le révolution surréaliste* (The Surrealist Revolution, 1924-29) *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution, 1930-33) and *Minotaure* (Minotaur 1933-39).

Heavily influenced by Freud's psychoanalysis as well as communist and anarchic ideas, the Surrealists, most of whom participated in Dadaism, argued for an automatic method both in literature and painting that reacted to forms of commodification set in by

capitalism. The object became for them the essence of their theory and practice. As its members manifested in the *Declaration of January 27, 1925*:

- 1) Nous n'avons rien à voir avec la littérature Mais nous sommes très capables, au besoin, de nous en servir comme tout le monde.
 - 2) *Le Surréalisme* n'est pas un moyen d'expression nouveau ou plus facile, ni même une métaphysique de la poésie.
Il est un moyen de libération totale de l'esprit *et de tout ce qui lui ressemble*.
 - 3) Nous sommes bien décidés à faire une Révolution.
 - 4) Nous avons accolé le mot de *Surréalisme* au nom de Révolution uniquement pour montrer le caractère désintéressé, détaché et même tout-à-fait désespéré de cette révolution.
 - 5) Nous ne prétendons rien changer aux moeurs des hommes, mais nous pensons bien leur démontrer la fragilité de leur pensées, et sur quelles assises mouvantes, sur quelles caves ils ont fixés leurs tremblantes maisons.
 - 6) Nous lançons à la Société cet avertissement solennel: Qu'elle fasse attention à ses écarts, à chacun des faux-pas de son esprit nous ne la raterons pas.
 - 7) A chacun des tournants de sa pensée, la Société nous retrouvera.
 - 8) Nous sommes des spécialistes de la Révolte.
Il n'est pas de moyens d'action que nous soyons capables au besoin d'employer.
 - 9) Nous disons plus spécialement au monde occidental: *Le surrealism existe*. Mais qu'est-ce donc que ce nouveau isme qui s'accroche maintenant à nous? *Le Surréalisme* n'est pas une forme poétique. Il est un cri de l'esprit qui retourne vers lui-même et bien décidé à broyer désespérement ses entraves, et au besoin par des marteaux matériels.
- 1) We have nothing to do with literature;
But we are quite capable, when necessary of making use of it like anyone else.

- 2) *Surrealism* is not a new means of expression, or an easier one, nor even a metaphysic of poetry.
It is a means of total liberation of the mind *and of all that resembles it*.
- 3) We are determined to make a Revolution.
- 4) We have joined the word *surrealism* to the word *revolution* solely to show the disinterested, detached, and even entirely desperate character of the revolution.
- 5) We make no claim to change the *mores* of mankind, but we intend to show the fragility of thought, and on what shifting foundations, what caverns we have built our trembling houses.
- 6) We hurl this formal warning to Society: Beware of your deviations as *faux-pas*, we shall not miss a single one.
- 7) At each turn of its thought, Society will find us waiting.
- 8) We are specialists in Revolt.
There is no means of action which we are not capable, when necessary of employing.
- 9) We say in particular to the Western world: *surrealism* exists. And what is this new ism that is fastened to us? Surrealism is not a poetic form. It is a cry of the mind turning back on itself, and it is determined to break apart its fetters, even if it must be by material hammers!⁴²

Breton's *Les Champs Magnétiques* (The Magnetic Fields, 1919) and the objects of Salvador Dalí and Man Ray, among others, were outstanding examples of the revolutionary character of the movement. Dalí's progressive gradation is indicative of this exploration of the object in the domains of art. In *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* (1931), he proposes the following definition of the object:

1. The object exists outside us, without our taking part in it
(anthropomorphic articles);
2. The object assumes the immovable shape of desire and acts
upon our contemplation (dream-state articles);

⁴² See Scheler, *Paul Éluard, œuvres complètes: chronologie*, LXIII. For the English translation, see Caws, 450.

3. The object is movable and such that it can be acted upon (articles operating symbolically);
4. The object tends to bring about our fusion with it and makes us pursue the formation of a unity with it (hunger for an article and edible articles).⁴³

In line with the aforesaid progression, the journal *Cahiers d'Art* in 1936 gave a detailed explanation of the Surrealist artistic practices: dream objects, found objects, poème-objets, readymades and Surrealist objects, among others. In this periodical as well, Breton's article "Crisis of the Object" mentions the contributions by Max Ernst, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and Pablo Picasso (22). These practices bear resemblance with kitsch and its ability to lure the viewer. Nevertheless, they resist commodification by exhibiting the negative aspects of commercializing everything including art as an elevated value.⁴⁴

Man Ray's ensemble of photographs in *L'Amour fou* and Breton's *poèmes-objets* are examples of these extended practices. As opposed to kitsch, these artistic compositions are characterized by their originality and their rupture with previous aesthetic tendencies. Their purpose is to bring two disparate objects closer in order to generate unexpected meanings. These Surrealist practices resort to fragmentary techniques, as they rescue an image from the poetic discourse by virtue of complex associations of verbal and visual signs.

Breton's *poème-objet* [fig. 28] is an illustration of the avant-garde that one can mistake for kitsch at first sight, but this creation underlies multiple meanings that further criticism in art. Made of the carved wood of a man, an oil lantern, a photograph, toy boxing gloves and paper, this poem-object also incorporates the following text in French:

ces terrains vagues et la lune
où j'erre

⁴³ See Salvador Dalí, *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dali*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 231-233. Originally published in French as "L'objets surréalistes." See *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* 3 (1931): 16-17.

⁴⁴ For a further view, see Pérez Alonso, "The Surrealist Collection of Objects," 452°F. *Electronic Journal of Theory of Literature and Comparative Literature*, 2 (2010): 112-126.

vaincu par l'ombre
 accrochée à la maison de mon cœur

these wastelands and the moon
 or I wander
 defeated by the shadow
 attached to the house of my heart



FIG. 28. André Breton, *Poème-objet*, MoMA.

Those wastelands Breton is referring to might represent the isolated background of the canvas, where he wanders alone and vulnerable. The darkness and uncertainty of the voice in the poem cannot even be lit up by the oil lantern at the top of the canvas. In addition, the sense of being defeated by his own shadow is counterpart of the boxing gloves next to the mysterious male bust. This figure is illustrated with a keyhole on his face that might point to

the house the poem speaks about, which is nothing but the inner life of the voice in the poem. As noted by Greenberg, this practice focuses on "processes of art," whereas kitsch only "imitates its effects" (15). In other words, Surrealism looked for novelty and values only encountered in art, whereas kitsch appropriates the means of high culture and undersells them so as to make a profit. Kitsch is based on imitation of those avant-garde practices that draw the attention of the viewer, and uses them to have an economic benefit.

Another noteworthy creation is the *frottage*, which the German artist Max Ernst discovered when he was beholding the patterns of the floor-boards of his room. Then, he put a piece of paper on top of them and started rubbing it with a pencil. This strategy allowed him to further experiment with motifs such as landscapes, trees, people, and animals, in addition to engaging in a complex process of printmaking. The world in these creations wavers between the dreaming and the waking aspect of consciousness, a diffuse area that evokes the Dionysian states of intoxication and frenzy. Furthermore, they react to the commodification of art that kitsch practices had begun to spread out. Owing to its driven desire for experimentation and creativity, they radically differed from the commercialization of objects that it proliferated in modern society.

These Surrealist plastic and poetic compositions are inspired by Picassian collages, as they represent a synthesis of words and images, genres and materials.⁴⁵ According to Bohn, "the role of the reader is thus to identify textual patterns and to translate them into structural equivalents at the cognitive level" so that the structure beneath the surface can be elicited (Bohn, 20-21). The French Michel Leiris is representative of this tendency with his *calligramme* "LE SCEPTRE MIROITANT" [fig. 29], where the words "amour", "miroir"

⁴⁵ For an extensive view on the theory of the collage and its influence on Surrealism, see Jack J. Spector, *Arte y escritura surrealistas (1919-1939)*.

and “mourir” reproduce a mirror effect resulting from the combination of the capital letters “ROI” and “MOI.” Apparently, this image contains a psychoanalytical message related to narcissism, omnipotence and death (Spector, 224). By including the words love, mirror and die, Leiris might be pointing to the death of the mirror aesthetics of previous generations. By virtue of this multiperspectivism, deeply rooted in Cubist strategies, Surrealist objects define themselves by virtue of their connection with other objects or constituents, but in so doing, they consolidate their position within the production of commodities as a critical act that challenges the evanescence of human relationships.



FIG. 29. Michele Leiris, “Le Sceptre Miroitant,” “Glossaire,” *Mots sans mémoire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969. 111.

The Surrealist movement also produced the so-called *cadavre exquis* or exquisite corpse, a method departing from automatic writing. In this practice, each collaborator adds words or images to a composition in sequence, either by following a rule or by being allowed

to see the end of what the previous person has contributed. This game epitomizes the ambivalence of the Surrealist concept of “line,” as the visual and the verbal aspects are diffused in a textural suggestiveness, and the syntactic equation between anatomy and time carries unexpected relations. The exquisite corpse by Man Ray, Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró and Max Morise [fig. 30] is representative of the superimposition of objects that appeals to sex and death drives. In a time dominated by the accumulation of capital, the Surrealists believed it necessary to return to our instinctual pulsations as an antidote to the commodification of human emotions. This *cadaver exquis* shows a double-headed creature comprised of the face of a man and a woman kissing passionately, while a hand is pulling the trigger in a murderous gesture. At the bottom of this representation, their gigantic body of this androgynous figure rests on a naked man painfully enduring its weight. As we can see, libidinal and deathly drives are at stake in a composition characterized by its violent character and its only purpose seems to be to shock the viewer to wake up from anaesthetize states of mind in culture that only values economic comfort, wealth and the appropriateness of conventional morality.

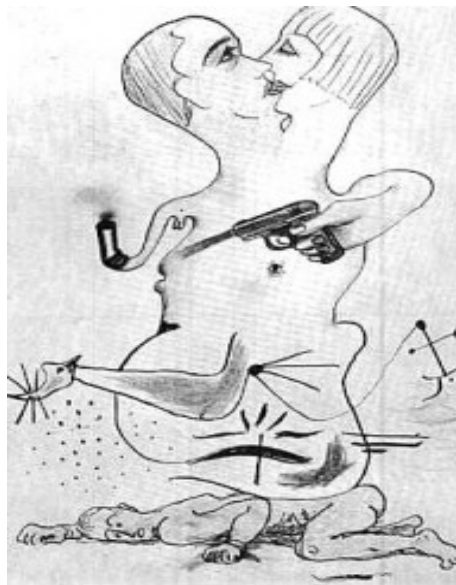


FIG. 30. Man Ray, Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Morise, *Untitled*, MoMA.

Surrealist percolation through the lucrative purposes of kitsch practices is symptomatic of a society in a state of crisis. A world is leaving, while another one is setting in to combat the effects of over-industrialization and circulation of capital. Surrealist practices such as *poème-objets*, *frottages*, collages and *cadaver-exquis* illustrate the interaction with culture industry and the tendency to even commodify emotions. Nevertheless, what distinguishes this art from kitsch is its social critique and call for action. The intentionality and the aggressiveness of its message attempts at awakening our consciousness from the sterility modern society turned into.

1.7. Conclusion

The question of the avant-garde concerns itself with societal contradictions and political ideologies that mark the transition between the ancient regime and the modern era. This rupture with the past entails a turn in thinking brought about by the epistemological and societal transformations of the world. The above-mentioned thinkers reflect on radical experimentation regarding culture and society. The art object discloses potential forms of alienation inherent in capitalist structures, as it reveals the relationship between the producer and the consumer. Poggioli reads the avant-garde as politically opposed to bourgeois's democratic society, but only possible within it. For Adorno, it is an aesthetic phenomenon that reveals the negativity of mass culture. Bürger ties this Modernist tendency with a practical exercise that questions the autonomy and the institution of art, whereas Greenberg engages in an in-depth analysis that distinguishes the profit-oriented motives of kitsch as opposed to the avant-garde. The practices commented in this chapter—*calligrammes*, readymades, *objet trouvés*, *Merz*, *poème-objets*, *frottages*—can be read as embodiments of social relations in a culture moved by the laws of the supply and demand. These forms consolidate their position as circulating commodities that seek to be purchased or gain

visibility in the art market, while revealing aspects of modern visual culture based on the experience of shock. We can only understand this attitude in terms of the irony that the most notorious avant-gardists used to counteract state of affairs and mainstream culture.

2. The Phenomenology of the Image: Imagism, Modernity and Antiquity

This chapter looks into the phenomenological constituency of the image in Imagism as the first avant-garde movement unfolding in Great Britain. Distinguishing themselves from the French Symbolists' reliance on the symbol to transfigure reality, the Anglo-American poets adopted the image as the perceptual device that allowed them to explore the relationship between the self and the world. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), our objective knowledge predates reflexive and scientific thinking insofar as the subject relinquishes the self-referentiality of its logos in favor of an encounter with and openness to the outside. The Imagists were fully aware of the significant connection between the subjective consciousness and the perceived entity. Whereas Cartesian philosophy separated body and mind, both Merleau-Ponty and the Imagists appear to argue for the unity of both constituents to explore physical and mental states. In phenomenological terms, this implicit and primeval knowledge differs from the Cartesian "res cogitans" and is intrinsic to a form of epistemology resulting from our being-in-the-world. The image is thus the access to a vision only captured by an attentive consciousness while experiencing a phenomenon in a particular instant.

The origins of Imagism date as far back as 1908. By that time, Hulme was involved in a series of altercations in the University of Cambridge and London that led him to abandon his interest in science and mathematics. Only then did he start developing his poetic notions.

T.E. Hulme formed the Poets' Club and organized several meetings with F.S. Flint, Edward Storer and Joseph Campbell at the Café Tour d'Eiffel. In the year 1909 Pound attended a few sessions, but the club had already begun to experience symptoms of exhaustion. The Poets' Club placed emphasis on precision and concreteness, which led Hulme to explore the relation between the visual image and the word as a concrete object. He frequented a select group concerned with the state of literature at the outset of the century (Mead 45). With their help, he created the Poets' Club, where he wrote the first Imagist poems: "Autumn" and "A City Sunset."

"Autumn"

A touch of cold in the Autumn night—
I walked abroad,
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.
I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children.

"A City Sunset"

Alluring, Earth seducing, with high conceits
is the sunset that reigns
at the end of westward streets....
A sudden flaring sky
troubling strangely the passer by
with visions, alien to long streets, of Cytherea
or the smooth flesh of Lady Castlemaine....
A frolic of crimson
is the spreading glory of the sky,
heaven's jocund maid
flaunting a trailed red robe
along the fretted city roofs

about the time of homeward going crowds
 --a vain maid, lingering, loth to go....⁴⁶

Similar to Impressionist paintings, the goal of these poems was to capture the object in its momentary appearance in order to act out an immediate emotion or a state of consciousness. In "Autumn," the moon is paralleled with a red-faced farmer, and the stars to white-faced children. These unexpected comparisons create a sense of strangeness that forces the reader to exploit his or her imagination.

Soon enough Hulme established a solid friendship with the English poet F.S. Flint, a new member who was highly interested in French poetry. Both of them created a new unnamed society on March 25 in the Eiffel Tower, where they defended the use of *vers libre* and the Japanese haiku so as to innovate the poetic creation of the time. According to Hulme,

[Poetry] is not a counter language, but a visual concrete one. It is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily. It always endeavours to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process. ("Searchers after Reality—II: Haldane" 315)

The poetic eye translates the direct observation of sensory data into simple and precise diction. In so doing, the rigidity of rhyme and meter are relinquished only to privilege the contemplative empathy or intuition generated by way of free verse and images. Precisely, Arthur Davison Ficke "In Defense of Verse Libre" argues that this new meter releases poetic expression from its obsolete constraints and any artificiality (19-21).

By 1911, two years after arriving in London for the first time, Pound spent one year in the U.S., and upon his return to London, he believed it to be necessary to give a thrust to the

⁴⁶ First published in Christmas MDCCCXVIII, London, The Poets' Club, 1909.

British poetic panorama. In December 1912 he created the School of the Images, among whose main members were H.D. and Richard Aldington. The most significant literary production of Imagism was *Des Imagistes*, an anthology that Pound elaborated in 1914. However, Pound ended up disengaging from the movement, when he realized Amy Lowell was diluting aesthetic principles for commercial opportunism. Lowell was a sagacious publicist with talent in poetry and garnered the attention of the Imagists, shortly after she arrived in London from Boston in 1914. Richard Aldington found a financial potential in a collaboration with Amy Lowell (Moore, *Becoming Marianne Moore* 443). Under her editorship, they wrote three anthologies titled *Some Imagist Poets* that were published in the years 1915, 1916 and 1917. Her version of the movement was considered to be more democratic, as it made room for variegated forms of writing that differed from Pound's aesthetic vision.

The Imagists were guided by a series of principles that attempted at freeing poetry from the shackles of Victorian and Georgian diction, ornamentation and sentimentality. Their main concern was thus to use concrete statements in free verse that broke with the prevalence of rhyme and the subjectivity of the inner voice. The Imagists laid the foundations of a poetry that had the potential to congeal time in snapshots while animating the word, namely, rendering it as life by emulating everyday speech. Taking these principles into account, Pound defined the image as the artifact par excellence that "presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" ("A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" 202). This theory of the image aided in the creation of an objective reality that rejected abstraction, as it distanced itself from life, thereby bridging the gap between the subject and the world. To quote Merleau-Ponty in "Eye and Mind," "[i]mmersed in the visible by his body, itself visible, the see-er does not appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by looking, he opens onto the world" (124). The Imagists argued for a phenomenological experience that

unified the inner voice and the perceived object in an exteriority. In other words, identification with the outside is a necessary condition to access philosophical questions at the heart of human condition: passage of time, cyclical natural processes, transcendence, life and death experiences, etc. The Imagists took advantage of Flaubert's *le mot juste* and prose tradition to compose poems that spoke about their contemporary world, and Ford Madox Ford, with journals such as *The English Review* and *The Transatlantic Review*, contributed to the dissemination of this movement.

The philosophical conception of the image that the Anglo-American poets argued for was profoundly rooted in French Symbolism. The Imagist poets that most commented upon the achievements of this movement were Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington and F.S. Flint. Their articles on the figure of Rémy de Gourmont are insightful pieces that show how cognizant they were on French Symbolism. In his article titled "The Gourmont: A Distinction" in *Little Review*, Pound emphasized Gourmont's concern with "modality and resonance in emotion," which implied breaking free from the constraints of rhyme and meter so as to pervade the surface of things (2). From the French Symbolists, Pound commended their magnificent ability to appeal to "the senses of the imagination, preparing the mind for receptivities. His wisdom, if not of the senses, is at any rate via the senses" (7). In other words, the French author succeeded in presenting an intuition that acted as a vehicle for knowledge and ethics. In line with Pound, Richard Aldington reaches a similar conclusion about de Gourmont:

He meant freedom and the use of the intelligence in the bravest freest way. He meant wit and irony and profundity of thought, true learning and the understanding of human nature; he meant to use his words, "the tradition of untrammelled minds." ("Rémy de Gourmont after the Interim" 32)

For Aldington, Gourmont utilized the utmost mental capabilities to reach out to the condition of our being. Literature was the medium that allowed him to explore the psychological and philosophical dimension of humankind and its relationship with an exteriority that began to experience a profound transformation, both in economic, scientific and technological terms.

Pound and Aldington eventually manifested their disagreement in the *Egoist* and *Little Review* with the indirectness of the symbol to deal with things. As an alternative, they conceived the image as an unmediated device that allowed them to convey an experience of the world in an instant. Although their thinking might be inaccurate in empirical terms, it points to the necessity to confront the self with its surrounding reality and apprehend a form of knowledge based on perceptual experience. As Pound remarks in his article on "Vorticism" in the *Fortnightly Review* of September 1, 1914, "[t]he symbolist's *symbols* have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic." However, "[t]he imagists's images have a variable significance" and the poet "must use his *image* because he sees it or feels it, *not* because he thinks he can use it to back up some creed or some system of ethics or economics" (461). If the symbol set the precedents for the theoretical paradigm of the image, the Imagists also addressed their attention to the French Symbolists' usage of *verse libre* as the banner of freedom against the imprisonment of the mind imposed by rhyme and meter. Poets such as Amy Lowell, John Gould Fletcher and Richard Aldington experimented with polyphonic prose and the *verse libre*. Specifically, John Gould Fletcher wants to convey "the emotional relations that exist between form, colour and sound" (xviii) These Imagist poets especially agreed with the Symbolists on the necessity of taking advantage of the *verse libre*, as it freed the poet from the constraints of meter to reach the highest level of creativity.

Apart from the liberation of rhyme, the Imagists directed their attention to painting as an art that best recreated the experience of being-in-the-world. As Aldington puts it in the 1915 Preface to the Imagist anthology, "we are not a school of painters, but we believe that

poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous” (7). Just as Aldington conceived of poetry as a visual language that should avoid conceptual thinking, Pound argued for eye-oriented perception as the most effective means of appealing to the mind. His theory and practice of the image as an optical medium gathered strength over the years, its principles circulating in little magazines and the correspondence exchanged with several colleagues. For instance, in a letter addressed to William Carlos Williams, he refers to the ‘ultimate attainments of poesy’ in the following terms:

1. To paint the thing as I see it.
2. Beauty.
3. Freedom from didacticism.
4. It is only good manners if you repeat a few other men to at least do it better or more briefly. Utter originality is of course out of the question. (*The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound* 6)

With these statements, Pound proposes a poetry that aspires to become painting or sculpture, as it is deprived of the embellishments of rhetoric only to attain things in and of themselves. The visual image, then, is the conduit that allows for a closer contact with a visionary reality. As Pound defended in *BLAST* 1, “the primary pigment of poetry is the IMAGE” (154), as it is more effective than abstract words in appealing to our senses and arousing an emotion. Contrary to those analytic habits of mind that have prevailed in Western thought over the centuries, Imagism attempted to seek a visual effect that delved into the mysteries of things. In line with Bergsonian philosophy, this poetics exploits intuitive faculties that are based on the perception of the external world so that truth can be arrived at. Thus, if Remy de Gourmont privileges thinking by sensorial images rather than by ideas, Pound critiques the

tendency of logic to move in circles and distance itself from reality.⁴⁷ This new language should free itself from long-standing conventions only to express the essence of things. The word, then, is an expression of both an objective presentation and the subjective consciousness of the artist, who transcribes perceptions from reality.

2.1. Imagism and the Theory of the Mind: Towards the Condition of a Pictorial Poetry

The theory and practice of Imagism encounters its roots in an epistemology that argues for the power of perceptual experience to access transcendental knowledge. The Imagists were fully aware that our senses were significant to establish a primary contact, but our reflected thinking was the driving force to translate those first-hand impressions into poetry. In the visual arts, the Impressionist painters set the precedents to capture an instant of time rather than attempting at representing the incommensurability of the world. As Merleau-Ponty states in "Eye and Mind," "it is the painter to whom the things of the world give birth by a sort of concentration or coming-to-itself of the visible" (141). The Impressionists opened the world before our eyes, demarcating a limit between the visible and the invisible. Their contact with external phenomena ties in with the literary principles of Imagism and its tendency to appeal to the visual through words. Yet the Impressionists distinguish themselves by exploiting light and color to such an extent that the final image becomes distorted. On the other hand, the Imagists attempted at presenting a clear and concise picture that appealed to the original sensation. As different as they might be regarding the treatment of the image, both movements concern themselves with the interaction of the subject with external phenomena and the translation of sense perception in visual terms. Only then did they believe that man could access a state of consciousness based on the quest for knowledge.

⁴⁷ See Wallace Martin's "The Sources of the Imagist Aesthetic."

At the turn of the century, the emergence of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism is shaped as an antidote to the mimetic tendencies imposed by the Renaissance. The philosophical postulates of these movements are based on the concept of impression. This idea is connected with the empiricist positivistic theories of Descartes, Locke, as well as the vitalism of Henri Bergson. The philosophy of the mind finds its maximum exponent in Descartes, who defended the innate ideas before our coming into the world. As opposed to this theory, Locke claims that in its initial stages, our mind is a *tabula rasa* or a blank slate devoid of natural concepts. Heretofore, man acquires knowledge through perceptual experience. Locke goes even as far as to distinguish between the sensations we receive through our senses and our reflective experience:

Experience: In that, all our Knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our Observation employ'd either about *external, sensible Objects; or about the internal Operations of our Minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that, which supplies our Understandings with all the material of thinking.* These two are the Fountains of Knowledge, from whence all the *Ideas* we have, or can naturally have, do spring. (104)

Locke contends that perception deals with simple ideas, basic units of "*one uniform Appearance*" (119), whereas reflective thinking concerns itself with complex ideas that are broken down into minor components.

In line with this thinking, David Hume developed his philosophy of consciousness. To his mind, impressions manifest the tension between a fleeting observation and truth, and it is intrinsically connected with theories on sensation. As Hume states in *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), the perceptions of the mind are divided into two kinds. Impressions are "all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will," and can be of an outward or inward order. Ideas, on the other hand, are "copies of our impressions or more lively ones" (97). This

philosophical concept had an impact on the origin of Impressionism as a mainly artistic trend. However, its influence can also be appreciated in the domains of poetry. As Schapiro rightfully remarks, Impressionism is founded on

a process of perception beginning with impacts of stimuli mainly below the level of awareness; it was also a term for effects in consciousness, like those of pain, taste, smell, pressure, heat, or sound, not all of which are referred to external objects. (26)

Rather than pointing to conceptual logic, Impressionism argues for an experience rooted in intuitive mechanisms. For an artist, the term impression consists in the simultaneous process of feeling and thinking, and thus, it is linked to a visual image that affects our mood and actions permanently or provisionally.

In his *Essai sur les donées immédiates de la conscience* (Essay about the Immediate Sensations of Consciousness, 1889), Bergson substitutes the traditional unities of space and time for the concept of "real duration." As the French thinker explains in "Philosophical Intuition," the individual will perceive "the continuous fluidity of real time which flows along, indivisible" (149). According to Bergson, movement is understood in relation to the process of change, which leads him to formulate his philosophical conception of *durée*. This ontological theory, which helps create an Impressionist aesthetics, is based on vibrations between past and present, whose rhythms, varying in intensity, dissolve into each other. As he claims in *Matter and Memory* (1912), "in reality there is no one rhythm of duration; it is possible to imagine many different rhythms which, slower or faster, measure the degree of tension or relaxation of different kinds of consciousness and thereby fix their respective places in the scale of being" (275). Matter and memory are condensed in the *durée*, which emphasizes the multiplicity of time. According to Bergson, temporal relations cannot be measured as in science, given that they are the result of a psychological experience defined

by its open-ended nature. For that reason, duration can only be apprehended by an intuitive process that never succeeds in presenting a finished image.

Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters like Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Édouard Manet, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Cézanne or Paul Gauguin are the precursors of this new artistic language which challenges traditional conventions. Their images are intense glimpses that aimed to raise awareness of a phenomenon, but their potency resulted in a blurred presentation. This vagueness of the picture distances itself from the Imagist premise of clarity, yet the poets learned the importance of dealing with particular events to suggest powerful emotions. Impressionist painters were only concerned with appealing to the viewer's visual perception so as to draw attention to the sensuous aspects of life. Their intention was to celebrate the beauty of impressions they encountered in an instant in time, and congeal it to render it permanent. They did not intend to paint clear forms but rather the intensity of the moment.

According to Ortega y Gasset, the modern painter deforms and dehumanizes reality in order to invent an unusual aesthetic pleasure (27). His ideas are mainly postulated in his essay "Diálogo sobre el arte nuevo" (Dialogue about new Art), in which he distinguishes two different modes of approaching artworks. One corresponds to the Renaissance close field of vision, which is characterized by imposing an optical hierarchy upon the represented element in order to emphasize its tactile aspects. The second model suggested by the new sensibility gives priority to far-off visual effects and to a democracy of viewpoints which pervade the interior life of the object. This second approach formulated by Ortega y Gasset refers to the techniques of French Impressionist painters, who strive to convey an immediate emotion and life movement by experimenting with the poetic possibilities of light and color juxtapositions. As Schapiro points out:

The argument of the Impressionists rationalized their painterly goal, their taste for the luminous, the colorful, the vibrant, the indistinct, and the broken, all of which they sought out in nature and transferred to the canvas in visible brushstrokes. What they opposed essentially was the hardness of outline and darkness of shadow in older art as untrue to the observed play of light and unsuited to the picturing of atmosphere and the interactions of colors in the aesthetically enjoyed outdoor world. (30-31)

On a first level, the use of broad brushstrokes and light patterns distorts the vision of the object by insisting on the importance of the atmosphere, and rendering it quasi-auratic properties. This suggests a constant *horror vacui* in the canvas, as the optical effect of the distant object is transferred to the near. In that sense, brushstrokes have the potential of conveying a moment of intensity that allows for the empathic identification with the setting. On a second level, the experimentation with pointillism and chromatic shades insists on the poetic beauty of familiar perceptions. Schapiro uses the adjective "uninterpreted" to designate the nature of Impressionist colors, which, according to him, are signs devoid of their conventional function. Painters explore the phenomenal world by resorting to the possibilities offered by the different gamut of tonalities (48). Thus, the causal and spatiotemporal constituents of experience organize the different impressions.

This pictorial language, charged with exquisite sensations, corresponds to the *verse libre* and the symbol of French Symbolist poets—Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Verlaine—. These mechanisms serve to minimize the gap between reality and the aesthetic object. However their endeavors, the impossibility of producing the effect of directness and immediacy failed on the grounds of the fact that artistic expression mediates with the real. Imagist poetics are influenced by the aesthetic postulations of Symbolism and Impressionism. French poets explore the *Ding-an-sich* as a way to penetrate into the haecceity of things rather than into external phenomena. Nevertheless, while Impressionist aesthetics

advocates pictorial values for poetry, the Symbolists take advantage of musical and rhythmical elements in order to emphasize the spiritual attitude towards life and the magical properties of language. Both visual and poetic aesthetics share the taste for optical sensations and the fusion of the different arts. This intersection between Impressionism and Symbolism is symptomatic of Charles Baudelaire, who emphasizes the musical properties of the poem, and studies the emotions conveyed by color relations. This importance attached to chromatic shades is noticeable in the review of the 1846 Salon Exhibition, where Baudelaire interprets Delacroix's command of color as follows:

The right way of knowing whether a picture is melodious is to look at it far enough away to make it impossible for us to see what it is about or appreciate its lines. If it is melodious, it has already taken a place in our collection of memories. Style and feeling in color come from choice, and choice comes from temperament [...] Sculpture, for which color is meaningless, and any expression of movement difficult, can have no claim to the attention of an artist particularly dedicated to movement, color and atmosphere. (56-57, 67)

The French poet favors color over sculptural relations, as in his view, the concepts of mass and gravity imposed by sculpture distort the act of seeing. The eye's mobility experienced by the viewer in an Impressionist painting is the equivalent to the Baudelairian poetics of spiritual mobility. By virtue of chromatic effects, Baudelaire breaks away from the realist tradition, and elaborates a mode of rhetorical self-consciousness which strives to create a literary sense of directness and more complex degrees of identification and distance.

Inspired by Baudelaire, the Imagist School tended towards Symbolist musicality and sensory language. Imagism was conceived as an alternative to Victorian moralizing tendencies and their ornamental profusions. It also argued for visual effects as the most accurate mechanism to translate the essence of the phenomenal world in poetry. The new poetic language was the counterpart of Cézanne's "realization," to use Altieri's terminology.

This painterly technique is an alternative to the mimetic principle of art. As Charles Altieri puts it, Cézanne moves from realism to "realization" by suggesting that

The reflective eye and the constructive hand must establish powers capable of reorienting painting, so that it becomes less a matter of making particular phenomena visible than of exploring what the nature of visibility allows painting to project about the relation between the will and the world. (*Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* 181)

Like Cézanne, the Imagists forge a poetry that appeals to splendid visual effects and momentary sensations. By virtue of Impressionist techniques, Modernist poets privilege the visual aspect in poetry and arrange the verses in an unusual typography that generates new meanings and associations. By relying on the power of vision, the Imagists laid the foundations of a poetic language that relinquished conceptualization. However the similarities with Impressionism, Pound critiques this pictorial movement on account of the vagueness of its images. The Imagist project was based on the clear presentation of the object as a means of infusing the word with life, and visual perception is the privileged sense to connect us with the world.

Apart from these painterly and literary influences, the Imagists were finally inclined to an objective art opposed to Impressionist aesthetics and Victorian style. Its members believed that there was no living poet to be imitated, and thus they resorted to Flaubert's *le mot juste* to constitute their aesthetics. As George Lane manifested in his article "Some Imagist Poets" from the *Little Review* of 1915:

These poets call themselves Imagists because their object is to present an "image"; they believe "that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous"; they desire "to use the language of common speech," and "to employ always the *exact* word, not the nearly exact, nor the merely decorative word." They wish "to produce

poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite”; and, finally, they are convinced that “concentration is of the very essence of poetry.” (27)

The Imagists, as if they were scientists, adopted a position of detachment based on the observation of the external world and the collection of data to produce an unexpected effect. According to Hulme, this can only be accomplished in a Coleridgean fashion, by bringing disparate images together (Tearle 47). Later on, the Imagists were finally inclined to an objective art opposed to Impressionist aesthetics and Victorian style. Ford Madox Ford believed that there was no living poet to be imitated, and thus they resorted to Flaubert’s *le mot juste* to lay the foundations of their aesthetics. This meant that they strip their poetry of its redundancies so as to capture a fundamental aspect of the perceived element.

2.2. Imagism and the Phenomenology of Modern Print Culture: Periodicals and Anthologies

Imagism was a product of modernity that found acceptance in a variety of journals circulating in the first decades of the twentieth century. Imagism was part and parcel of a fruitful print culture that became central to capitalist modes of production, successfully adhering to the laws of the supply and demand. Despite the fact that journals and periodicals were highly selective, they participated of the intricacies of a system that regulated the literary marketplace and allowed artists to make themselves known in an extremely competitive world. In this fashion, the advertising industry gave rise to the appearance of the phenomenology of the marketplace where images and texts were popularized through journals to commercialize modern aesthetics. Editors usually had little fund to market their magazines, yet this provided them with the independence mass-market periodicals did not grant their authors. In fact, important Modernist works such as *The Ulysses* were serially published in these selective magazines (Morrison, “Nationalism and the Modern American

Canon" 18, 29). Apart from some kind of financial aid, one of the most decisive factors to sustain a magazine was motivation.⁴⁸ Only by preserving its original intention and shying away from lucrative purposes, can any given magazine fight monotony and succeed. As Pound puts it:

The significance of any work of art or literature is a root significance that goes down into its original motivation. When this motivation is merely a desire for money or publicity, or when this motivation is in great part such a desire for money directly or for publicity as a means indirectly of getting money, there occurs a pervasive monotony in the product corresponding to the underlying monotony in the motivation. ("Small Magazines" 690)

In the same fashion as in the nineteenth-century, advertising had to be seriously selected based on its price and the potential to appeal to the audience. Images were thus cultural products to be consumed, and thus they needed to be extremely effective to capture the attention of readership. At times, the format is identical in different periodicals and furthermore limited to one particular idea. When readers become familiar with it, they take a turn to another type of knowledge, which made advertising be attentive to public interests.

The production and distribution of magazines involved investing funds in search of a profit. On several occasions the presence of a benefactor could unfold the editorship. An illustrative case of this is the *Little Review*, which counted on the financial aid of John Quinn, a lawyer from New York interested in art and literature. As Pound remarks, Quinn agreed to lend \$750 for the edition and the payment of foreign contributors. Then, American editors would print and distribute the journal, including the work of Eliot, Lewis and Joyce. Yet Quinn was persuaded to provide \$5,000 for extra costs and this caused some arguments with Pound, who ended up taking a position in the *Dial* (Rainey, "The Cultural Economy of

⁴⁸ See Rainey, "The Price of Modernism: Publishing *The Waste Land*" in Bush ed. *Eliot the Modernist in History*.

Modernism" 45). In Paris *the transatlantic review* was also sustained by Quinn and had Ford Madox Ford as the editor, who included the work by Hemingway, Robert McAlmon and Cummings.⁴⁹

American magazines such as the *Dial*, the *Criterion* and the *Little Review* found it difficult to be distributed in Europe, as publishers depended on certain agreements to obtain financial aid. Nevertheless, their elitism to make room for outstanding works was seriously taken into account. For instance, when considering where to publish *The Waste Land*, Pound and Eliot decided on the *Dial* rather than the more commercial *Vanity Fair*, as they saw the former as a symbol of distinction. Though these authors were suspicious of the rapport between the profit-making purposes of capitalism and the absence of literary achievement, their immersion in the print culture suggests that they were aware of the necessity to promote their work to reach status. The relation between profit and success is illustrated by the *Dial*, the magazine that awarded Eliot \$2,000 for the publication of his poem. As Rainey remarks, "[i]t was not simply the institutions that were the vehicle of the poem; the poem also became the vehicle of the institutions" (106). In the same fashion, Harriet Monroe became involved in those marketing processes of Modernism, allocating awards yearly such as the Levinson Prize that gave reputation to poets such as Frost, Stevens, Cummings, Lowell, Crane, Moore, H.D. and Williams. Her magazine *Poetry* was a platform to promote this literary genre and the awards contributed to the popularization of Modernist poems (Morrison, "Nationalism and the Modern American Canon" 26).

As these magazines show, literary works and structures of production attained a symbiotic relation that lay in the reciprocal exchange of forces. This resulted in the development of a phenomenology of advertisement that made possible the proliferation of images and texts through "the combined efforts of typesetters, proofreaders, indexers,

⁴⁹ See Walter S. Sutton's *Pound, Thayer, Watson and the Dial: A Story in Letters*.

printers, and marketers, each of which introduces a network of relationships" (Cullen, *Editors, Scholars and the Social Text* 3). The making of the text is constituted as a sociocultural process that involves collaborative interactions. By adopting the methods provided by the large and highly technologized apparatus of twentieth-century, little magazines found a receptive public attracted to the magazine by its visual appearance or prestige. At times their success depended on the work they published and whether or not they communicated with their readers, as was the case of William Carlos Williams. Other poets such as Maxwell Bodenheim, Mina Loy, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens and H.D. found their place in small magazines, contributing to the dissemination of Anglo-American Modernism. All these conditions opened avenues for a serious reconsideration of the state of literature, and the communication between editors and contributors was necessary to innovate.

2.2.1. Imagism, Little Magazines and Advertising

The production and distribution of little magazines in the marketplace was possible thanks to the collaboration with the advertising industry. These journals made profits by commercializing products of interest to an audience inclined to particular tastes. Pound was attentive to the nooks and crannies of the marketplace and appropriated advertising strategies⁵⁰ to promote his Imagist theory and practice. For instance, he gave an appealing name to the British movement by investing it with French resonances, which called the attention of Amy Lowell and persuaded her to contribute some poems to the first Imagist anthology. As well, Pound in "A Few Don'ts for an Imagiste" provided the mysterious formula of the image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an

⁵⁰ See Timothy Materer, "Make It Sell! Ezra Pound Advertises Modernism," in *Marketing Modernisms: Self-Promotion, Canonization, Rereading*.

instant of time," whose meaning the consumers of the product were tempted to dispel and argue about (*Poetry* 1: 200). Furthermore, Imagism carried in itself authority and prestige and thus poets wanted to identify with this doctrine so as to lay out their cultural power. In fact, Amy Lowell took advantage of her appearance in *Des Imagistes* to become the sole promoter of the movement and publish future anthologies. Given its cachet, it was easy for Imagism to find a space on the pages of little magazines, which the movement also considered to be a source of prestige—due to their highly selective character—as well as an effective medium to spread its word and reach an audience.

In addition to this connection with mass culture and little magazines the Imagists had access to what Morrison has rightfully called "the counterpublic sphere." The *Egoist*, the *Freewoman* and the *New Freewoman* opposed bourgeois circles and the dominant culture and politics of the state. In turn, Modernist authors frequented suffragist and feminist groups as well as socialist, anarchist, syndicalist associations that reacted to the state apparatus. Nevertheless, they took advantage of publicity strategies and commercial advertisement utilized by the official culture to promote High Modernism. Mass periodicals contributed to the marketing of commodities so as to insist on the importance of leading a particular lifestyle rather than the utilitarian qualities of the product. At the same time, newspapers benefited from advertising, as they attracted larger audiences that would eventually help fund printing expenses. Editors of little magazines were well aware of the potential of marketing industry, thereby adapting it for their own purposes (Morrison, *The Public Face of Modernism* 84-86). Small magazines are therefore commodities to be distributed and consumed by an audience seeking differentiation from mainstream attitudes. This network of market relations promotes a type of phenomenological perception based on "the social construction of the meaning of cultural artifacts" (Carroll, Tafoya and Nagel 8). A collective consciousness invites one to look into the perceptual constituency of images and texts in the

pages of those journals, which played an important role in spreading the aesthetic postulations of Imagism.

The New Age [fig. 31] was one of the first literary magazines in Great Britain originally published in 1894 and dedicated to the expansion of Christian Socialism. From 1907 to 1922 A.R. Orage and Holbrook Jackson were in charge of editing the journal under the financial sponsorship of George Bernard Shaw. Under their supervision, the philosophy of Nietzsche and the politics of Fabian and Guild socialism⁵¹ were the main fields of interest. Other topics revolved around the concept of private property, the constitution of a socialist political party and women’s suffrage. In the years of World War I the magazine committed itself to promoting Freudian psychoanalytical theories and Modernist aesthetics.

The New Age was also prolific in discussing the main philosophical ideas of the time that would make an impact on the origin and development of Imagism. In the October 19 issue of 1911, T.E. Hulme wrote his “Notes on Bergson,” where he continued the reflections he began in 1909 on the Bergsonian theory of “the nightmare of universal mechanism.” The impossibility of analyzing the external world on a material basis was part of Hulme’s argumentation. He came into contact with Bergson’s premises, just as eminent figures of the British arts and letters, namely Pound, Epstein and Orage, were also attracted to the French philosopher’s notions of *durée*.

⁵¹ Fabian socialism is a democratic organization whose main purpose is to promote socialism by way of reform, not revolution. On the other hand, guild socialism made its appearance in the first years of the twentieth century with the purpose of empowering workers to implement guilds as the means of building bridges with the public and taking control of industrial production. For a further view on Fabian socialism, see Shaw, *Fabian Society: Its Early History* and the definition of Guild socialism in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

THE NEW AGE. May 2, 1907.

**ALL
NEED
IT—
HOVIS
BREAD**

TRADE MARK
BREAD

Science
and
Experience confirm.

**THE
NEW AGE**

AN INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST REVIEW OF
POLITICS, LITERATURE, AND ART

EDITED BY
A. R. ORAGE and HOLBROOK JACKSON

**DELICIOUS
COFFEE
RED
WHITE
& BLUE**

FOR BREAKFAST & AFTER DINNER.
In making, we use purest coffee. It holds
as much stronger than
any other COFFEE.

No. 660 [New Series. Vol. I. No. 1.] THURSDAY, MAY 2, 1907. [Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper.] ONE PENNY

THE OUTLOOK.

Planning an Empire.

Now that the incidental festivities, dinners, speeches, and entertainments by rival political organisations, which the newspapers appear to regard as the most striking features of the Colonial Conference, are drawing to a close, it may be well to consider how far that Conference has gone towards doing what it was intended to do. The task before the Conference, the task implicitly before us all, is nothing less than the creation of a British Empire. At present, of course, no such Empire exists. All that exists, either legally or actually, is "the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and its Colonies and Dependencies." Of these Colonies and Dependencies some are ruled bureaucratically from Downing Street, others are self-governing, and are bound together only by a common allegiance to the Crown, by a faint and ill-defined suzerainty exercised over them by the Parliament in which they are not represented, and by a certain sentiment of unity, which a common tradition and (in most cases) a common language bring to them. We do not wish to underrate the importance of this sentiment, without which indeed permanent union would be impossible. But a sentiment too weak to find expression in concrete organisation is not likely to be strong enough to outlast the wear and tear of centuries. It seems clear that, if the Empire is not to go to pieces in the course of the next hundred years or so, means must be found to bring its parts into closer relation with one another. This is a problem worthy of far closer attention from Socialists than it has yet received. For us the barren negation of the old Radical Little-Englandism is impossible. If we accept it we are false to all our traditions. If Imperial Federation is impracticable, the Federation of the World of which Marx and Lassalle dreamed must be even more impracticable. If we cannot have a Parliament of the Empire, how can we hope for a Parliament of Man? If a man love not his brother whom he has seen, how shall he love Humanity which he has not seen? Moreover the predatory Internationalism of Capital will force us into Imperialism, as it forced the older Socialists into Internationalism. How helpless would a host of small and romantic Nationalities prove when confronted with all the powers and principalities of cosmopolitan finance! Only a Socialist Federation—a Socialist Empire—could face them without flinching.

A Brixton Budget.

Seldom has there been a measure so characteristic of its author as Mr. Asquith's Budget. It is an undeniably clever performance, as safe, astute, and diplomatic as utter lack of sympathy and imagination can make it. It is carefully designed to please as many sections of the community as possible without exciting the apprehensions of any. For "the City" there is the reduction of the National Debt, with its

promise of an improvement in the price of Consols. For the middle-classes, whose "bitter cry" the Opposition has been on exploiting, there is the discrimination of the Income Tax, with its relief for the smaller earned incomes. Yet this discrimination has been so contrived as not to scare wealthy Liberals, whose secession would deplete the war-chest of the party; for the discrimination is effected by taking off and not by putting on, so that the immense tribute of rent and interest will continue to be appropriated without diminution for the private use of a class. At the same time the conditions of payment are to be made more stringent and harder of evasion, so that the Chancellor may hope to gain by stricter enforcement almost as much as he will lose by his small but well-advertised mercies. Meanwhile the working class, unrelieved of the "taxes on the people's food," at which the Liberals wax so indignant when other people propose them, are to be placated by a promise of Old Age Pensions—in the distant future. And Mr. Asquith sets aside £1,500,000 to provide a "nucleus" for the purpose and to prove the sincerity of Liberal intentions. We are disposed to regard this "nucleus" as the cleverest thing in the Budget. That the Liberals have the remotest intention of granting pensions to the veterans of industry we do not for a moment believe. The dodge is both cleverer and more economical than that. We take it that Mr. Asquith will continue to dole out additions to the "nucleus" at the rate of a million a year until such time as the party is prepared to face a General Election, and that the Government will then go to the country with the cry that, if the people want pensions, they must not interrupt the good work and must send Cobden, not Short, back to power to complete it.

Broadening the Basis.

But what will the Tories be doing the while? They will hardly, we imagine, tamely suffer the issue to be shifted from a number of questions on which they are quite likely to win, to a single question on which they would be almost certain to lose. They will doubtless pledge themselves, not only to continue Mr. Asquith's policy in this matter, but to give it a new impetus by "broadening the basis of taxation" and so accelerating the day when the "nucleus" shall grow to practicable proportions. And, in doing this, they will be laying a finger on the weak point in Mr. Asquith's policy. For the Liberals have no new sources of taxation to fall back upon. They dare not attack property; they cannot, in common decency, impose fresh import duties. Even in a fat year like the present they can put their hands upon no new source of revenue. What are they to do when the lean years come? They will then be faced with a revived agitation in favour of Tariff Reform as a means of raising revenue, strengthened by their failure to take off the existing food taxes. How many years' purchase would they give to Free Trade under those conditions? All this only emphasises the importance of keeping the Socialist fiscal

FIG.31. *The New Age* 1.1. (2 May 1907): 1.

Among the latter trends, *The New Age* acted as a platform for the Imagist to claim for the necessary renewal of poetry. F.S. Flint published his poetry in *The New Age* and, as a connoisseur of French language and Symbolist poets, he informed of the innovations taking place in France at that time. His interest in popularizing poetry was associated with his critique of the "welter of vulgarity" associated with business procedures and the obsolete poetic expression in England over the years of Victorian sentimentality and didactic concerns ("Book of the Week: Recent Verse" 353). As Flint further argues in the 1908 July issue of the *New Age*, "the lengthy poem" had its day and poetry, in turn, is to tend to "broken cadences" that reveal the enigmas of the world (213). His 1909 essays on French Symbolism attest to his attraction to *verse libre* as the vehicle to transform English poetics and imbue it with life. The reflection of the modern status of art in Great Britain can be found in the reviews about Pound published in the *New Age* by Flint and Darrell Figgis in the May issue of 1909 and July, 1910. The impact of Pound's writings will provide him with certain notoriety to publish poems such as *Provença* (1910) and *Canzoni* (1911), pieces that showed his Pre-Raphaelite leanings. Of special importance is his poem "Seafarer," published on November 30, 1911.

Pound would become a regular contributor over the years 1917 and 1920, when he would review art and music under the pseudonyms of B.H. Dias and William Atheling (Martin, *The New Age Under Orage* 283). In 1912 he also wrote "Patria Mia" for the numbers 19 to 27 of volume 11 of *The New Age* and "America: Chances and Remedies" for volume 13. These pieces entailed severe criticism to his native country to the degree that it "set forth the simplicity of Americans, in such a fashion that not only will all foreigners understand implicitly America and its people--all its people" ("Patria Mia" 445). Pound also emphasized the necessity that affluent Americans invested in artists lacking in financial

resources so as to enhance creative levels of modernity.⁵² The relationship with his native country can also be appreciated in issues 19 and 20 from *The New Age* of 1915, where Pound goes deeper into politics by dealing with the position of the U.S. in World War I. In "Provincialism the Enemy" from the July issue of the 1917, he showed his opinion against regional attitudes and in favor of the sophistication of the city. Pound was also the subject of criticism in "Readers and Writers" from issue 12 of 1915, where his Noh-Dramas are celebrated, yet his overuse of informal language is deemed inappropriate. All these articles prove his interest in cultural and societal issues that were at stake in modernity.

In the January 1916 issue of *The New Age*, his article "Affirmations: As for Imagisme" spoke about the evolution of the image from Imagism to Vorticism, emphasizing that "[i]ntense emotion causes pattern to arise in the mind--if the mind is strong enough" (349). Pound further distinguishes between "pattern-units" and "applied decoration," as the former appeal to the energy of the creative process as opposed to superfluous form. In his words:

Energy, or emotion, expresses itself in form. Energy, whose primary manifestation is in pure form, i.e., form as distinct from likeness or association can only be expressed in painting or sculpture. (350)

The fourth series of "Affirmations: As for Imagisme" is an analysis of the status of the image and its impact on the development of early-twentieth century poetry in Great Britain. With the above-mentioned remarks, Pound is determined to bring poetry closer to the domain of the visual arts so as to insist on the notion of clear form as the essence of poetic expression. In this respect, *The New Age* was one of the first magazines that reinforced relationships between poetry, art and politics, defining the social phenomenology of modernity through the

⁵² See Pound, <http://www.galenet.com/servlet/LitRC>.

intense dialogues of different contributors and the usage of advertising techniques that coexisted with mass culture.

Along these lines, Pound made sure Imagism reached an international scope, and thus he was skillful at building a network of relationships with several authors in Great Britain and the U.S., creating fruitful transatlantic exchanges. This is noticeable in his collaboration for *Poetry*, an American journal where Pound persuaded the editor Harriet Monroe to publish the first Imagist poems by Richard Aldington and H.D. in November 1912 and January 1913. With the assistance of her associate editor, Alice Corbin Henderson, Monroe also wrote favorable reviews about Imagist anthologies and included Amy Lowell's *Some Imagist Poets* (1915-1917), which opened new avenues for rethinking American poetics (Marek 58). However, she made sure *Poetry* would include regional poets from the South and the Midwest, namely, Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, DuBois Heyward and Carl Sandburg. The inclusion of these authors was possible thanks to Henderson's ability to select submissions and distribute the magazine. Her article "Too Far from Paris" is significant to reach an overarching comprehension of an indigenous American poetry and its place in the Modernist tradition (Marek 31-36).

The expressive language of Imagism reached the other side of the Atlantic with unprecedented success. The pieces published in *Poetry* [fig. 32] were enmeshed with numerous advertisements, thereby constituting a phenomenological perception of society that blended high and low cultural practices. In this respect Imagist poems, though they belong to art, level off mass-market techniques. For instance, an advertisement from the Ralph Fletcher Seymour Company for printing books was placed together with a subscription of *Poetry*.

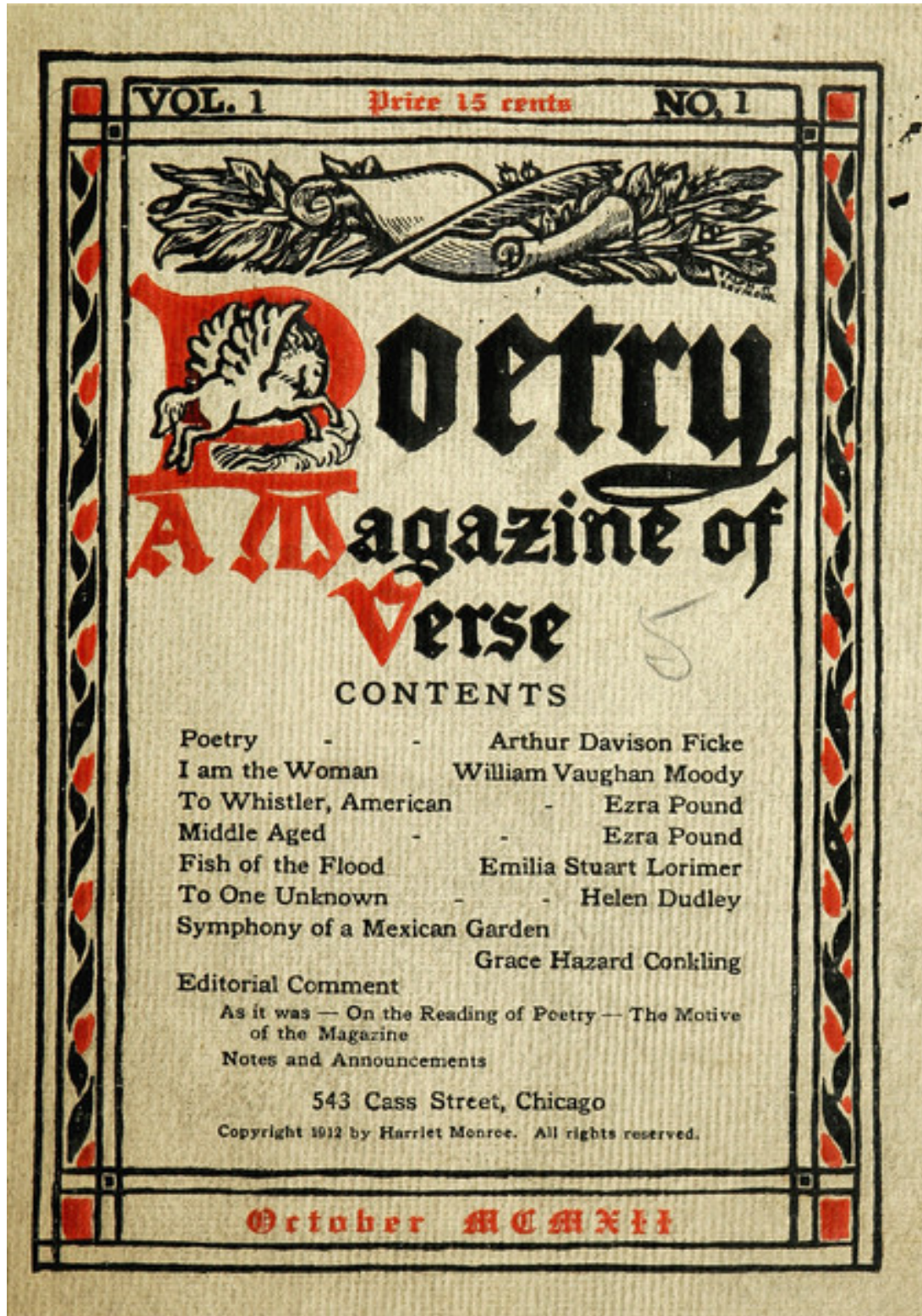


FIG.32. *Poetry* 1.1. (October 1912)

Likewise, anthologies and periodicals such as the *Egoist* and *BLAST* were promoted in the pages of the Chicago magazine.⁵³ In this manner, Monroe contributed to the creation of a market for poetry that coincided with the inception of advertising industry. It is thus possible that some of the Imagist poems adopted the striking visual strategies in the marketplace to call the attention of the audience. The conciseness and directness of Imagism was welcome by *Poetry* owing to its capacity to imprint an image in the reader's mind, just as advertisements did.

As a vehicle to publicize poetry, this journal did well allying itself with the Imagist principles, as both the movement and the periodical were determined to make profit by selling the idea of high cultural status and refined taste. This is noticeable in using a French title in his poem "Au Vieux Jardin," where Aldington applies the principles of Imagist poetry by selecting the beautiful aspects of the outside that suggest a sense of melancholia:

"Au Vieux Jardin"

I have sat here happy in the gardens,
 Watching the still pool and the reeds
 And the dark clouds
 Which the wind of the upper air
 Tore like the green leafy boughs
 Of the divers-hued trees of late summer;
 But though I greatly delight
 In these and the water-lilies,
 That which sets me nighest to weeping
 Is the rose and white color of the smooth flag-stones,
 And the pale yellow grasses
 Among them. (43)

⁵³ See the last page of the first issue and volume of *Poetry*.

At stake in this poem is the act of seeing objects that belong to the garden. The reader is presented with a scene that exhibits the transformation of nature into a man-made structure. The outside world is subservient to human purposes, thereby emphasizing a sentiment of mourning for a lost past. This can be observed in the adjectives that point to an identification with the atmosphere, namely "still pool" and "dark clouds." The poet might be complicit with the architectural structure of the garden as a symbol of modernity, yet he appears to manifest that the ideal harmony between man and Nature has vanished as a consequence of industrial progress. In order to point to a melancholic state of mind, the subject fixes his gaze on colors and elements that enact the paradigms of Imagism evoked by Aldington himself in "Modern Painting and the Imagists:"

1. Direct treatment of the subject.
2. As few adjectives as possible. A hardness, as of cut stone. No slop, no sentimentality. When people say that Imagist poems are "too hard," "like a white marble monument," we chuckle; we know that we have done something good.
3. Individuality of rhythm.
4. A whole lot of don'ts, which are mostly technical, which are boresome to anyone except those writing poetry, and which have been already published in Poetry.
5. The exact word. (*Egoist* 202)

In "Au Vieux Jardin," optical and textural hues are emphasized to suggest a gloomy mood. The use of adjectives contributes to the intensification of the values suggested by the noun, which by itself would attenuate the poetic emotion. In this poem, the transient images are not mere appearances, but rather reveal a world of their own by absorbing the setting. Although the spirits of the viewer are enhanced by the trees and the water-lilies, it appears that the rose, white stones and yellow grasses bring him to tears. The rose and the water-lily have been commonly attributed to beauty and love, and thus they might point to the evanescence of a

precious moment that otherwise persists in the memory of the speaker. In the same vein, the white flag-stones and pale yellow grasses evoke a sense of melancholia. Those natural and artificial elements arouse powerful emotions in the beholder, who seems to be fused in the surroundings of the garden. In these poems Aldington shows us the activity of consciousness at its utmost, as he foregrounds a phenomenon that reproduces the relationship between the subject and the object.

As for H.D., she published her first poems in *Poetry*, one of which illustrates the Imagist tendency towards conciseness and clarity of the image, two features also shared by advertising. "Epigram" is based on a Greek epitaph inscribed in a monument built in the first century AD by a slave of a freedman of Emperor Tiberius. The protagonist of the story, Atimetus, is believed to have been a physician, and lies at the tomb of his wife, weeping for her death. The Greek verses that give voice to Homonoëa read as follows: "I, the talkative and cheerful swallow Homonoëa, lie here, leaving behind tears for Atimetus. To him I was dear since I was little. But unexpected ill fortune cut off this great friendship." To these words her husband responds in the following terms: "whatever time is owed still to my life I would have gladly exchanged for you, dear Homonoëa." Then he continues conveying that "tears are of no use nor can Fate be moved. I have lived my life; this one end rules all."⁵⁴ The long epitaph and plaintive crying are condensed to such an extent in H.D.'s version that it seems she created a completely new poem.

EPIGRAM

(After the Greek)

The golden one is gone from the banquets;
 She, beloved of Atimetus,
 The swallow, the bright Homonoëa:
 Gone the dear chatterer;

⁵⁴ For a further analysis of the Greek epitaph, see, *Turia: A Roman Woman's Civil War*, 91.

Death succeeds Atimetus.

As if this poem were an advertisement that attempted to capture immediate attention, H.D. selects the aspects of the original that best represent the Imagist principles of brevity and concreteness. In her view, the traits that best define Homonoëa, whose meaning is harmony, are the cheerfulness of her talk and her comparison to a swallow, a bird that emphasizes the sense of freedom. The rest of the lines of the old poem are inconsequential and distract the reader from the essence of the message. Therefore, H.D. presents an emotion objectified in the facts of the funeral so as to avoid any passionate rhetoric that allows us to focus on the necessary personal traits that define Homonoëa. In the same manner, she acquires the centrality the original epitaph denies to her by effacing the speech of Atimetus. This can be interpreted as a reaction to patriarchal accounts that privilege male figures while placing women on the margins of discourse. H.D. might be vindicating a visible position for Homonoëa that rescues her from the oblivion of historical accounts.

After Aldington and H.D.'s poems came to light in *Poetry*, the March 1913 issue of the same magazine made room for the publication of the Imagist credo, which includes Pound's "A Few Don'ts" and Flint's "Imagisme," where he postulated the image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (Pound 200). The poetic image was believed to be a psychological phenomenon that accessed knowledge by capturing a particular emotion of a fleeting moment. As Pound further argues:

It is the presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art. (200-201)

The image allows us to experience a sense of absolute freedom that transports us to spheres unknown to everyday life. It reminds us of an incommensurable world that can only be

apprehended by human consciousness in fragments. For that reason, Pound recommends the poet to "use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something" as well as "go in fear of abstractions" (201). The word is to stand for a visual conduit that emulates painting to condense time and space as the basic constituents of poetry. As to rhyme and rhythm, Pound is inclined to break with the fetters that coerced the creation of a free image. The mind is to discover cadences and sound patterns that contribute to the presentation of the visual content. In this respect, "In a Station of the Metro," published in *Poetry* in April 1913, is representative of the basic features of Imagism announced by Pound and Flint in their theoretical writings:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough. (12)

Like effective advertisements, the poem is characterized by an unusual briefness that condenses a striking image that compares the faces in the crowd with the whiteness and clarity of flower petals. A parallel between the inception of metro as public transport and the resonance of Fraser's anthropological study *The Golden Bough* suggest that beauty can be encountered in the least suspected places.

These poems show the impact of Imagism on the pages of *Poetry*, which stimulated transatlantic exchanges between Great Britain and the U.S. while acknowledging outstanding poetic work thanks to the creation of societies and awards. This magazine showed concern for some of the innovations that were taking place on a literary level, especially regarding the usage of commonplace topics, verse libre and a phenomenological approach to modernity. All of this contributed to the internalization of a poetic sensibility through the means of mass culture, yet finding the essence of the space where the work was produced (Marek 58).

If *Poetry* was one of the journals most committed to disseminating Imagism, periodicals such as the *Freewoman* [fig. 33] later known as the *New Freewoman* by Dora

Marsden gave room to Pound and Flint's ideas, enhancing the proliferation of print culture. The *Freewoman* was an ephemeral journal edited by Dora Marsden with the purpose of defending the rights of women in the early twentieth century. Despite her engagement in the feminist cause, Marsden was convinced the movement was limited to middle-class women, when it should promote intense dialogue and discussion on areas revolving around domestic roles and sexual concerns. Precisely, Fanny Johnson wrote an article titled "Man at Home" in the third issue of the *Freewoman* that dealt with an equal distribution of housework between both genders. Rather than rejecting women's domestic life, Johnson argued that they should use this role in the best of their benefits to secure their rights and interests. Marsden and other authors of the journal were in agreement with the idea of 'free-love' and examined the deficiencies of monogamy by focusing on negative figures such as man, the spinster, the married woman and the prostitute. She was also critical with pigeonholing women as reproductive creatures, as this leads them to restrain their emotions. Likewise, the article "State Maternity Homes" signed by F. W. L. R. on December 28, 1911, in the *Freewoman* speaks about the difficulty in giving birth to children under extreme conditions of poverty and hygiene. The State should pay attention to the high mortality rate of newborns and mothers and strive to implement a solution that shies away from moral dilemmas or patterns of conduct.

Owing to the *Freewoman* participation in the feminist cause, they took advantage of the potential of advertising⁵⁵ to raise awareness of the Suffrage movement and patent agencies that provided centrality to women. Dora Marsden, the editor of the journal, precisely made use of mass market to reach a larger audience, and Mr. H. Winterton, who worked for the Gough Press agency, contacted Willing and Co. to aid in the dissemination of the

⁵⁵ The companies, advertisements and books I mentioned in this paragraph are detailed by Morrisson in *The Public Face of Modernism*, especially the chapter titled "Marketing British Modernism: The *Freewoman*, the *Egoist*, and Counterpublic Spheres," 84-132.

Freewoman by placing advertisements in the streets and underground stations of London. Their main income precisely came from marketing consumer items belonging to national companies such as Coleman's Mustard and Flako Soap and London Department stores like Debenham, Freebody and A L' Ideal Cie, which were interested in merchandising fashionable clothing. In addition, they publicized in their pages other periodicals involved in women's issues, especially the right to vote. For instance, Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union was divulged in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and the Women's Freedom League. Nevertheless, the *Freewoman* did not only publish advertisements related to commercial culture, but also to counterpublic sphere, and thus syndicalist and anarchist movements dealt with revolutionary questions that reacted to state politics, while urging the importance of launching financial reforms and radical art forms. Illustrations of this were the International Suffrage Shop, radical publishers and censored books, namely Kauffman's *Daughter's of Ishmael* and Rémy de Gourmont's *A Night in the Luxembourg*, which found its place in the *Freewoman*.

After the brief appearance of the *Freewoman* in the London panorama, *The New Freewoman* [fig. 34] came into scene in June 1913 under the editorship of Dora Marsden⁵⁶ and Harriet Shaw Weaver. In the beginning, Rebecca West ran the literary section of the journal, but then Ezra Pound was appointed as the main editor, which allowed him to promote Imagism in the London literary circles with the unconditional support of Aldington. Rebecca West and Mary Gawthorpes were intrigued by the politics of anarchism, syndicalism and the philosophy of egoism, the latter of which was one of Pound's main areas of interest.

⁵⁶ Apart from the analysis of the poems appearing in the *New Freewoman*, I have taken as a reference *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism* by Bruce Clarke, especially regarding the editorship and the content of the journal.

THE FREEWOMAN

A WEEKLY FEMINIST REVIEW

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THREEPENCE

[Registered at G.P.O.
as a Newspaper.]

Joint Editors:

DORA MARSDEN, B.A.
MARY GAWTHORPE

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BONDWOMEN.

IT is a wholly pertinent matter that the temerarious persons who launch THE FREEWOMAN should be asked, "Who are the Freewomen?" Where are the women of whom and for whom you write who are free? Can they be pointed out, or named by name? There must be, say, ten in the British Isles. The question is pertinent enough, but it is difficult to answer, because its answer must of necessity become personal. We might, perhaps, hazard the name of one Freewoman who has become a sufficiently national figure to make her mention impersonal—Ellen Terry. There at least is one, and for the rest the inquisitors must be content with being enabled to arrive at the conception of Freewomen by way of a description of Bondwomen.

Bondwomen are distinguished from Freewomen by a spiritual distinction. Bondwomen are the women who are not separate spiritual entities—who are not individuals. They are complements merely. By habit of thought, by form of activity, and largely by preference, they round off the personality of some other individual, rather than create or cultivate their own. Most women, as far back as we have any record, have fitted into this conception, and it has borne itself out in instinctive working practice.

And in the midst of all this there comes a cry that woman is an individual, and that because she is an individual she must be set free. It would be nearer the truth to say that if she is an individual she *is* free, and will act like those who are free. The doubtful aspect in the situation is as to whether women are or can be individuals—that is, free—and whether there is not danger, under the circumstances, in labelling them free, thus giving them the liberty of action which is allowed to the free. It is this doubt and fear which is behind the opposition which is being offered the vanguard of those who are "asking for" freedom. It is the kind of fear which an engineer would have in

guaranteeing an arch equal to a strain above its strength. The opponents of the Freewomen are not actuated by spleen or by stupidity, but by dread. This dread is founded upon ages of experience with a being who, however well loved, has been known to be an inferior, and who has accepted all the conditions of inferiors. Women, women's intelligence, and women's judgments have always been regarded with more or less secret contempt, and when woman now speaks of "equality" all the natural contempt which a higher order feels for a lower when it presumes bursts out into the open. This contempt rests upon quite honest and sound instinct, so honest, indeed, that it must provide all the charm of an unaccustomed sensation for fine gentlemen like the Curzons and Cromers and Asquiths to feel anything quite so instinctive and primitive. With the women opponents it is another matter. These latter apart, however, it is for would-be Freewomen to realise that for them this contempt is the healthiest thing in the world, and that those who express it honestly feel it; that these opponents have argued quite soundly that women have allowed themselves to be used, ever since there has been any record of them; and that if women had had higher uses of their own they would not have foregone them. They have never known women formulate imperious wants, this in itself implying lack of wants, and this in turn implying lack of ideals. Women as a whole have shown nothing save "servant" attributes. All those activities which presuppose the master qualities, the standard-making, the law-giving, the moral-framing, belong to men. Religions, philosophies, legal codes, standards in morals, canons in art have all issued from men, while women have been the "followers," "believers," the "law-abiding," the "moral," the conventionally admiring. They have been the administrators, the servants, living by borrowed precept, receiving orders, doing hodmen's work. For note, though some men must be

FIG.33. *The Freewoman* 1.1. (23 November 1911): 1.

For that reason, the *New Freewoman* engaged in the advertisement of books related to revolutionary political topics as was Sitirner's *The Ego and His Own* and Floyd Dell's *Women as World Building*. The contributors of the journal also continued writing on feminist issues. For instance, Francis Grierson upholds the following stance in her article "Mind and Movements:"

There must be an actual awakening to the spiritual side of life and thought before anything great can arise out of the present chaos of conflicting opinions and sentiments, and woman will never enjoy her own rights until she rises superior to the material forces which bind the world to conditions little above the conditions of primitive barbarism. (11)

In line with the feminist concerns presented in the *Freewoman*, Grierson stands out the necessity for women to contribute to a psychic and spiritual awakening of twentieth-century thought. Her project demands economic independence and political engagement so as to transform society.

Other articles such as the one written by Winnifred W. Leisering's point to the idea of individuality for women to reach their essence in opposition to male ego. Nietzsche's philosophy of the overman is symptomatic of this self-realization and perfection of the mind. It is likely that Pound influenced women writers of the journal by beginning to introduce the relationship between poetry and politics. His presence in the editorial committee might have also made an impact on the publication of a few articles and poems that dealt with Imagism, particularly because the movement coincided with the apology of the new that was shared by the radical politics of anarchism and feminism. Rebecca West precisely wrote "Imagisme," where she summarized the principles of the movement with the probable intention of giving it further outreach. The *New Freewoman* also published a series of poems by Amy Lowell, Skipwith Cannell, F.S. Flint and William Carlos Williams. They were preceded by the

complementary title "The New School" and somehow responded to the Imagist dogmas popularized in the little magazines, as it can be seen in Amy Lowell's "In a Garden."

IN A GARDEN

Gushing from the mouths of stone men
 To spread at ease under the sky
 In granite-lipped basins,
 Where iris dabble their feet
 And rustle to a passing wind,
 The water fills the garden with its rushing,
 In the midst of the quiet of close-clipped lawns.

Damp smell the ferns in tunnels of stone,
 Where trickle and splash the fountains,
 Marble fountains, yellowed with much water.

Splashing down moss-tarnished steps
 It falls, the water;
 And the air is throbbing with it;
 With its gurgling and running;
 With its leaping, and deep, cool murmur

And I wished for night and you.
 I wanted to see you in the swimming-pool,
 White and shining in the silver-flecked water.
 While the moon rode over the garden,
 High in the arch of night,
 And the scent of the lilacs was heavy with stillness.

Night and the water, and you in your whiteness, bathing! (114)

The erotic content of the poem coincides with the introduction of topics concerning feminine sexuality and social roles in the *Freewoman* and the *New Freewoman*. Lowell presents a

scene at night, when a love encounter appears to take place in a garden decorated by stone fountains and granite basins from which water trickles. The liquid element might be the equivalent to the sexual effervescence and the desire aroused by the lovers' bodily contact. The scent of lilacs and the moon as the symbol of eroticism contribute to establishing a parallelism between the garden and the memory of such a moment. This fuses the external phenomenon with the speaker's emotions. According to the content publicized in *Poetry*, the poem recounts the idea of women's freedom to experience their own sexuality and creativeness.

On another note, Skipwith Cannell's "The Dance" conveys the ecstasy of quasi-dithyrambic movements that bring the subject to tears. A melancholy sense takes over the scene, which also empathizes with the voice of the poet. The visual image of sobs extinguishing the fire of the sun and the comparison of the wolf in front of a bear show the extreme emotions experienced by the speaker.

THE DANCE

With wide flung arms

With feet clinging to the earth

I will dance.

My breath sobs in my belly

For an old sorrow that has put out the sun;

An old, furious sorrow.

I will grin,

I will bare my gums and grin

Like a grey wolf who has come upon a bear. (114)

These lines might reveal the precepts of Egoist philosophy circulated in the pages of the *Freewoman*. Such theory valued the self in its essence, which can be observed in the outburst of energy presented in the poem. Just as Cannell envisages a harrowing scene where an individual appears to embody the grotesque caricature of an animal, F.S. Flint in

"Hallucination" offers a haunting vision of a mysterious house, where the poet wanders in the still of the night. Like "The Dance," "Hallucination" might contain references to egoist thinking, especially in the last lines, where the poet appears to question the absence of free will by claiming that "There is no direction." At first, it appears that the speaker heads for the cot where his baby is lying, yet he focuses his attention on the darkness of the rooms and continues walking without a clear destination. The poem possesses a psychological dimension that arouses anxiety and fear. The house is presented as a caustic place that provokes uncanny sensations; it is the space where, paradoxically, the poet finds himself at home, while feeling estranged from the familiarity of the surrounding scenario. The image deals with the troubles of the mind compared to a vacant house.

HALLUCINATION

I know this room,
and there are corridors:
the pictures, I have seen before;
the statues and those gems in cases
I have wandered by before,—
stood there silent and lonely
in a dream of years ago.

I know the dark of night is all around me;
my eyes are closed, and I am half asleep.
My wife breathes gently at my side.

But once again this old dream is within me,
and I am on the threshold waiting,
wondering, pleased, and fearful.
Where do those doors lead,
what rooms lie beyond them?
I venture...

But my baby moves and tosses
 from side to side,
 and her need calls me to her.

Now I stand awake, unseeing,
 in the dark,
 and I move towards her cot.
 I shall not reach her... There is no direction...
 I shall walk on... (114)

Besides the English version of Imagism, the movement also made impact on American poets such as Robert Frost, Marianne Moore, E.E. Cummings and William Carlos Williams. Despite not participating officially in the movement, Williams published "Postlude" in the *New Freewoman* with other Imagist poets. By making allusion to Greek mythology, this composition fuses the exoticism of a past era and space with the present state of mind of the subject. Williams is interested in showing the desire for the lover he is recreating in his mind. This topic of eroticism fitted well in Marsden's magazine, which vindicated the idea of sexual pleasure as opposed to reproductive urges. Reminisces to Isis, the Egyptian goddess of fertility and crops, and Venus, the Roman deity of love, beauty and eroticism, reinforce the sexual content of this piece. There are virile references to Mars, the god of war, which harmonizes the opposing forces between feminine sexuality and male puissance. The sense of peace after the intensity of the erotic encounter is symbolized in the figure of Poseidon, the Olympic "God of the Sea," and the tranquility of the paradise island of Atlantis.

POSTLUDE

Now that I have cooled to you
 Let there be gold of tarnished masonry,
 Temples soothed by the sun to ruin

That sleep utterly.
 Give me hand for the dances,
 Ripples at Philae, in and out,
 And lips, my Lesbian,
 Wall flowers that once were flame.

Your hair is my Carthage
 And my arms the bow
 And our words arrows
 To shoot the stars,
 Who from that misty sea
 Swarm to destroy us.
 But you're there beside me
 Oh, how shall I defy you
 Who wound me in the sight
 With breasts shining
 Like Venus and like Mars?
 The night that is shouting Jason
 When the loud eaves rattle
 As with waves above me
 Blue at the prow of my desire!
 O prayers in the dark!
 O incense to Poseidon!
 Calm in Atlantis. (14)

This poem brims with striking visual images that appeal to the eye, thereby creating a sensorial effect able to convey the sensuality of the encounter. It also seems as if the poet strived to become a painter or sculptor, professions that emphasize the necessity to use the sense of touch to mold the materials. This goes hand in hand with the physical contact established between two lovers: "Now that I have cooled to you / Let there be gold of tarnished masonry" (1-2). Other sensory experiences that intensify the romantic relationship

are the fragrance of the flowers, which is described in terms of flame. Body parts are also mentioned and idealized to celebrate the beauty of love:

Your hair is my Carthage
 And my arms the bow
 And our words arrows
 To shoot the stars, (9-12)

In other words, masculine vigor and feminine eroticism are necessary conditions that define man. In addition, the words Williams refers to are compared to arrows so as to signify the relevant central role poetry plays in our human existence. Words are rendered carnal by making it possible to visualize the physical nature of love.

As these poems prove, Imagism found acceptance in short-lived venues that allowed them to propagate their theory and practice. Soon after the *New Freewoman* ceased to be published in December 1913, the *Egoist* [fig. 35] came into the London scene in 1914. Edited by Harriet Weaver and Dora Marsden, the magazine became the "English propagandist organ for Imagism" (Hughes 228). Thanks to the exchange of ideas with Dora Marsden, Pound also became increasingly interested in the relationship between literature and politics, which is present in several of his articles and poetry.

Influenced by the egoist philosophical ideas of Max Stirner, yet also by Friedrich Nietzsche and Maurice Barrès, the *Egoist* was essential in the consolidation of the movement. The journal was successful in producing an initial print run of 2,000 copies, but soon after it fell to 750 in 1915. Given this crisis, the highly selective *Egoist* was forced to participate of commodity advertising to attract a wider readership. Its pages were the expression "product-oriented" motifs coexisting with "product-symbols" that appeal to a Modernist audience characterized by their intelligence and refined taste. In other words, the periodical combined

phrases employed in the advertising industry and content that attracted the interests of a cultivated readership (Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism* 104-106).

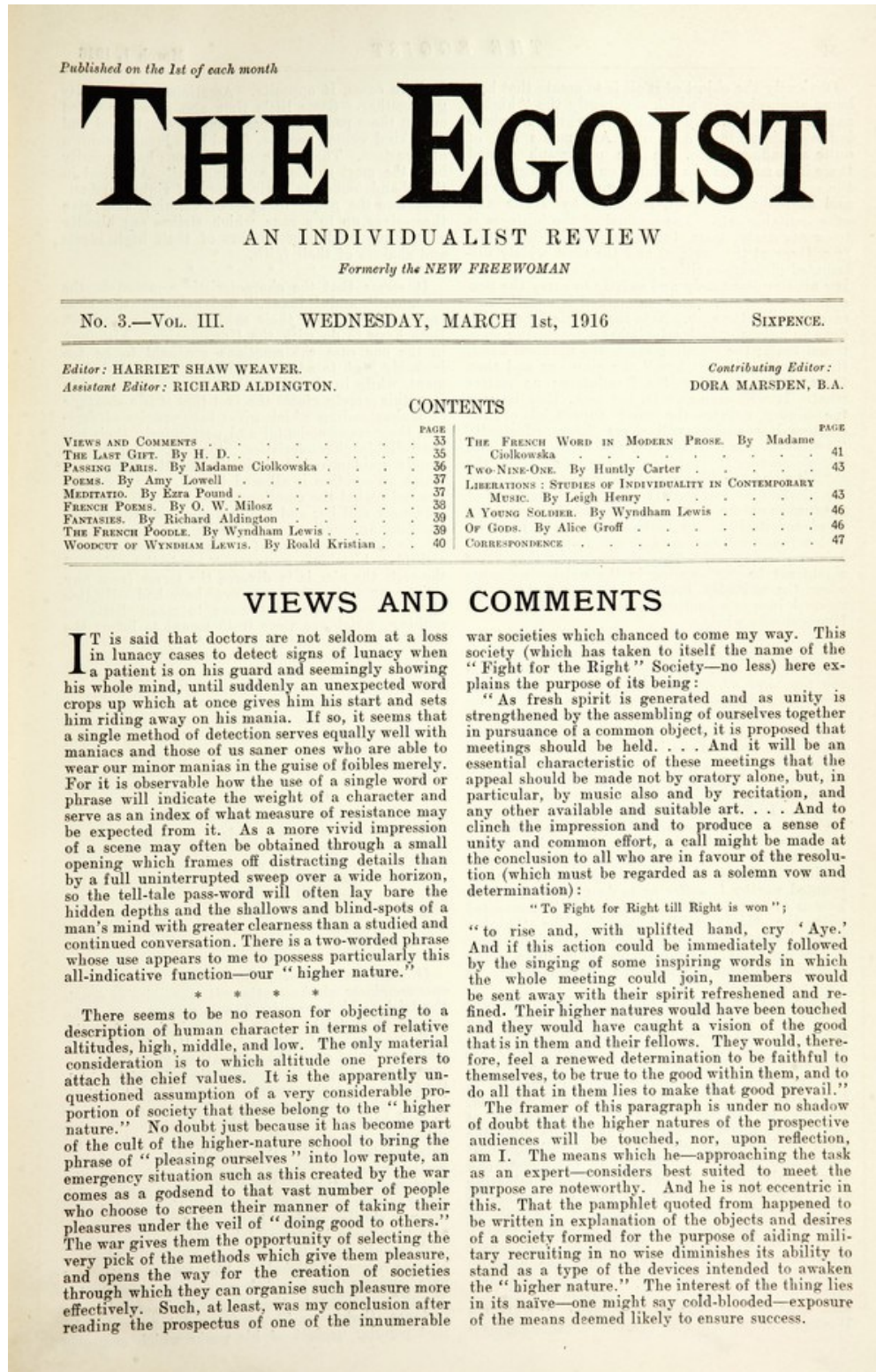


FIG. 35. *The Egoist* 1.1. (1 March 1916): 1.

An illustration of the impact of promotional culture is Allen Upward's "The Magic Carpet" [fig. 36] published in the *Egoist* on June 1, 1914.

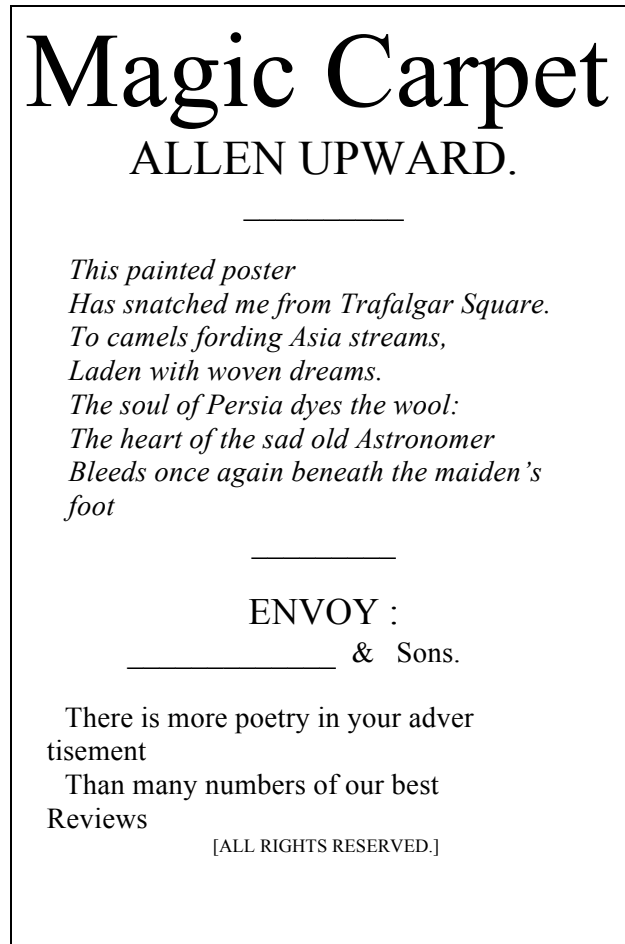


FIG. 36. Allen Upward, "The Magic Carpet," *Egoist* 1.11 (1 June 1914): 220.

This poem is incorporated in the section of advertisements, which might lead any reader to leaf through its content. Upward appeared to be captured by the poster of Trafalgar Square, which transported him to the enchantment of the Far East. The Imagist poem is thus marketed and circulated as if it were a high-value commodity that is capable of changing our superficial lifestyle, while imbuing us in a dream world.

Through the pages of the *Egoist*, Imagism began to find acceptance among the London elite, especially in January 1914, when Aldington himself took the position of

assistant editor. This allowed him to produce a special issue for Imagism on May 1, 1915. The number opened with the continuation of Marsden's "Truth and Reality," which the editor began in previous publications of the *Egoist*. This article appears to communicate the philosophical ideas of Imagism, particularly regarding the connection between truth, reality and appearance. As Marsden remarks in the third issue of the *Egoist* in 1915, appearance precedes reality, yet it does not identify with the real, but rather with the imaginary: "It is the emphasized assertion that the Imaginary IS and has a place among the things which men most urgently need equally with the "real" and the "true"" (37). In other words, just as the external world is significant to the extent that man participates of it and truth aids in the discernment of authenticity, the imaginary contributes to the opening of an area where creation takes place. This is precisely the Imagist interpretation of poetry and its concern about the relationship between the real and the perceiving subject so as to bring into being a clear image. Marsden continued her musings in the 1915 fourth issue of the *Egoist*, where she referred to the potential of the creative mind in the following terms:

The great artist would be the Mind which could achieve the synthesis of the two—imaging and realizing: such a Mind as would be able to apprehend the new vision so clearly that he could recreate and reproduce it with precision.
(53)

Her words resonate the Imagist dictum of presenting a clear image devoid of its superficial linings. Retrieving the essence of the perceived object is at the core of this poetry. For that reason, the mind is required to pervade the inner aspects of the thing in order to reach truth.

The fifth issue of the *Egoist* of 1915 published poetry and reviews of Imagism. Most significantly it featured poetic pieces by Richard Aldington, H.D., John Gould Fletcher, F.S. Flint, D.H. Lawrence, Amy Lowell, Marianne Moore and May Sinclair. If Pound celebrated the beauty of the faces "In a Station of the Metro," Aldington's poem "In the Tube" is a

rather extended and embittered response to the public method of transport and advertising culture. As Morrison claims, the voice of the poem appears to be "falling before the images of a commercial mass culture" (*The Public Face of Modernism* 99). His vision not only represents the continuous sways but also the mechanical behavior of metro users, whose hard and immobile faces look away, as if they were swallowed by the nothingness. Even when the gaze of two men crosses, their thoughts appear to coincide in the violence of the emotion: "*What right have you to live?*"

IN THE TUBE

THE electric car jerks;
I stumble on the slats of the floor,
Fall into a leather seat
And look up.

A row of advertisements,
A row of windows,
Set in brown woodwork pitted with brass nails,
A row of hard faces,
Immobile,
In the swaying train,
Rush across the nickering background of fluted dingy tunnel;
A row of eyes,
Eyes of greed, of pitiful blankness, of plethoric complacency,
Immobile,
Gaze, stare at one point,
At my eyes.

Antagonism,
Disgust,
Immediate antipathy,
Cut my brain, as a sharp dry reed

Cuts a finger.

I surprise the same thought

In the brasslike eyes:

"What right have you to live?" (74)

The poem emphasizes the sense of alienation modernity has brought with its advertisements and breakthroughs, rendering men ruthless creatures that only concerned themselves with their own survival. London is thus perceived as a jungle-image where inhabitants distance themselves from each other.

As to "Mid-Day," H.D. infuses subjectivity in the journey taken by seeds, which bears resemblance to the flow of the speaker's consciousness. In contrast to Aldington, her poem focuses on a natural scene, attaching importance to cosmic processes on Earth. H.D. conveys a sense of anxiety and confusion, just as the seeds wander with no fixed direction. As opposed to the path of the seeds, which seep through "the crevices of the rocks" and perish, the poplar rises majestically on the hill. The poem thus evokes the cycle of life and death, and the several eventualities we face on a daily basis.

MID-DAY

I

THE light beats upon me.

I am startled—

A split leaf rustles on the paved floor.

I am anguished—defeated.

A slight wind shakes the seed-pods.

My thoughts are spent as the black seeds.

My thoughts tear me.
I dread their fever.
I am scattered in its whirl.
I am scattered like the hot shrivelled seeds.

The shrivelled seeds are spilt on the path.
The grass bends with dust.
The grape slips under its crackled leaf.

II

Yet far beyond the spent fruit-pods
And the blackened stalks of mint,

The poplar is bright on the hill.
The poplar spreads out, deep rooted among trees.

O poplar, you are great among the hill stones,

While I perish on the path
Among the crevices of the rocks. (74)

Apart from Aldington and H.D., Marianne Moore also published her eulogy to Yeats and Tagore, outstanding references to modern poetry.

TO WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS ON TAGORE
IT is made clear by the phrase,
Even the mood—by virtue of which he says

The thing he thinks—that it pays,
To cut gems even in these conscience-less days;

But the jewel that always
Outshines ordinary jewels, is your praise. (77)

This poem, as well as the abovementioned pieces, emphasizes the necessity to relinquish rhetorical grandiloquence in favor of precision of the image and invention of new rhythms. For that matter, the usage of advertising techniques entrenched in mass culture were beneficial to introduce ideas and art forms other than those promoted by the state. As Morrisson remarks, "posters, fliers, advertising consultants, slogans, and the logic of the name brand" were a few of the devices utilized by the Liberal press that also made an impact on the *New Freewoman* and the *Egoist*.

The *Little Review* [fig. 37] was another magazine based in Chicago that highlighted the experimental work of American, British, Irish and French Modernists, thereby creating a fruitful transatlantic exchange between Europe and America. Founded by Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, the magazine ran from 1914 to 1929, publishing renowned works from Cubism, Dadaism and Surrealism as well as James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In fact, Heap brought European experimentalism to the forefront by familiarizing herself with essays such as Léger's "The Esthetic of the Machine" and the 1921 Parisian "Dada Manifesto." She also attended the exhibitions and lectures held by Alfred Barr at the Modern Museum of New York. His catalog "Cubism and Abstract Art" appears to have been influenced by Apollinaire's "Aesthetic Meditations," and as an avid reader and observer, Heap might have learned from these sources when spreading vanguardism in America. Thanks to her, Stein's *The Making of Americans* was partially included in the *Little Review* (Marek 93-96).

Like the *New Freewoman* and the *Egoist*, the *Little Review* engaged in variegated topics ranging from feminism to anarchism, promoting women's writing and criticism as a new form of art. The editors were particularly engaged with a project that emphasized resistance to patriarchal structures and models of thinking, and thus they put forward gender-based criticism as a means of vindicating the relevance of feminine sexuality in private and public life (Marek 68-72). As Anderson remarks in the March 1914 issue of the *Little*

Review, "criticism is never a merely interpretative function; it *is* creation. It gives birth!"

(2). In other words, criticism is an art genre that integrates creation and interpretation, poetry and philosophy. In the same vein, it encourages the artist and the audience to interact so as to exchange perspectives that enhance discussion.

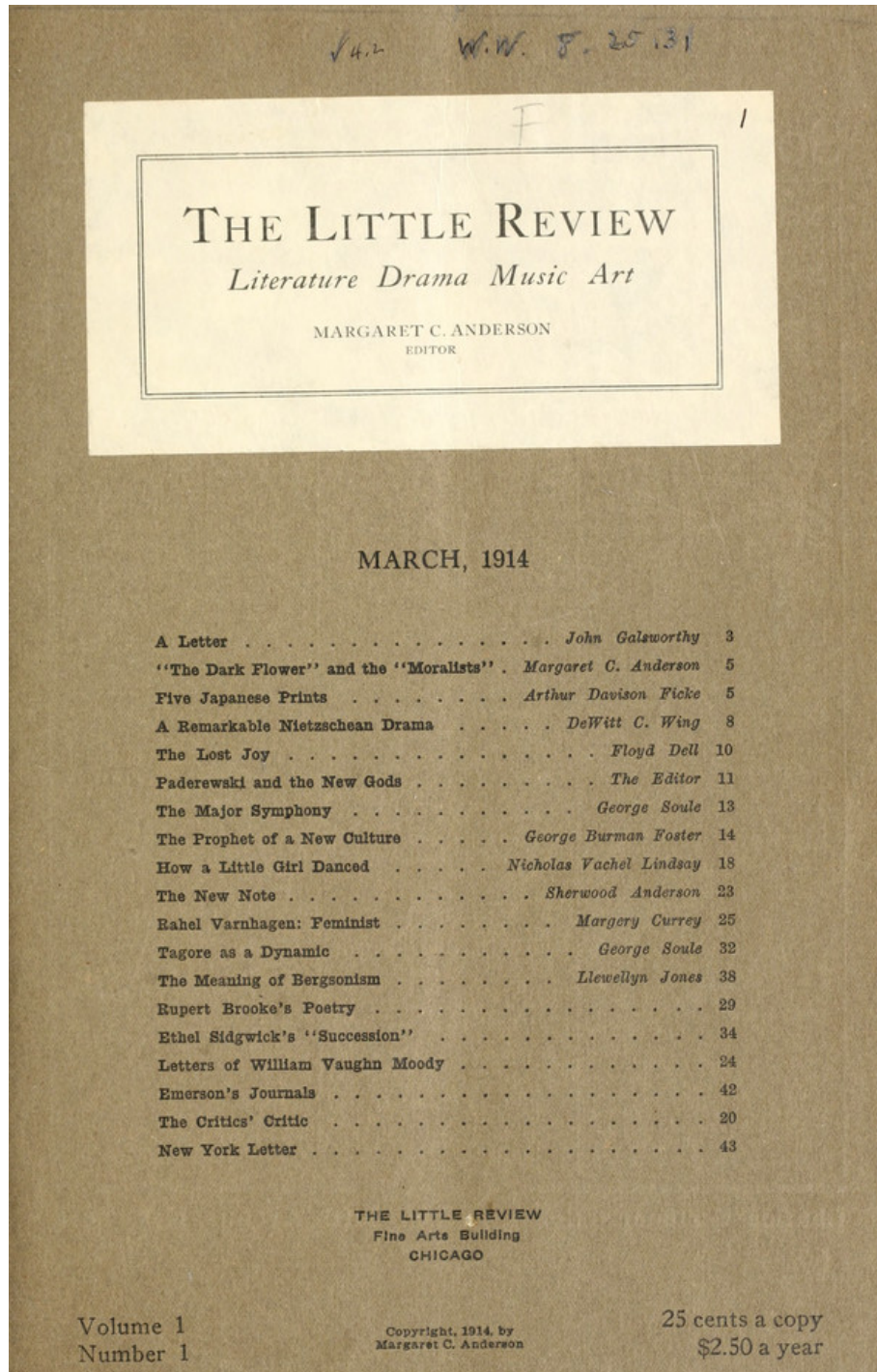


FIG. 37. *The Little Review* 1.1. (March 1914): n.p.

Sections such as "Reader Critic" embody the existing communication between editors and their readers, who provided positive or negative responses to their work (Marek 82). These were the main endeavors of the magazine, which Pound recognized and appreciated. Given his concern with the perspectives of the journal, Pound was appointed in 1917 foreign editor, which subsequently provided him the opportunity to make Imagism known in the U.S. Other topics covered in the first issues were essays on Nietzsche and literary works by Floyd Dell, Rupert Brooke and Alice Meynell.

In addition to this thematic, the *Little Review* in the "Sentence Reviews" publicized book notices that also appeared in the pages of mainstream newspapers such as the *Continent* and the *Chicago Evening Post*. The *Little Review* was also successful in promoting advertising⁵⁷ at a low cost, making room for mass-market brands such as Manson & Hamlin pianos or the "Carola Inner-Player." Commercial publications, ranging from fiction and coffee-table travel books to best-sellers were also advertised, as was the case of *Diane of the Green Van*, which won a contest and occupied an outstanding place in the *Little Review*. Margaret Anderson was astute in reducing the cover price from 25 cents to 15 cents so as to increase its circulation. She even changed the subscription cost from \$2.50 to \$1.50 per year and announced the possibility of receiving a free magazine for a three-year membership.

The seductive power of advertising was effectively utilized by young poets and essayists to vindicate their innovations as intrinsically associated with processes of modernization and modernity. According to Morrison, the *Little Review* promoted "the development of the marketing potential of adolescence and a tentatively emerging "public sphere of youth" sustained by youth forums and commercial magazines" (Morrison, *The*

⁵⁷ For a deeper analysis of the relation between the *Little Review*, mass culture and the brands publicized, see Morrison, *The Public Face of Modernism*, especially chapter four, "Youth in Public: The *Little Review* and Commercial Culture in Chicago."

Public Face of Modernism 134). The writings published in the *Little Review* advocated the vigor of youth as opposed to the old, and Margaret Anderson marketed this idea by resorting to the typography and topics encountered in commercial advertising. Many were attracted to young generations and their attitudes towards sociocultural issues and traditional institutions. This can be noticed in "Renaissance of Parenthood," written by Margaret Anderson, and Arthur's Ficke response to two poems published by a sixteen-year-old boy (Morrison, *The Public Face of Modernism* 151-153).

Nietzschian ideas were also at the core of such revolutionary language. In the March issue of 1914, George Burman Foster wrote "The Prophet of New Culture," which summarized the Nietzschean position against what he considered the malady of Christianity. In the following issue, Foster's article titled "Man and Superman" continues outlining the ethical concerns of Nietzsche's postulations on the role of man and his dehumanization on the grounds of technological overuse. Against the plights of time, man needs to assert himself by committing to a willpower that refuses societal compulsions and obligations, which sometimes is analogous to the adolescent attitudes towards life. For this reason, humankind is to search for the superman, that is, "the man who overcomes the man of today weary (sic) of life and athirst (sic) for death" (6-7). This new creature, as Foster puts it in his following article of the *Little Review*, is committed to return art to life. What modernity has brought with itself is a dissociation between aesthetics and the world we inhabit, when in fact, they should be indistinguishable:

[a]rt was the very life of man, revealing his strength, his freedom, his creativeness, with which he fashioned things after his own image and according to his own likeness. Man put his soul into all that he said and did, all that he lived, his work was a work of art, his speech a song, his life beauty. (*Little Review* 21)

Man ceased to infuse art with life, thereby using it for the purpose of eking out a living. This is precisely what Foster severely criticizes by virtue of Nietzsche's vocabulary. Art needs to tend to aestheticize life, whereas the duty of aesthetics is to become animated. The role of the youth is thus to transform their energy into a type of art that revolutionizes society.

Owing to the necessity to renovate the artistic scene, it is not strange that Imagism fitted in the pages of the *Little Review*. The editors were especially sympathetic to the efforts made by Amy Lowell to keep the movement alive, and therefore they assisted her in the best possible terms. In the August issue of 1915, Margaret Anderson expressed the quirks of Imagism in the following words:

You may say it has been the aim of all composers and poets to put nature into poetry, but the Imagists *have done it*: their medium is not only a more direct one: the point is that they seem to have dispensed with a medium. Their words don't merely convey color to you; they *are* the color. The new musician can do this—and I believe he can do it on the piano better than on any other instrument. ("The Piano and Imagism" 9)

Imagism enlivened poetry by disposing of a medium and becoming reality itself. As Anderson remarks, their words do not express chromatic hues or sound patterns, but rather they are the essence of rhythm and color. The Imagists were in constant search of beauty in the world, and they made use of words to convey a sense of wonder experienced before a natural phenomenon. Given the interest aroused by this movement, a series of poems were published in several issues of the *Little Review*.

F. S. Flint's poem "The Swan" is one of the first poetic pieces that successfully applied the usage of color and rhythmic patterns in Imagism, a movement widely publicized in the *Little Review* given its connection with the cult of youth. Published in July of 1914, Flint's poem utilizes the old symbol of the swan to link his personal state of mind with the bird's agonistic chant, which might also be indicative of the passing of an old generation in

favor of a new one, as illustrated by the contents of the *Little Review*. This is even more noticeable if we attend to the fact that in Western tradition the swan sings, when it takes its last breath. In the same vein, Flint might select this motif to shy away from urban lifestyles and the superficiality of commercial culture that conceal the beauty encountered in Nature.

"The Swan"

Under the lily shadow
 and the gold
 and the blue and mauve
 that the whin and the lilac
 pour down on the water,
 the fishes quiver.
 Over the green cold leaves
 and the rippled silver
 and the tarnished copper
 of its neck and beak,
 toward the deep black water
 beneath the arches,
 the swan floats slowly.

Into the dark of the arch the swan floats
 and into the black depth of my sorrow
 it bears a white rose of flame. (14)

If in Cézanne or Corot's paintings mood is conveyed by the gamut of tones, in Flint's poems it is the setting that causes a variety of emotions. In "The Swan," for example, the essence of the landscape is attained by way of chromatic images and light patterns that allow for the visualization of the poet's mood. The word, the equivalent of the patches or *taches* of the surface of the canvas, opens up a poetic field of visual and tangible sensations. In that sense, the scene of the pond is depicted by way of dim color shades—blue, mauve, silver, black—that charge the poem with melancholy and a nostalgic mood. In the last stanza, the emotion is

juxtaposed onto the figurative expression of the "white rose of flame," and creates an effect of decadence and despair. The metaphor in Imagist poetry is the vehicle for the lyrical subject's feelings and also conveys a visual experience by virtue of associative language. As Richard Aldington states in his article entitled "The Poetry of F.S. Flint" from the fifth issue of the *Egoist* of May 1915:

[...] there is an escape from artificiality and sentimentality in poetry, and that is by rendering the moods, the emotions, the impressions of a single, sensitized personality confronted by the phenomena of modern life, and by expressing these moods accurately, in concrete, precise, racy language. The aeroplane is less romantic, and after the first glance, less interesting than an olive-tree; aeroplanes and olive-trees are, to a Londoner, about equally exotic. The real poet's material lies in between these extremes. (80)

As Aldington calls to mind, Flint's poetic prowess lies in revealing the mood of the self in response to the phenomena of modernity. The objectivity and concreteness the Imagists claimed for did not hinge upon the presentation of an external episode in an instant of time, but rather the significance such an event possessed for the viewer. This poetry stands for the interaction of the subject with the surrounding world, which enables one to gain insight into further knowledge about the relationship between human emotions and outside reality. Flint is thus engaged in the quest for truth by exploring the beauty of a phenomenon. His objective was to write a poem that vindicated the Imagist ideas circulated in the *Little Review* and he did so by transforming the long-lasting motif of the swan into a novel creation without paragon regarding the past.

If Flint's poem succeeded in merging the melancholy of the speaker with the decadent motif of the swan, Amy Lowell invests the poetic scene with sexually charged language. This is noticeable in "Clear, With Light Variable Winds," a poem published in the September

1914 issues of the *Little Review* that can be easily associated with the agency and subjectivity of women the editor commercialized in the magazine.

"Clear, With Light Variable Winds"

The fountain bent and straightened itself

In the night wind,

Blowing like a flower.

It gleamed and glittered,

A tall white lily,

Under the eye of the golden moon.

From a stone seat,

Beneath a blossoming lime,

The man watched it.

And the spray pattered

On the dim grass at his feet.

The fountain tossed its water,

Up and up, like silver marbles.

Is that an arm he sees?

And for one moment

Does he catch the moving curve

Of a thigh?

The fountain gurgled and splashed,

And the man's face was wet.

Is it singing that he hears?

A song of playing at ball?

The moonlight shines on the straight column of water,

And through it he sees a woman,

Tossing the water-balls.

Her breasts point outwards,

And the nipples are like buds of peonies.

Her flanks ripple as she plays,

And the water is not more undulating
Than the lines of her body.

"Come," she sings, "Poet!
Am I not worth more than your day ladies,
Covered with awkward stuffs,
Unreal, unbeautiful?
What do you fear in taking me?
Is not the night for poets?
I am your dream,
Recurrent as water,
Gemmed with the moon!"
She steps to the edge of the pool
And the water runs, rustling, down her sides.
She stretches out her arms,
And the fountain streams behind her
Like an opened veil.

In the morning the gardeners came to their work.
"There is something in the fountain," said one.
They shuddered as they laid their dead master
On the grass.
"I will close his eyes," said the head gardener,
"It is uncanny to see a dead man staring at the sun." (20-21)

In this poem Lowell might be recreating the mythological figure of the Naiad, a water nymph commonly inhabiting fountains, wells and springs. By rescuing the Naiad, the gap between Antiquity and the modern era has been filled. Along these lines the reader is reconnected with the sense of wonder lost on account of the excess of pragmatism and rationality that the twentieth century brought with itself. Both the setting of the action and the characters of the poem exchange forces, that is, the landscape acquires human emotions while the individuals

are invested with the mystery of the night. Lowell takes advantage of elegant yet salacious language to speak of the sexual encounter between the presumed Naiad and the poet:

Her breasts point outwards,
And the nipples are like buds of peonies.
Her flanks ripple as she plays. (25-27)

Lowell's daring words were extremely unusual in the aftermath of Victorian times. Imagism thus took a turn toward the exploration of feminine sexuality seen through the lens of women. This poem illustrates an overpowering energy embodied in the figure of the Naiad, which contrasts with the passivity of the poet paralyzed before her beauty. Of particular importance are the lines pronounced by the nymph, as they might be a critique to superfluous models of beauty:

"Come," she sings, "Poet!
Am I not worth more than your day ladies,
Covered with awkward stuffs,
Unreal, unbeautiful?
What do you fear in taking me?
Is not the night for poets?
I am your dream,
Recurrent as water,
Gemmed with the moon!" (30-38)

Instead, this passage argues for an authentic and quintessential beauty devoid of all type of adornments that prevent beholding a clear image. With her words and exoticism, the Naiad allures the man, who falls prey of her charm. Lowell has effectively subverted gender roles, conferring agency on the goddess and a submissive position on the man, who eventually drowns in the fountain, in all likelihood, under the spell of the nymph. In so doing, the abovementioned lines responded to the progressive ideas of feminism circulated in the journal. This piece was exceptionally aggressive in an era dominated by decorum and

melliflousness. It also entails an alert to the dangers of the deadly potential of sexual drives as well as the impossibility of resisting the temptation of satisfying desire.

In the December 1914 issue of the *Little Review*, Aldington, like Lowell before, also published a daring poem where he showed his skepticism about deep-rooted beliefs in Christianity. These claims were inflammatory in the twentieth-century British artistic panorama, as Victorian values and morals dictated patterns of behavior. The poem coincided with Nietzsche's remonstrance against Judeochristian tradition, and that might have been the reason why it was publicized in the *Little Review*.

"Church Walk, Kensington"

(Sunday Morning)

The cripples are going to church.
Their crutches beat upon the stones,
And they have clumsy iron boots.

Their clothes are black, their faces peaked and mean;
Their legs are withered
Like dried bean-pods.

Their eyes are as stupid as frogs.'

And the god, September,
Has paused for a moment here
Garlanded with crimson leaves.
He held a branch of fruited oak.
He smiled like Hermes the beautiful
Cut in marble. (2)

The poem establishes a parallel between what Aldington might consider to be the emptiness of Christian values and the lavishness of the cult to Hermes in the splendor of September. The speaker appears to ridicule while pitying church-goers' fervent faith in God's miracles

and salvation. Towards the end of the poem, Aldington emphasizes the unavoidable and true force of the cycle of Nature embodied in the god Hermes as opposed to the decadent values of Christian orthodoxy.

In addition to the above-mentioned poets, the April 1915 issue of the *Little Review* included three poems by Skipwith Cannell under the common title of "Wild Songs." Although the Imagists were not prone to express intense emotions, Cannell manifested pungent passions in his poetry. "In the Forest" is an illustration of the ravaged state of mind of the individual in the face of uncertainty. A shriek invades the forest, where the gods of Nature stand in awe. The poet thus conveys a sense of fear before a presence that escapes human understanding and is able to tear one apart. This content might express the sublimity of Nature against man's attempt to subdue it. Despite the fact that the Imagists promoted the beauty of the urban world on the pages of the *Little Review*, they also committed themselves to visualizing Nature's force at its utmost against man's domination. Cannell was successful in showing this struggle.

IN THE FOREST

I am not alone, for there are eyes
Stealthy and curious,
And they turn to me.
I will shout loudly to the forest,
I will shout and with a sob
Gripping my throat I will cower
Quickly
Beneath my cloak.

For the old gods stand silently
Behind the silent trees,
And when I shout they step forth
And I dare not

Look upon their faces. (6)

The Imagist poems of Flint, Lowell, Aldington and Cannell published in the *Little Review* illustrate several concerns that were at stake in the twentieth century, thereby creating a type of print culture that affected the modernization of poetry. The topics commercialized for their audience deal with the reversal of gender roles, the staunch criticism against the Church and the consideration of the unconscious as the psychic force that is liable to renewing the state of the arts.

On the whole, the journals that published Imagist poems and manifestoes paved the way for a deeper reflection on the future of the arts and letters. They were the vehicles that promoted transatlantic exchanges between the U.S. and Europe, building bridges that set in the main international tendencies. Magazines such as the *New Age*, *Poetry*, the *Freewoman*, the *New Freewoman* and the *Little Review* opened up a fruitful space to question the status quo and consider the possibilities of art to effect necessary changes in society and thinking. In such network of fruitful relationships Imagism opposed mass culture while taking advantage of the means provided by advertising industry to publicize its principles, especially regarding strategies that favor conciseness and clarity. Editors were in need of a readership that purchased their product so that they could continue disseminating their ideas, and they found an ally in the techniques utilized by mass market. That is why small magazines obtained economic benefits from publishing all kinds of advertisements. In exchange for that, the main literary and philosophical questions of the early twentieth century could be circulated, and Imagism was no exception. In addition, the readership of this press felt to be part of cultural prestige. Alternatively, collaborators hoped to be included in the pages of these periodicals given their association with high standards. Magazines succeeded in developing the meaning of a sociocultural phenomenology where the low spheres of advertising and publicity coincided with higher disciplines as were poetry, philosophy and

criticism. Therefore, contamination between both disciplines was inevitable and gave rise to processes of hybridization.

2.2.2. Imagist Anthologies: Hellenism, Orientalism and Modern Culture

Des Imagistes was the first anthology edited by Pound in the February 1914 issue of the *Glebe*. One month later, in March 1914, it was published as a book in New York and in April it came out in London. In total, three Imagist anthologies were distributed in America and England, the first selling 2,099 copies, the second 1,612 copies and the last one 1,028 copies (Fletcher 190-91). The main poets of *Des Imagistes* [fig. 38] were Richard Aldington, H.D., F.S. Flint and Ezra Pound, but Skipwith Cannell, John Cournos, Ford Hermann Hueffer, James Joyce and Allen Upward also appeared in its pages to give further scope to the movement. Influenced by the French Symbolists, the Imagists distrusted language, but rather than aiming at its destruction, their intention was to purify it of any rhetorical artifice. According to Cage, "the symbolists sought not only a transcendence of language, but a transcendence of nature as well" (26). In that sense, the word seen as an object helped them to reach that effect. According to Pound, Imagism is a movement full of dynamism and energy and is not content with imitating reality, but with establishing a new relation between the object and the image. This aesthetics reduces poetry to its ultimate essence by cultivating the direct treatment of the object, relinquishing any word which does not contribute to its presentation, and advocating the internal musical sequence of the phrase. Although Imagism was characterized by its reliance on briefness and clarity, it was precisely those pieces written in polyphonic prose that were more acclaimed, and thus poems such as D. H. Lawrence's "A Woman and Her Dead Husband" received the positive critiques of Harriett Monroe ("Some Imagists" 151).

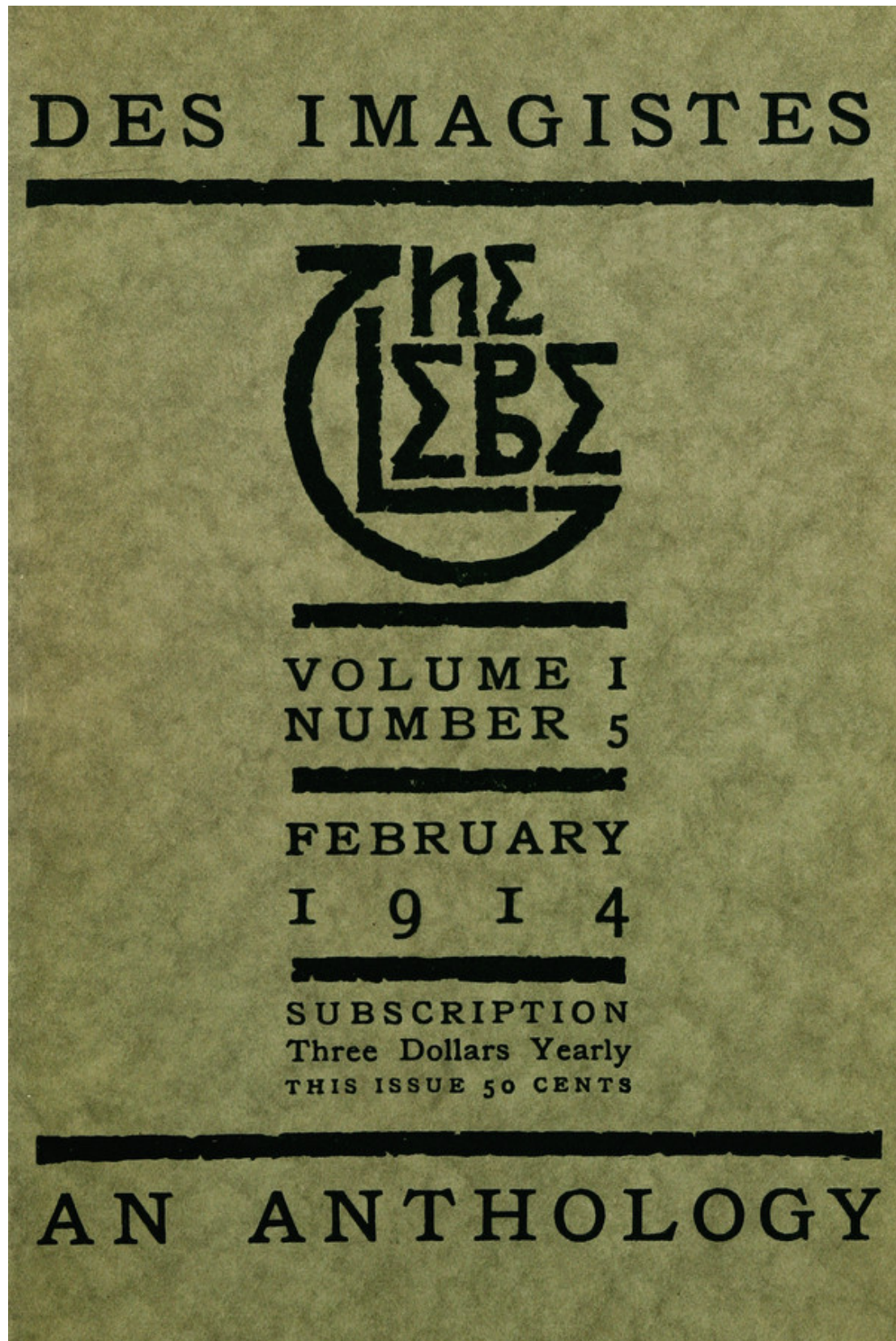


FIG. 38. *Des Imagistes: An Anthology* 1.5 (Februar 1914).

Later on, due to Amy Lowell's control over Imagism, there were some backlashes, such as those of Ezra Pound, who distanced himself from the movement, when he could see that Lowell had transformed Imagism into a movement that responded to commercial promotion. To this extent, Lowell, Aldington and H.D. produced *Some Imagist Poets*, which was released in the years 1915, 1916 and 1917. The first of the series was in charge of Amy Lowell, who was called the "foremost member of the 'Imagist,'" when her *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* came out in October 1914 (Coffman 26). As Pound believed she had misappropriated the term, he forbid Lowell to use the title "Imagistes" for her anthology. Instead, the title adopted an anglicized version that dropped the final "e." The Imagists saw this new stage as a more democratic version of Imagism against Pound's poetic project, which earned him the label of "generalissimo" Flint used to refer to his persona (Copp 61). In turn, Pound referred to Imagism as Amygism, given the central role Lowell adopted. However, this claim was not completely true, as Aldington contributed the preface to the 1915 anthology and H.D. was in charge of most of the editing process of 1915 and 1916. In this last year John Gould Fletcher and D.H. Lawrence were included into this second collection of poems. In order to counter the visibility of these Imagist anthologies, Pound wrote the *Catholic Anthology* in 1915, which made room for Pound's "Contemporania" and Eliot's "Pruffrock." The final anthology, titled *Imagist Anthology*, was published in 1930 to reminiscence the movement.

In these collections, the Imagists returned to Hellenic tradition to hint at the ideal of immutable beauty in their poetry, and they found their referent in the fixed model of the visual arts. This idea bears resemblance to Ortega y Gasset postulations in *La deshumanización del arte* (1925), where he theorizes on the modern point of view and its lack of similarity with reality. By tracing back past models, they defined a phenomenology of antiquity that returned to the origins of aesthetic expression in the quest for originality, to use

Poggioli's terminology. H.D. and Richard Aldington are representative illustrations of these Classical overtones in connection with painterly tendencies such as French Orphism. In Greek mythology, Orpheus was a musician that calmed all creatures on Earth with the sound of his lyre. He is known for descending to the underworld to rescue his wife Eurydice, after she died from viper bite. Yet, the condition that both Hades and Persephone imposed upon him was that he could not look back until he reached the upper world. His connection with both realms is what might have attracted the Delaunays to Orphism, especially regarding the fragmentation and superimposition of planes (Hughes 63). In poetry, Apollinaire's *Bestiaire ou cortège d'Orphée* (The Book of Beasts or Procession of Orpheus, 1911) shows the interaction of the arts and two epochs, which is also noticeable in H.D. and Aldington's attempts to bridge the gap between Classical antiquity and modernity.

This is noticeable in "Bromios," a poem by Aldington that recreates the ravaging force of the god Dionysus every time he makes appearance.

BROMIOS

The withered bonds are broken.
 The waxed reeds and the double pipe
 Clamour about me;
 The hot wind swirls
 Through the red pine trunks.

Io! the fauns and the satyrs.
 The touch of their shagged curled fur
 And blunt horns!

They have wine in heavy craters
 Painted black and red;
 Wine to splash on her white body.
 Io!

She shrinks from the cold shower—
 Afraid, afraid!

Let the Maenads break through the myrtles
 And the boughs of the rohododaphnai.
 Let them tear the quick deers' flesh.
 Ah, the cruel, exquisite fingers!

Io!
 I have brought you the brown clusters,
 The ivy-boughs and pine-cones.

Your breasts are cold sea-ripples,
 But they smell of the warm grasses.
 Throw wide the chiton and the peplum,
 Maidens of the Dew.
 Beautiful are your bodies, O Maenads,
 Beautiful the sudden folds,
 The vanishing curves of the white linen
 About you.

Io!
 Hear the rich laughter of the forest,
 The cymbals,
 The trampling of the panisks and the centaurs. (17-18)

The first stanza offers an image of Nature preparing to welcome the God Dionysus, also known as Bromios, that is, the noisy, roaring, boisterous. Next, fauns, satyrs, Maenads, panisks and centaurs come into scene to celebrate the arrival of Dionysus with the excess and abundance that always surrounds the god. In order to transport us to the cult of Bromios, Aldington utilizes archaic words associated with Classical mythology, namely, garment such as chiton or peplum, or terms stemming from Greek, as one can see in rohododaphnai, a plant

from the myrtle family associated with Greek environment. On the whole, the poem strives to revive a past that sets a precedent for the renewal of British poetry.

In "Sitalkas" H.D. also returns to Greek past to rescue the myth of Apollo Sitalkas, an epithet linked to the harvest. This poem describes the arrival of fall, evoked by Argestes, a wind coming from the North West, and the leaves scattered on Lycia's coast. H.D. might refer to life and death processes that characterize the cycle of life.

SITALKAS

Thou art come at length
 More beautiful
 Than any cool god
 In a chamber under Lycia's far coast,
 Than any high god
 Who touches us not
 Here in the seeded grass.
 Aye, than Argestes
 Scattering the broken leaves. (20)

What is remarkable of this piece is the usage of ancient vocabulary, as it aids in the phenomenological recreation of the Greek scenery while suggesting that the renewal of seasonal cycles is shared both by modernity and antiquity. In other words, the only possible permanence in the world is the mutability of Nature.

If the Hellenic tradition was significant to Aldington and H.D., Pound returned to past Eastern cultures such as Japan and China so as to investigate how the visual character of Chinese writing could lead to develop his notion of a clear and striking image. In 1913 Pound received the manuscripts of the Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa,⁵⁸ which helped him formulate

⁵⁸ For a further view of the relationship between Pound and Fenollosa, see Nolde's *Blossoms from the East: The China Cantos of Ezra Pound*.

the principles of his ideogrammatic method. The calligraphic Chinese writing structures the new epic by juxtaposing a conceptual unity over a series of diverse concrete elements that define an abstract concept. Pound, Williams, Stevens, H.D., Moore and E.E. Cummings encounter in Oriental poetry a model to cultivate intensity, precision, visual clarity and the relation between poetry and painting. Pound looked over the years into Eastern art, focusing on the study of Noh drama and haiku as compositions that involved commonplace situations to convey mood. In his view, the poet was to adopt the role of a scientist and avoid any sense of didacticism to arrive at an epiphanic content by way of "a sudden striking visual image" (Pratt, *Imagist Poetry Imagist* 38). This appeal to eye-oriented perception lays the foundations of early twentieth-century poetics. Pound's "Fan-piece, for her Imperial Lord" enacts this concrete poetry by charging the fan with emotional properties that point to the act of courtship in the Chinese world. This poem is a translation of Lady Ban's "Song of Regret." Lady Ban was a concubine of Emperor Chen of the Han, who eventually abandoned her only to correspond another mistress (Qian *Orientalism and Modernism* 45). In despair Lady wrote her song, which Pound adapted as follows:

O fan of white silk,
clear as frost on the grass-blade
You also are laid aside. (45)

The fan, as well as the person holding it, seems to be laid aside, and the allusion to the whiteness of the frost and the silk is symptomatic of this melancholy and, maybe, sense of mourning due to abandonment and solitariness.

Another poem that shows a return to an Eastern past is Allen Upward's "The Gold Fish," from "Scented Leaves from a Chinese Jar." Although the rest of the poetic series appears to be prose rather than verse, this piece is a clear illustration of free verse. Upward

appears to compare the passion of love to concrete images—golden fins, flames, lighting—that emulate the intensity of the emotion.

THE GOLD FISH

Like a breath from hoarded musk,
 Like the golden fins that move
 Where the tank's green shadows part—
 Living flames out of the dusk—
 Are the lightning throbs of love
 In the passionate lover's heart.

Pound and Upward believe in the power of Eastern imagery to transfer a concrete mood to the poem, and thus they create visual picture that appeals to the mind to create a sense of bewilderment. This unexpected effect is also prone to be experienced in poems that deal with the modern landscape. F.S. Flint is representative of this trend, especially in pieces such as "London."

LONDON, my beautiful,
 it is not the sunset
 nor the pale green sky
 shimmering through the curtain
 of the silver birch,
 nor the quietness;
 it is not the hopping
 of birds
 upon the lawn,
 nor the darkness
 stealing over all things
 that moves me.

But as the moon creeps slowly

over the tree-tops
among the stars,
I think of her
and the glow her passing
sheds on men.

London, my beautiful,
I will climb
into the branches
to the moonlit tree-tops,
that my blood may be cooled
by the wind. (31)

This piece is successful in conveying the transference of mood from the individual to the city and vice versa. It appears that the speaker is not impressed by the elements that London offers to the passerby. Instead, he is captivated the moonrise, which might coincide with a romantic encounter between two lovers that meet at night. At this juncture the moon takes on the persona of a feminine figure that looks forward to meeting her beloved in the still of the night. Flint effectively displays the transference of the subject's state of mind to the London urban center, thereby showing the identification of the individual with the environment.

This is also noticeable in Cournos's "The Rose," which identifies the rose with a lived experience preserved by memory in random fragments. The speaker evokes a past moment of a day at Nice seashore, where he beheld the waves of the sea dragging pearls, emeralds and opals "with a monotonous rhythmical sound" (6). Other elements such as the sun, the seagulls and ships help recollect the atmosphere of such a day. Towards the end of the poem, the speaker reaches the conclusion that, once the rose is thrown into the sea, only scattered petals remain, not the definite figure of the rose. This is akin to the fact that human

consciousness merely grasps the past in random fragments that will never form a whole picture.

I remember a day when I stood on the sea shore at
Nice, holding a scarlet rose in my hands.

The calm sea, caressed by the sun, was brightly garmented in blue,
veiled in gold, and violet, verging on silver.

Gently the waves lapped the shore, and scattering into pearls, emeralds
and opals, hastened towards my feet with a monotonous, rhythmical sound,
like the prolonged note of a single harp-string.

High in the clear, blue-golden sky hung the great, burning disc of the
sun.

White seagulls hovered above the waves, now barely touching them
with their snow-white breasts, now rising anew into the heights, like
butterflies over the green meadows . . .

Far in the east, a ship, trailing its smoke, glided slowly from sight as
though it had foundered in the waste.

I threw the rose into the sea, and watched it, caught in the wave,
receding, red on the snow-white foam, paler on the emerald wave.

And the sea continued to return it to me, again and again, at last no
longer a flower, but strewn petals on restless water.

So with the heart, and with all proud things. In the end nothing remains
but a handful of petals of what was once a proud flower... (54)

The poems of the anthology are a clear expression of the identification of the individual with the outside world. The Imagists are convinced that in order to reach knowledge, we need to make use of our perception as the primary source of awareness. Their attraction to Eastern tradition and the Classical Antiquity resulted in a poetry based on a phenomenological experience based on the paradigm of the clear image, particularly regarding the visual effects of Chinese calligraphy and Greek writing. Precisely, H.D. and Pound succeeded in mimicking the briefness of epigrams and Japanese haikus as well as their tendency to render

emotions physical by appealing to specific elements of Nature or daily life. Despite the aesthetic principles shared by all the poets included in the first anthology, the Imagists ended up taking divergent positions that resulted in the eventual disappearance of the movement. Nevertheless, it opened new avenues for the development of poetry in England that would also reach the American artistic panorama.

2.3. E.E. Cummings and Imagism: The Phenomenon of the Visual Poem

E.E. Cummings's poetry was affected by variegated styles ranging from avant-garde aesthetics to sonnets and romantic motifs of love and nature. Although he was not an active member of Imagism or Cubism, he fell under its spell. Critics such as Bertha W. Clark also stood out Marinetti's impact on Cummings, particularly regarding the absence of connectives and the significance of verbs and words charged with action as a means of "expressing the true rhythm and tempo of our times" (Dendinger 80). In artistic terms, Cummings's poetic pieces bear resemblance to Futurist picture-poems in that they attach importance to the visual appearance of words and their layout on the page. Apart from Futurism, other European avant-garde movements affected his aesthetic expression. The Armory Show played an important role in introducing paintings from Cubism, Dadaism and Expressionism, which Cummings had the opportunity to see and learn from. On another note, as a painter he also traveled on numerous occasions to Paris, where he had the opportunity to meet Pablo Picasso and familiarize himself with multiperspectival strategies of Cubism and Gleizes's work. These pictorial experiments allowed Cummings to manipulate syntax as a means of innovating sentence structure and free verse. At the same time, painting was the perfect medium that reified intellectual abstractions and attended the particular sensations undergone by the self (Haines IV 30). This relationship with the visual genre helped the poet articulate

his own phenomenological imagery, which lies in the way words are experienced on the page and the reactions their sound and visual patterns elicit in readers.

On a first level, Cummings's poetry bears resemblance to the meaninglessness, the free play and the absurdity exhibited by the Dadaists. S. V. Baum notices the following effects in the work of Cummings that speak of confusion:

Each printed page discloses such violation of order that the reader is shocked: words are stretched out vertically and horizontally; capital letters jump up where they do not belong; punctuation marks intrude irregularly; lacunae appear within and between lines. Because order has been violated, it is concluded that meaning, in its dependent variable, has been destroyed at the same time. And a poem without meaning is nonsense. (104)

However, a deeper level prevails so as to reach plenitude outside conceptual conventions. Barbara Watson remarks that "he substitutes an insistence on a seemingly chaotic surface in order to indicate a stability so profound and inner that it needs no artificial" (42). That is, freedom and order are part and parcel of the processes of the world, but they take place spontaneously and thus they are outside man's control. This is one of the reasons why his poems are difficult to understand unless they are read aloud, thereby relying on the voice to attain full meaning. Regarding typography and presentation, they aid in adding content to the signified. In this sense, the formal aspects of his pieces are vital to the extent that they fill in the gap between words and images, creating a poem-painting that integrates perceptual experience to decode meaning.

This usage of linguistic and optical elements of art devises the phenomenological constituency of reality, which Friedman divides into "the true world" and "the ordinary world." The former is the realm of awareness, "depths, truths and verbs," whereas the latter belongs to "surfaces, facts and nouns" (47-48). The true world is counterpart with movement, change and those circular processes embodied in nature. By contrast, the artificial world

represents the static, artificial and logical.⁵⁹ That is why Cummings takes advantage of variegated topics ranging from the Transcendental tradition of Emerson and Thoreau to commonplace matters of modernity. It is frequent to notice references to vital processes, romantic love, war and satires. Likewise, Webster Schott has paid heed to elements of early twentieth-century, namely, "advertising slogans, slang, and parodies of clichés and platitudes that pop up in his poems" (Dendinger 307). All this thematic fits well within the philosophical dimension of the two realms as well as the format and style that the poet applied in his works.

As a poet and painter, E.E. Cummings accomplished notoriety in reproducing the visual aspect of art and the resonance of the poetic word, which ties in with the outward appearance of the ordinary world and the depth of true world. He simultaneously applied romantic sentimentality and the experimental typography of the time to arrive at the intensity of feeling. As William Carlos Williams puts it:

He wanted to see, see, see! And the words speak of what he saw... and felt.
For it must not be forgot that we smell, hear and see with words and words
alone, and that with a new language we smell, hear and see afresh—by this we
can well understand cummings' early excitement at his ease. (102)

For Williams meaning was secondary to the sensations offered by our eyesight and the true word is to arrive at the essence of that observation with an authentic attitude. In this concrete poetry, the visual effects interact with syntax, spelling and punctuation in order to enact aliveness, movement, individuality as well as to deride collective homogeneity. According to Webster, Cummings "manipulates spatial, visual and syntactical elements of language as

⁵⁹ For a further view on the difference between the two worlds conceived by E.E. Cummings in his poetics, see the first section of Friedman's essay "The Meaning of Cummings" in *E.E. Cummings* edited by Friedman, 46-52.

material, creating physical effects on the page. These effects iconically reinforce meaning and emotion" (120).

SNOW uses scattered commas, periods, and semicolons that imitate the appearance of the snowfall. The reader is thus forced to reconstitute the poem to make meaning out of it. Words imitate the form of snowflakes, which gradually disintegrate up to the point of disappearing. Similarly, their texture is suggested by writing "s ofC," which might signify soft. Cummings uses verbs whose spelling can only be hinted at to reproduce the idea of motion. Examples such as "crusing," "descend," "come," "go" are segmented and intertwined by syllables and punctuation symbols that hinder comprehension. Nouns, on the other hand, fix an image and contribute to the form of the poem.

SNOW
 cru
 is
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 lydesc
 BYS FLUTTERFULLY IF
 (endbegi ndesignb ecend)tang
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 ofC omego
 CRINGE WITHS
 lilt(
 -ing-
 lyful
 of)!
 (s

r
 BIRDS BECAUSE AGAIN S
 emarkable
 s)h?
 y&a
 (from n
 o(into whe)re f
 ind)
 nd
 ArE
 GLIB SCARCELYEST AMONGS FLOWERING (Kennedy 23)

This poem appears to be animated given the protean ability of words and punctuation marks, as well as its emotional overtones. The reader is therefore thrust to effect an exercise of translation based on the feeling of that dislocated language. According to Marianne Moore:

For E.E. Cummings, the parts of speech are living creatures that alter and grow. Disliking "all dull nouns," he concocts new ones that are phenomena of courage and mobility. (Dendinger 232)

On another note, the visual signs that he uses on the page are the parenthesis, which reproduces the idea of having a digression or afterthought. According to S.V. Baum: "In order to catch the effect of "all-at-oneness," Cummings inserts some part of the experience within the boundaries of parentheses and so suggests the simultaneousness of imagery" (112). Along these lines, the rest of the scattered punctuation describes the movement of the flakes. Cummings also appears to refer to butterflies and birds that flutter while snowflakes descend. This might be an allusion to the renewal of the cycle of Nature, beginning in the winter and evolving to spring or summer. In this poem, the voice of the individual poet is relinquished in favor of verbal, vocal, and visual signifiers that the reader is to decode by

engaging in a play of sign and icon and here lies the complexity of Cummings' puns and cryptic writing.

This concrete poem intends to preserve the text as an autonomous entity, but at the same time, it opens new paths of reading that do not follow sequential order. According to Robert E. Maurer, Cummings took the frank attitude of a child to form an unusual language and defied the misconceptions of adults ("E.E. Cummings' Him" 83). This piece is illustrative of this linguistic turn, as it furthers the coinage of words, while privileging the verticality of writing by emulating the movement of snowflakes in their descent. At the same time, the change of typeset serves to emphasize a message that turns out to be clearer than those words dissected by punctuation signs. All in all, this concrete poem refers to aspects from the outside world that evokes the Imagist tendency to involve the subjectivity of the self and an external reality.

2.4. Conclusion

Imagist poets defined a theory of the image that showed its imbrication with phenomenological approaches to poetry, namely the perceptual experience an object awoke in the subject. The members of the movement wanted to recover the ancient Classical values, such as directness of presentation and economy of language, as well as the modern tendency towards experimenting with non-traditional verse forms. The modern visual culture of little magazines was extremely beneficial to promote the theory and practice of Imagism, which was based on the clarity of the image and concise presentation. Additionally, editors and contributors demonstrated a positive tendency to build bridges, as they reciprocally perceived one another as reputed sources. Along these lines, poets such as T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, Richard Aldington and F.S. Flint were significant to reinforce the movement in Great Britain and transport it to the U.S., where the Imagist anthologies were

received with enthusiasm. For these authors the emphasis on the image as a vehicle to capture the thing-in-itself runs parallel to avant-garde innovations, especially those rooted in Cubist tradition. Precisely, Pound's ideogrammatic method and Cumming's concrete poems are the equivalents of Cubism's juxtaposition of multiple angles and perspectives in a unique picture. Thanks to the parallel with painting, poetry focuses on the clarity of vision to convey mood. The Imagists considered eyesight to be the most objective sense to appeal to the condensation of language and retain an instant emotion. Their poetry is, therefore, a conjunction of inner and outer aspects congealed in time, yet it also focuses on its spatiality to emphasize the importance of the object as the origin of creativity.

3. Vorticism, Mass Culture and Machine Aesthetics: Politicizing National Vanguardism

This chapter examines Vorticism as a continuation of the radicalized position that avant-garde adopted after Imagism. My analysis revolves around the interpretation of the image as a product of modernity embedded in the apparatus of mass culture, yet the Vorticists had no lucrative orientation. Their intention was to acquire an influential position that allowed them to react to social structures in a twofold fashion. On a first level, the Vorticists opposed the obsolete Victorian aesthetics that the establishment supported, only to commit themselves to transforming art by adopting the revolutionary attitude of European experimental trends, most significantly Marinetti's Futurism and Cubism. Yet, on a second level they eventually rejected Futurist dogmatism on the grounds that it pushed the London-based movement into the background, depriving it of visibility. In fact, Marinetti intended to absorb them in his Futurism, which provoked a negative reaction of the Vorticists. In addition, he accused them of passéism, which strained the relationships between the members of both movements.

To begin with, I argue that the Vorticists considered it necessary to develop a national consciousness that emphasized the aspects that Continental vanguardism celebrated most, namely, industrialism, urbanization and technological progress. Though Vorticism found it difficult to divest literature of the shackles of lyricism, they were successful in setting precedents for the aesthetics of the machine, to which they attributed spiritual traits that

differed from their Italian counterparts. Noteworthy of attention is Alvin Coburn, who explored the abstract dimension of photography through his vortographs, contributing to the transatlantic version of Vorticism in the U.S., which eventually did not reach the success he looked for. In terms of programmatic action, the main difference between the Vorticists and the Futurists is that the former sought to define an agenda that emphasized the intrinsic characteristics of a British avant-garde, whereas the latter concerned themselves with creating a Pan-European movement of international projection. At stake was the degree of visibility and the audience they looked to arrive at.

For the dissemination of their program, the Vorticists took advantage of the press and mass culture. Of special importance was the publication of *BLAST*, as it paved the way for their enterprise of promoting the central role London played in British modernity. In order to call the audience’s attention, they made use of advertising strategies based on the experience of shock. For that matter, the magazine displayed a flamboyant cover based on commercial tactics of shock, namely, diverse font sizes, lines and a striking layout. In addition, the Vorticists celebrated the violent practices of the suffragettes—smashing windows, destroying canonical paintings, defying authority, etc—as these methods were effective in giving them visibility.

The presence of women Vorticists is the last point this chapter explores, given the impact they had on developing a feminist subjectivity in Vorticism. Artists such as Helen Saunders, Jessica Dismorr, Dorothy Shakespear, not without mentioning the financial support provided by Kate Lechmere, is essential to understanding this vanguardism. Though criticism has displaced Vorticist women from the central position men adopted, their role is vital to examining their ability to act and to be acknowledged from the margins of the movement. Of particular interest to this chapter is the definition of women’s Vorticist art in terms of the concept of androgyny. Saunders and Dismorr felt attracted to the geometric language of their

male comrades, because it was a defiant gesture that separated them from Victorian feminine sensibility. In so doing, they are believed to adopt the symbolic vocabulary of phallogocentrism to oppose domestic roles women were relegated to. Despite the usage of masculine forms, Vorticist women concerned themselves with gender issues and feminine sexuality. Therefore, the study of their works through the lens of androgyny is significant to opening perspectives on the issue of gender, as their Vorticist art evokes feminine body and sensibility.

Vorticism came to light as a result of disaffection with the state of art in the years previous to World War I. By 1886 Frederick Brown had launched the New English Art Club (NEAC), which broke with the creative paradigms of the Royal Academy in favor of Impressionist aesthetics. At that point the Slade School of Fine Art came into scene with renowned teachers such as Henry Tonks, whose Impressionist leanings would influence future Vorticists. In fact, most of the members of the movement started their artistic career at the Slade, namely Spencer Gore, Cuthbert Hamilton and Wyndham Lewis. Other renowned members included Helen Saunders, Christopher Nevinson, William Roberts, David Bomberg and Edward Wadsworth. The Bloomsbury painters were also associated with the Slade (Cork 56-84). In the following years disparate groups rapidly multiplied, and thus Camden Town, the AAA and the London Group were swift in fostering exhibits. Despite the significance of these artistic associations, Roger Fry made great impact in London artistic circles with the inauguration of the Omega Workshops in July 1913 in Fitzroy Square. Fry intended to aid painters in dire straits while incorporating Post-Impressionist aesthetics into the decorative arts. Nonetheless, the Vorticists disengaged from the Omega, when Lewis blamed Fry for stealing a commission originally offered to Fry, Spencer Gore and Lewis for the "Post-Impressionist Room" at the *Daily Mail's* Ideal Home Exhibition in October 1913. After this incident, Lewis inaugurated the Rebel Art Center in March 1914 thanks to the financial aid of

Kate Lechmere, promoting the activities of the group in the press (Cork 85-101 and Wees 37-72).

These events as well as the rift with the Futurists concocted the appearance of the Great Vortex in 1914, when a bold manifesto was published in the first issue of *BLAST*. The Vorticists strove to stress their difference from European vanguardism by politicizing their national aesthetics and the relevant role England played in processes of modernization. As the manifesto puts it: "Machinery, trains, steam-ships, all that distinguishes externally our time, came far more from here than anywhere else" (*BLAST* 1 39). Despite the fact that the Futurists preceded the Vorticists in proclaiming their enthusiasm about technology, the latter were of the opinion that the industrial environment was inherent within London rather than within any other place in the world. For this reason, the Vorticists believed themselves to be connatural with the aesthetics of the machine rather than other vanguardisms. Their art is characterized by the fusion of Cubist sense of stillness and the Futurist dynamism (Dasenbrock 162). As Lewis remarks in "Our Vortex:"

The Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest.
The Vorticist is not the Slave of Commotion, but it's Master,
The Vorticist does not suck up to Life.
He lets Life know its place in a Vorticist Universe! (*BLAST* 1 149)

The Vorticists reconciled the antagonistic impulses of stillness and dynamism that were at the heart of Cubism and Futurism, respectively. They also had faith in the machine, as it was a symbol of modernity and part of the world they inhabited. Nevertheless, they refused to identify with the destructive potential of technology, especially after World War I. The Vorticists were convinced that with the excess of mechanization man was becoming an insensitive creature, alienated from human relationships.

As we can infer from the birth and development of Vorticism, this movement engaged

in a double process of resistance that led to both the rejection of Victorian culture and Futurism alike. The Vorticist image came to possess such strength that it even found a place in the artistic panorama of the U.S. with figures such as Alvin Langdon Coburn and Ezra Pound. Taking into account the cross-disciplinary character of the movement, I will consider the impact of Futurism and Cubism on the rise of the national consciousness in London that opened avenues for Vorticist tenets. Of special importance is the synthesis of words and images in this movement, as they were an expression of European avant-garde and its connection with mass culture. The media, the press and cinema recorded the shock experience, the little magazines being especially successful in appealing to the eye.

From July 2, 1914 to July 15, 1915, the Vorticist magazine *BLAST* pervaded the London cultural circles, integrating expatriates such as the American sculptor and painter Jacob Epstein and the poet Ezra Pound as well as the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. Precisely, the collaboration between artists and poets was one of the most notorious traits of Vorticism, defined as a movement across the arts and embedded in the apparatus of modern visual culture. This tendency to embrace all the arts can be observed in Wyndham Lewis, Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders, who contributed pieces of painting and writing to *BLAST*. The Vorticists also produced original creations such as Alvin Langdon Coburn's vortographs, otherwise defined as abstract photographs. The Vorticists conceived the image as a cultural product of modernity to promote a national aesthetics through manifestos, articles, poems and drawings.

This chapter draws on a series of critical works⁶⁰ that rethink national concerns in

⁶⁰ The latest study on Vorticism, the editions of Berghaus's special issue of the *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies* (2015), Mark Antliff and Scott W. Klein's *Vorticism: New Perspectives* (2013) and Paul Edwards, *BLAST: Vorticism 1914-1918* (2000), involve an ample variety of contexts, topics and artists that contribute to the enhancement of Vorticist criticism. Rebeca Beasley has also contributed new perspectives in works such as *Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism* (2007) and *Theorists of Modernist*

Vorticism and its position against Continental experimentalism. Despite the breadth of knowledge previous studies demonstrate regarding archival documentation of the London-based movement and its little magazine *BLAST*, they omit political aspects that emphasize the singularity of Vorticism. I will examine the role of mass culture and the machine aesthetics of Cubism and Futurism to outline the national consciousness the British Vorticists derived from word-image relations and the adaptation of Continental avant-garde practice and theory.

3.1. The National Production of Vorticism: *BLAST* and Mass Culture

The preponderance of Cubism and Futurism paved the way for further experimentation in the field of avant-garde aesthetics, not without causing a profound anxiety due to the difficulty in finding strategies that radically differed from or innovated the postulations of these avant-garde movements. The Vorticists were fully aware of their position in the margins of European experimentalism. In geographical terms, Great Britain was displaced to the periphery of the continent, which might have complicated the reception of the theories and practices concocted in the mainland. After all, countries from Continental Europe created contact zones that promoted an effective exchange of manifestos, magazines and aesthetic

Poetry (2007). Reed Way Dasenbrock in *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis: Towards the Condition of Painting* (1985) approaches the Vortex in terms of the synthesis of Cubism and Futurism to account for the plastic and literary concerns of the London-based movement. Past studies such as those by Timothy Marterer and Richard Cork respectively in *Vortex: Pound, Eliot and Lewis* (1979) and *Vorticism and its Allies* (1974) contribute literary and artistic perspectives that focus on specific authors and their creative theories. In 1976, Richard Cork produced one of the most remarkable works of Vorticism, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age* (2 vols), which entails a profound exegesis of the evolution of the movement since its inception. The archaeological recovery of letters, statements and documents offers, without a doubt, a unique vision of the English Vortex. To conclude, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (1972) by W.C. Wees projects contextual issues of conflict such as the impact of the First World War, the rise of the suffragettes as well as the political and religious revolts in Ireland onto the configuration of the radical orientation of Vorticism.

practices. Nonetheless, it is likely that these ideas delayed their gestation in Great Britain owing to its maritime separation. This possible belatedness might have prevented the Vorticists from reaching centrality. By the time the British movement took the first steps towards avant-garde culture, European experimentalism had already become established, and thus the Vorticist paragon fell into deaf ears. Vanguardism made its appearance as an alternative to a system that was in its death throes. Its success revolved around the resistance to a dominant culture based on a lifestyle that relied upon economic profit and mass production. However, it ended up becoming fashionable to be absorbed by conventional forces. In this context Vorticism posited itself as a movement that not only reacted against the pre-eminence of Victorian values inside Great Britain, but also against the dogmatic attitude of mainstream avant-garde. Critical voices agreed that "England's art and letters were less 'developed,' less 'modern' than those being created on the Continent" (Peppis 84). In this manner, the Vorticists adopted the same methods of diffusion as primary vanguardism to spread their word. Little magazines, manifestos, independent exhibits and provocative performances merchandized their product, while attacking the very same system that allowed for free circulation. This double counteraction is worthy of attention, given its significance to make Great Britain known worldwide and inject force to a Vorticist national consciousness.

With the publication of *BLAST* on July 1, 1914, Lewis was remarkable in contributing an English ultra-nationalism (Peppis 84). The Vorticists were familiar with the Italian war against Turkey in North Africa, as when the Futurists came into the London artistic scene, they were speaking about their imperialist concerns. This might have made an impact on Lewis's nationalism in reaction to the privileged position of Germany in Europe. In fact, he despised German patriotic sentiment, claiming in *BLAST 2* that "Germany should win no war against France or England" (5). In his article "The God of Sport and Blood," included in the same issue of the magazine, Lewis continue his tirade:

German statesmen and generals are too thoughtful. To become anxious is to become democratic. They have become infernally philosophic and democratic, their heads naturally being too weak to resist. There is only one sort of person who can be conscious and not degenerate. Germany's rulers do not belong to that august category. (10)

With his particularly biting sense of humor, Lewis ridicules figures of authority, as statesmen's and generals' excess of reasoning has precisely taken up arms, rather than promoting peace and wellbeing. Nonetheless, he was sympathetic to the unofficial Teutonic cult, as it advanced "all branches of contemporary activity in Science and Art" (5). In fact, *BLAST 1* [fig. 39] acknowledged the relevance of Germany in the aesthetic field by translating passages of Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst (On the Spiritual in Art, 1911)*. Outside Great Britain, these nationalistic issues were at stake and influenced the Vorticist interest in political concerns. Theretofore, the presence of the suffragettes, the Ulster Unionists and union workers contributed to the convulsive aesthetics of Vorticism (Peppis 88). Although the Vorticists showed quasi-misogynistic sentiments against the suffragettes, they were attracted by their use of violence and propensity to cause a stir. The militant action of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst and the Women's Social and Political Union were closely followed by both Futurists and Vorticists, even when mentioning their altercations in "To Suffragettes," from *BLAST 1*:

We admire your energy. You and artists are the only things (you don't mind being called things?) left in England with a little life in them. If you destroy a great work of art you are destroying a greater soul than if you annihilated a whole district of London. Leave art alone, brave comrades! (151-52)

Due to the suffragettes'⁶¹ forceful response to political causes, the Vorticists encountered in their practices a role model to promote their aesthetics of spectacle as a masculine activity. In fact, they defended the acts of Lillian Lenton, who burned the tea pavilion at Kew Gardens on February 20, 1913, and Frieda Graham, an alias for Grace Marcom, who smashed paintings at the National Gallery. Other women involved in violent incidents were Hilda Evelyn Burkett, known as Evaline Burkitt, and Florence Tunks, who were arrested in Felixstowe in 1914, after they burnt the Bath Hotel. Notwithstanding, the Vorticists adopted a position of detachment from suffragism and were determined to disengage themselves from these women.

This politics of spectacle coincided with the avant-garde interest in an art that promoted action. The Vorticists were convinced that if they wanted to reach the audience, they needed to take advantage of advertising practices to circulate their message. Print culture thus contributed to an increase in mass-market periodicals that made economic profits. For instance, *The Daily Mail* set a low price for readers to be able to buy the journal, and in turn, their supplies augmented in the marketplace. Lewis and other Vorticists were attentive to these strategies, as their intention was to circulate *BLAST* worldwide. Wadsworth was in charge of the international promotion of the journal, especially in the main capitals of Europe and America. In order to have a wide scope Hulme suggested making use of Howard Latimer's publishing house, as they took advantage of strategies of shock that helped to promote their journals. Pound even wrote an article on Vorticism in the *Fortnightly Review* to disseminate the London vanguardism (Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism* 117-18).

⁶¹ For a further analysis on the relationship between the Vorticists and the vandalist acts of the suffragettes in Great Britain, see Erich Hertz's "The Gender of Form and British Modernism: Rebecca West's Vorticism and *Blast*" in *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.

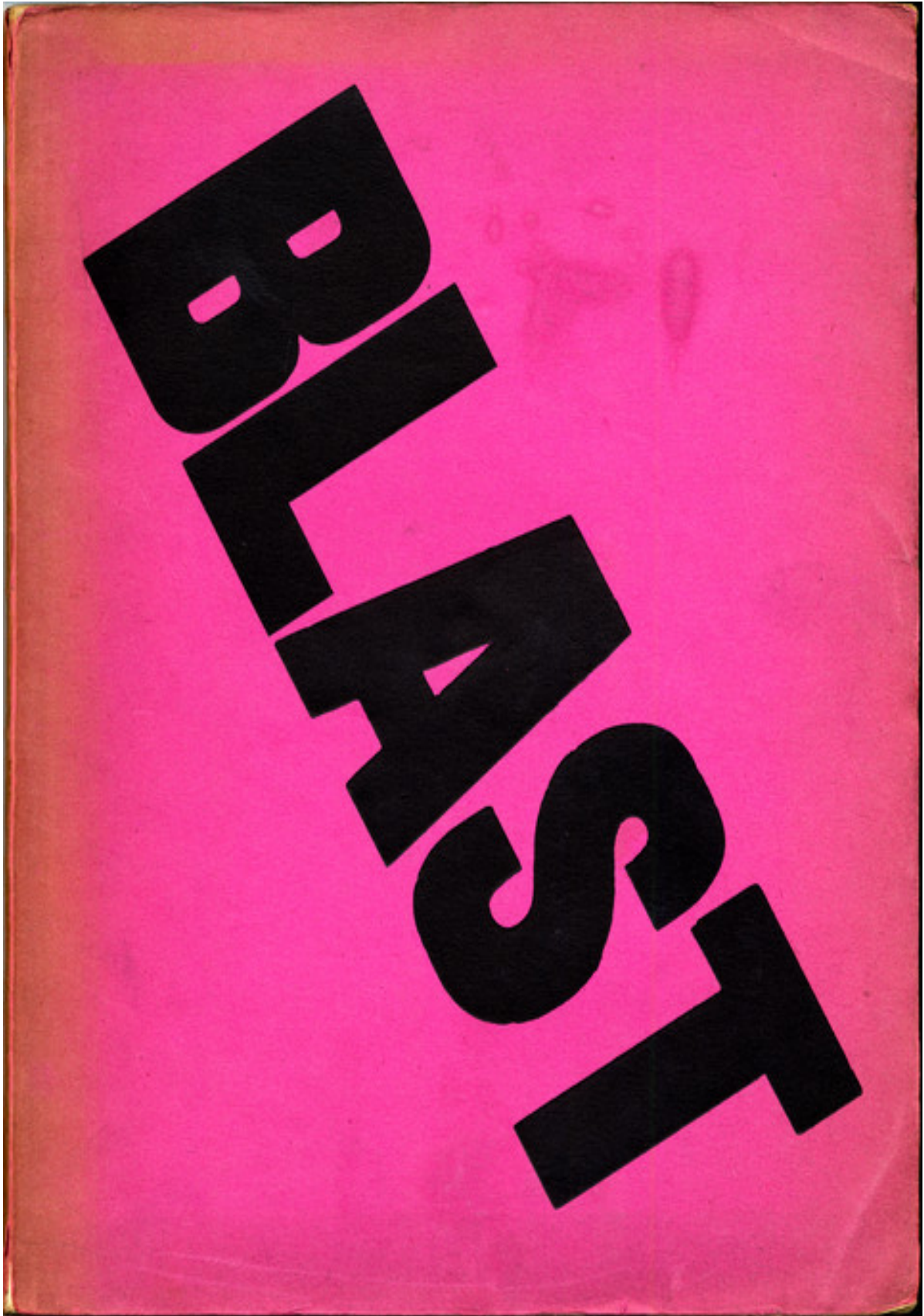


FIG. 39. *BLAST* 1.1. (20 June 1914): n.p.

Mimicking promotional strategies, *BLAST* illustrated its pages with catchy phrases and typesets devoid of content, but in turn, they built bridges between product and consumer. Just as advertisements promote the commodity they attempt to market, messages in *BLAST* participated in the promotional culture of capitalism, especially, by using font sizes, visual array and shocking design. Its enumeration of "blasts" and "blesses" is a sign of commercial culture that, rather than emulating Marinetti's Futurist aesthetics, vindicates a national identity that distinguishes the Vorticists from Continental experimentalism. In its section of "blasts," they remonstrated against Parisian and American culture so as to preserve their own identity, yet negating Victorian canon of the bourgeois for considering it sickly and decadent. After concluding with blasting names associated with their time, the "bless" section begins by praising England for its ships, seafarers, ports and industrial machinery. They also celebrated Shakespeare and Swift as authors who were distinguished by their humor as a token of British cultural sign. The manifesto utilized appealing typography and nonsensical messages that evoked strategies of media and advertisement in capturing the attention of the consumer. As Reynolds puts it:

This celebration allowed them to extol English advertising practices, practices that displayed for the world England's preeminence in industry, economics, politics, and culture. Most obviously, *Blast* displayed and celebrated this merger of English avant-garde and commercial art through the journal's aesthetics. (245)

By highlighting the autochthonous elements of Great Britain and its fast industrial development, Vorticism politicize its own vanguardism, creating an image that resembled a cultural product to be merchandized.

To put it simply, the Vorticists not only engaged in capitalist structures that looked to circulate their product. However, they were conscious of the force of marketing strategies to

invigorate their message, and thus *BLAST* was the political banner of the movement that raised awareness of the urgent necessity to revitalize their art and literature, all the while building bridges with European vanguardism, yet without relinquishing their nationalistic concerns.

3.2. Cubism, Futurism and the Machine Aesthetics: The Dialectics of Form and

Dynamism in Vorticist Art

The dialectics of Vorticist poetry and plastic arts reconciles the tensions between form and dynamism inspired by Futurist and Cubist aesthetics, which Reed Way Dasenbrock terms as "dynamic formism" (41). To that end, Vorticism shows the precision and controls encountered in Cubism, but it also adopts the vitality and aggressive force of the Futurists. From the former movement, the Vorticists appropriate the sense of motion, in order to convey, by way of the distribution of lines and colors, the energy of the creative process, and the dynamic force of the modern metropolis. Like the Cubists, they do not relinquish their concern with form, as geometric figures help them attain a state of visionary consciousness. Rather than identifying with the flux and chaos of the machine world, the Vorticists adopt a position of detachment that allows them to interrogate the loss of values, and comment on the dehumanization of being. Therefore, it is important to consider Cubism and Futurism in the configuration of Vorticism. In doing so, I examine manifestos of Futurist and Cubist artists such as Giacomo Balla, Gino Severini, Umberto Boccioni, and Pablo Picasso as well as poets and theoreticians such as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Guillaume Apollinaire, Aleksei Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlenikov. With that backdrop in mind, my intention is to develop a conceptual framework so as to assess the originality of Vorticism as an avant-garde movement that resulted from reconciling the urge towards form and dynamism in their mechanical approach to art. My analysis explores artists such as the painter and novelist

Wyndham Lewis, the sculptors Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and Jacob Epstein, and the poet Ezra Pound. Other contributors I will consider include David Bomberg, C.R.W. Nevison, Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders.

At the outset of the twentieth century, Cubism and Futurism were the primary avant-garde movements that showed concern for the modern world of the machine, adopting a differential approach to form and dynamism that, in a Hegelian gesture, would be synthesized by the Vorticists. The forms that inspire the aesthetic language of these avant-gardists included structures of elevators, skyscrapers and steamboats, as they are characterized by the precision and clear-cut lines of the machine. Influenced by the Italian Futurists, the Vorticists assumed the topic of technology, although they did not coincide with the celebration of speed and dynamism. In this respect, they opted for the Cubist emphasis on immobility. As they put it in *BLAST* 1: "Our Vortex desires the immobile rhythm of its swiftness" (149). If the Vorticists showed their inclination for the cult of the machine, soon enough they refused to continue to embrace mechanizing matters without restrictions.

As a center of avant-garde art, Paris welcomed Cubism in 1907 and Futurism in 1909. The machine aesthetics of these movements coexisted in the following years, making it difficult at times to discern between both trends. In 1911 Futurist artists such as Boccioni and Severini visited the Salon d'Automne and Fernand Léger's Cubist studio, which explains the similarities they shared in form and content, i.e. the aeroplane, the automobile, the modern metropolis, etc. (Green 42). Towards the decade of the 1910s, Cubism and Futurism were exchanged in England to refer to disparate European vanguardisms inspired in the mechanical aspects of the object. This aesthetics found its place in London thanks to the efforts of Roger Fry, who inaugurated the "Manet and the Post-Impressionist Exhibition" in 1910 and the "Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition" in 1912 at the Grafton Gallery. There the works of several French and British Post-Impressionists precluded the appearance of

Cubism in London. These exhibits called the attention of Wyndham Lewis, who contributed a catalogue to the "Cubist Room," eventually published in 1914 by the *Egoist*. Lewis commented the work of Frederick Etchells, Cuthbert Hamilton, Edward Wadsworth and C.R.W. Nevison, pointing out that "all revolutionary painting to-day has in common the rigid reflections of steel and stone in the spirit of the artist; that desire for stability as though a machine were being built to fly or kill with" (9). On the whole, Vorticist art eschews the sensuality of human form and chromatism in favor of the mental aspects suggested by abstraction and the geometrism of the machine.

3.2.1. Cubism and Vorticism: Technology or the Ideal of Modern Abstraction

These Cubist theories in England were scrutinized by Hulme in his "Lecture on Modern Art and its Philosophy" at the Quest Society of London early in 1914.⁶² Hulme's ideas were based on Willhelm Worringer's lecture at the 1913 Berlin Congress of Aesthetics, where he spoke about the organic forms of Greek and Renaissance art and the geometrism of Egyptian and Byzantine works. In his lecture Worringer⁶³ defended the urge towards empathy and

⁶² For a detailed view on the Hulme's influences and theories on modern art, see Robert Ferguson's *The Short Sharp Life of T.E. Hulme*, especially chapter 9, "Hulme and Modern Art."

⁶³ In his dissertation *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (Abstraction and Empathy, 1908), the German art historian Wilhelm Worringer described two urges that revolve around the creative activity: the urge towards empathy and the urge towards abstraction. In his view, the first implies a concern with the outer world, and thus it is reducible to appearances and the imitation of or identification with nature. Futurism is an illustration of that phenomenon, as it resorts to the subject matters of the modern metropolis, machinery and labor, and translates the fluidity and dynamism of the world in their creative practices. On the other hand, the urge towards abstraction, according to Worringer, based on stylization and deformation, turns the object into an autonomous entity disengaged from mimetic concerns. The artists within this tendency do not trust reality, but evade it only to delve into its inner properties. Cézanne and the Cubist painters such as Picasso and Braque belong to this tradition. For an in-depth analysis of Worringer's categorization and its connection with Futurism and Cubism, see Dasenbrock, *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis: Towards the Condition of Painting*, especially the first chapter.

abstraction. While the former signals the sensuous identification with the forms encountered in the outside world, the latter emphasizes the hard outlines of objects. The treatment of the object by Cubist painters such as Picasso and Braque relied upon this tendency towards geometricization that showed concern for the inner properties of the object, thereby going beyond the mere appearances of Impressionism.

As Ortega y Gasset remarks, the artist of the twentieth century deforms ordinary reality to the point of dehumanization (30). This is noticeable in Cubist and Vorticist painters, who tend towards figuration in order to question the notions of beauty and truth. The necessity to attain the true essence of the object is reminiscent of the neo-Kantian approach of the thing-in-itself (*Ding-an-sich*). However, whereas Kant asserts the impossibility of arriving at it, Schopenhauer maintains that it can certainly be represented. This is what he terms the immediate objectification of the will (*die Objektivität des Willens*), which finds its roots in the Platonic ideas, that is, those reminiscences of an intuition of the things preceding our birth. According to Schopenhauer, the idea is already an object that has freed itself from those forms articulated by the principle of sufficient reason, and thus it has reached its maximum expression in representation. Ideas, always identical, and devoid of origin or end are the eternal paradigms of finite things, and thus point towards true and authentic knowledge (Schopenhauer 90-95).

This attitude to penetrate into the form of the object and externalize its essence is noticeable in Cubist and Vorticist artists. Hulme contends that ancient art is an attempt to counter the mutability of Nature in favor of the permanence of the abstract form. However, "the new 'tendency towards abstraction,'" as he points, "will culminate, not so much in the simple geometrical forms found in archaic art, but in the more complicated ones associated in our minds with the idea of machinery" (Csengeri 282). Modern art is not to look at a prehistoric past where objects only preserved their essential traits, but rather at the

mechanical constituency of technology as the model of creativity. This is so because mechanical innovation encourages us to see the world outside conventional parameters. Therefore, art as an expression of originality is to pay heed to the new sensibility opened up by the machine.

Vorticist painters resort to the geometrism of mechanical structures in Cubism, because these enabled them to divest the object of its superficial element and apprehend its essence. As we notice in Fernand Léger’s *The Railway Crossing* [fig. 40], the composition is characterized by the juxtaposition of geometric figures and chromatic shades that abstract the idea of the railway crossing to the point of perceiving it from multiple angles and perspectives. The mechanical elements have the ability to convey the essence of the object at hand in opposition to the sensuous details that impede full comprehension. In general terms, Cubist creations shifted away from appearances so as to have access to the intelligible world of eternal and unchanging Forms.



FIG. 40. Fernand Léger, *The Railway Crossing*, Art Institute of Chicago.

In the same vein, the Vorticists learned from the Cubists how to treat the object as if it were an equation or a diagram. Unlike synthetic Cubist paintings, they want to preserve the two-dimensional nature of art, and distinguish it from non-art. Hence, they do not engage in incorporating daily materials in the canvas (Dasenbrock 71-7). Rather, they strived for a higher status that allowed them to perceive the truth of the object, by combining lines and chromatic shades. *The Crowd* [fig. 41] by Lewis unifies the machinistic elements and the formal constituents rooted in Cubism. Composed of right angles traversed by a series of quadrangular figures, the initials of "encl" followed by what seems an "o" are inscribed in the canvas, questioning the meaning of the word. Then, a thread of red lines is interwoven with diverse shapes creating the illusion of skyscrapers that colonize the modern metropolis. Some of these figures, visibly human and painted in red, seem to hold flags and move forward, all of which suggests Lewis negative perception of twentieth-century world. Whereas the deployment of fierce contrasts of colors points to revolutionary action, paradoxically, the imprisonment suggested by geometric shapes seemingly deprives the individual of any hope.

Vorticist sculptors were also highly attracted to the primitivist component of ancient artworks, and Epstein and Brzeska develop a highly accomplished style that reproduces that primitivism. Picasso can be considered to have been one of the most notable precursors of this tendency with his painting *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* [fig. 42]. Originally titled the *Brothel of Avignon*, the work presents five nude prostitutes characterized by their angular and irregular anatomy. Given their geometrism these figures are deprived of any sensuality that celebrates the feminine body. Even two of the women on the right appear to be wearing African masks that cause terror. Distinguished by its two-dimensionality and flatness, this composition ties primitivism with "the violent, the horrible, the unspeakable" (Dasenbrock 80). In other words, sexuality was considered to be a taboo in primitive cultures, which, transposed to the context of the twentieth century, might have a bearing on the mechanization

of eroticism. The terrifying and caustic appearance of these women points to an irrefutable sense of alienation that modernity has brought with itself, turning human being into a solipsistic creature disengaged from the other.



FIG. 41. Wyndham Lewis, *The Crowd*, Tate.

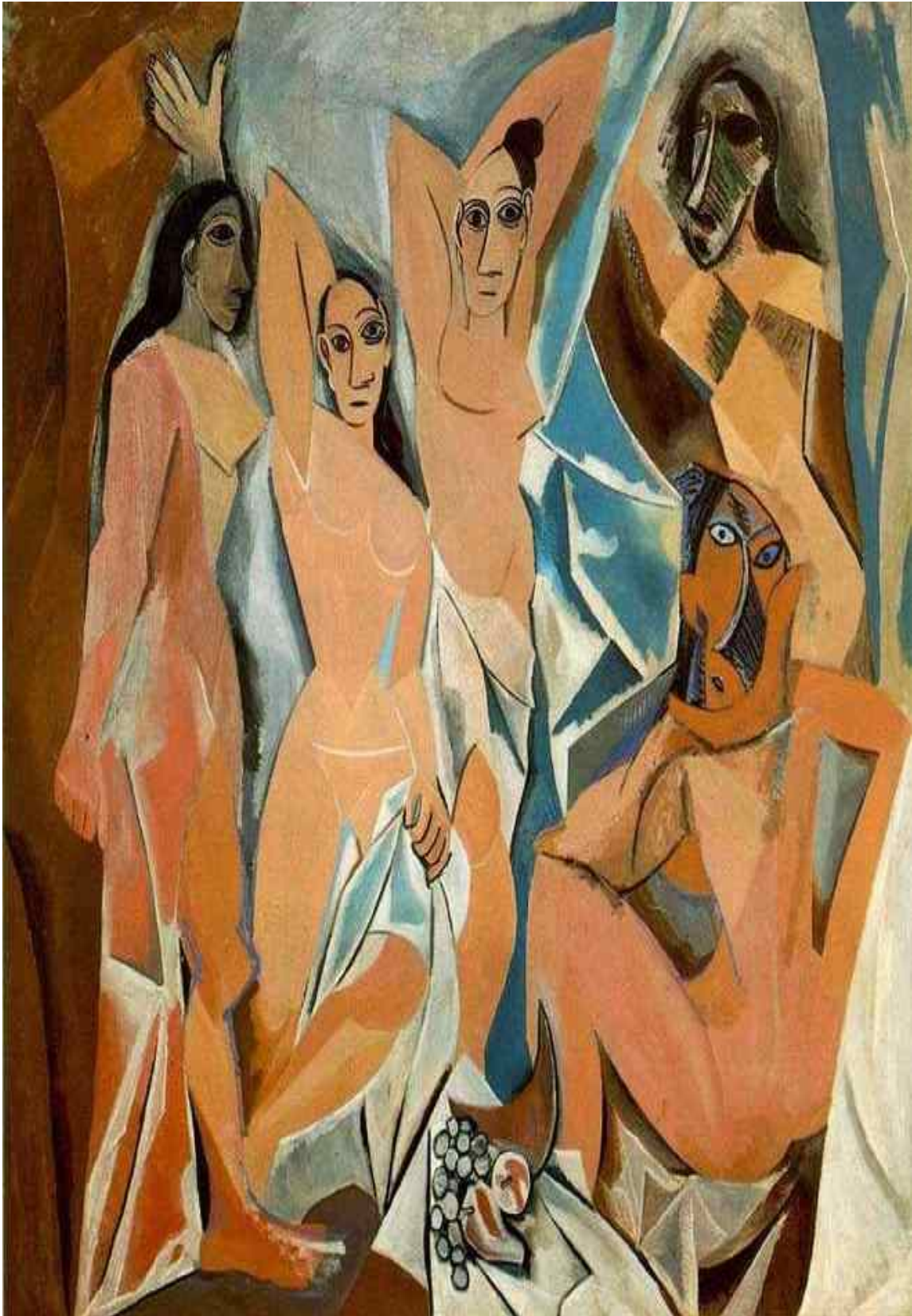


FIG. 42. Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)*, Modern Museum of Art.

Like Brancusi, Gaudier-Brzeska uses the past so as to establish similarities regarding the present. This is noticeable in *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound* [fig. 43], a colossal head that is reminiscent of the virility and fecundity of ancient cultures. This return to the primitive is understood as an identification with the forces of sexual desire and violence that govern and prefigure the modern world. The head simplifies Pound’s traits to such an extent that it appears to have reached immutability. The hardness of the material and its form is symptomatic of the desire to combat the ephemeral nature of life, and thus Pound, as a transient human being, is invested with permanence.



FIG. 43. Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound*, National Art Gallery.

Just as Vorticist painters and sculptors resort to juxtaposing strategies in order to revitalize poetic practices, Vorticist poets take advantage of parataxis to mimic the plastic

language of abstraction. In his literary work, Pound distinguishes between two states of perception, the passivity of collecting impressions, and the active invention of the world. If the first tendency is associated with Futurism, the second pointed to the analytical forms developed by Cubism, Expressionism, Imagism and Vorticism. According to Dasenbrock, "the poet places one concise perception next to another without a transition in a way that implicitly creates a connection, but it is up to the reader to fill in the transition and to make the connection explicit" (96). These aesthetic principles allow him to see forms or ideas that the reader is supposed to uncover by adopting an engaging position so that the poem could be deciphered. Pound was interested in the study of old literatures and cultural traditions. For him, the revision of the past would lead to the new. Pound draws on the Vorticist painters and, especially, the sculptors' techniques of simultaneity of remote spaces and times in order to create a meaningful relation between the past and the present. His conception of history shifts away from syntagmatic models, as it does not account for a chronological sequence of causal connections. Instead, his view of history is paradigmatic, that is, it "has a shape or pattern or form as well as a linear order, and the significance of history lies in the patterns we find in it, not just in its linear order" (Dasenbrock 103). Pound, then, establishes an equivalent parallel with the past to examine and represent the present.

Pound considered the juxtaposing techniques of the sculptors Epstein and Gaudier-Brzeska as models to create a spatiotemporal network of allusions between the old and the new. By doing so, differences between both times are reconciled. It is Gaudier-Brzeska's theorizations on sculpture that help Pound speak of the word in poetry as the relationship between planes. In *BLAST* 1, Gaudier-Brzeska designates sculptural feeling as "the appreciation of masses in relation" and sculptural ability as "the defining of these masses by planes" ("Vortex" 155). The Vorticists, according to Gaudier-Brzeska, have outnumbered surfaces and shapes to realize "abstract thoughts of superiority." The Vortex is for them "will

and consciousness" ("Vortex" 155). Despite its tension and starkness, the geometric vocabulary of Vorticism has access to pure form by conveying affect (Hickman 137, 148). Pound's poem "Before Sleep" is symptomatic of the relation of planes that Gaudier-Brzeska argued for in his writings.

BEFORE SLEEP

I.

The lateral vibrations caress me,
 They leap and caress me,
 They work pathetically in my favour,
 They seek my financial good.
 She of the spear, stands present.
 The gods of the underworld attend me, O Annuis.
 To these are they of thy company.
 With a pathetic solicitude, they attend me.
 Undulent,
 Their realm is the lateral courses.

II.

Light !
 I am up to follow thee, Pallas.
 Up and out of their caresses.
 You were gone up as rocket,
 Bending your passages from right to left and from left to right
 In the flat projection of a spiral.
 The gods of drugged sleep attend me,
 Wishing me well.
 I am up to follow thee, Pallas. (*BLAST* 1 47)

In this poem Pound invokes the goddess Pallas Athena through a vocabulary that recalls the plasticity of Vorticist sculpture. The descriptions provided appeal to the figure of Athena and its world, namely, the allusion to the spear and supernatural properties such as her power of

“[B]ending your passages from right to left and from left to right” (15). The plasticity of this writing is not only noticeable in the malleability suggested by the sculpture of Athena, but also in its elastic return to the past to make a comment on a present situation. In this case the poem might speak about the absence of gods in modern times. Pound often establishes a network of associations charged with evocative power that transform the sculptural lines of force into hardness and intense energy.

The relationship between Cubism and the visual and poetic production of Vorticism was evident insofar as both movements reflected on the apparatus of technology and engineering as a means of taking a close look at the inner aspects of the represented object. Abstraction is thus intrinsically connected with the creation of a reality that hinges upon the viewer’s perspective and ability to access the inner content of the image. Vorticism thus integrated a certain degree of autonomy into their compositions yet without disregarding the main philosophical concerns of modern times.

3.2.2. The Vorticist Adaptation of Italian and Russian Futurism

If Cubism set the precedents of machine aesthetics in London, F.T. Marinetti continued propagating messages in favor of technology, war, dynamism and speed. In 1910 he gave his first lecture in the London Lyceum Club for Women and two years later the Italian Futurists showcased their international exhibit at the London Sackville Gallery (Lyon 92-123; Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla 37). By that time, Roger Fry also presented the “Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition of English, French and Russian Artists” at the Grafton Galleries in October 1912. Boris von Anrep, a Russian artist who had settled in London, assisted in disseminating the work of avant-garde Russian artists later associated with Futurism such as Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova. Their artwork had a place in Michael Sadleir and John Middleton Murry’s journal *Rhythm*, which gave the Russian painters some visibility in

Great Britain (Beasley, "Vortorussophilia" 41-43). In the same vein, Edward Wadsworth translated Kandinsky's fragment on "Inner Necessity" in *BLAST* 1, which proves the interest of the would-be Vorticists in the theories of the Russian artist. Their connection with Futurist trends stemmed from Italy and Russia, although it was the former that made a greatest impact on the configuration of the English Vortex.

In April 1913 Gino Severini put on view his show at the Malborough Gallery, which was followed by the "Post-Impressionist and Futurist Exhibition" and the "Exhibition of the Works of the Italian Futurist Painters and Sculptors" at the Doré Gallery. While in London Marinetti infuriated the audience with infamous speeches such as *The Siege of Adrianopoli*. After these events, the Italian Futurist found in C.R.W. Nevinson a staunch supporter, with whom he wrote the "Vital English Art: Futurist Manifesto," published in the *Observer* on June 7, 1914. The Manifesto showed a stark opposition to tradition, academicism and softness, thereby proposing "an English Art that is strong, virile and anti-sentimental" (209-210). At the end of the text, Marinetti and Nevinson attributed Futurism to various artists that would become Vorticists without previously consulting with them.

Wyndham Lewis considered this action an outrage and on June 12, 1914, he and his allies disrupted a lecture Marinetti was delivering in the Doré Gallery. Despite the negative reaction of the future Vorticists, Marinetti performed his Noise Concerts at the London Coliseum and the Albert Hall. Almost simultaneously Lewis, Etchells, Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, Hulme and Wadsworth prepared themselves to launch their own movement. In order to visualize the specificity of Vorticism, Lewis criticizes the aestheticism and sentimentality Marinetti and Nevinson attacked in their manifesto. For Lewis, Futurism bears resemblance with Impressionism in their coincidence on the representation of reality. As he upheld in *BLAST* 1: "Futurism, as preached by Marinetti, is largely Impressionism up-to-date. To this is added his Automobilmism and Nietzsche stunt" ("Vortices and Notes: The Melodrama of

Modernity" 143).

Inspired by the Futurist attitude towards the machine, the Vorticists also embraced technology as a liberating force in the benefit of man's interests. According to Catherine E. Wall, this responds to an eagerness for "communication through space and time: telegraph, wires, radio towers, and transcontinental or intercontinental movement" (58). Although the Vorticists disagreed with the Futurists' idolatrous treatment of modernity, they were attracted to certain aspects such as dynamism, simultaneity and speed. Of particular interest is the conception of movement in Futurism and Vorticism, which ties in with the "transference of a state," enunciated by Bergson in *Matter and Memory* (1912). The theories of the French philosopher are central to understanding spatiotemporal perception in the first decades of the twentieth century. In his work he distinguishes between Newton's conception of homogeneous space and heterogeneity. The latter stands for an amount of things in a fixed space, whereas the second refers to the temporality of matter in movement. As Bergson puts it, homogeneous space and heterogeneous time express "the double work of solidification and of division which we effect on the moving continuity of the real in order to obtain there a fulcrum for our action, in order to fix within it starting points for our operation, in short, to introduce into it real changes (*Matter and Memory* 280). In contrast to spatial uniformity, movement is infused with temporal heterogeneity, as it shows change of position. Hence, motion is diametrically opposed to space, as the former points to fluidity and processes of change that reveal the plurality of consciousness. *Durée* thus distinguishes itself from outer reality as it focuses on the multiple perceptions developed on a temporal basis.

As a reaction to the static and immutable features offered by Positivist thought, Futurist poets and artists assimilate the heterogeneity of movement embodied in Bergson's *durée*. This concept is of importance, as it runs parallel to the sense of simultaneity and dynamism in the urban metropolis. From an immobile contemplative state, the Futurist artist

registers the automobile and the airplane's speed as an intrinsic symptom of the modern world. In addition, "conflict, violence, misogyny, anarchism, and ultimately war are welcomed as expressions of universal dynamism" (Martin, "The First Manifesto and the Futurist Aesthetic" 41). Futurist artists, then, conveyed this sense of simultaneity and dynamism by effacing the boundaries between objects as much as discursive practices and experience (Mathews 94). In this regard, Bergson's intuition accounted for the creative process in Futurism, as matter was invested with motion and duration.

Bergson's philosophy of *durée* is transferred to the domains of art. This is evident in the "The Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting" (1910), celebrated at the Futurist Salon at Milan. Futurist painters propose a sense of dynamic motion that challenges the static image in the retina in favor of the rapid shift of the object. They accomplish these effects by eliminating space from the canvas, disrupting mimetic practices and traditional laws of perspective (Caws 179, 183). In *Girl Running on a Balcony* [fig. 44], Ball experimented with a variety of chromatic shades and the sequential arrangement of figures so as to create the illusion of dynamism and movement. For the Futurist painters "all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing. A profile is never motionless before our eyes, but it constantly appears and disappears" (Caws 179). The world is conceived as a field of action that reflects on the frantic rhythm of modernity. There is an impression of intelligibility, as the elements of the foreground and the background, namely the balcony rails and the girl's feet, are multiplied to emulate an impression of movement. The painter translates the simultaneous nature of actions and the plurality of viewpoints by capturing the noises of the street and the flux of the objects.

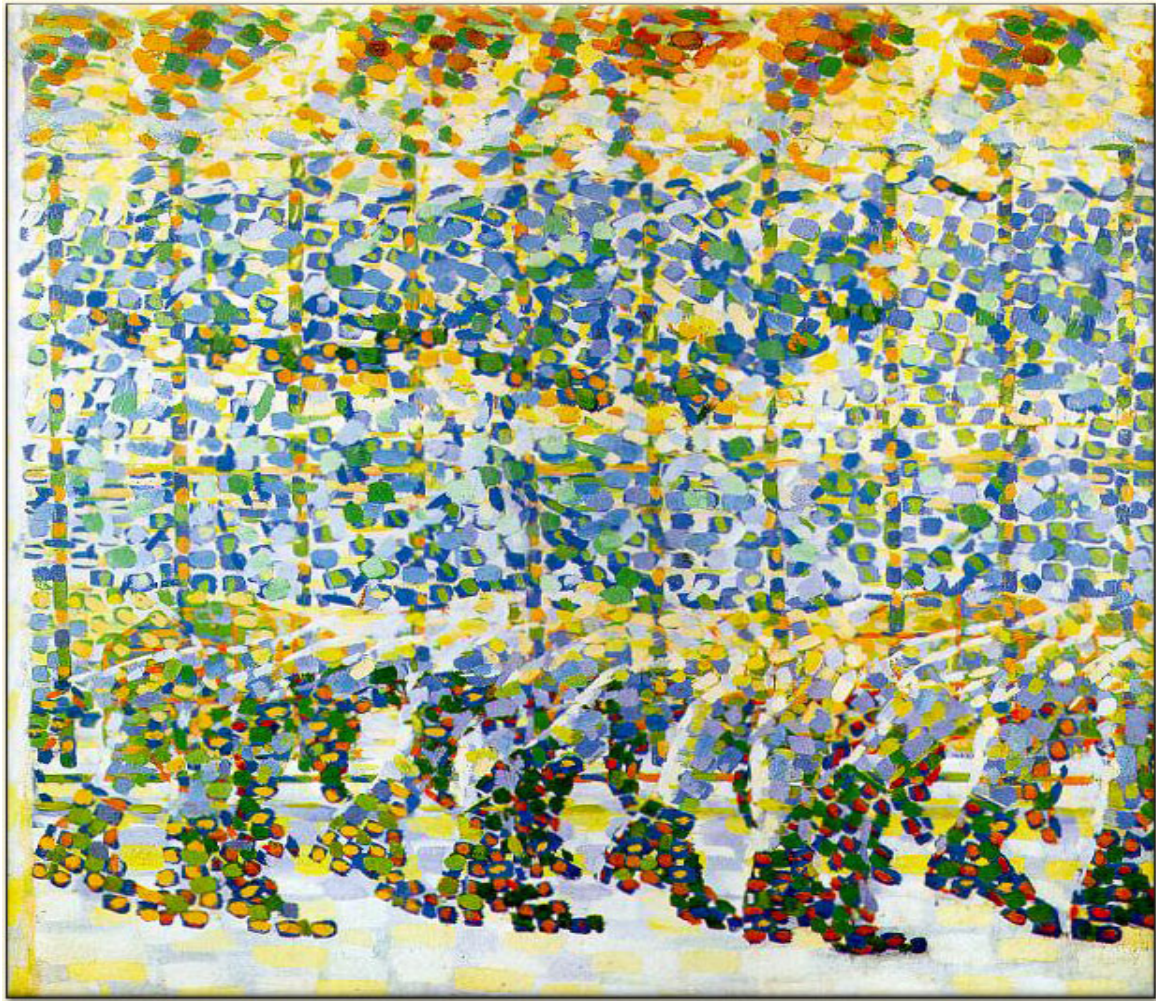


FIG. 44. Giacomo Balla, *Girl Running on a Balcony*, Museo del Novecento.

Just as Futurist painters created the illusion of movement by presenting sequences of the image, the Vorticists took advantage of this dynamism, not without criticizing the vagueness of the image in motion. This point is illustrated by Lewis through an exchange that took place after one of Marinetti's performances in London. Whereas for the Italian Futurist the existence of an object is contingent on its speed, Lewis contends: "I loathe anything that goes too quickly. If it goes too quickly, it is not there" (O'Keefe 152). Furthermore, the Futurist obsession with speed, as he argued, was a version of realism that bore resemblance to Impressionist experiments with light and speed. The Vorticists thus concerned themselves with the clear perception of the figure represented, and this is evident in Edward Wadsworth's paintings. Just as his Vorticist colleagues, he was attracted to Marinetti's

movement, showcasing a few paintings with Futurist traits in the Exhibit of the Doré Gallery in London. Nevertheless, he was disappointed by Marinetti’s ego and emphasis on speed. In his view, the figure presented in the canvas needs to be clear to apprehend the essential features of the object. Unlike Boccioni’s *Girl Running on a Balcony*, his *Abstract Composition* [fig. 45] displays angular and sharp forms juxtaposed over one another, which evoke the tall buildings of the city and the machinistic view of modernity. The viewer is also confronted with a sensation of intense energy that evokes the center of the Vortex, yet this dynamism is captured in a snapshot, differing considerably from the Futurist imprecision of contours.

Regarding the sculptural medium, the Futurists were also interested in conveying the idea of simultaneity and dynamic motion. In the “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture” (1912), Boccioni claims: “instead of breaking up reality into individual natural elements, we want to render *life as matter*, revealing in it its quality as movement” (Tisdall and Bozzolla 72). Boccioni also rejects the anachronistic tenets of form applied to modern sculpture, as they do not hold true for modern sensibility. For Boccioni, new sculpture emphasizes lines of force as a means of revealing the “physical transcendentalism of the object.” This effect is achieved by combining a variety of planes and materials such as cloth, glass, iron, leather, and wood, so as to liberate space and objects from their environmental constraints (Caws 175-176). Boccioni’s *Fusion of Head and Window* [fig. 46] was representative of this tendency to eradicate the boundaries between the artistic object and reality.



FIG. 45. Edward Wadsworth, *Abstract Composition*, Tate.

In this composition, a window frame, metal catch and triangles of glass are placed on top of the head with long hair. According to Poggi, the use of various sources suggests “a kind of inner or absolute dynamism based on the collision of the different physical properties—weight, density, and mass—of the constructive elements” (21). Boccioni reproduces the sense of simultaneity in a plastic language. In the same vein, the synthesis of masses and planes points to dynamic force fields that attempt to capture the pure rhythm of reality (Caws 176, 178).

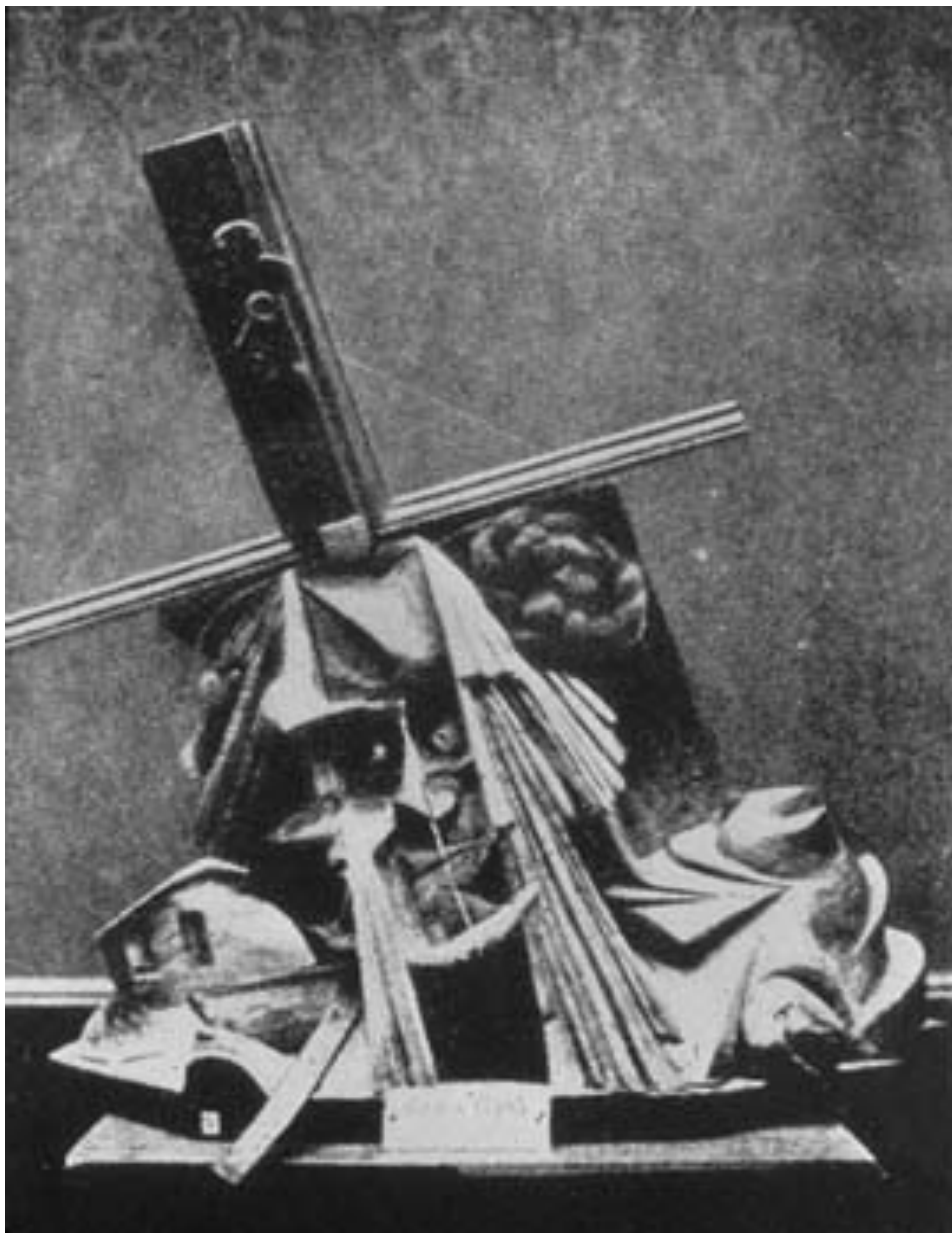


FIG. 46. Umberto Boccioni, *Fusion of a Head and a Window*, destroyed.

If the Futurist sculptors celebrated modern life and created the impression of simultaneity by fusing a variety of planes and materials, the Vorticists were preoccupied with a series of events that affected man in the first decades of the twentieth century. Jacob Epstein's attitude towards the machine was initially eulogistic, but when he observed the devastating effects caused during World War I, his sculptures took a dramatic turn. The *Torso in Metal from "The Rock-Drill"* [fig. 47] is an illustration of the fears that Epstein projected on humanity and the indiscriminate usage of the machine. His sculpture illustrates a robot-like figure that initially held a rock-drill. In order to emulate the idea of movement, Epstein even thought about the possibility of adding an engine, which would emphasize overpowering force and virility. As he was increasingly disappointed by the machine's ability to cause mass destruction, he decided to dispose of the drill and show the figure with its arms amputated. In this new version the sculpture is emasculated and defenseless, which insists on the apocalyptic vision of modernity.

As a counterpart of male destruction, Epstein's *Venus – second version* [fig. 48] concerns itself with female ability to procreate, although the figure distances itself from models of sensuality and exuberance women are often associated with. The marble block is distinguished by its geometrism and impressive dimensions, which recall the design of the machine. Particularly remarkable are the bosom and the belly of the woman, as these are the body parts often associated with femininity. Epstein thus attempted at unifying the fertile rituals of the past and the mechanization of sexuality in the modern era.



FIG. 47. Jacob Epstein, *Torso in Metal* from "The Rock-Drill," Tate.



FIG. 48. Jacob Epstein, *Venus – second version*, Yale University Art Gallery.

The juxtaposition of planes and dynamism both in Futurist painting and sculpture are two features that affect the plastic art of Vorticism. Nevertheless, the British artists did not show a celebratory attitude towards the present world, but rather they were inclined to critically analyze the deficiencies that modernity brought with itself. Therefore, their creations ally themselves with primitive cultures to make sense of the transvaluation of values, to use Nietzsche's terminology. As for the poetic genre, the Vorticists look at the Futurists and Cubists, who applied these visual effects of painting and sculpture to their poems. Marinetti believed in the role of typography, the suppression of spelling or adjectives and the use of verbs in motion. His *bruit* motif is also significant in that it emphasizes the violence of war, the frantic rhythm and velocity of modern life by a chorus of typewriters, kettledrums, rattles and pot-covers (Motherwell 25). Despite Marinetti's typographical innovations, the Vorticists did not make radical experimentations on the level of the page, yet they utilized the pictorial connotations of words so as to evoke an image.

In their study of Futurist poetry, Tandy and Sferrazza argue that the classical rhetoric of appropriateness has been replaced with a dislocated sentence structure akin to brushstrokes in modern painting (16-17). This new aesthetics responds to the conventions of the machine world. Hence, Marinetti in his "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" (1912) formulates a series of principles that a Futurist writer should follow. In short, he advocates the destruction of syntax by using only infinitives that adapt to nouns, rather than hinging on an *I* that articulates and dictates perceptions. Such *I* is rooted in psychological conventionalisms, and thus it must be overturned by what Marinetti defines as an "*intuitive psychology of matter*;" that is, the life force that releases syntax from restrictions and sets imagination in motion. Adverbs, adjectives and punctuation are to be suppressed, as they invest the phrase with monotony and sluggishness, rather than with rhythm. As Marinetti remarks, "to accentuate certain movements and indicate their directions, mathematical symbols will be

used: + — × : = and the musical symbols" ("Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" 85). This Futurist language does without commonplace analogies in favour of the reconciliation of "seemingly diverse and hostile things." Images do not appeal to judgements of taste, but to chance encounters that lead to "*words-in-freedom*" (*parole in libertà*), free intuition and unbounded imagination ("Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" 84-89).

Marinetti's "*words-in-freedom*" bear upon Kruchenykh's theorizations on the *Zaum* poem, based on the invention of words out of old roots or clusters of phonemes devoid of any significance. In his "Declaration of Transrational Language" (1921), Kruchenykh manifested:

Thought and speech cannot keep up with the emotions of someone in a state of inspiration, therefore the artist is free to express himself not only in the common language (concepts), but also in a personal one (the creator is an individual), as well as in a language which does not have any definite meaning (not frozen), a *transrational* language. Common language binds, free language allows for fuller expression. (Caws 182)

Transrational language distances itself from conceptual thinking only to generate a creative activity that frees creative expression. As Kruchenykh argues, it is a form of word creation based on the "magic of songs, incantations, and curses;" on the "revelation [...] of things unseen;" and on "musical-phonetic word-creation—orchestration, texture" ("Declaration of Transrational Language" 183). The artist's mission for Kruchenykh is to create a language that does not account for a consensus of meaning but for an alternative vision of the world. In that sense, the artist renames things according to the dictates of his consciousness, and will privilege the potential of the sound over the word in itself. For Kruchenykh, the verse is unconsciously broken down into syllabic patterns that defamiliarize reality ("Declaration of the Word as Such" 67-68).

As for Kruchenykh's *beyonsense*, he devises a language that disrupts the sequential order of the sentence, while playing with phonemic and morphemic patterns. His Russian

colleague Khlebnikov adopts a similar attitude towards the formation of words out of linguistic components in a quasi-scientific method. As Ziarek rightfully remarks, "Khlebnikov's explanations of beyonsense always proceed on two levels: On the one hand, they involve scientific descriptions, diagrams, and mathematical formulas, and on the other, they incorporate illustrations from nature, quite distinct from the aesthetics prevalent among the city-oriented futurists" (197). His work *Zangezi* (1922) is illustrative of beyonsense, as it blends drama, poetry and theoretical treatises that lend themselves to the temporality of the event and language. Words, phonemes, and graphemes project a multidirectional force onto the page that reformulates language and writing practices, abandoning the rigidity of ingrained structures in favor of the plasticity of language. On another note, *Zangezi* poses dilemmas that lie at the heart of an excessive usage of technology to the detriment of Nature and humankind. Khlebnikov's beyonsense allows for a reconceptualization of everyday experience that reacts to mathematical calculations. In poems such as "Refusal," Khlebnikov speaks about the massacre originating from the Russian Revolution. According to Ziarek, the Russian poet argues for "a poetics of historicity" that remaps the creative possibilities of the future in contrast to obsolete meaning and discourses (Ziarek 218-220).

Although the Vorticists did not possess broad knowledge of the Russian aesthetic achievements, it appears that at least they were familiar with the avant-garde innovations taking place in Russia by that time. For instance, Wyndham Lewis's *Portrait of an English Woman* (ca. 1913) and Ezra Pound's interview on Vorticism were published in the Petrograd anthology *Strelets* (The Archer) in 1915 (Bru 21). Reports of Vorticism in Russia might have reached British artistic circles, possibly awakening the interests of the latter in Russian Futurism and modern literature. In fact, Lewis wrote a series of "Imaginary Letters" in the *Little Review* over the years that follow 1915 that addressed the topic of Russian literature, thereby building bridges with the English Vortex. As for Pound, he dismissed modern

Russian literature in "The Paris Letter" as informing of "no problems that are of interest to any man with two grains of lucidity" (*The Dial* 276). Nevertheless, he concerned himself with the literary work of Chekhov, Dostoevsky and Turgenev. His contact with John Cournos, a Russian writer and translator, might have also led Pound to familiarize himself with Russian literary texts. Cournos had a Russian-Jewish background, but at the age of ten he emigrated to Philadelphia and in 1912 he moved to London, where he met the Imagists. Pound extensively corresponded with him and was likely to peruse his translations and reviews on Russian literature in the *Criterion*.⁶⁴

The acquaintance of the Vorticists with Marinetti's innovations and Russian avant-garde artists close to Futurism made an impact on the development of the Anglo-American avant-garde. In particular, Vorticist poetry utilizes a language that reminds us of Marinetti's *parole in libertà* and the *zaum* language of Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov. This can be noticed in Pound's poem "Ancient Music" published in *BLAST*, where he makes use of a medieval song⁶⁵ to play with the symbolism of sounds:

ANCIENT MUSIC

Winteir is icumen in,
Lhude sing Goddamm,
Raineth drop and staineth slop,
And how the wind doth ramm!

Sing: Goddamm.

Skiddeth bus and sloppeth us,
An ague hath my ham.
Freezeth river, turneth liver

Damm you; Sing: Godddamm.

⁶⁴ See Pound's correspondence with John Cournos in *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941* (276).

⁶⁵ The manuscript of the medieval song "Summer Is Icumen In" (The Summer Has Arrived) is located in the British Library. For a reference of the medieval song, see Andrew Taylor and A. E. Coates's "The Dates of the Reading Calendar and the Summer Canon," in *Notes and Queries* 243.

Goddamm, Goddam, 'tis why I am, Goddam,
 So 'gainst the winter's balm.
 Sing goddamm, dam, sing goddamm,
 Sing goddomm, sing goddamm, DAMM. (20)

This poem evokes the Kruchenykh's attempt at recovering original resonances of Slavic native language, which bears resemblance to Pound's return to the Anglo-Saxon past. The song reminisces the thirteenth-century medieval English rota, although Pound has effected a few transformations in terms of content that parodies the first version. If the original entails a celebration of summertime, Pound's version curses the arrival of winter in an urban environment owing to extreme cold weather. The composition makes use of old suffixes such as "eth" to invest it with archaic overtones that contrast with the modern scene. Towards the end, the repetition of curse words with a variant of "a" and "o" sounds instils the poem with an irony that contrasts with the solemnity of the old poem.

Vorticism entails a synthesis of both the formal practices of Futurism and analytical Cubism. It implies a twofold reaction to the Futurist concern with dynamism and simultaneity, and to the overtly static nature of Cubism, in order to arrive at a style based on movement without relinquishing form. As Dasenbrock rightfully remarks, "the Futurists also sought a renovation of subject matter to accompany their renovation of style" (30). For that very reason, Lewis critiqued Cubism, as it distanced itself from the modern world, rather than partaking in it. Nevertheless, he was also dissatisfied with the formlessness of Futurist compositions, as they are conceived as a conglomerate of diffused and imperfect sensations that appeal to intuition. In doing so, the Futurists refute the dogma that prefigures the autonomous work of art, namely, "the disjunction of art and the praxis of life" (Bürger 53). Cubism, on the other hand, accounts for a form of abstraction dissociated from society. Yet,

in both cases, the long-standing genre of art as an institution is criticized in order to promote new creative acts that question the values of bourgeois society.

Whether they identify with or detach from the reality of their time, both the Cubists and the Futurists were attracted to the innumerable changes of the modern world, specifically the apparatus of engineering. The former tended to crystallize the mechanics of the object, whereas the latter invested it with movement. Due to the potential of technology to alter our spatiotemporal perception, the Futurists embraced the machine as the symbol of twentieth-century aesthetics. Nonetheless, World War I changed the perception of the machine as a modern arcadia, and thus the Vorticists started to raise awareness of its destructive and alienating constituency. Vorticism showed concern for modernity-related topics, not so much because they found these motifs agreeable, but rather because they were determined to commit themselves to the world they were living in. Their stance radically diverged from the Futurist celebration of the war, technology and speed, yet they also radically opposed the war. For that matter, they relied upon Cubist techniques of abstraction to maintain a position of detachment that enabled them to be impartial and attentive to the changes of the world.

3.2.3. Vorticism and the Mechanical Art of Photography: On Alvin Langdon Coburn's Vortographs

If it is true that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," Alvin Langdon Coburn succeeded in capturing this idea in his photographs, especially in his so-called Vortographs. These are snapshots that reproduced repeated forms out of the alignment of three mirrors. In a time when photography was underrated owing to its mimetic reproduction of reality, Coburn took advantage of the experiments with abstraction that the Cubists initiated and the Futurists continued so as to elevate the mechanical art to an aesthetic category akin to painting or sculpture. The modern photographer was able to appreciate a perspective of the landscape or

the individual that went unnoticed by the viewer, yet the object remained unchanged. Coburn was determined to modify the passive role of photography, and indeed he proved that the snapshot of the camera had the potential to significantly alter the object, resulting in forms and light effects other than the original. In other words, like Vorticist paintings and sculptures, his Vortographs introduced abstraction into the field of photography, creating a kaleidoscopic effect that allows the reader to dissect the object from multiple viewpoints in order to rethink its ontology. To put it simply, if in a beginning photographic art went hand in hand with the faithful representation of the referent without questioning its existence, Coburn's vortographs engage in the distinction between reality and illusion, presenting the object as an elusive entity hinging upon the kaleidoscopic image. To be sure, the artistic product distances itself from the original to such an extent that truth is contingent on interpretation. The image has become an unstable device that does not refer back to the world but to its own constituency. Coburn's vortographs are thus the maximum expression of photography in considering the alterity of the world and the coalescence of different viewpoints.

Before Coburn became involved with the Vorticists, he showed brilliant potential in the field of photography. At an early age, he utilized gum and glycerin to produce his first photographs, and soon enough his friend F. Holland Day provided him the possibility of showing his prints in the exhibits of the "New School of American Pictorial Photography" and the "Brotherhood of the Linked Ring."⁶⁶ When he returned to the United States, he established himself in New York, becoming part of the Photo-Secession Group, integrated by

⁶⁶ For a further view, see Branchini and Romer, *The Photographs of Alvin Langdon Coburn at George Eastman House*.

Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Clarence H. White and Gertrude Käsebier, to name a few. These artists "strived to have photography accepted as an art in its own right: each image would not be seen as a document or snapshot but as a singular object to be contemplated for the personal expression of the artist" (Newhall 26). Their main concern was to eschew Romanticist views in favor of the abstraction developed in modern painting and sculpture. In line with this aesthetics, Coburn photographed the tops of tall buildings to emphasize the geometric lines of industrial edifices. Arising from his contact with the Photo-Secessionists, he was given a one-man show in the Camera Club of New York in 1903 and many of the prints he produced in the following years were included in Stieglitz's journal titled *Camera Work*. The friendships he made in the circles of the Photo-Secessionists led Coburn to develop a portraiture project of several authors and painters he admired. In his own words, "it was my practice before meeting my subjects, to saturate myself in their books so that I might previously come to know something of the inner man" (Newhall 27). Nevertheless, the pictorial style of the Photo-Secessionists began suffering symptoms of exhaustion, and Coburn believed it to be imperative to innovate the photographic medium to avoid stagnation. His exhibit in the Albright Gallery in Buffalo, NY, was titled "The Old Masters of Photography" and entailed a harsh critique of the lack of progress made by the Pictorialists over the last decades.

Attentive to avant-garde experiments, Coburn familiarized himself with the Cubists and Futurists' experiments with kaleidoscopic perspectives and the impressions of movement, which might be appreciated in the following words:

It is this progress of the arts that has interested me. Where is it leading us? There are "moderns" in Painting, in Music, and in Literature...if we are alive to the spirit of our time it is these moderns who interest us. They are striving, reaching out towards the future, analyzing the mossy structure of the past, and building afresh, in colour and sound and grammatical construction, the

scintillating vision of their minds; and being interested particularly in photography, it has occurred to me, why should not the camera also throw off the shackles of conventional representation and attempt something fresh and untried? Why should not its subtle rapidity be utilized to study movement? Why not repeated successive exposures of an object in motion on the same plate? Why should not perspective be studied from angles hitherto neglected or unobserved? Why, I ask you earnestly, need we go on making commonplace little exposures of subjects that may be sorted into groups of landscapes, portraits, and figure studies? Think of the joy of doing something which it would be impossible to classify, or to tell which was the top and which was the bottom! (Nordström, Padon, and Luca Ackerman 127)

Coburn's eagerness to innovate photography came true when he met the Vorticists, from whom he learned the visual language of abstraction. He even took photographs of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, two of the most representative figures of the British movement, thereby completing his portraiture project. In fact, 1917 was the year when John Quinn, an affluent lawyer and patron of the arts, disseminated the *Exhibition of the Vorticists at the Penguin* in New York, where paintings by Dismorr, Etchells, Lewis, Roberts, Saunders and Wadsworth were showcased. He did so after Pound remonstrated in an issue of the 1915 *New Age* against those art collectors that invested exorbitant amounts of money in purchasing copies of past times, when modern artists were in dire straits. Not without reason did John Quinn⁶⁷ feel offended, since he concerned himself with the status of modern art, to the point of aiding in the organization of the Armory Show and purchasing works of the Impressionists, Fauvists and Dadaists, among others. Seeing that Quinn could conceivably contribute to the economic funding of Vorticism, Pound wrote him a letter that eulogized the lawyer. This accolade persuaded Quinn to acquire paintings of the most representative

⁶⁷ To contrast Quinn's artistic acquisitions and relationship with Pound, see Benjamin Lawrence Reid's *The Man from New York: John Quinn and His Friends*.

figures of the avantgarde, namely Etchells, Lewis, Roberts and Wadsworth. He even paid tribute to Gaudier-Brzeska after his death in the battlefield by purchasing some of his sculptures.

Although Vorticism was eventually a failure in the U.S., Coburn appreciated the possibilities of abstraction in photographs. Around 1916 Coburn attached three mirrors to the lens of a camera, which showed a fissured image. Pound used the term “Vortoscope” to refer to such device, whereas the photographs were called “Vortographs.” Such experiment made Coburn known in London with his exhibit of 18 Vortographs in 1917. Coburn persevered in elevating photography to a truly art genre through the technological apparatus and the models provided by abstraction that reevaluated the prospects of the mechanical arts. His *Vortograph of Ezra Pound* [fig. 49] shows the multiple image of Pound in a black and white foreground traversed by dark lines that evoked the geometrism of Cubism and the dynamism of Futurism.



FIG. 49. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Vortograph of Ezra Pound*, Museum of Modern Art.

Another illustration of vortograph work is *Vortograph* [fig. 50] which is comprised of circular and quasi-triangular shapes made of crystal that bear resemblance to frosted vegetation patterns. At the same time the rounded figures project a distorted image of an unidentifiable object. In this *Vortograph* Coburn consciously transforms the ontology of the original object, in favor of an autonomous creation that relies upon the transformative power of a prismatic view. At the heart of this photograph is not the element in itself but its mutation into an unrecognizable entity that is subservient to the subjectivity of the artist’s mind, as well as the active role of the viewer to decipher the enigma of the image. This vortograph is an enactment of the encounter with the marvellous within the quotidian that invites us to relinquish the superficial view in the name of a profound field of vision that enables insight into the unknown.



FIG. 50. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Vortograph*, National Gallery of Art.

With his Vortographs Coburn took Vorticism to another level that was unknown to avant-garde artistic production. Instead of reproducing the object at hand, he transformed it through techniques of abstraction, creating an autonomous reality that differed from mimetic patterns. To that end, the referent is lost as a result of juxtaposition of lenses that emphasize the different layers of the object. This procedure is synonymous with the destabilization of the totalizing idea of the image so as to privilege a meta-aesthetics based on the illusive and elusive character of reality. Coburn appeared to comprehend the mutable aspects of daily life and the impossibility of completely grasping its experience. For that reason, he made use of a type of prismatic perspective relying on the subjectivity of the viewer.

3.3. Vorticism and Women: The Androgynous Aesthetics of Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders

The presence of women in Vorticism is significant to the extent that they contribute to the analysis of the sexualization of the image. At times Vorticist women participate of an androgynous aesthetics that allows them to gain visibility in a male dominated world. Despite the fact that avant-garde culture was extremely progressive on many fronts, patriarchal structures determined the acceptance or exclusion of ideas, models of representation and individuals. To that end, women were not sufficiently acknowledged, and thus they were forced to adopt masculine registers to be able to access circles of power and develop their professional career as artists. Within Vorticism Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders assimilated the patterns of their male colleagues, not without relinquishing feminine concerns. Their paintings and poems appealed to the necessity of androgynous gender performance to reach the maximum potential embedded in both sexes. Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders illustrate the position of women in modernity and the constitution of their own identity by adopting masculine models that allowed them to participate in artistic circles.

In this vein, the performance of gender identity in terms of the sexualization of the Vorticist image is at stake in Dismorr's and Saunders's poetic and artistic works.

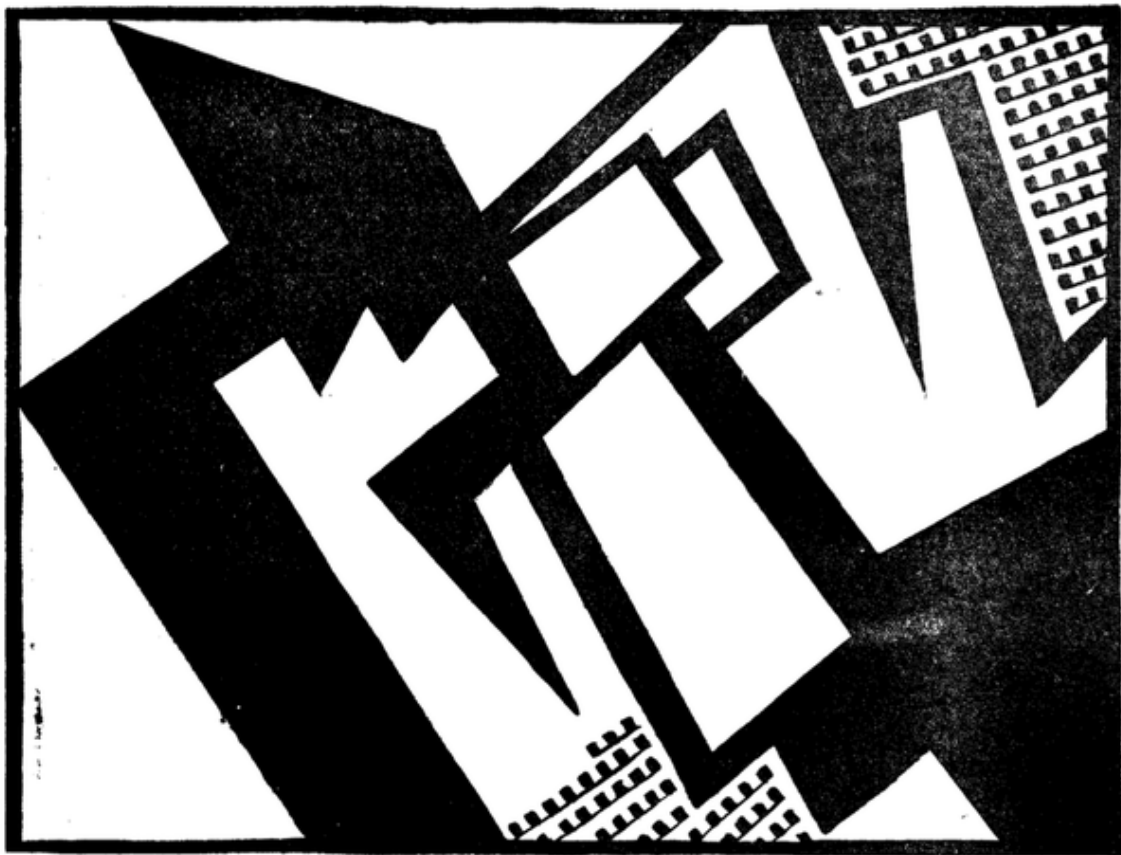
Vorticism was an extremely masculine movement that harshly opposed any sense of femininity and effeminacy. This idea was partly due to its association with Marinetti and the Italian Futurists, who concerned themselves with the creation of a virile art oriented towards the destruction of conventions. Consequently, women's traditional features of softness did not fit within the paradigms of a movement that called for action in order to innovate. The case of Vorticist women is worthy of study, as they combine masculine and feminine traits in their artworks and life praxis that lend themselves to novel readings of this London-based vanguardism. For all intents and purposes, Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders are exemplary cases that offer a new vision of Vorticism in terms of gender identity. By analyzing the evolution of their artistic careers from their inception to the moment they joined Vorticism, we can hint at the fact that women ended up taking in masculine forms with a twofold end—that is, rebelling against feminine domestic roles embodied in Victorian culture, and reclaiming a space that allowed them to attain a certain degree of visibility. Dismorr and Saunders positioned themselves in the boundaries of the border. That is to say, they willingly embraced the minor experimental culture by placing themselves on the periphery of the avant-garde. The adoption of the manly aesthetics of the Vorticists challenged conventional associations of femininity, all the while embracing a revolutionary model that allowed them to be accepted in a world dominated by men. Therefore, it is not strange to assume that these women Vorticists incorporate cultural constructs that respond to male and female patterns of behavior. By doing so, Dismorr and Saunders might be pointing to a crisis of traditional roles of masculinity and femininity, and instead, they surreptitiously argue for an economy of intersubjectivity that allows for reciprocal exchanges between both genders.

The Vorticists showed radical patterns of behavior in multiple senses, yet they were extremely conservative so as to promote models other than patriarchal. As Miranda Hickman⁶⁸ argues, Lewis, Wadsworth and Etchells appeared to perceive virility jeopardized by forms of femininity, eschewing them as much as possible. After all, women were considered to be amateurs in artistic terms and forced to abandon their profession once they married. Their social influence might have only hinged upon their financial situation, as was Kate Lechmere's case securing funds for Lewis's project to launch *BLAST* and decorate the salon of the Rebel Arts' Center. More modest figures such as Dismorr and Saunders were initially not taken seriously. As Hickman points out, the painting titled *The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel, Spring 1915* shows the male artists from Vorticism in the center of the image. Seated at the table were Cuthbert Hamilton, Ezra Pound, William Roberts, Wyndham Lewis, Frederick Etchells and Edward Wadsworth. In the upper-left hand corner we can see Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders, whose role was usually reduced to serving tea. Nevertheless, they gradually entered male circles of art and ended up being accepted as professional artists, contributing pieces of graphic and literary work to *BLAST* 2. They even exhibited with other members of the movement in London at the Doré Gallery and the Penguin Club in New York in 1917 (Hickman 53-58). In addition, their cordial relationship with Lewis is proved by the occasional exchange correspondence.

Before joining Vorticism, Jessica Dismorr spent a period in France, from 1903 to 1905, studying at the Étapes Art Colony under the supervision of Max Bohm. Later in 1910 she enrolled in the Académie de la Palette in Paris to complement her artistic training guided by the Scottish painter John Duncan Fergusson. Dismorr also took part in the movements of the British Fauvists and the Rhythmists, who connected Bergson's theories on vital energy

⁶⁸ See Hickman, "Beyond the Frame: Reassessing Jessie Dismorr and Helen Saunders" in Günter Berghaus's *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*.

with the female nude and its curvilinear forms. Yet she relinquished this sensuous register in favor of the masculine vocabulary of Vorticism. In rejecting the Rhythmist language and, especially the female nude, Dismorr manifested her opposition to traditional roles of femininity, often associated to Victorian conventions (Hickman 59-61). Her usage of Vorticist expression corresponds to her association with male forms, yet she does not categorically abandon the essence of womanhood.



The Engine.

Dismorr.

FIG. 51. Jessica Dismorr, *The Engine*, *Blast 2* (July 1915): 27.

As it can be noticed, the illustration above [fig. 51] is composed of hard and sharp lines that are reminiscent of the Vorticist aesthetics practiced by Wyndham Lewis and his comrades. This composition is an abstraction of the machine and its clean-edged surface and chiaroscuros. The title also evokes the hustle and bustle of modern experience, which is emphasized by the aggressive traces that mimic Futurist “force lines.”

Her poem "Monologue," the literary equivalent of Dismorr's visual images, merges masculine and feminine references in an effort to open up an androgynous space where both genders coexist without sacrificing any part of their subjectivity. The only element of discord is the mechanic transformation that the body undergoes as the poem advances.

MONOLOGUE

My niche in nonentity still grins—
 I lay knees, elbows pinioned, my sleep mutterings blunted against a wall.
 Pushing my hard head through the hole of birth
 I squeezed out with intact body.
 I ache all over, but acrobatic, I undertake the feat of existence.
 Details of equipment delight me.
 I admire my arrogant spiked tresses, the disposition of my perpetually
 foreshortened limbs,
 Also the new machinery that wields the chains of muscles fitted beneath my
 close coat of skin.
 On a pivot of contentment my balanced body moves slowly.
 Inquisitiveness, a butterfly, escapes.
 It spins with drunken invitation. I poke my fingers into the middles of big
 succulent flowers.
 My fingers are fortunately tipped with horn.
 Tentacles of my senses, subtle and far-reaching, drop spoils into the vast sack
 of my greed.
 Stretched ears projecting from my brain are gongs struck by vigorous and
 brutal fists of air.
 Into scooped nests of nostrils glide slippery and salt scents, I swallow slowly
 with gasps
 In pursuit of shapes my eyes dilate and bulge. Finest instruments of touch they
 refuse to blink their pressure of objects.
 They dismember live anatomies innocently.
 They run around the polished rims of rivers.
 With risk they press against the cut edges of rocks and pricking pinnacles.

Pampered appetites and curiosities become blood-drops, their hot mouths yell
war.

Sick opponents dodging behind silence, echo alone shrills an equivalent threat.

Obsessions rear their heads. I hammer their faces into discs.

Striped malignities spring upon me, and tattoo with incisions of wild claws.

Speeded with whips of hurt, I hurry towards ultimate success.

I stoop to lick the bright cups of pain and drop out of activity.

I lie a slack bag of skin. My nose hangs over the abyss of exhaustion, my
loosened tongue laps sleep as from a bowl of milk. (65)

This poem opens by evoking what appears to be a moment of parturition, when the newborn "in nonentity still grins" and, squeezing its "hard head through the hole of birth" engages in "the feat of existence." The body parts of the creature are "spiked tresses," "foreshortened limbs" and "chains of muscles" that present a robotic constituency in contrast with the humanity of the "close coat of skin." The mechanical being then begins communicating its perceptual experience of moving clumsily, tasting "succulent flowers" and "salt scenes" as well as hearing the brutal sound of gongs. Vorticist vocabulary can be noticed in the sharp geometry and violence of imagery. At a certain point, it gives the impression the reader is transported to the battlefield, where the artillery of the creature seems to "dismember live anatomies" and "hammer their faces into discs." At the same time, the violent "incisions of wild claws" attest to the destructive potential of the human dynamo. In the poem the machine acts as the linking medium that negotiates an androgynous identity. Whereas male features are embodied by the dominance and force of the automaton, femininity responds to the scene of childbirth and traditional blossoming images of Nature. Although Dismorr makes use of an unequivocally virile language rooted in Vorticism, she does not refuse to negotiate a space that takes into account feminine subjectivity. After all, one sex cannot exclude the other, but rather it is the binary nature of human experience what should be emphasized.



FIG. 52. Helen Saunders, *Atlantic City, Blast 2* (July 1915): 57.

My hand gropes out restlessly through the heat. By its curious movements it
keeps my body afloat.

It is grateful when it feels the sudden resistance of an iron bar.

This bar is rectangular. Its edges are rather sharp.

I twist my hand round the bar so that the edge saws gently at my wrist,

I am glad of the slight pain. It is like a secret.

Now things get through: an antediluvian sound comes through the Deluge of
Mud

It is something by way of an olive branch.

It seems to be a recruiting band,

The drums thud and the fifes pipe on tip-toe.

They are trying to pierce and dart through the thick envelope of the drum's
beating

They want to tear jagged holes in the cloud.

I try to open my eyes a little.

A crowd of india-rubber-like shapes swarm through the narrow chinks.

They swell and shrink, merge into one another like an ashen kaleidoscope!

My eyes are shut down again.

A giant cloud like a black bladder with holes in it hovers overhead.

Out of the holes stream incessant cataracts of the same black mud that I am
lying in. There is a little red in the mud.

One of these mud-shafts is just above me.

It is pouring into me so that my body swells and grows heavier every minute.

There is no sign of sinking.

It floats like a dingy feather on stagnation. Where does this taste of honey
come from?

This mud has curious properties.

It makes you dream. It is like poisoned arrows.

(Such mud, naturally, is medicinal: that is why they have set up this vulgar
"Hydro" here.

It is a health-resort.)

I have just discovered with what I think is disgust, that there are hundreds of
other bodies bobbing about against me. (72)

Like Dismorr's poem, "A Vision of Mud" presents a gender ambiguous speaker who might be receiving hydropathic treatment. To be sure there is no physical trait that allows the reader to decipher the sexual identity of the voice in the poem, which opens up a space to reconsider androgynous interpretations. In the first lines, the word "eclosion" suggests the blossoming of flora or the emergence as a larva from an egg. These reproductive traits are usually associated with femininity. Yet this word might stand for exclusion or closure, which invites us to think over women shut down by gender roles and their possible exclusion from power structures, if they refuse to identify with particular models of femininity. This tension and reaction to the paradigms of the system is illustrated in the following lines: "How is it that if you struggle you sink? / I lie quite still: hands are spreading mud everywhere: they plaster it on what should be a body" (4-6). In other words, no matter how much the agent of the action struggles, since the mud as a symbol for acceptable norms of conduct will always engulf any individual that dares to defy the status quo. However, there exists the possibility of staying "afloat," offer resistance and endure the pain:

This bar is rectangular. It's edges are rather sharp.
 I twist my hand round the bar so that the edge saws gently at my wrist,
 I am glad of the slight pain. It is like a secret.
 Now things get through: an antediluvian sound comes through the Deluge of
 Mud (13-17)

The language described in these lines is charged with the masculine potential Vorticism argues for, making reference to sharp geometric lines (rectangular bar, sharp edges) and violence ("I twist my hand").

In what follows, Saunders presents apocalyptic imagery that is reminiscent of the ravage caused in the trenches during World War I. There are allusions to drums' beating and "holes in the cloud" that evoke an open fire. Towards the end of the poem, Saunders claims

the mud to possess visionary properties that have transported the subject to a war-like scene where "there are hundreds of other bodies bobbing about" (43-44). The mud as a medicinal therapy has led us to experience a caustic vision of a battlefield full of corpses all over the place. The vocabulary is essentially Vorticist in that it illustrates sharp figures and hard textures that remind us of the virile attributes. Yet Saunders might also communicate the peril of relying on manpower and the crisis of masculinity noticeable in the diagnoses of multiple cases of male hysteria. Whereas the opening of this piece might critique the women's pigeonholing in terms of their reproductive features and their confinement to the private sphere, it concludes by rejecting male models due to their destructive potential. The third way offered by an androgynous identity might contribute to reciprocal exchanges and mutual understanding between sexes.

To summarize, Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders offer a novel approach to the investigation of avant-garde criticism. Their peripheral position within the Vorticist movement responds to the difficulties women often found in making their way in artistic circles. Their acceptance of an aggressively virile aesthetics discloses a desire to counter the sentimental models of Victorian institutions. In order to resist the establishment, they needed to absorb the male aesthetics of Vorticism, especially because men had power on the margins of this avant-garde. The problematic relations of gender that Dismorr and Saunders encountered benefited the gestation of an androgynous art where sexual difference is erased. Therefore, their literary and artistic creations are characterized by the absence of gender referentiality that encourages intersubjective exchanges in the constitution of identity.

3.4. Conclusion

The marginal position of Vorticism within the avant-garde was significant to consolidate a national consciousness based on the politicization of the image on multiple fronts. The role of

mass culture helped Wyndham Lewis to exploit advertising strategies in *BLAST*, the official magazine of the movement, raising awareness of the privileged position of Great Britain regarding topics of modernity. London was precisely a center of energy characterized by its leisure industry, fast-developing urbanization and methods of transport. Despite the fact that the Vorticists welcomed Marinetti's celebration of machine culture, they ultimately ended up disengaging themselves from such position due to several reasons. In the first place, the Vorticists were well aware that, if they looked to reach a certain level of visibility within the European avant-garde, they needed to react to Futurism, a movement that was about to absorb them. From the margins of Continental vanguardism, they raised their voices to question issues that were the political banner of Cubism and Futurism, namely the contribution of technology to the advancement of humanity. The machine provided the Vorticists with the possibility of innovating in aesthetic terms, namely the insight into abstraction to contest the prevalence of mimetism. Along these lines, Coburn's vortographs were extremely original inventions that paved the way for considering the transformative character of photography regarding the filmed object. Yet the destructive potential of technology during World War I led the Vorticists to consider it a double-edged sword, especially after Gaudier-Brzeska's death in the battlefield.

Apart from the articulation of a political identity that responded to mass culture and the opposition to Marinetti's Futurism, women succeeded in the construction of a sexualized image. Jessica Dissmorr and Helen Saunders looked into androgynous spaces where feminine and masculine aspects coalesce, particularly in relation to the generative role of the machine. This multiperspectival study of Vorticism aids in the overarching comprehension of the visual poetic identity of this movement, while engaging with the constitution of a political image based on the effects of the media and mass culture, technology and the critique of traditional gender roles. Vorticism is thus a movement that, in spite of its marginal character

regarding Continental avant-garde, paved the way for reconsidering positions of resistance that are at the heart of political thinking.

4. Feminism and the Ekphrastic Poems of Mina Loy

As we have seen earlier, Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders participated of the margins of the Vorticist movement due to their condition as women. In order to react to Victorian patterns of behavior and gain acceptance as artists, they used the staunchly virile aesthetics of Vorticism. Notwithstanding, their visual and poetic pieces ultimately show the tendency to reconcile feminine and masculine aspects that reclaim an androgynous space of intersubjective exchanges. Mina Loy was displaced to the periphery of art, having posthumously achieved merit in the avant-garde. If Dismorr and Saunders limited themselves to the aesthetics of Vorticism, Loy's production was extremely prolific, to the point of having travelled all over Europe and America, familiarizing herself with an ample spectrum of experimental trends. In particular, she moved to Florence, where she learned from the Italian Futurists. Around the year 1920, Loy moved to New York, establishing a friendship with the Dadaists. To be sure, she married the Dadaist Arthur Cravan in Mexico City in 1918, after her divorce from Stephen Haweis in 1913. In the American artistic circles, she became an icon of the modern woman and started acting in several plays. Loy formed also part of the group of the *Others* journal, which integrated poets and artists such as Man Ray, William Carlos Williams, Marcel Duchamp and Marianne Moore. After her initial stay in New York, she temporarily stayed in Mexico, Chile, Argentina and several cities in Europe—Surrey, Geneva and Florence—. Later in 1920 she returned to New York and in 1921 she stayed in Paris, Florence, Austria and Berlin. In 1932 she moved to Paris once again, where she was

introduced to the Surrealists, who made it possible for her to be an outstanding representative of the Julien Levy Gallery from 1932 to 1936. One year later, she returned to New York, where she was involved in art made from derelicts of society.⁶⁹

Although Loy involved herself in several avant-garde trends in Europe and America, she did not belong to any movement. However, she wrote ekphrastic poems on some of the most remarkable contributions from a feminist standpoint. Her artistic work and her knowledge of Marinetti's Futurist writings helped her invest poetry with plastic properties that transported the reader to a new context. According to Schulte, Loy was "aware of the iconic value of words and their pictorial presentation" (9). Marinetti's "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" and "Destruction of Syntax—Imagination without Strings—Words in Freedom" made an impact on Loy's unrelated analogies as well as the erasure of any sense of grammatical correctness. Like the Futurists she was inclined to abolish linkers, punctuation, adjectives and adverbs only to privilege active or infinitive verbs and nouns as carriers of full meaning. Juxtaposition was also essential to convey musical, olfactory and visual impressions that appeal to our perceptual experience.

Loy's familiarity with Futurism aided in her vision and understanding of Vorticism in Great Britain and her refutation of an aesthetics that discriminated feminine perspectives. If in a beginning Loy was enticed by Futurism, she eventually distanced herself from Marinetti on the grounds of his misogynistic ideas. Unlike Dismorr and Saunders's neutrality, she was an avid supporter of women's cause, which resulted in the publication of her "Feminist Manifesto" in 1914. In this pamphlet she argues for "absolute demolition" of the system in order to "bring about Reform." As she puts it, "economic legislation, vice-crusades and uniform education" are nothing but cosmetic operations that only "gloss over Reality" (Caws

⁶⁹ For an extensive reading of Loy and her avant-garde connoisseurship, see Raphael Schulte's "'Face of the skies': Ekphrastic Poetics of Mina Loy's Late Poems" (6).

611). For that reason, women need to resist definitions and categorizations, whether they be mistresses or mothers, as these hinge upon masculine models. In this respect, Loy appears to oppose Dismorr and Saunders's assimilation of men's vocabulary, as it eventually leads to the loss of identity. In her words:

The women who adapt themselves to a theoretical valuation of
their sex as a relative impersonality, are not yet Feminine
Leave off looking to men to find out what you are not—seek
within yourselves to find out what you are
As conditions are at present constituted—you have the choice
between Parasitism, & Prostitution—or Negation (Caws 611)

In Loy's view, women need to preserve their own traits, especially those relative to their motherhood and body. They are to reinvent themselves by taking an inward turn to their own being and accept their own subjectivity in opposition to male restrictions and derision. In opposition to Marinetti's "obsessive I that up to now the poets have described, sung, analyzed, and vomited up," Loy defends the preservation of a unique feminine voice. According to Elizabeth Arnold, "to survive as a woman poet in the midst of macho avant-gardists, she had to establish herself as an assertive, independent agent" (84). As Irigaray points out in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984), the subject embodies the traits of patriarchy, and thus women are separated from their agency, becoming an envelope for both man and child. This resignation from their own concerns results in the loss of a feminine voice, since woman "passes ceaselessly through the child in order to return to herself" (35). Their task, then, lies in the search of a "double envelope" that redefines her identity.

In her "Feminist Manifesto," Loy hints at women's necessity to reconnect with themselves and find her own envelope. One of the issues a woman is expected to come to terms with is her privileged position to give birth to a child, with whom she is to identify, rather than with man. Loy remarks that the desire to be loved and protected restrains their

"intelligent curiosity and courage in meeting and resisting the pressure of life sex" (Caws 612). In the search of their own writing, women are urged to enjoy their body so as to discover a literary dimension that acknowledges the presence of a second sex other than masculine investments. As Irigaray argues, feminine subjectivity ties bodily pleasures to the different positions adopted by the text so that the patriarchal ideals of closeness and linearity can be challenged: "We can never complete the circuit, explore our periphery: we have so many dimensions" (*This Sex which is not One* 213). In the same manner, Loy speaks of self-respect and the confidence in women's sexual condition to point to the deficiencies of patriarchal structures.

4.1. Loy's ekphrastic poems: "Brancusi's Golden Bird" and Wyndham Lewis's "Starry Night"

Loy's ekphrastic poem titled "Brancusi's Golden Bird" integrates Cubist and Futurist expressive language into her feminist views. The sculpture [fig. 53] is a stylized abstraction of a bronze bird divested of any superficial feature that prevents the reader from apprehending the essence of the figure. In the same vein, the poem preserves the essential features of the bird. Rather than objectively describing its external appearance, Loy effects an inward turn that allows us to apprehend the immutable aspects of the figure against the transience of life. As Burke points out, "she looked to the black page as an alternate space suitable for the examination of complex states of consciousness," where interplay of words and silence enables "the enactment of a female inwardness" akin to her portraits of female subjects (n.p.).



FIG. 53. Constantin Brancusi, *Golden Bird*, The Art Institute of Chicago.

"Brancusi's Golden Bird"

The toy
become the aesthetic archetype

As if
some patient peasant God
had rubbed and rubbed
the Alpha and Omega
of Form
into a lump of metal

A naked orientation
unwinged unplumed
the ultimate rhythm
has lopped the extremities
of crest and claws
from
the nucleus of flight
The absolute act
of art
conformed
to continent sculpture
-- bare as the brow of Osiris --
this breast of revelation

an incandescent curve
licked by chromatic flames
in labyrinths of reflections

This gong
of polished hyperaesthesia
shrills with brass as the aggressive light
strikes

its significance

The immaculate

conception

of the inaudible bird

occurs

in gorgeous reticence (*The Lost Luna Baedeker* 79-80)

In order to describe the mold of the sculpture, Loy utilizes a judgement of taste, comparing the chiseling to a godly act that appears

As if

some patient peasant God

had rubbed and rubbed

the Alpha and Omega

of Form

into a lump of metal

According to Kant, a judgement of taste is based on the presentation of an object "as if" it were a concept without a purpose, also called purposiveness without purpose. In Kantian philosophy, Brancusi's *Golden Bird* is the equivalent to the beautiful, defined as that which "without a concept is cognized as the object of a *necessary* liking" (90). Devoid of any sense of interest, the subject is inclined to the restful contemplation of the object. Brancusi's bird manifests itself as the beautiful, insofar as Loy speaks about it "as if" it were valid for everybody else, irrespective of the universality of the concept. In other words, such aesthetic object opens the question of becoming beautiful to everybody else, when our inner voice rises and acknowledges the universal validity of the judgement, thus becoming a categorical imperative.

From her words we can infer that Loy believes we should assent on the eternal beauty of the bird, which is reminiscent of legends and fertility rituals in primitive cultures. It is

precisely the central role of women in sexual and reproductive processes what discloses the importance of femininity in this ekphrastic composition. The poem thus invests the figure with female reproductive experience, which is characterized by its abundance and potential to procreate. These characteristics are precisely underscored in Loy’s manifesto, where she recovers the aspects of femininity obliterated by patriarchal thought. Embodying the “Alpha and Omega / of Form,” those Greek letters signify the beginning and ending of time and existence. Just as Osiris was dismembered in his totality, the bird jettisons superfluous elements, namely, extremities, crests and claws, in favor of an ascending vision that transports us to the essence of the flight. In the same vein, bronze is the material of which the sculpture is made, pointing to a hyperaesthesia that fuses an excess of sounds (“shrills with bras”) and chromatic shades (aggressive light). These traits link the animal with the feminine in its exuberance, which is ultimately curbed by its petrified form and silence.



FIG. 54. Wyndham Lewis, *Two Women*, Tate.

"The Starry Sky" of Wyndham Lewis [fig. 54] is another case of ekphrasis, where the geometric language of Cubism is transformed into literary terms. Primarily known by the title *Two Women*, Loy might have selected Lewis's painting to contribute a feminist reading that encompasses the experience of sublimity. As Kant writes,

the beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime, is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness. (90)

The beautiful responds to the containment of the figure within its contours; the sublime, on the other hand, acts out a compelling desire for expansion. Loy captures the regularity of lines and shapes from Vorticism, which reminds us of the clarity of the beautiful: pyradimical survivors, cyclorama of space, geometric chimeras. Yet the poem is an embodiment of the aesthetics of the sublime, as allusions to "the austere theatre of the Infinite," "the sublime," celestial bodies and unusual natural phenomena such as "Nirvanic snows" bring us in contact with the incommensurable and awe-inspiring. The objects in this poem respond to a sublime effect, as they are devoid of contours and measures, while modeling the unshaped out of the materials obtained from the world. This poem strives to reconcile the fixity of the beautiful and the dynamic force of the sublime as a means of facing the individual with a radical alterity defined by its excess. The poem hinges upon an aporetic knowledge that privileges uncertain encounters. The overwhelming other Loy might be speaking of is the feminine experience of the two women in Lewis's painting, two strange beings confined to the male forms of Vorticism. The poem appears to argue for femininity as a radical other that desires to break free from geometric rigidity, all the while rethinking an ethical project characterized by its all-inclusive discursive generosity. What is at stake is the possibility of approaching the unrepresentable as a force field that sets imagination in motion. Owing to the exclusion of

discourses of power, the feminine figure acts as the locus of the sublime to counter the contemplative models of the beautiful usually adopted by men.

"The Starry Sky" of Wyndham Lewis
who raised these rocks of human mist

pyramidal survivors
in the cyclorama of space

In the
austere theatre of the Infinite
the ghosts of the stars
perform the "Presence"
fall
upon the aged radiance
of suns and moons

— The nerves of Heaven
flinching
from the antennae
of the intellect
— the rays
that pierce
the nocturnal heart

The airy eyes of angels
the sublime
experiment in pointillism
faded away

The celestial conservatories
blooming with light
are all blown out

Enviably immigrants
 into the pure dimension
 immune serene
 devourers of the morning stars of Job

Jehovah's seven days
 err in your silent entrails
 of geometric Chimeras

The Nirvanic snows
 drift — — —
 to sky worn images (*The Lost Luna Baedeker* 91-92)

The ekphrastic poetry of Mina Loy is central to feminist discursive practices, as she offers astute interpretations of paintings produced by male artists by focusing on aspects that revolve around the feminine inner world. Brancusi's *Golden Bird* and *The Starry Sky* by Wyndham Lewis select an expressive language that reminds us of the geometrism of Cubist shapes. At the same time, Loy introduces elements that underscore woman's subjectivity as inherent within an ethical project that is open to presenting the unrepresentable experience of femininity, as it has always been veiled by dominant discourses. This ekphrastic poetry does justice to sensibilities that were denied existence and thus offers the possibility of inventing a new language.

4.2. Conclusion

Mina Loy concerned herself with aspects of feminism in her enterprise to defend women's rights. For Loy it was vital to define a feminine aesthetics in opposition to masculine constraints and definitions and her manifesto was symptomatic of the importance to argue in favor of a type of femininity that lays the foundations of the sexual and gender

preoccupations of modernity. Although Loy was not a member of Vorticism, her role is significant to an ekphrastic interpretation of fertility as depicted by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and Wyndham Lewis's paintings. Loy uses a visual language that records the sharp lines of Cubism and the energy of Futurism, but she focuses on the feminine world to attack Futurist excess of virility, while emphasizing the geometric vocabulary of Vorticism through a feminine lens. Her ekphrastic poems on Gaudier-Brzeska's sculpture and Lewis's paintings shed light on feminine readings of those works, thereby centering on the insight into feminine subjectivity and reproductive roles. In this sense, the formal aspects of her poems mimic the sharpness of lines utilized by the Vorticists, but the main ideas underlie issues pointing to feminine subjectivity, whether this be in terms of her bodily life or inner consciousness.

5. Transatlantic Modernisms and American Visual Identity

Modern art is closely linked to the development of visual culture, whose inception is believed to have taken place in mid-nineteenth-century Paris. At that time the French capital was a dynamic center of attraction displaying the magnificence of its street illumination and advertisements of magazines, stores and restaurants, among others. This network of possibilities opened up a fruitful entertainment industry rooted in a visual apparatus that responded to lucrative purposes. The act of seeing became a sociocultural phenomenon imbricated in processes of industrialization. As Michael North argues, visual experience

is simply an accidental by-product of industrialism, as human beings are allowed, or forced, to see at great speed or from dizzying heights, but the most important category of new experience is produced by entirely new media.
(178)

Likewise, the advent of photography and cinema contributed to the circulation of multiple images from public and private spaces, thereby giving rise to significant changes in visual perception that affected the making of art. The camera was one of the emblems of modern society, though it did not find immediate acceptance. Magazines such as the *Little Review* mistrusted the potential of photography due to its association with mass culture. Yet influenced by European vanguardism there emerged periodicals such as *Broom*, which published European articles, as was the case of Léger writing on Chaplin and Cendrars dealing with American visual culture in “Profound Today.” The *Dial*, the *Seven Arts* and the

Soil published material by E.E. Cummings based on mass entertainment. In fact, Dada and its connection with the culture industry was one of the main features that allied European movements with American popular art (Norton 180-183). Be that as it may, the avant-garde adopted a position that countered the visual apparatus of modernity by availing itself of the means used by mass culture and the entertainment industry as subversive forms that question the viability of consumer society. In this context the avant-gardists required attentiveness to distinguish between superfluous messages and critical comments. For this reason, the receiver was incited to actively participate in the quest for meaning.

The relevance of visual culture in the U.S. gathered importance with the arrival of European avant-gardists. In 1915, Duchamp and Picabia made their appearance in New York, where they delighted in the skyscrapers of the city. By that time, they met renowned figures of American artistic panorama, namely, Stevens, Williams, Man Ray, Katherine Dreier, Mina Loy and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, who thrust avant-garde venues in the U.S. One of the events that made a great impact was the "International Exhibition of Modern Art," which was organized by Walter Pach, Arthur Davis and Walter Kuhn at 69th Regiment Armory. But it was on February 17, 1913, when the Armory Show of 25th Street drew all the attention of art connoisseurs (Perloff, "The Avant-Garde Phase of American Modernism" 195-198). In that show Duchamp⁷⁰ presented his "Nude Descending a Staircase," one of the creations that most shocked the audience. In 1917 came his *Fountain*, an artwork conceived in terms of the readymade, that is, a functional object that enters the aesthetic domains by way of the artist's sheer choice. All throughout his life Duchamp continued developing these practices, which invited one to reflect on the profit-oriented value of these objects as well as on the distinction between high and low aesthetic genres. As Marjorie Perloff observes, the readymade opposed art in capitalist bourgeois society (*The Futurist Moment* 201). The

⁷⁰ For a further view on Duchamp, see the first chapter of this investigation.

visibility of these utilitarian pieces in a museum-based context enhanced meditation over the industrialization of our senses, to use North's terms, in the age of mechanical reproduction and mass entertainment (185). Expanding the limits of art and creating new categories was the very essence of modernity, and Duchamp's readymades are illustrative of this trend. Apart from the Armory Show, Alfred Stieglitz's work in the field of photography enhanced the power of visual culture by introducing a new art associated with popular forms. His photography captured snapshots of the network of the urban metropolis, namely machines, skyscrapers and methods of transportation. Precisely, *The Steerage* [fig. 55] shows a blend of high and low classes as well as elements belonging to modern daily life. Originating from the Photo-Secession Gallery, also known as 291, *Camera Work* [fig. 56] was one of the magazines that included photographs of misty landscapes that responded to pictorialist style, those being Getrude Kasebien, Heinrich Kuehn and Paul R. Haviland (Perloff, "The Avant-Garde Phase of American Modernism" 201). The journal also published fourteen pieces of Picasso and Matisse as well as Neo-Impressionist photographs, like those by Karl F. Struss. In addition to its concern with photography, *Camera Work* released the work of Matisse from 1908 to 1910, lithographs by Toulouse-Lautrec in December, 1911, Cézanne's and Picasso's watercolors in 1911 (Dijkstra 11). Given Stieglitz's exposure to Expressionism and *Der Blaue Reiter* while in Germany, it is not strange that the magazine published Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911) over the years 1915 and 1917. After a trip to Paris he learned about Postimpressionism and Cubism in Paris, and upon return to New York he organized a series of shows of Rodin and Matisse. In 1910 he promoted an exhibit of "Young American Painters" influenced by Cézanne and European avant-garde. Arthur Dove, John Marin, Marsden Hartley and Max Weber were but a few of the painters Stieglitz promoted (Halter 163). Stieglitz's familiarity with European vanguardism also

made possible the publication of works on Cubism and Futurism by Gertrude Stein and Mina Loy’s *Aphorisms on Futurism in Camera Work* (Dijkstra 28).



FIG. 55. Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, Paul Getty Museum.

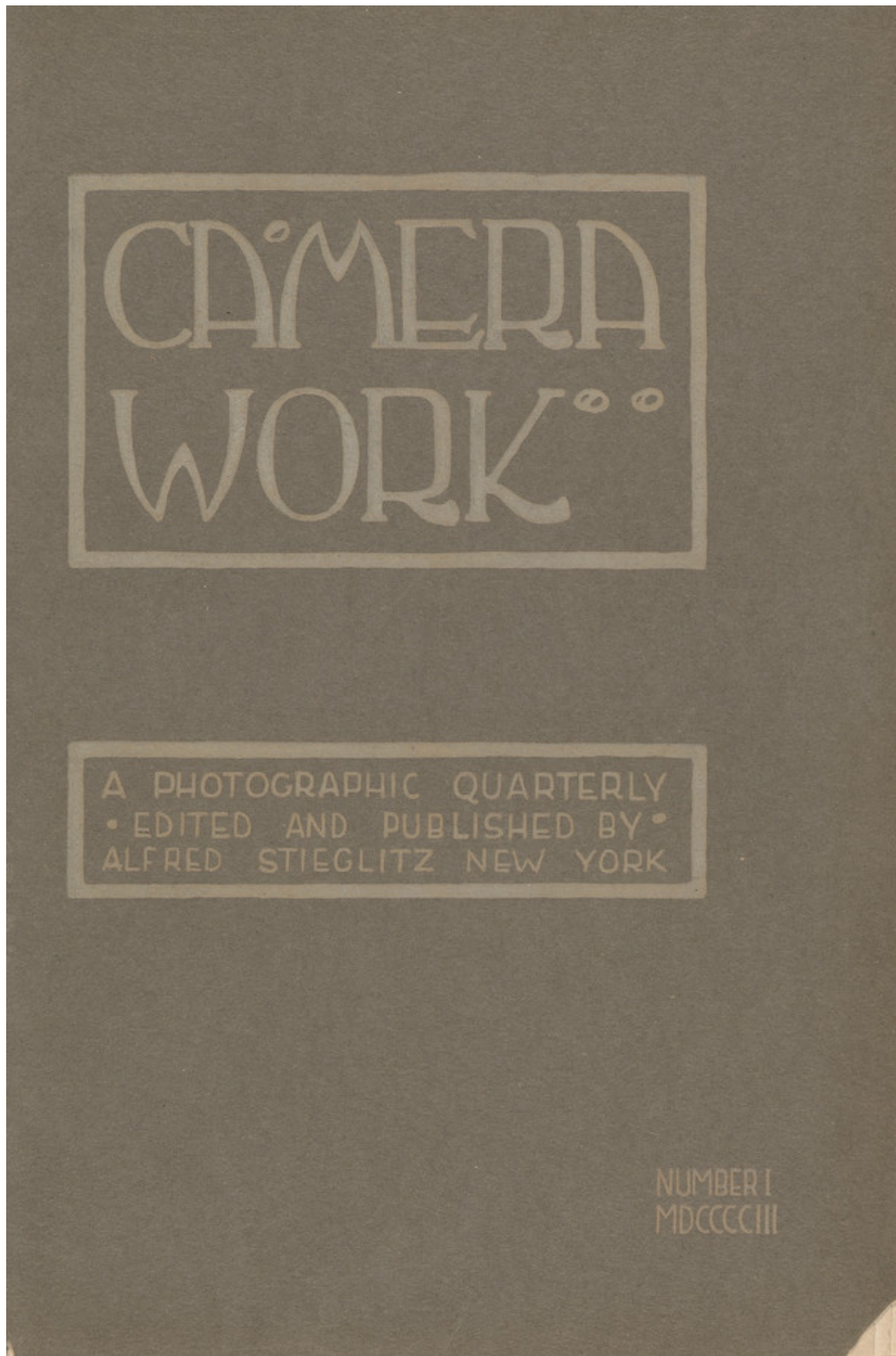


FIG. 56. *Camera Work* 1 (January 1903): n.p.

Like Stieglitz, American painters⁷¹ travelled to France or Germany, where they learned from avant-garde art and introduced it in New York. For instance, Charles Demuth took several trips to France and Germany between 1907 and 1925. In Paris he had the chance to meet Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck and Picasso, to name a few. Similarly, Charles Sheeler in 1909 and Marsden Hartley in 1912 left for Paris, where they made contact with the Cubists. The latter also stayed in Germany, where he met Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky, familiarizing himself with *der Blaue Reiter* as well as *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. The three painters were inspired by European experimentalism, but they would eventually contribute to the renewal of American art by displaying the peculiarity of the architectural edifice of the city and indigenous forms. Sheeler presented paintings for the "Armory Show" and for the "Independents Show" that gave visibility to the Precisionist movement and its significance for the encounter with their native soil.

As we have seen, the American Modernists travelled to France and Germany, from where they learned and carried back new tendencies to New York. At the same time, European avant-gardists emigrated to the U.S., leading to the assimilation and adaptation of such aesthetics. An illustration of the interest raised by European experimentalism is the magazine *291*. Originating from gallery 291, the periodical published contributions by Max Jacob, Ribemont Dessaignes and Francis Picabia. The latter was fascinated with the machine and its erotic potential is noticeable in *Portrait of a Young American Girl in a State of Nudity* [fig. 57]. In this drawing the words "For-Ever" are inscribed in the spark plug, which, according to Perloff, stands for the role played by the flirt in the sexuality of the young American girl ("The Avant-Garde Phase of American Modernism" 204). Desire appears not to have been aroused yet, whereby a fire needs to be set alight, so that sex drive comes into

⁷¹ For a reference of Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler and Marsden Hartley on their relationship with European vanguardism, see Marling, *William Carlos Williams and the Painters, 1909-1925*, especially pages 25, 69, 82.

play. Allying itself with values of force, the spark plug is also symbolic of a phallic image to be activated by feminine desire. Like sexual arousal, Picabia’s drawing is the result of an inner impulse that mimics the mechanisms of the machine.



FIG. 57. Francis Picabia, *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine*, 291, no. 5-6 (July-August 1915).

This is also a distinctive feature of Man Ray's technological art. Born in Philadelphia and raised in Brooklyn, Ray was the son of Russian-Jewish parents and in his youth he frequented the anarchist circles of Ferrer Center. Apart from his antiwar illustrations for the journal *Mother Earth* edited by Emma Goldman, he was known for his Proto-Cubist paintings and portraits of Duchamp as his alter ego Rose Sélavy. Yet it was during his Paris stay in 1921 when Ray invented his rayographs, cameraless photographs of objects whose light and shadow are manipulated. In *Man* [fig. 58] Ray took the picture of an eggbeater transformed into a male figure by way of the assigned name (Perloff, "The Avant-Garde Phase of American Modernism" 207). Like Picabia's machine art, Man Ray seem to toy with the idea that man in the early twentieth-century is a mechanized creature that participates in commodity exchanges. The assumptions this picture implies concern the fact that functional objects are a central part of our everyday life, and as such they need to have a space in the aesthetic domain. Consumer society is to be visualized as part and parcel of the evolution of art. In addition, new avant-garde genres are ironic comments that question bourgeois conception of art in terms of taste.

The reception of European avant-garde trends would continue in the decade of the 1930s. In 1936 the Museum of Modern Art made room for the exhibitions "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" and "Cubism and Abstract Art." It is possible that Stevens learned about those shows, as his long poem "The Man with the Blue Guitar" presents Cubist and Surrealist leanings. By the same token, "The Painters of Still Life" took place on January 25th, 1938, at the Wadsworth Atheneum and it appears that it made an impact on a series of poems in *Parts of a World* by Stevens.⁷²

⁷² See MacLeo's *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art: From the Armory Show to Abstract Expressionism*, especially chapters three and four to contrast the later pictorial trends that influenced Stevens.



FIG. 58. Man Ray, *L'Homme*, 1915, The Bluff Collection.

In the field of poetry, the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Lorrinhoven critiqued the excess of mechanization and superficiality of American art. Likewise, Mina Loy, Mina Gertrude Lówy, of Hungarian-Jewish father and English mother, familiarized herself with Futurism in Italy over the years 1914 and 1915. In 1916 Loy left for New York and in 1918 she eloped with Arthur Cravan to Mexico ("The Avant-Garde Phase of American Modernism" 211-212). Her poetry shows the tendency towards fragmentation and intensity, while including foreign expressions that suggests the effects of cross-fertilization in the U.S. Her verse also appeals to the eye with line breaks and irregular punctuation, thereby mimicking the artifice of visual culture and Futurist experimentations.

American born poets were well aware of both the potential that entailed the reception of European avant-garde in the U.S. and its dependence on the visual apparatus of entertainment industry and consumer society. William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore and Hart Crane were informed of the experimentalism of the old continent through their friendship with American painters or their trips to Europe. Williams attended the Lycée Condorcet in 1897 as part of his secondary education and after graduating from the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1906, he headed for Leipzig to study Pediatrics. During his stay in Germany and in several other trips he took over the 1920s to the Netherlands, France, Spain and England, and he was exposed to the avant-garde. Likewise, Moore spent a summer in Europe after graduating from Social Sciences, which might have played a part in her connoisseurship of the aesthetic situation of the time. She also travelled frequently to England and France (Willis 3). Crane arrived in Paris in 1929 and he frequented the American expatriate community (Parkinson 131). As for Stevens, he never abandoned his native country, but he was actively involved in the art scene of New York. Other poets such as Stein, Eliot and Pound settled in Europe. Their experience as

expatriates is fundamental to their understanding of twentieth-century American poetic production.

In the U.S. Williams, Moore and Stevens were part of *The Others* group. Inaugurated by Alfred Kreymborg and Man Ray, the coterie integrated Walter Conrad Arensberg, Mina Loy, Marcel Duchamp and Precisionist painters such as Charles Sheeler, Charles Demuth and Joseph Stella. The intense activity of *Others* made possible conversations about early twentieth-century state of art as well as performances such as one of Alfred Kreymborg's plays performed by Mina Loy and Williams. These frequent meetings also allowed Williams to make contact with Robert McAlmon, with whom he founded *Contact* in 1920, a magazine concerned with attachment to a place as a means of creating art (Marling 28-31). At Arensberg's apartment, Stevens had conversations with Duchamp and could see several Cubist paintings. He also read reviews of the exhibit of the "Independents" in *The Blind Man*, familiarizing himself with the Dada aesthetic of New York that would eventually affect some of his poems from *Harmonium* (MacLeo 19-23).

As to the Precisionists Sheeler and Demuth, they raised awareness of the importance to visualize urban spaces and architectural structures that conferred the U.S. its distinctiveness. Other Modernist painters such as Hartley and Dove sought urban and rural locations that were expressive of their singularity, as opposed to impersonal sites encountered everywhere, namely shopping malls, stadiums, department stores, etc. Drawing on the visual experience of American and foreign artists, Williams, Stevens, Moore and Crane articulated a poetic language that showed the formal innovations of European vanguardism. Yet they invested their literary pieces with a profound reflection of the meaning of place as intrinsic to the search for an American national consciousness. In addition to this return to the origins of the land, another version of U.S. art is appreciated on the other side of the Atlantic, where expatriates such as Gertrude Stein in Paris, Eliot in

London and Pound in Italy were building bridges between Europe and their country fellows. Eliot's *Criterion* and Pound's assistance in the publication of the *Little Review* were essential in fostering transatlantic exchanges between Europe and the U.S.

All these artists and poets were influential in disseminating European vanguardism and its critical imbrication in modern visual culture. Though in the beginning they were enticed to these aesthetic and sociocultural experiences, there was a turn to rethinking the specifics of an American identity characterized by its sense of place or displacement to unfamiliar spaces.

5.1. Sense of Place in American Modernist Production: Coteries, Magazines and The Quest for National Identity

After receiving and assimilating avant-garde innovations from Continental Europe, American Modernists became fully aware of the necessity to explore other methods that exhibited their own singularity. Though they preserved the formal techniques encountered in Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism, artists and poets in the U.S. were determined to search for the essence of an expressive language that defined its authenticity as opposed to European foreignness. One of the avenues of research was the exploration of the distinctive features of the American soil as a means of contributing novel aspects to modern aesthetics. To put it simply, their intention was to lay bare the sense of place, the genuine character of the environment as perceived by locals and outsiders. This phenomenon is closely linked to the strong attachment of communities to rural or urban spaces and the value they acquire for the observer. In other words, the landscape is the carrier of cultural and natural traits that constitute its own essence. Poets such as William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Hart Crane and Robert Frost embarked on the project of defining an indigenous language attached to their native soil. In this regard, the group of the Precisionists led by Charles Demuth and

Charles Sheeler as well as other Modernist painters helped the poets to "see" the sense of place and transcribe it in words. Given its spatial constituency, the visual medium of painting was more effective than language to speak about the native soil. The poets engaged in the examination of those artworks in order to articulate an aesthetic expression that translated the force of the place on the page. Heretofore, the verbal character of poetry attempted at mimicking painting in an effort to transform the temporality of the former into the spatiality of the latter. In that sense, poets such as William Carlos Williams and Hart Crane took the paintings of Charles Sheeler and Joseph Stella as referents to record urban architecture as part of the sense of place. In the same manner, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens and Robert Frost promoted local natural spaces in their poetry by emulating the experience of shock embedded in the visual apparatus. Painters such as Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley and Georgia O'Keeffe also focused on local spaces in Nature that reflected on the particularity American identity. They utilized the trendy strategies of abstraction to market and give visibility to places that were ignored on account of the high impact of European avant-garde.

Apart from inter-arts relations that searched for the "Americanness" of art and poetry, New York became a center of attraction to define the essentials of American Modernism. Galleries such as 291 not only showed the works of European avant-gardists but also introduced photography as an art intrinsically associated with America and the local traits of painting. Thus, figures such as Henri Matisse, Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp were exhibited. In the same vein, American photographers like Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen and Alvin Langdon Coburn found a place in the gallery. Of special importance were the theories on photography articulated by Paul Strand and Marius de Zayas in *Camera Work*, as they gave an impulse to modern art. Regarding painting, Stieglitz made sure the work of Max Weber, John Marin, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley and Georgia O'Keeffe was promoted. This visual culture fostered by avant-garde painting and

photography was effective in registering urban and natural locations that conditioned the sense of place in the U.S. Given the prevalence of modern visual culture, it is not strange to assume that poets created images that evoke the advertising industry or abstract painting.

This fact is proven by the relationships established between artists and poets through editorial publications, coteries and galleries such as 291. Yet additional magazines and groups emerged out of the shared project of redefining the originality of American poetry and art. *The Seven Arts* was devised during a party in Greenwich Village by James Oppenheim, Waldo Frank and van Wyck Brooks. The magazine ran from November 1916 to October 1917 and its main concern was to imprint "spiritual and affective bonds with specific regions onto an overarching narrative of cultural nationalism" (White 83). Among its several contributors, Sherwood Anderson, Robert Frost, Theodor Dreiser, Amy Lowell, Paul Rosenfeld and Louis Untermeyer published pieces that emphasized the necessity to articulate a national consciousness out of the connection with the native land. Anderson was precisely characterized by his attempt at linking American soil to a national identity. As Frank remarked, Anderson's book of poems titled *Mid-American Chants* (1918) yearns for the American Indian past effaced by the advent of industrialism, a view also shared by Brooks. The editors were of the opinion that the settlement of white men predominantly coming from Europe contributed to the disappearance of original innocence (White 83). In this regard, the myth of an Adamic past is erased, as the excess of urbanization encroaches the native land.

Like *The Seven Arts*, *The Soil* was gestated in Greenwich Village. Edited by Robert J. Coady from December 1916 to July 1917, the purpose of the magazine was to connect American soil with the deployment of industrial machinery as an essential part of capitalist production. As opposed to *The Seven Arts*, this magazine signaled the potential of the metropolis in the process of creating a truly American aesthetics. Poets such as Gertrude

Stein, Wallace Stevens and Arthur Cravan contributed outstanding pieces oriented towards a reflection between place and national identity. Regarding artists, Maxwell Bodenheim and Charles Chaplin were also notorious for their articles (White 87-88).

The Seven Arts and *The Soil* were not the only venues that paved the way for rethinking aesthetics in terms of place. Meetings such as those at the Arensbergs' apartment on 67th West Street took place frequently. French artists such as Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp as well as American born artists, namely, Man Ray, Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley and Charles Sheeler used to attend those coteries. Poets such as Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens and Mina Loy were also regulars at those gatherings, where they built fruitful exchanges and discussed ideas about genuine American art (Leavell 31). The apartments of Alfred Kreymborg at Grantwood and Lola Ridge at Greenwich Village acted as meeting points and were frequented from time to time by Moore and Williams, who contributed works to *Others*, a poetry magazine around which the group with the same name organized. Edited by Alfred Kreymborg thanks to the financial aid of Walter Conrad Arensberg, the journal originated in July 1915. The content of *Others* was poetry-oriented, including innovative forms based on free verse, everyday expressions and a format that showed the manipulation of typography, syntax and punctuation. Edited in July 1916, the "Competitive Number"⁷³ was an illustrative case of formal innovations that included contributions by Carl Sandburg, Marianne Moore, Amy Lowell, Mina Loy, Ezra Pound and Harold Witter Bynner. Williams was also in charge of the August 1916 "Spanish-American"⁷⁴ Number, which introduced readership to articles of reputed writers such as José Asunción Silva and Luis C. López. Another important issue was

⁷³ See William Carlos Williams, ed., *Others: A Magazine of the New Verse* 3.1. "Competitive Number" (July 1916).

⁷⁴ See ed. William Carlos Williams, ed., *Others: A Magazine of the New Verse* 3.2. "Spanish-American Number" (August 1916).

"Three Others,"⁷⁵ which published poems by the painter Maxwell Bodenheim, Williams and Kreymborg. In addition, *Others* engaged in socio-political matters and called into question gender and sexuality models. This is perceived in Alice Groff's "Hermaphrodite-us," Moore's "Critics and Connoisseurs" and Williams's "The Young Housewife." The December issue of 1917 also included the "Negro Number," which addressed the thematic of immigration, urban population and labor as positive in society. When *Others* was in its last throes in July 1919, McAlmon visited Chicago to energize a post-*Others* movement that registered the experiences of New York, Saint Louis and Chicago.

If *The Seven Arts*, *The Soil* and *Others* set precedents for considering location as essential to the authenticity of American aesthetics, *Contact* succeeded in expanding the interconnection of native soil with the literary production. Launched in December, 1920, by Williams and McAlmon, the first issue of the magazine defined "the essential contact between words and the locality that breeds them" (Williams, "We Will Be American" 1). Although both writers acknowledged the role of Dadaism in the U.S., their determination was to find a genuine art disengaged from the foreignness of France. For that reason, an overarching understanding of one's own ground would enable one to gain insight into a national consciousness. As Dewey asserts in "Americanism and Localism," "the locality is the only universal" (15). In other words, it is by abstracting the contact of particular neighborhoods and communities that a national identity emerges. This is one of the main traits of localist Modernism that pervaded the pages of *Contact*. An illustration of the publications included in the magazine is "Summer Night in a Florentine Slum," where Loy appears to give visibility to the disenfranchised in Florence, emphasizing the idea that contacts between individuals have the ability to forge solidary bonds. The idea of proximity was also prominent in Wallace Stevens, who "contends with the physical boundaries of place

⁷⁵ See Alfred Kreymborg, ed., *Others: A Magazine of the New Verse* 3.4, "Three Others" (December 1916).

as an eroticized zone” (White 105). It appears that his poetic word is rooted in local spaces as a means of accessing the particularity of American soil.

Unlike *Contact* 1 and 2, *Contact* 4 was characterized by the typographical innovations learned from print culture and New York Dada. Its “Advertising Number” was the maximum exponent of avant-garde visual experimentation, showing a high degree of mastery in the manipulation of graphic design. At the same time, the content of this number dealt with the sociocultural phenomena of modernity, especially regarding the arrival of Einstein in New York. His theory of relativity conveyed the dilemmas of the time, in that the idea of spatiotemporal compression coincided with scientific and socioeconomic debates that were taking place. These discussions were noticeable in America, where a tendency to cultural hybridization hinted at the fact that identity was constantly under construction and contingent upon permeable boundaries. Williams’s poem “St. Francis Einstein of the Daffodils” signals the excitement that the presence of the Physicist and his theory of relativity entailed for the Americans. As the following stanza reads:

April Einstein
 through the blossomy waters
 rebellious, laughing
 under liberty’s dead arm
 has come among the daffodils
 shouting
 that flowers and men
 were created
 relatively equal.
 oldfashioned knowledge is
 dead under the blossoming peachtrees. (William, *Collected Poems* 1: 46-56)

What these lines show is that the scientific theory of relativity was the emblem of modernity, as space and time are not considered to be absolutes anymore, but rather relative and

dependent on movement. Despite the fact that this theory opened new avenues of research, it also revealed the absence of universals, which implied the loss of security. If everything is relative, humanity is deprived of stability and of any ground that sustains existence. Just as Nietzsche proclaimed the demise of God, so did William announce the death of "oldfashioned knowledge" (55). This idea is not to be seen as negative, since it is the beginning of an era that furthers the exercise of imagination in any creative activity.

In addition to this poem, Williams made a critical comment on the American marketplace and the inequalities resulting from an excess of capital. In this regard, he adopted a disparaging attitude to the promotion of the laxative "Nujol," as its effects were damaging, yet it continued to be publicized and commercialized in different media. Williams also condemned the behaviour of Senator Roland S. Copland for receiving economic remunerations from Standard Oil, the company that manufactured the product, instead of denouncing its malpractice (White 117-119). These references cast suspicions on an increasingly industrial America that participated of a corrupt system. Local spaces might thus be invested with the negativity of the law of the supply and demand.

In the following years three additional magazines came to light. In the fall of 1921 Harold Loeb and Alfred Kreymborg published *Broom*,⁷⁶ and in November, 1922, Gorham Munson, Matthew Josephson and Kenneth Burke launched *Secession*.⁷⁷ Both journals were based in different cities, the former being in Rome, Berlin, London and New York, whereas the latter was settled in Vienna, Berlin, Reutte and New York. In addition, their editors were interested in promoting transatlantic exchanges between Europe and the U.S. as much as radical experimentation. Their reflections on cosmopolitanism and localism contributed to a further comprehension of place in American Modernism.

⁷⁶ See Loeb, "Broom: Beginning and Revival." *Connecticut Review* 4.1. (1970), 6.

⁷⁷ See Gorham, "The Fledgling Years, 1916-1924," *Sewanee Review* 40 (1932), 3-4.

All in all, coteries and magazines succeeded in articulating the sense of place in American Modernist production. Artists and poets knew that if they wanted to innovate their expressive language, they needed to distance themselves from European avant-garde, as this was not their voice. For that matter, a return to the roots of their native land laid the foundations for creating a unique experience that was always available, yet concealed by the distracting force of vanguardism.

5.1.1. Precisionism, Urban Architecture and Industrial Landscapes

Poets and artists in the U.S. became fully aware of the necessity to spell out a distinctive sense of place that resulted in the profound renewal of aesthetic language. American Modernists thus concentrated on the urban centers where they lived to the extent that these spaces were emblems of their environment that distanced themselves from European style. One of the artists that firstly devised a truly indigenous American aesthetics was the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, whose ideas stem from the Transcendentalists' concern with local experience. As Dijkstra correctly points out, "[h]e discovered why he was American by seeing his emotions paralleled in the objective world of the city around him" (99). In other words, Stieglitz conceived art as an expression of the soil where it was produced. The photographer's task was to avail himself of the materials on the outside and congeal the essence of the moment. As Paul Strand acknowledges in his article "Photography and the New God:"

He has looked with three eyes and has been able to hold, by purely photographic means, space filling tonality and tactility, line and form, that moment when the forces at work in a human being become most intensely physical and objective. (256)

Although in a beginning Stieglitz was known for his pictorial technique, which presented misty landscapes and ethereal shapes, this last style Strand refers to was named "straight." Namely, it was concerned with presenting an instantaneous image.

Stieglitz's experimentations in the photographic field gave rise to Precisionism, becoming an influential figure for many of its members. The movement was formally influenced by Cubism, Futurism and Abstract Expressionism, especially regarding the manipulation of geometry and abstraction, yet its main innovation takes place on the level of content. The work of Charles Sheeler, Charles Demuth and Joseph Stella, among many others, reflects the technological and industrial challenges affecting the fast-developing society of the U.S. Americans were oblivious to their surroundings, and thus the Precisionists believed it necessary to reconnect with their sense of place, paying attention to city lifestyles and processes of modernization. In essence, they created "a truly American way of looking at things" (Dijkstra 160). The images they manipulated include architectural structures associated with the modern cityscape, such as skyscrapers, office blocks, bridges, tunnels and subways, among others. To a certain degree, their interest in the city also involved perusing the mechanisms of visual culture such as the advertising industry and entertainment business. In their view, the representation of machinery, urban planning and publicity should be reflected on the canvas as a means of inscribing the essence of the modern American metropolis.

Influenced by the visual art of the Precisionists, William Carlos Williams and Hart Crane wrote poetry that reproduced the forces of the modern age. During the years 1903 and 1904 Williams met Charles Demuth at Mrs. Chain's boarding house in Philadelphia. By that time the poet was studying Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, whereas Demuth was pursuing a degree in Fine Arts (Williams, *Collected Poems 1909-1939* 1: 500). As a result of this friendship, Williams dedicated *Spring and All* (1923) to Demuth and, in

exchange for this tribute, the painter reproduced *The Figure Five in Gold* [fig. 59], based on the poet’s “Great Figure.”



FIG. 59. Charles Demuth, *I Saw Figure 5 in Gold*, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In the poem, Williams resorts to cinematic techniques so as to record the dynamism, and even hectic activity, of the city, which reminds the reader of the Futurist engagement with the machine world:

Among the rain
and lights

I saw the figure 5
 in gold
 on a red
 firetruck
 moving
 tense
 unheeded
 to gong clangs
 siren howls
 and wheels rumbling
 through the dark city (Williams, *Collected Poems 1909-1939* 1: 174)

Like Precisionism, Williams presents an urban scene characterized by the simultaneity of the impressions received by the viewer. In his *Autobiography*, he informs that he conceived the poem one evening, when he left work at the Post Graduate Clinic to visit his friend Marsden Hartley. At that point, he heard the howl of sirens and engines and immediately afterwards he saw the fleeting figure 5. As Williams recalls, "[t]he impression was so sudden and forceful that I took a piece of paper out of my pocket and wrote a short poem about it" (172). As we can see, the poem represents those fragments of the scene that struck the poet, namely, the yellowish and reddish shades of figure 5, the speed of the firetruck, the disturbing noise of the siren and the wheels. This image coincides with Futurist strategies of dynamism and simultaneity pointed by Severini in his *Manifesto* of 1913:

in this epoch of dynamism and simultaneity, one cannot separate any event or object from the memories, the plastic preferences or aversions, which its *expansive action* calls up *simultaneously* in us (121).

"The Great Figure," like Severini highlights, seeks to transfer mobility to the poetic word, in an attempt to invest it with life. At the same time, it exhibits events and objects belonging to the urban world so as to raise awareness of the frantic rhythm of life and its detriment to slow thinking. Williams's poem was reproduced by Charles Demuth, who followed "the

dictates of his own logic” to capture the force conveyed by its verbal counterpart (Tashjian 71). Repeated three times, the size of the number 5 gradually shrinks, as if the image were distancing itself from the observer. In a Futurist manner, Demuth appears to set the number in motion, which adopts a central position in the canvas while the juxtaposition of planes and geometric shapes of buildings, lights, street lamps reveal the city life. Demuth was skillful at conveying the experience of speed and the striking colors of the image. In his Precisionist manner, he was successful in presenting urban architecture.

Another poem that merges the Precisionist interest in the modern metropolis and Futurist engagement in visual culture is “The Attic Which Is Desire.”

The Attic Which Is Desire:

the unused tent

of

bare beams

beyond which

directly wait

the night

and day—

Here

from the street

by

* * *

* S *

* O *

* D *

* A *

* * *

ringed with

running lights

the darkened

pane

exactly
 down the center
 is
 transfixed (Williams, *Collected Poems 1909-1939* 1: 325-326)

This poem might recreate the view of a tent containing an inscription that reads SODA. Directly from a skyscraper an observer appears to be captivated by the luminous sign and taken to another dimension. In this manner, advertising and the culture industry traps the viewer in an experience that numbs their senses and reduces their attention span. Although the experience might be pleasing in a beginning, man runs the risk of being embedded in the fraud of images the purpose of which is to trick them into contributing to mass market by consuming multifarious commodities such as a can of soda.

Another poem that reveals Williams's urban sense of place is "Classic Scene," based on his friend Charles Sheeler's *Classic Landscape* [fig. 60]. Both artists met thanks to Matthew Josephson, who introduced each other in a Dutch Treat dinner in 1923. Apart from that, Sheeler had already befriended Charles Demuth in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Later he collaborated with Paul Strand in the production of the film *Manhatta* and contributed to the promotion of Dada in America through magazines like *Aesthete* (Tashjian 74). The verbal piece is a clear illustration of ekphrasis, although it steps out of the limits imposed by the image, becoming an act of interpretation rather than a truthful description of the painted object. The painting originates in the photographs Sheeler was commissioned to take for Ford Motor Company's new River Rouge Plant. In the beginning those pictures served to promote the company, but later on they influenced some of his artworks, as was the case of *Classic Landscape*. In fact, Sheeler was so interested in photography that since 1915 he produced commercial photos for Marius de Zayas and until 1919 he exchanged

correspondence with Stieglitz, from whom he learned the art of straight photography (Tashjian 77).

Classic Landscape is an illustration of abstract composition that celebrates the machine world. On the right of the image we see the railroad track that leads to a powerhouse whose chimneys give off smoke. On the left are brownish and pastel sand blocks opposite to cylindrical structures and rectangular buildings. The clean and straight lines of the design are reminiscent of Ancient architecture from Greece, which confers magnificence upon the industrial complex. It appears that Sheeler conceived technology as a force that aids in the organization of life.



FIG. 60. Charles Sheeler, *Classic Landscape*, National Gallery of Art.

As a verbal counterpart, the poem succinctly describes the geometry of the powerhouse in terms of “a red brick chair” formed by two blocks of aluminum, one of which discharges

fumes. The verbal piece acts as an autonomous object that takes advantage of the hard-edged shapes encountered in Cubism to transmit a sense of permanence, an aspect that is complemented by the usage of static verbs such as "sit" or "remain."

Classic Scene

A power-house
in the shape of
a red brick chair
90 feet high

on the seat of which
sit the figures
of two metal
stacks—aluminum—

commanding an area
of squalid shacks
side by side—
from one of which

buff smoke
streams while under
a grey sky
the other remains

passively today—

(Williams, *Collected Poems 1909-1939* 1: 444-445)

All in all, the poem and the painting enact the energy of urban landscapes, placing especial emphasis on the sense of place generated by architectural structures as powerful methods to connect man with the particularities of American soil. Notwithstanding, whereas Sheeler

celebrated the world of machinery and streamlined processes, Williams appeared to adopt a cautious position regarding mass-produced forces.

If Williams's poetic sense of place was proved by his friendship and artistic collaboration with Demuth and Sheeler, some of Hart Crane's sections from *The Bridge* are inspired by Joseph Stella's polyptych *New York Interpreted* [fig. 61]. This fact is confirmed by a letter that Crane sent to Stella in 1929, where he requested consent to use his painting as the front page of *The Bridge*, yet difficulties in printing processes made it impossible to utilize the illustration. The poet was also familiar with Stella's essay "The Brooklyn Bridge (A Page of my Life)," and it appears that he wanted to publish it in Eugene Jolas's magazine *transition*, where it was finally divulged in the 1929 issue (Irwin 35). As biographical and technical accounts show, Stella's visual work must have inspired Crane's "Myth of America." As the poet states, each section "is a separate canvas, as it were, yet none yields its entire significance when seen apart from the others. One might take the Sistine Chapel as an analogy" (*The Complete Poems* 249). In effect, the bridge acts as a recognizable symbol of spatiotemporal mediation that grounds the collective sense of place and aids in the outreach of order. Its horizontality is a symptom of closeness to the soil and roots that form the U.S. nation.

In his essay titled "The Brooklyn Bridge (A Page of my Life)," Joseph Stella informs of "the sense of liberation" that Brooklyn provided for him. His obsession with the vision of the bridge is described as follows:

Seen for the first time, as weird metallic Apparition under a metallic sky, out of proportion with the winged lightness of its arch, traced for the conjunction of WORLDS, supported by the massive dark towers dominating the surrounding tumult of the surging skyscrapers with their gothic majesty sealed in the purity of their arches, the cables, like divine messages from above, transmitted to the vibrating coils, cutting and dividing into

innumerable musical spaces the nude immensity of the sky, it impressed me as the shrine containing all the efforts of the new civilization of AMERICA—the eloquent meeting point of all forces arising in a superb assertion of their powers, in APOTHEOSIS. (87-88)

These words correspond to the magnificence of the vision Stella experienced, honing in on the darkness and gothic appearance of skyscrapers, the vitriolic color of the sky's clean arches. All of these features lead the painter to think of America as the ideal of modern civilization embedded in the architectural structures of urban metropolis.

Stella's vision is brilliantly represented in his polyptych of five canvases that match multiple places of New York City. The first board stands for the port, whereas the second and the third typify Broadway and Times Square, on the one hand, and the skyscrapers of Manhattan with the Flatiron, on the other. The fourth panel depicts the neighborhood of Broadway, where the subway and tunnels intersect. Finally, the last painting epitomizes a subjective vision of the Brooklyn Bridge. Formally speaking, the chromatic shades tie in with the fluorescence of city's lightning, just as the linear design appears to emulate the urban planning of Manhattan. Given its Italian origin, we can appreciate an influx of Futurism regarding the geometric treatment of the composition and the usage of urban motifs. In addition, Stella was inspired by the style Renaissance in terms of the subject matter and the spirituality of the vision.



FIG. 61. Joseph Stella, *New York Interpreted*, National Gallery of Art.

As for Crane’s *The Bridge*, it utilizes several of the images of the modern metropolis that Stella takes advantage of in his painting: skyscrapers, the subway, traffic lights, piers, to name a few. This might lead to a consideration of the poem in ekphrastic terms, although it does not constitute an exact representation of the picture in the verbal medium. In any case, an analysis of the relationship between the poem and the painting is successful in opening up the notion of ekphrasis to the subjectivity of the poet’s vision.

In the first place, the bridge in Crane’s poetic work and Stella’s painting has the same resonances. As a connecting source, it is successful in linking the past and the present, and hence the dedication “To the Brooklyn Bridge” at the beginning. This ability to bracket is noticeable in the section “Ave Maria,” which tells the story of Christopher Columbus’s accidental arrival in America. The next part, “Powhatan’s Daughter” consists of five subdivisions that reminiscence the story of Pocahontas as an emblem of the origins of the American soil. The rest of the sections signal the effects that modernization has brought with itself by referencing the vagabonds and their journeys by train to the west of the country.

There are also allusions to jazz and the advertising industry that recall Stella's use of light and color. The next composition "Cutty Sark" speaks of the topic of time and eternity in the form of a fugue. Crane also uses descriptions of clipper ships that set the scene nearby the bridge. "Cape Hatteras" is an ode to Whitman that emphasizes "the epic of modern consciousness" (Crane, *The Collected Poems* 252). Other sections are "Three Songs," "Quaker Hill" and "The Tunnel," the last of which exposes "twentieth-century Manhattan as a reincarnation of Columbus's fifteenth-century America" (Giles 10). At the same time, it evokes a loss of the self once it comes into contact with darkness. *The Bridge* ends with "Atlantis," a poem that might be based on Crane's reading of Lewis Spence's *Atlantis in America* and Plato's Republic. According to Robert Rehder, "Atlantis is another bridge, between myth and history, past and future, America and Asia, the solid ground of imagination and hope" (158). For Crane, Atlantis is associated with the possibility of devising an uncertain past that transforms the future.

The poetic structure of *The Bridge* reveals a profound sense of place that bears resemblance to Stella's painting. Each stanza appears to imitate the polyptyc structure of the canvas, in that it captures different scenes of the city, yet it introduces the human element as a means of perceiving the relationship of the individual with the urban environment. In order to gain insight into the architectural spaces shared by the visual and verbal works, I will focus on the dedication titled "To Brooklyn Bridge," divided into eleven stanzas that capture an impression of the cityscape.

TO BROOKLYN BRIDGE

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
 The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
 Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
 Over the chained bay waters Liberty—

Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes
As apparitional as sails that cross
Some page of figures to be filed away;
—Till elevators drop us from our day...

I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights
With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene
Never disclosed, but hastened to again,
Foretold to other eyes on the same screen;

And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced
As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—
Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!

Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft
A bedlamite speeds to thy parapents,
Tilting there momentarily, shrill shirt ballooning,
A jets falls from the speechless caravan.

Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,
A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;
All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn...
Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.

And obscure as that heaven of the Jews,
Thy guerdon... Accolade thou dost bestow
Of anonymity time cannot raise:
Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.

O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
(How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)

Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,—

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
Beading thy path—condense eternity:
And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;
Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.
The City's fiery parcels all undone,
Already snow submerges an iron year...

O sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curvship lend a myth to God. (*The Collected Poems* 3-4)

The poem opens with the striking image of the seagull flying over the waters of the sea, a symbol of freedom that coincides with the reference to Liberty, which might stand for the statue or the feeling experienced by the lyrical voice. Let us remember that Joseph Stella expressed the idea of "sudden liberation" that the bridge meant to him. Yet the contemplation of this reverie is disrupted by what seems to be clerical work. In other words, the beholder is required to continue his or her duties in such a monotonous fashion until the day ends. There is a pun on the word "sail," which is uttered as "sale," thereby reminding us of the capitalist demand of making profit. Nevertheless, once workers finish doing business, they entertain themselves by seeing a film in a movie theater. According to Giles, Crane's ambivalent use of language,

testifies to the ceaseless orbit of commercialism upon which New York revolves: the workers' wages are exchanged for goods in shops, the sale of

commodities enables business to employ clerical workers—pages of figures—who in turn spend their earnings to keep the cycle in motion. (33)

In other words, New York has adopted a central position for capitalism, responding to the law of the supply and demand that makes financial exchanges possible. Contemporary America is thus imbued in socioeconomic processes that engage individuals in consuming mass-entertainment products such as movies. As we can see, the professional world and commercialism are aspects overlooked by Stella in his painting, but Crane is determined to focus on the interaction of individuals with their urban surroundings perhaps to think over the mechanization of human actions.

The three next stanzas direct our view towards a passer-by with a clumsy stride, possibly the one who attended the movie theater after work. Then we are taken to the subway, where the order and monotony experienced in the previous stanzas is savagely disrupted by a bedlam that approaches the passer-by, who Crane assumes is the receiver of the poem. Following this event, we are taken to Wall Street, where we are led to behold an industrial landscape with girders, derricks and cables. This vision of Crane's contemporary America is a symptom of the energy cities brought to civilization, a fascination that is also shared by the Futurists. As Giles puts it, the city in *The Bridge* entails

a transformation from a puritanical and romantic individualism, where character was sacrosanct and each man communed privately with his God, towards a classical harmony where character is protoplasmic and Man is defined in terms of his relations to others. (89)

At stake is the role played by man in society, though each of us runs the risk of dissipating in anonymity and losing our identity. This might arouse a sense of culpability that reminds us of the notion of original sin. For that matter, the voice utilizes a panegyric tone that might look for the absolution of the passer-by under a dark sky. These religious undertones bear resemblance to Stella's second, third and fourth paintings of *New York Interpreted*, where he

emulates the solemn aesthetics of the stained glass from Renaissance Churches. This rediscovery of the Italian Renaissance has the purpose of stylistically emulating the glories of such past and create a secular myth of America where technology deprives religion of its central position. By making reference to the Renaissance Stella also appears to provide a vision of the modern city through the etherealization of the bridge and surrounding skyscrapers, which provides the viewer with a feeling of ascent.

Finally, we are transported again to the frantic rhythm of the city with its traffic lights, piers and parcels. For Crane this qualifies the degree of a divine vision fallen from the sky. This is coincident with Joseph Stella, who captures the forces of the modern cityscape in his polyptych, while projecting a metaphysical dimension onto the bridge. Although in both cases the cityscape might be considered to be a deterrent that prevents us from accessing a clear image, the visual and verbal medium are presented as epiphanies in a confusing world that requires further thinking.

All in all Williams's and Crane's poems are based on the visual aesthetics of painters they personally met or corresponded with. They focused on architectural structures and urban landscapes, since they were intrinsically connected to their native soil, and this helped to infuse poetry with originality other than its reliance upon avant-garde foreignness. By recreating American spaces such New York or Ford Motor Company, they veered aesthetic language in a direction that raised awareness of a national poetic identity.

5.1.2. Local Color and Natural Spaces: The Artistic Encounter with the American

Sublime

American Modernists engaged in the representation of urban spaces as a distinctive trait of their environment that allowed for a reconnection with their native soil. Yet they also took a turn to Nature in order to consider the impact of earthly forces on the creative activity as the

essence for the expansion of imagination, all the while they touch base with the specifics of the American land. If the exploitation of the earth had alienated men from their original locale, it is not strange that art attempted at reconciling the tensions brought about by the pioneering ethos. Painters in line with Georgia O'Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove and John Marin experimented with the forms encountered in the natural world to react to the excess of industrialism. In poetry Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost and Marianne Moore were a few illustrations of the imprints left by virgin landscapes in the U.S. Their main task lies in the rediscovery of the innocence and freedom lost in the aftermath of colonization. These artists and poets redefined the notion of the Romantic sublime in terms of their own sense of place. They relied upon local references to places and the nonrepresentational strategies that were fashionable in awaking the public's interest. Their writings and paintings celebrate the cult of wilderness in America. At stake was the quest for a truly American sublimity that opposed European paradigms and limitations.

Van Wyck Brooks admires the European attachment to their ground and the collective memory resulting from this identification between individuals and their roots. However, he critiqued the Americans' detachment and disconnect from their own landscape, which raised awareness of the loss of origins. For Brooks the American village in its "state of essential decay" is symptomatic of the dehistoricization of experience:

Nature has been robbed and despoiled and wasted for the sake of private and temporary gains, and now having no more easy rewards to offer, it is taking its revenge on a race that has been too impatient and self-seeking to master its inner secrets. ("Enterprise" 162)

In other words, Nature has been instrumentalized for the purpose of making profit, yet this did not contribute to the revitalization of the village. Other than that, it emphasized the lack of community values and business competition that impeded the fusion of humans and

Nature. On the grounds of civilization American locales had been domesticated to such an extent that they lost their color and sense of place. This estrangement and alienation from Nature and man is coincident with the myth of Adam's fall, which according to Viorica Patea, represents "the errant quest" for "the world of blissful harmony" ("The Myth of the American Adam" 16).

A return to wilderness was necessary to reconnect with those spaces obliterated by the excess brought about by progress and civilization. In *America and Alfred Stieglitz* (1934), William Carlos Williams defines national identity as follows:

the realization of the qualities of a place in relation to the life which occupies it; embracing everything involved, climate, geographic position, relative size, history, other cultures—as well as the character of its sands, flowers, minerals and the condition of knowledge within its borders. It is the act of lifting these things to an ordered and utilized whole, which is culture. (29)

Indeed, art was the privileged medium to capture the essence of the place, and thus the American Modernists were imbued in their surroundings. Their project was to rediscover the forgotten uniqueness of the American landscape, and transport it to aesthetic domain. In order to rethink Modernist art and poetry, the Kantian and Romantic notion of sublimity might account for the role played by natural spaces in the development of a genuine collective identity in the U.S. In this tradition the sublime is based on the exposure of the mind to an overpowering natural phenomenon that results in the affirmation of the ego. On the one hand, Wordsworth claims for the supremacy of the subject over Nature. On the other hand, Kant argues that it is the victory of Reason, rather than the self, that holds in check the overwhelming experience with Nature. As opposed to the so-called Wordsworthian "egotistical sublime," Keats propounds the vanishing of the ego in the face of the infinite and unknown.

Wordsworth's conception of the sublime is perceived in American poets such as Wallace Stevens and Robert Frost, who referred to the topography of the U.S. as a means of rendering specificity to its wild places. Precisely, Stevens wrote a poem titled "The American Sublime" that speaks about the nature of the sublime in relation to its geographic environment.

The American Sublime

How does one stand

To behold

To confront the mockers,

And plated pairs?

When General Jackson

Posed for his statue

He knew how one feels.

Shall a man go barefoot

Blinking and blank?

But how does one feel?

One grows used to the weather,

The landscape and that;

And the sublime comes down

To the spirit itself,

The spirit and space,

The empty spirit

In vacant space.

What wine does one drink?

What bread does one eat? (*Collected Poetry and Prose* 106-107)

The question for Stevens is what attitude to adopt, such as when you "behold" and "confront the mockers," or when General Jackson posed for his statue. The subjectivity of those acts

determines the attempt at reaching a universal consciousness resting upon the environment. By comprehending those gestures, the sublime fills the spirit and the place, conditioning the type of wine and bread one consumes. It is thus the topography, climate and ulterior circumstances that shape the overpowering force of the sublime.

If the above-mentioned poem introduces the theoretical concerns of an American sublime, "The Idea of Order at Key West" is effective in engaging "a community of listeners in the midst of natural beauty" (Quinn 84). By the 1920s, Florida not only became a getaway for the wealthy, but also a land for speculative purposes that would prelude the financial crisis of the stock-market (Longenbach 125). Florida landscape was efficiently advertised by real-estate agents, who created a touristic culture of which Stevens would eventually participate with his several trips to Key West. Nevertheless, Stevens was far more interested in writing poems that challenged the excess of industrialization and instead reconnect humans with their natural land. This is the prelude of an ecocritical poetry that faces us with the dangers of destroying our environment. In "The Idea of Order at Key West," Stevens invents images for the people who inhabit the landscape of Florida, providing an attachment to and appreciation for the shared soil. This enterprise bears upon the manifest destiny that called for the expansion across the continent, thereby creating a sublime image that reveals the virtues of an American arcadia. In this fashion, Nature and poetry are organic forces that constitute the sense of place and bridge the gap between men and their surroundings.

The Idea of Order at Key West

She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
The water never formed to mind or voice,
Like a body wholly body, fluttering
Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
That was not ours although we understood,

Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

The sea was not a mask. No more was she.
The song and water were not medleyed sound
Even if what she sang was what she heard,
Since what she sang was uttered word by word.
It may be that in all her phrases stirred
The grinding water and the gasping wind;
But it was she and not the sea we heard.

For she was the maker of the song she sang.
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
It was the spirit that we sought and knew
That we should ask this often as she sang.

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
That rose, or even colored by many waves;
If it was only the outer voice of sky
And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
However clear, it would have been deep air,
The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
Repeated in a summer without end
And sound alone. But it was more than that,
More even than her voice, and ours, among
The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,
Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
Of sky and sea.

It was her voice that made
The sky acutest at its vanishing.

She measured to the hour its solitude.
 She was the single artificer of the world
 In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
 Whatever self it had, became the self
 That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
 As we beheld her striding there alone,
 Knew that there never was a world for her
 Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,
 Why, when the singing ended and we turned
 Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,
 The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
 As the night descended, tilting in the air,
 Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
 Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
 Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
 The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
 Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
 And of ourselves and of our origins,
 In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds. (*Collected Poetry and Prose* 105-106)

The poem is an illustration of the egotistical sublime, as it is the human chant that dominates the sea. At the beginning the voice of a woman merges with the sound of the sea, though they did not adjust harmoniously to each other, thereby creating a divide where the human and the natural preserve their own nature. This is proven by the fact that she was the medium conveying the sound of the sea, but rather than encompassing her voice to the babbling of the water, the liquid element was humanized, which responds to the notion of the Wordsworthian

sublime. Her phrases were evocative of the water and the wind, but it is her ego that triumphs over Nature, "[f]or she was the maker of the song she sang" (14). That is, the feminine chant prevails in the setting, given that she has the ability to tame the sea with her voice, and this is how the self defeats its overwhelming environment. In the fourth stanza, the poetic subject confirms that there was something beyond the voice of the sea and the sky, the water and the wind, the bronze shadows and mountainous atmosphere. And this was precisely her voice as "the single artificer of the world / In which she sang" (37-38). Moreover, as the poem continues, the sea "became the self / that was her song," that is, the power of the ocean was subdued by the human chant, making the world of nature disappear (39-40). The woman acts as an Orphic figure that tames the force of Nature into aesthetic expression.⁷⁸

Towards the end of the poem, the lyrical subject invokes his friend Ramon Fernandez⁷⁹ and wonders why the lights "[m]astered the night and portioned out the sea" (49). This image posits the conflict of the mind regarding the prevalence of imagination or reality. The idea of order in the poem allies itself with the harmony the mind encounters when Reason is capable of interceding between understanding and the sublime imagination. The world of art, resulting from human creation, orders the chaos of Nature. This Kantian ideal is complemented by a series of mediations that bridge that gap between the unrepresentable object of the sea and human consciousness. In other words, the vastness of the ocean is mediated by the woman's song, which is simultaneously conveyed by the speaker himself. As Voros remarks,

⁷⁸ For a further analysis on Wallace Stevens and the Romantic tradition, see Joseph Carroll, *Wallace Stevens' Supreme Fiction: A New Romanticism*.

⁷⁹ Stevens states that Ramon Fernandez did not respond to anybody in particular, but as Longenbach remarks, "most of Stevens's readers will know that Fernandez was a critic familiar to Stevens from the pages of the *Nouvelle revue française*, the *Partisan Review*, and the *Criterion*" (161). His critical contributions adopted a political tendency in the aftermath of the riots in Paris.

Rather than depicting the power of poetry over Nature, the poem depicts the power of the sum of perceptual experiences created by human and nonhuman components *in the speaker*, whose main role in the poem may be summarized as that of creative listener. (10)

All these cumulative visions appeal to a "rage for order" that somehow can only be substantiated in the disorder of Nature. Alternatively, we might assume that in every chaos lies a certain order and it is the role of Reason to intercede and appease the anxiety of the thinking subject. The landscape of Key West provided Stevens a sense of plenitude that he did not encounter in the frantic rhythm of the city. He extolled the beauty and exoticism of Florida, contributing to its popularization through his poems.

The presence of the sea in Stevens's "Idea of Order at Key West" appears to be serene, after Reason has set in to ease any dissonance. By contrast, Robert Frost in "Once by the Pacific" shows a scene of incomparable magnitude:

The shattered water made a misty din.
 Great waves looked over others coming in,
 And thought of doing something to the shore
 That water never did to land before.
 The clouds were low and hairy in the skies,
 Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes.
 You could not tell, and yet it looked as if
 The shore was lucky in being backed by cliff,
 The cliff in being backed by continent;
 It looked as if a night of dark intent
 Was coming, and not only a night, an age.
 Someone had better be prepared for rage.
 There would be more than ocean-water broken
 Before God's last *Put out the Light* was spoken.
 (*The Poetry of Robert Frost* 250)

Written in the form of a Classical Shakespearean sonnet, the poem reminiscences a moment

of Frost's childhood in San Francisco coastline. On repeated occasions, his father went for a swim into San Francisco Bay and Frost was left alone on the beach taking care of his father's clothes, which sunk him into despair. These moments of natural rage wreaked havoc in Frost's consciousness, because, as Parini highlights, "any moment of stasis, however idyllic, can easily be shattered" (14). In the poem, the image of the waves breaking against the shore depicts the awe-inspiring sense aroused by the sublime regarding the safe position of the observing subject. This is emphasized by the effacement of limits between the sky and the ocean and the suggestion of vastness derived from it. Nevertheless, the sublime adopts apocalyptic overtones that affect not only the beholding subject, but also humankind. The clause "[b]efore God's last *Put out the Light* was spoken" shows the reversal of the Genesis "Let there be light: and there was light" (14). Instead of witnessing an act of creation, we are confronted with an image of supreme destruction.

Another poem that exhibits the sublime in Nature is "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," which Frost wrote in Shaftsbury, Vermont. Apparently, the day came, when he finished writing "New Hampshire," and then he decided to go out and see the sunrise in the woods (Tuten and Zubizarreta 347). In a lyrical form, the poem shows the musings of a rider while contemplating the snow in the woods:

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
 To ask if there is some mistake.
 The only other sound's the sweep
 Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
 But I have promises to keep,
 And miles to go before I sleep,
 And miles to go before I sleep. (*The Poetry of Robert Frost* 224)

The poem presents a contrast between Nature and urban society, on the one hand, and Nature and man, on another. The voice succeeds in illustrating the regional color of New England by taking advantage of the inner monologue. The narrator of the poem appears to experience a sense of wonder when stopping at the woods that bridge the gap between a series of oppositions: "clearing and wilderness, law and freedom, civilisation and nature, fact and dream" (Gray 380). The mundane concerns of the working world interrupt the revelation of the vision. A sinister atmosphere pervades the composition, especially in the following verses: "My little horse must think it queer / To stop without a farmhouse near" (5-6). Although the landscape invites one to peacefully contemplate the scene, the speaker finally shies away on the grounds of the "promises to keep," that is, the daily commitments and obligations. According to John C. Kempt, the poem manifests "the tension between a regional world, with its conventions and responsibilities and the meditative, selective character of the persona" (201). Yet it is also possible that the setting destabilizes the subject, discerning a ghostly atmosphere where the inside and outside merge. The closing line of the poem causes the speaker to suspend his willingness to believe in the unbelievable and unreachable, namely the phantasmagoria in the woods, as he has to return to his daily routine. Daily concerns are projected as having undermined the Romantic connection of the self with the land, creating a great separation that emphasizes alienating attitudes.

In these two poems by Frost, we can hint at an unsolvable divide between the natural landscape and the ego. As opposed to the Wordsworthian sublime, Frost conceives wildlife as energy completely estranged from the mind and even dreadful. As such there is no possibility of a mental introjection that apprehends its boundlessness and overpowering presence. As John F. Lynen manifests, "Frost views nature as essentially alien. Instead of exploring the margin where emotions and appearances blend, he looks at nature across an impassable gulf" (143). This separation of the human from the nonhuman threatens reality to annihilate the ego in its entirety. Frost believes Nature to be a brute and thoughtless force that not only has the ability to destabilize human consciousness, but also to challenge its potential. At stake is a death wish that suggests a terrific sensation regarding the devastating power of the natural world.

If Stevens and Frost utilized the "egotistical sublime" to exhibit the negative representation of an overwhelming object that can only be apprehended by the human consciousness and resignified in language, Moore is further interested in the positive effects of the unknown. Paying heed to the poems of the abovementioned authors, they present a human figure that expresses a reaction to a violent natural phenomenon. Before such scene the mind rests at ease, knowing that it has the power to comprehend such menacing event. Notwithstanding, Moore divested her poetics of human presence, allowing sublimity to act on its own and acknowledge a radical alterity that is impossible to be apprehended by man. In question is the generosity of being open to the experience of an overwhelming other.

In "An Octopus" Moore evokes her experience after visiting Mount Rainier National Park in Washington State with her mother and brother in 1922. According to Jennifer Ladino, Moore took advantage of the quotations from the brochure of the National Park Service's *Rules and Regulations* so as to counter the "utilitarian approach to nature" and tourism in the U.S. as forms of marketing the environment (288). The glacial range described in "An

Octopus" is reminiscent of the Kantian and Romantic sublime, though in this case Moore avoids including the lyrical voice of the "I" that witnesses the puissance of the landscape. The environment accounts for the ungraspable and unrepresentable otherness that relinquishes an anthropomorphic approach in favor of the nonhuman. The poem thus gives way to a type of writing that mimics the natural processes so as to achieve meaning other than that exposed by conceptual articulations. It is the site that enables one to live and reflect on the impossibility of reaching out to the real in its entirety.

One of the most significant features of "An Octopus," which due to its length I will not reproduce completely in these pages, lies in the fact that it reworks the sublime by engaging the reader in the singular geography of the glacial range in Washington. In addition, Moore "erase[s] the earlier individualized voice in favor of a universalizing 'one'" that causes the landscape to speak its grandeur (Diehl 60). In this fashion, man's urge to subjugate Nature is overturned on the grounds of an ethics that emphasizes openness to the unreachable as a means of questioning human-centered perspectives. The first lines of the poem are an illustrative example of this idea:

AN OCTOPUS
of ice. Deceptively reserved and flat,
it lies "in grandeur and in mass"
beneath a sea of shifting snow dunes;
dots of cyclamen-red and maroon on its clearly defined
pseudopodia
made of glass that will bend—a much needed invention—
comprising twenty-eight ice fields from fifty to five hundred
feet thick,
of unimagined delicacy. (1-8)

As we can see, "An Octopus" opens with an image that reproduces the indescribable excess and greatness of the sublime. It is also noticeable that Moore takes advantage of the direct

observation and precision probably learned after obtaining a major in Biology from Bryn Mawr College in 1909 (Marianne Moore, *A Marianne Moore Reader* 254-255). We can thus note references to organic processes such as pseudopodia, temporary cytoplasm of unicellular organisms, as well as botanic knowledge from the area: periwrinkles, anemones, fir trees, larches... This environment accounts for "austere specimens of our American royal families" (17). By enumerating the specifics of the flora of the glacier, she points out the essence of a truly American sublime based on the notion of a compelling sense of place.

Next, there is a move towards the wildlife that constitutes the National Park: "What spot could have merits of equal importance / for bears, elk, deer, wolves, goats, and ducks?" (40-41). All these animals contribute to the definition of the essence of the space, highlighting its frantic activity digging up burrows or feeding on vegetation. Aside from the active life of animals, we are informed of the mineral constituency of the area, "[c]omposed of calcium gems and alabaster pillars, / topaz, tourmaline crystals and amethyst quartz" (50-51). In this fashion, we receive a forceful image that reminds us of the appearance of the place. The usage of quotations is also significant given that it blurs the demarcations between the poetic and documentary genre, creating a sublime effect that confounds the reader. Those references are taken from the brochure, which attempts at promoting touristic visits by virtue of enticing language, like the "grottoes from which issue penetrating draughts / which make you wonder why you came" (62-63) and "fond of the spring fragrance and the winter colors" (91). The usage of references encountered in leaflets reveals to what extent the culture of capital has pervaded the domains of Nature, up to the point of marketing landscapes such as Mount Rainier for the sake of making profit. Although the trails of Big Snow Mountain shelter multifarious creatures, namely chipmunks, water ouzels and eagles that might be attractive to the eye of the beholder, it also conceals the negativity that the sublime might effect under given circumstances. The sense of terror is also evoked in some quotes to alert

us to the danger of the ice and cliffs, emphasizing the invasion of civilizing in natural landscapes, jeopardizing its original constituency. For that reason, the visitor might find "names and addresses of persons to notify / in case of disaster" (98-99). The poem continues stressing exotic plants and zoological agents such as chlorophyllless fungi and rhododendron that bring us back to the mythical world of Greece. Likewise, allusions to Mount Tacoma complete the vision of a landscape characterized by both its innocence and hostility:

the white volcano with no weather side;
the lighting flashing at its base,
rain falling in the valleys, and snow falling on the peak—
the glassy octopus symmetrically pointed,
its claw cut by the avalanche
"with a sound like the crack of a rifle,
in a curtain of powdered snow launched like a waterfall." (191-197)

In these concluding lines, we are presented with a threatening vista of Nature at its utmost activity. The volcano that crowns the scene is the catalyst of lightning and rain that might end up in the destructive force of an avalanche.

Drawing on quotations from tourist brochures and signposts at Mount Rainier, Moore might be calling our attention to the failed attempts of humans at taming the sublime. Consumer culture has invaded the most beautiful corners of America, jeopardizing its constituency and original beauty. "An Octopus" invites us to "think and feel further" about the sublime in an effort to rectify a shortcoming in representation attributed to cognitive thinking (Tsang 65-66). Insofar as the poem is conceived as an artifact subject to interpretation, there is room for questioning the prevalence of logocentrism in Western

thought since Plato.⁸⁰ In other words, I view the erasure of the "I" as a critique of the metaphysics of presence. Instead, the text registers that absence and reaffirms the possibility of conveying meaning. In this poem Moore appears to rescue a reality that presents itself as unreachable and ungraspable in its wholeness.

As seen in the abovementioned poems, language is the privileged medium to communicate the idea of the natural sublime, given the limitless possibilities of the word to evoke different images in each reader. It was also effective in focusing on the locality of the ground whether this be Florida, New Hampshire or Washington State. We have seen how Stevens and Frost took advantage of Wordsworthian sublimity to give priority to rationality as a faculty of the mind able to supersede the immensity and devastating power of Nature. The subject achieved a sense of elevation knowing that the environment could destroy man, but the former did not have the capacity to think. By contrast, Moore developed a type of ethical sublimity that denied the human-centered presence in her poem. Instead she causes the landscape to speak its mind in an attempt to discover an otherness beyond anthropomorphic concerns. As different as their projections of the sublime are, the three poets succeeded in promoting local areas that focus on the particularity of the sense of place in Nature. The images of these three poets might suggest that there are alternative experiences founded in Nature that present themselves as the other of modernization. These poems seek to reconnect humans with the natural world, publicizing ecological attitudes that distance themselves from the violence done to the landscape for the sake of civilization. The relationship with the American soil is what constitutes an ethics of the sense of place, in that it reconnects the poets with the specificity of their own land, which was forgotten on grounds

⁸⁰ By logocentrism I refer to the Greek word for speech, thought, law or reason. Since Platonic thought, speech was privileged over writing, because it entailed the presence of the interlocutor as opposed to the absence embodied in writing. Speech was invested with consciousness or interiority, whereas writing appeared as a mere exteriority, whose meaning can only be extracted by referring back to speech.

of twentieth-century industrialization.

From now on this chapter moves on to conceptualizing the sublime in the domain of modern painting that hints at particular features of the American topography. My intention is to analyze the presentation of unrepresentable aspects in the natural world by focusing on the art of Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley and Georgia O'Keeffe. Given the visual character of painting, we might be led to consider the difficulty in conveying the sense of vastness and might. Notwithstanding, abstraction opens intriguing avenues to rethink nonpictorial elements of Nature. In other words, I will interpret the paintings of the above-mentioned artists in terms of the postulations of the sublime. Although nonrepresentational art set precedents in the Stieglitz group, it ran the risk of preventing us from discovering the essential aspects of the object. As Stieglitz remarked, the Europeans understood the connection of their objects with their reality, but American artists had already come into contact with their own environment, and thus they had to keep looking into it. As Dijkstra informs, "if abstraction was to be used it should constitute a means by which the artist uncovered the essential lines and volumes of the American object" (147). The search for materials in their natural soil was the goal of the painters of 291, and this was the case for Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartely and Georgia O'Keeffe, who promoted American landscape by taking advantage of European abstraction as an artistic strategy.

Arthur Dove's art was precisely promoted by Stieglitz in his galleries at New York, where abstraction was seen as a salable strategy to make contact with a truly American identity. After attending Hobart College and transferring to Cornell University, Dove⁸¹ began his artistic career in New York, where he was in charge of illustrating several periodicals. This first job might have provided him with connoisseurship of modern print culture and

⁸¹ For a detailed view of Arthur Dove's biography, see *Arthur Dove: A Retrospective* by Debra Bricker Balken et al. and *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove* by Ann Lee Morgan. For an abbreviated version, see Arthur Dove (1880–1946) by Jessica Murphy <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dove/hd_dove.htm>.

promotional strategies to make his art known. From 1908 to 1909 he and his wife Florence moved to Paris, familiarizing themselves with Cubism and Expressionism as well as artists such as Alfred Maurer and Max Weber. Upon his return to New York, Dove had his one-man show at 291, where he found the support of Stieglitz as an art patron that contributed to the expansion of American Modernism. During the years 1910 and 1911, European abstraction and Bergson’s philosophy of *élan vital* make an impact on his work. Bergson was concerned with a spiritual energy that animates living entities and renews natural processes. Later in life he happened to live in Long Island, where he explored the local landscape by focusing on its essential forms, lines and colors. Dove was particularly fascinated by the possibilities of light, as “[i]t applied to all objects in nature, flowers, trees, people, apples, cows. These all have their certain condition of light, which establishes them to the eye, to each other, and to the understanding.”⁸²



FIG. 62. Arthur Dove, *Clouds and Water*, Alfred Stieglitz Collection.

⁸² See Samuel M. Kootz, *Modern American Painters*.

In the above-mentioned painting [fig. 62] Dove seems to convey the sublime experience by abstracting natural shapes to the point of reducing them to "patterns of straight lines and curves" that reflect "the essentials of his organic environment through its textures, colors and lines" (Dijkstra 151). Dove presents the aggrandizing effects and force perceived in the local landscape of Halesite, Long Island. As Rosenfeld remarks, Dove communicates the "love and direct sensuous feeling of the earth," where the limits between objects coalesce and abstract shapes emerge out of the "body's semi-consciousness of itself" (Rosenfeld 168, 170). Boats, hills, the sky, the wind are confounded, suggesting the agitation of the mind before the ferocious confrontation of the elements. In a Keatsean interpretation of the sublime, it appears that Dove self-vanishes when confronted with Nature, and he is only capable of acknowledging life at its utmost outside himself, in the form of trees, mountains, the sea, etc. All in all, art privileges abstraction as the main strategy to visualize his work and disclose truths about the landscape of regional areas such as Long Island.

In addition to Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley⁸³ was another distinguished painter within the Stieglitz circle. He began his career as an artist in 1892 at the Cleveland Institute of Art and soon after he moved to New York City, where he received art training at the New York School of Art and the National Academy of Design. He was introduced to the work of Continental avant-gardists such as Cézanne and Picasso, as well as having the opportunity to exhibit at the 291 in 1909 and 1912. During this year Hartley also spent some time in Paris, where he frequented the avant-garde circles of American expatriates, especially that of Gertrude Stein, who encouraged him to write poetry in addition to continuing with his painterly activity. One year later, he traveled to Berlin, making contact with German Expressionists such as Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky, who influenced his tendency

⁸³ For further references about Hartley's biographical and artistic training, see Norma J. Roberts, ed. (1988), *The American Collections* and Bram Dijkstra, *Cubism, Stieglitz and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams*, 150-151.

towards abstraction in relation to his regional and national American background. This exposure to European movements made it possible for him to exhibit at the Armory Show of New York, reaching the same status as other renowned figures.

After another long stay in Europe from 1921 to 1930, Hartley returned to the U.S. and settled in his native Maine, where he allied himself with regional trends that sought to paint local scenes of America. In fact, Hartely seemed to be influenced by the regional icons of Maine reflected in popular consumer culture. As Cassidy remarks, his paintings were associated with "the consumption of place in the tourist indutry" (67). That is, landmarks such as Orchard Beach and Mount Katahdin were some places frequented by tourists that attracted Hartley's attention and thus he transformed them into art, thereby contributing to the advertisement of Maine. This attitude towards the promotion of the local is appreciated in paintings such as *Jotham's Island (now Fox)*, *Off Indian Point*, *Georgetown, Maine*, *Mouth of Kennebec River*, *Seguin Light at Left* [fig. 63]. However, it is also evident that he was impressed with the natural formations of the scene. In this artwork he combines the rocky features of the coast of Maine with a vision that echos the American sublime. Certainly Hartley was familiar with the American Transcendentalists and Romantics, namely, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson and David Thoreau. His readings of these authors allowed him to express the sense of awe resulting from the contemplation of the overwhelming seascape of Maine. The painting below is symptomatic of the technique of sublimity, as Hartley presents the Main coastline in its most abrupt essence. Yet the dynamism of Nature is held in check by virtue of abstract forms that spiritualize the scene. This artistic view bears resemblance to the ideas exposed by Emerson in his essay "Nature" (1836), where he stated that in order to reach a state of fullness with Nature, we are to relinquish social demands in favor of a solitary retreat that allows us to experience the sense of oneness with our environment. This idea is illustrated in Emerson's words:

I see the spectacle of morning from the hilltop over against my house, from daybreak to sunrise, with emotions which an angel might share. The long slender bars of cloud float like fishes in the sea of crimson light. From the earth, as a shore, I look out into that silent sea. I seem to partake its rapid transformations: the active enchantment reaches my dust, and I dilate and conspire with the morning wind. How does Nature deify us with a few and cheap elements! (13)



FIG. 63. Marsden Hartley, *Jotham's Island (now Fox), Off Indian Point, Georgetown, Maine. Mouth of Kennebec River, Seguin Light at Left*, Addison Gallery of American Art.

Like Emerson, Hartley in his painting appeals to a Pantheism that unifies man and Nature to attain spiritual harmony. The images of the sky and the sea with its rocky shore, violent waves and sharp pine trees appear to become part and parcel of an identical whole. Before

this immensity, individuals are thus encouraged to reach out to the outside so as to better their human condition by mimicking the uncorrupted spirituality of the natural world. This idea ties in with the ethical concerns of the philosophy of sublimity, which elevates the mind to a higher state of consciousness by exposing oneself to the grandeur of an otherness, whether this be God or Nature. Hartley thus found inspiration in the sublimity of Maine's landscape, but he also promoted his art by taking advantage of the profit-oriented motifs of consumer culture.

Another Modernist painter that stood out in the Stieglitz circle was Georgia O'Keeffe.⁸⁴ She received extensive training in art from the Art Institute of Chicago, the Art Students League of New York, the University of Virginia and Columbia University's Teachers College, but it was in January 1916 when she made herself known by her drawings. Stieglitz noted her unique abstract style and soon enough introduced her work at the 291 to other members of his group such as Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin and Paul Strand. After intense collaboration she got married to Stieglitz and moved to New York, where she engaged in the representation of the urban landscape of city life as well as enigmatic flowers. Given the interest of the public in European movements, O'Keeffe's use of abstraction might be interpreted as a promotional strategy that raised awareness of a truly American art. Stieglitz was successful in commercializing O'Keeffe's painting and organized a series of exhibits at the Anderson Galleries (1924–25), the Intimate Gallery (1925–29), and An American Place (1929–46). Owing to his knowledge of the art market, Stieglitz associated his wife's painting with an extremely sexualized image that appealed to a series of critics interested in Freudian theories and European abstraction. Thanks to her husband efforts, O'Keeffe enjoyed the economic benefits, but she would eventually struggle to

⁸⁴ For an extended view of O'Keeffe's biography see Jack Cowart, Juan Hamilton and Sarah Greenough's *Georgia O'Keeffe: Art and Letters* and Lisa Mintz Messinger's *Georgia O'Keeffe*. Short references of O'Keeffe's life are on <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geok/hd_geok.htm>.

reshape her public image against gender interpretations that attributed O'Keeffe's paintings to "a full course of life: mysterious cycles of birth and reproduction and death expressed through the terms of a woman's body" (Rosenfeld 204). Believing that her abstractions were the source of misreadings, she reduced the production of such works as well as its allocation in Stieglitz's galleries. O'Keeffe also purchased some of the paintings she sold in order to promote her own artistic production and obtain benefits that made her paintings more visible and accessible to a broader audience..

Part of the imagery she created for herself was defined by her experience of New Mexico, which contributed to marketing an artistic identity detached from the Freudian readings Stieglitz and other critics associated her with. Towards the end of the 1920s, O'Keeffe took a trip to Santa Fe, which left an indelible imprint on her art. In Abiquiu and Ghost Ranch she discovered a rough landscape that set her imagination in motion. The geology, changing weather and unusual vegetation played a part in her local art of New Mexico. The fusion and confusion of boundaries between human, animal and plant pervade in the canvases of O'Keeffe. One of the paintings that most successfully presents this tension is *Black Place II* [fig. 64], which makes reference to the Bisti Badlands in Navajo country. O'Keeffe took a few trips there with her assistant Maria Chabot, who marveled at:

the black hills-black and grey and silver with arroyos of white sand curving around them-pink and white strata running through them. They flow downward, one below the next. Incredible stillness! (*Maria Chabot-Georgia O'Keeffe: Correspondence 1941-1949* 193)

The observation of such bleak land in the composition below might be interpreted as a contemplative exercise of the dynamic sublime, especially regarding the vigor impelled by weather-like phenomena. The hard-edged geometric shapes that point to the rocks and hills encountered in Navajo country as well as the contrast between lightness and darkness

exhibits Nature as the site of attraction and repulsion. The painting is devoid of the human presence, perhaps because the sublime for O’Keeffe in painting, as was for Moore in poetry, revolves around the acknowledgement of forces that resist human control. Man is no longer the measure of all things, and abstraction helps reconsidering alternative forces other than cognition to access the world. Ultimately, O’Keeffe’s succeeded in publicizing New Mexican landscape, which contributed to awakening the interest of artists and tourists in the area.



FIG. 64. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Black Place II*, Alfred Stieglitz Collection.

These three artists appear to have engaged in the presentation of the sublime as an overpowering force that centers on local areas of American geography. Their artworks show abstract leanings as an strategy that help rethink the constituency of sublimity, whether this

be the regional landscapes of Long Island, Maine or New Mexico. Stevens, Frost and Moore were at an advantage regarding these modern painters, as the word acted as a privileged medium to approach the unrepresentable and further elaborate on the magnificence of such an experience. Nevertheless, these artists found abstraction methods particularly original in the outreach of the sublime, though on different fronts. Whereas Dove's art consists in emerging out of himself so as to enter the object, Georgia O'Keeffe follows a reversal procedure; she assimilates the outside within herself. It is the depiction of a discourse that rejects hierarchical relations in favor of openness to experiences bordering processes of creation and destruction. Her artistic experience is thus based on accounts of feminine sexuality and its sensuous dynamics. Unlike O'Keeffe and Dove, Marsden Hartley spiritualized Nature and thought that humans needed to negotiate a space that allowed them to fuse in the environment, transcending the concerns of their daily life.

5.2. The Sense of "Lost" Place: American Expatriates in Europe

"All of you young people who served in the war. You are a lost generation," said Gertrude Stein to Hemingway (Hemingway, *A Movable Feast* 29). Stein came across the expression when she took her car to a garage, where she overheard the words of an employer. Since the young man in charge of the repair continued working longer than expected, the owner yelled at him, "You are all a "generation perdue." These words resonated in Hemingway's memory to such an extent that they eventually gave the name of an entire generation of American expatriates. The term also designates the period between World War I and the Great Depression. For this reason, it is generally known as the "Generation of 1914" in Europe. Given the loss of direction and confusion issued from the military conflict, the artists of this particular moment felt out of place and without a bond to their American identity.

The Great War displayed a humanitarian crisis caused by the excessive usage of

destructive machinery and chemical substances. A city devastated by military hostilities, Paris⁸⁵ became a center of attraction for avant-garde artists and philosophers. The bohemian community of Montparnasse had an intense cultural activity in its bars, where jazz music or literary talks were held. Given the dynamism in this city, Cubists, Futurists, Dadaists, Expressionists and Surrealists found the breeding ground for radical experimentation. Artists like Picasso, Braque and Duchamp, writers such as Cocteau and musicians in line with Stravinsky were some of the renowned figures that participated of the city life. This stimulating atmosphere was in stark opposition to the materialism of urban America, as reported by writers such as Theodore Dreisder and Upton Sinclair. After the exhibits of the Armory Show in New York and others in Boston and Chicago, which introduced works by Cézanne, Duchamp and Picasso, writers in line with Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound and Henry Miller emigrated to Paris, where they mingled with avant-garde trends.

Dissatisfied with the "paucity of indigenous creative activity" in the U.S., this young generation of expatriates was unified by the creation of a "homemade way" project that gave visibility to their national and international concerns during the inter-war years (Monk 3). This is especially noticeable in the commitment shown by Pound, Eliot and Stein to further the work of some of their colleagues. The common denominator of these expatriates was their sense of alienation from their present and past experiences, which sowed suspicion in the possibility of a promising future. The massacre that responded to the economic interests of the armed conflict led to a crisis of identity based on feelings of anger and frustration that forced the intellectual youth to go into exile to come to terms with themselves. This literary project evidences a sense of displacement, which was characterized by an existential search for unfamiliar spaces.

⁸⁵ For a further view of the Parisian city life and avant-garde trends, see *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation: A History of Literary Paris in the Twenties and Thirties* by Noel Riley Fitch.

This sense of “lost” place is embodied in the aesthetics of the collage, in that the dislocation or displacement of space coincides with the detachment American exiles identified with. Multiperspectival modes of approaching reality was attributed to Pablo Picasso, who around 1912 experimented with blending words, syllables and material fragments encountered in journals, magazine advertisements, bus and cinema tickets, etc.



FIG. 65. Pablo Picasso, *Bottle of Suze*, Kemper Art Museum.

This diversity of elements opens up an interval between objective and semantic signifiers that complicate the retrieval of meaning. Picasso's *Guitar* [fig. 65], where he juxtaposes disparate bits and pieces from multiple viewpoints, is especially noticeable in that it contributes to the creation of a false impression of reality.

The collage found its poetic expression in Guillaume Apollinaire's *calligrammes*, compositions that directly appeal to the eye by taking advantage of word order to represent a graphic content. Stein, Eliot and Pound were also cognizant of this artistic strategy, which integrates real-life items and sentences into the canvas. As a literary counterpart, their long poems adopt a polivocal discourse to emphasize the multiplicity of meaning. The impact of Cubist aesthetics on their poems is significant to the point that it reveals spatiotemporal discontinuities that underlie the heterogeneity of the world. By integrating a multiplicity of styles, metronomes and rhythms, the text lends itself to reading challenges and decoding riddles (Patea, *La tierra baldía* 59).

Originating in the spatial strategies of Picasso and Gris's collages, Gertrude Stein's style tends towards the condition of painting. In addition, it shows the conflicts experienced in terms of place, as she lived in different European and American cities that made her feel a sense of ubiquity. Stein⁸⁶ was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania in 1874 and in her early months of life her parents embarked on a five-year journey to Europe with her and her two older brothers. When the family returned to the U.S., they moved to Oakland, California, and once she turned eighteen, she began her studies in Psychology at Harvard Annex under the supervision of Williams James.⁸⁷ A few years later Stein decided to study Medicine at Johns Hopkins, which she eventually dropped out to accompany her brother Leo to London and

⁸⁶ For biographical details of Stein's biography, see Greenfeld's *Gertrude Stein: A biography*.

⁸⁷ William James (1842 – 1910) was an influential American philosopher and psychologist whose theories revolve around empiricism and pragmatism. *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) is one of his most renowned works.

Paris, where she established herself. This frequent change of place might have influenced her conception of literature in terms of attachment to or detachment from the space one inhabits. The bohemian atmosphere of Paris was appealing to her, particularly regarding the state of art. As a collector, her oldest brother Michael, who also lived in Paris, assisted her in acquiring artworks. This was possible thanks to the gatherings at the salon at 27 rue de Fleurus, where avant-garde artists such as Matisse, Gris and Picasso were invited (Posman and Schultz 1-22). If these painters broke with the conception of a unified object, emulating their collage practices Stein challenged linear writing and logicity. Her portraits on Cézanne and Picasso are writing experiments that put our memory to the test while confronting us with nonsensical sentences that never reach closure. This is noticeable in her references about Picasso:

This one was one having always something being coming out of him, something having completely a real meaning. This one was one whome some were following. This one was one who was working. This one was one who was working and he was one needing this thing needing to be working so as to be one having some way of working. (335)

Stein's playful language does not serve any purpose entrenched in the dynamics of patriarchal thought. Her repetitions and slight modification of phrases appear to add a new perspective to each sentence, creating a polyvocal discourse that bears upon the collage.

Her interest in art led her to redefine literature in terms of notions of space rooted in the collage effects employed by Picasso and Gris, as well as in the concerns revolving around woman's body as a place where writing is inscribed. This is evident in *Tender Buttons* (1914), where she applies techniques of automatic writing and the stream of consciousness as counterparts of visual forms. Her intention is to defamiliarize words and displace objects from their usual contexts to challenge preestablished meaning. In addition to

the role played by Cubism, Stein was influenced by Cézanne's idea of equality, defined by Grahn as "a field in which every element mattered as much as any other" (8). This network of relations between components is the main premise that develops the multiple vantage points on the textual domain. Stein takes advantage of the collage to explore the connections of gender and the corporeality of language. As Mary O'Connor argues, the poet "has learned as much from her analysis of the language of women's magazines as she has from Picasso" (117). *Tender Buttons* develops a voice based on changing modes of perception that disrupt syntactic and semantic patterns in an effort to question empirical and metaphysical models of thinking. As "buttons fastening side to side, signifier to signified," words become, in Schmitz's view, "tender, pliable, alive in the quick of consciousness" (119-120). This grammatical and semantic placelessness tie in with a presymbolic area of language that contravenes sequentiality of writing and the principle of sufficient reason as the central domain of truth. In opposition to Lacan's "Rule of the father" and Derrida's *différance*, both of which privilege the symbolic order of patriarchy and rationality, Kristeva argues for pre-Oedipal stages that, as De Koven rightfully highlights, pivot on the primacy of the signifier, that is, "the play of intonation, rhythm, repetition, sound association" (177). These sensuous constituents of language draw on the unconscious desires that threaten to destabilize consciousness, while insisting on the plural dimension of women's tendency to write the body rather than intellectual processes. This *écriture féminine* propounded by Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous, among others, is the equivalent to Steins "bodily stains" and "menstrual images" constructed in *Tender Buttons*. As Lisa Ruddick maintains, Stein's language resists linguistic instrumentalization associated with the symbolic order. Instead, she returns to the womb as the place that concentrates the drives preceding the Oedipus complex (236).

Stein experiments with "Objects," "Food," and "Rooms." The first section might be read in terms of the commodification of our life. The objects that are mentioned, namely the

carafe, box, piece of coffee, umbrella, cloak belong to our everyday experience Gertrude Stein is determined to bring to light. This part opens with the carafe:

A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS.

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a
Single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All
this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The differ-
ence is spreading. (3)

Depicted as a "blind glass," the carafe has been playfully poeticized following the paradigms of Cubist multiperspectivism, extending the comparison to a "cousin" and "hurt color." These humorous techniques coincide with children's language, especially regarding the fact that "innocence is alien, since it is 'lost' to the very adults who assign it to children" (Stockton 30). This manipulation of writing is characterized by its dissimilarities, which emphasize the existing gap between both objects in a system that generates multiplicity of unexpected connections. And indeed the carafe might be seen as blind glass, in that it comes with a tap that acts as the artifact that obstructs vision. This dissemination of meaning in "Objects" stands for the site where sexual difference is textually inscribed as a means of severing structures of signification the reader identifies with. Instead, Stein argues for a transgressive writing associated with *jouissance* as the driving force that contests masculine categorizations.

The presence of disparate realities in the last poem display unusual scenes that make us wonder about the connection between a dress and an aider. In these brief four lines there is an invocation to an aider so that somebody, presumably a woman, can be saved from, perhaps, sexual attacks.

THIS IS THE DRESS, AIDER

Aider, why aider why whow, whow stop touch, aider whow, aider
stop the muncher, muncher munchers.

A jack in kill her, a jack in, makes a meadowed king, makes a
to let. (17)

This aggressiveness is evident in the several interjections and verbs that have overtones of violent and sexual connotations. According to Schmitz, "aider" might resonate the name that Stein gave her lover, Alice B. Toklas in a portrait she composed (124). In any case, the reader experiences a sense of uncertainty that leads to questioning our conventions and structures of reality. In a democratic act, the objects in this fragment level off and acquire an equal position. Stein dismantles the idea that man is the measure of all things and instead demonstrates these items possess an ontology of their own that dictates our actions in the everyday. They are even charged with death and sex drives. For instance, a jack is important to the extent that if we are deprived of it, we will miss it, when we need it. Furthermore, the last line of the poem signifies the fusion of poet and lover in the symbolic act of writing, which culminates in bodily and literary pleasure (Schmitz 124).

As for the second part, its title refers to commonplace practices that center on the quality and flavor of food, as in the following passage:

ROAST POTATOS

Roast potatoes for (33)

Stein speaks about roast potatoes and adds the preposition "for" as a means of opening the possibilities of the utility of this tuber.

SALAD

It is a winning cake. (37)

As for the salad and the affirmation that it is "a winning cake," we should interrogate why this is the case. These two lines invite one to make assumptions about the connection of salad and its likeness to a winning cake. Such comparison might be established because the

salad, a low-calorie dish, deserves a dessert to satisfy one's appetite. In any event, the physiological function of nourishing, once again, connects bodily functions with the text, insisting on the importance of everyday actions we tend to disregard.

The final passage, "Rooms," is an eloquent speech that lends itself to thinking over the positions adopted by the body in the world: "To begin the placing there is no wagon" (43). That is, a location exists before one sets off, and the example of the wagon contributes to the definition of space, which eventually hinges upon movement. In other contexts, Stein introduces ideas that, with a given explanation, could be related and comprehended, as proves the following passage:

Is there pleasure where there is a passage, there is when every room is open.
Every room is open when there are not four, there were there and surely there
were four. There were two together. There is no resemblance. (44-45)

It appears that those rooms are similar and different at the same time and respond to notions of pleasure. Yet Stein does not explain this statement, and that might be because she is referring to a language understood as a space where displacements of meanings culminate in what Lisa Ruddick defines as "the return to the mother" and the charges embodied in the rhythms of the womb (235). Grammar and punctuation contribute to the construction of a lost sense of place from mundane reality. *Tender Buttons* thus releases writing from perceptually and ontologically constructed desires in favor of a ground zero that allows for uncertain leeways that expand imagination.

Despite her monotonous and repetitive writing, Stein explores areas of language where beauty and pleasure coalesce. And the feminine body is the place that allows for a recomposition of language and desire. Furthermore, her puns and suppression of punctuation bring about unusual associations that subvert sequential discourse practices and conceptual

thinking. Instead, Stein appears to concern herself with a sensuous language that reflects on the implications of space as a vehicle to connect with or disconnect from the world.

Spatiotemporal displacement is also intrinsic to the aesthetics of T.S. Eliot.⁸⁸ Born in Saint Louis, Missouri, in 1888, he lived there until he attended Harvard University to pursue a B.A. in Philosophy and in 1910 he moved to the Sorbonne. Upon his return to the U.S., he intended to obtain a Ph.D. in Philosophy, but he traveled again to Europe to finally establish himself in London, where he got married and worked as a clerk at Lloyd's Bank. In the British capital he met Ezra Pound, who played a part in the publication of *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) and *The Waste Land* (1922), becoming the leading figure in Anglo-American literature and criticism.

The Waste Land is the most emblematic poem of Modernism. This long poem is composed of multi-layered fragments ranging from ritualistic practices, medieval stories, biblical passages and modern expeditions. Eliot articulates a trans-historical dialogue between past and present, reality and myth. His method is based on the usage of allusive strategies that further a network of connections (Levenson 201). As Altieri argues in his essay "Eliot's Impact on Twentieth-Century Anglo-American Poetry,"

allusions create the sense that there is a common cultural perspective from which the different levels of historical existence within the poem can be understood and assessed, while also challenging poets to push their readers beyond conditions of immediate response so that they will reflect on their own positioning within history, and hence compose a site beyond the immediate event. (200)

In that sense, Eliot's allusive and mythical method challenges the limitations imposed by uniform tradition by creating a trans-cultural dimension that invites one to question the

⁸⁸ For an extensive view of T.S. Eliot's biography and literary career, see the introductory study of Patea *La tierra baldía*.

prevalence of one voice over another (Patea, *La tierra baldía* 89). Drawing from collage techniques, Eliot's methods interpret the present by examining the impact of past traditions. This interest in revealing preceding eras serves the purpose of reenergizing historical landmarks as essential to the modern world. According to Eliot in "The Function of Criticism" (1923), literary works are seen

not as a collection of the writings of individuals, but as "organic wholes," as systems in relation to which, and only in relation to which, individual works of literary art, and the works of individual artists, have their significance. (23-24)

By rescuing pieces of history, myths and present-day affairs, Eliot contends that criticism is fundamental only if connections with works of different artists are tendered. This way the artist eschews human solipsism in favor of a correlation of forces with other individuals.

Inspired by the principle of collage applied in the nonrepresentational arts, Eliot's theory of impersonality and his "objective correlative" dismantle photographic mimetism by taking advantage of juxtaposing techniques. In this fashion, Eliot adopts multifarious voices invested with particular rhythms and registers that speak of plural forms of consciousness, spaces and times (Altieri, "Eliot's Impact on Twentieth-Century Anglo-American Poetry" 191). "Prufrock" is exemplary of this attitude, as it subverts the belief in a univocal and impervious self rather than underlying its fragmented identity. This poem relies upon Laforgue's strategies of self-mockery and interior monologue, which helps record the inner conflicts of the self. In distinguishing between the objective correlative and the subjective voice in Prufrock, Altieri makes the following appreciations:

By conceiving the poem as an objective correlative for emotions, rather than a direct expression of them, Eliot could envision writing as an effort to render psychic forces in conflict, without having to succumb to any single version of a speaking presence working, as Prufrock does, to secure imaginary versions

of the self which in fact miss half of what is happening in the very process of seeking closure. ("Eliot's Impact on Twentieth-Century Anglo-American Poetry" 198)

This introspective poetry rebels against Victorian conventions by shying away from any sense of rhetoric and didactics. Likewise, Eliot's theory of impersonality builds upon Bradley's idealist philosophy. According to Bradley, the condition of the self originates in the experience of the world from an individual consciousness or "finite center." For Eliot this "finite center" constitutes a fundamental source of knowledge. Yet this viewpoint cannot be said with any certainty to reconcile itself with others. Hence the importance of the study of tradition to overcome human solipsism, the principal problem he approaches in his thesis (Levenson 187). This outlook also made impact on Ortega y Gasset, who defined the notion of "substance" as a web of universal relations based on plural perspectives. According to Ortega y Gasset, the idea of a univocal reality is false, as it is the point of view that articulates an overview (Rodríguez Huéscar 48). The appreciations of the Spanish philosopher set theoretical precedents for explaining the differences between the mimetic principle of Renaissance and modern works of art based on the prevalence of fragmentation and juxtaposition.

The philosophical precedents of Bradley aided Eliot in the writing of *The Waste Land*. As Eliot affirms in his dissertation,

the life of a soul does not consist in the contemplation of one consistent world but in the painful task of unifying (to a greater or less extent) jarring and incompatible ones, and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include and transmute them. (*Knowledge and Experience* 147-148)

This failure to reconcile "jarring and incompatible perspectives" is what explains Eliot's interest in Russell's empiricism, as this privileges hard facts over subjective analyses.

According to Eliot and Russell, facts "cannot corrupt," whereas interpretations certainly can, as they reckon on "opinion or fancy" rather than truth (*Selected Essays* 32-33). Eliot veered towards empiricist philosophy to legitimate the role of criticism and avoid inaccurate interpretations that do not hold truth. This sense of objectivity developed in the sciences is of necessity to attain knowledge. In the coming years, Eliot relinquished this objectivist thinking in favor of a hermeneutic historicism the purpose of which was to question human knowledge. As Shusterman upholds,

Historicism points to the inexorable change of beliefs, aims, methods, vocabularies, and standards over the course of time. In recognizing the inevitability of change, it recognizes that of difference and the possibility that divergent views and practices may find rational justification in their respective, historically different communities. (41)

Since history is prone to change with the passage of time, the poet and critic should also be attentive to processes of change. For this reason, tradition is to be revised and reinterpreted according to the situations generated in the world.

The Waste Land is a long poem divided into five sections that project the multiperspectival strategies of the collage and the philosophy of the viewpoint. As Kearns argues, Eliot's work represents "a system of beliefs" that tapped into "the sum total of the ritual cultic, and related social practices of a given society" (80). His anthropological readings of Weston and Frazer provided him with a cross-cultural understanding of the religious rituals that aided in his desire to construe a unified sensibility. As a correlative object, the poem, according to Menand, manifests "a vision of degeneration" that, far from pointing to a "private disorder," reveals a "general reality" (90). In other words, the lyrical I/eye is rejected in favor of a plural consciousness that reflects the instability of the world and the metamorphoses that several voices undergo by building bridges between tradition and the contemporary state of affairs. The first part, "The Burial of the Dead," centers on the

cyclical processes of the seasons. Spring is evoked to speak of desire and then the voice brings back childhood memories in Munich such as sled trips and love affairs:

Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
 With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
 And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
 And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
 Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch. (5-12)

This topography is associated with the decadence of the Habsburg Empire and the sentence in German accounts for the sense of a lost place on account of warlike conflict and national invasions. The allusive reference to Marie in the following lines appears to evoke Marie Larisch, the Empress's cousin. Her words suggest paradisiacal freedom. Immediately afterwards, the landscape presented is described as bleak and in ruins.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
 Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
 You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
 A help of broken images, where the sun beats,
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
 And the dry stone no sound of water. (19-24)

These apocalyptic lines reminiscence the voice of the prophets of the Old Testament, who denounce men's placelessness and loss of direction, which results in a subsequent existential crisis. In this context Madame Sosostriis comes into scene, a fortune-teller who speaks of Phlebas, the "drowned Phoenician Sailor," as an alert to a possible death by water. Once this encounter concluded, the protagonist appears to be on London Bridge, where he recognizes his friend Stetson:

Unreal City,
 Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,

I had not thought death had undone so many.
 Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
 And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
 Flowed up the hill and down King Williams Street,
 To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
 With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
 There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: 'Stetson! (60-69)

This passage visualizes the urban architecture of London with its polluted air and disoriented masses, who appear to be confused and estranged from their own human condition. It is this gloomy thought, which brings to mind Baudelaire's city, that is eventually interrupted by the casual encounter of the speaker with a friend. At this point the frightening and pessimistic view is disregarded in favor of a superficial human contact with Stetson, who likens to a veteran of the Great War and points in an anachronistic gesture to the Battle of Mylae (Patea, *La tierra baldía* 112). This contrast between the present and the past let us see, as Harriet Davidson observes, the fragmentary condition of the self in modernity. Yet paradoxically the recovery of wholeness is only possible through the loss of the self, which is in line with the mysticism of Saint John of the Cross (*T.S. Eliot and Hermeneutics* 122). Acknowledging our insufficiency and limitations is significant to the degree that it helps understand the world in terms other than egoism.

In "A Game of Chess" a bejewelled lady from London is presented in a room, where she appears to be in an agitated state of mind owing to the absence of passion she and her partner feel for each other. The bedroom where the action takes place is depicted as a sumptuous property furnished with a chair akin to Cleopatra's, a laquearia that points to Dido's palace and the canvas that visualizes the Ovidian myth of Philomela's rape at the hands of King Tereus. These women, according to Davidson, symbolize "the destructive and creative force of desire" ("Improper Desire" 129). After invoking Philomela's rape, the

maiden was mutilated so that she could not reveal the identity of her assailant. This scene is recorded and recreated in the pub, where two women gossip before closing time about a friend abused by her husband and betrayed by her friend. The brutality of the act has no paragon in the present and the past, and it seems that humanity is condemned to perpetrate the same vile deeds ad infinitum. The allusions to stories of passion registered in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *Hamlet*, on the one hand, and passionate women from Classical Antiquity serves to elucidate the title of the section. According to Gregory S. Jay, the language of Shakespeare offers an analytical understanding of human life, whereas figures such as Virgil and Dante provide visions associated with moments of sublime emotions (120). "A Game of Chess" reveals the absence of passion and the mechanical nature of sexuality, which is governed by power relations (Patea, *La tierra baldía* 126). What is significant in spatial terms is that a displacement between the upscale circles of the British capital and the low-class atmosphere of the pub takes place so as to create unexpected shifts of locale. This move accounts for the simultaneity of human acts in different sites, which reflect the plural perspectives of the world.

"The Fire Sermon" begins with the figure of Tiresias sitting on the banks of River Thames, where he appears to be thinking over the futility of human actions:

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
 The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers
 Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
 Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed. (176-180)

Tiresias becomes the beholder of all the actions that befall in the section. The bright and crystal-clear waters evoked in the above-mentioned lines are nothing but a mirage, yet he would like his desired image to come true. Allusions to Wagner's *The Twilight of the Gods* and the Nibelungen saga point to the profanation of the river, which recalls the loss of the

ring guarded by the nymphs, an act that reveals the absence of spiritual values in modernity. Tiresias also becomes the witness of the lewd relationship between Mr. Sweeney and Mr. Porter, which contrasts with the encounter of Diana and Actaeon.⁸⁹ In this context there emerges the figure of Mr. Eugenides, labelled as "the Smyrna merchant." This city evokes the Greek splendor of Antiquity in contrast to London. The merchant is also characterized by his proficiency in financial operations as opposed to his lack of spiritual depth. The speaker reproduces how a young man, depicted as carbuncular, has sexual intercourse with a typist only to quickly abandon her, once they were finished. In a shocking parallel, the end of the section introduces a young woman that regrets losing her chastity owing to the lecherous desires of a man. Given the emptiness of emotions and existential vacuum, the title of the poem points to Buddha's "Fire Sermon" to find human salvation. Fire acts not only as a lethal element but also purges our souls of suffering and superficial demands

The next passage, "Death by Water," speaks of a dead Phoenician, who strikingly resembles Phlebas, the sailor Madame Sosostriis described in the first section. In an allusion to Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Eliot ponders over the meaning of baptism and Christ's death as symbols of spiritual regeneration that differ from Phlebas materialistic concerns and the vain world of appearances.

"What the Thunder Said" is staged in the mountains, where the poetic persona calls out for rain and suddenly a thunder God discloses three imperatives from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*: "Datta, dayadhvam, damyata"—to give, to sympathize, to control—. In other words, humanity should show generosity, empathy and control to

⁸⁹ Ovid's *Metamorphoses* mentions the encounter of Actaeon and Diana. The narrative informs the moment when Actaeon unexpectedly sees Diana taking a bath with her nymphs. Feeling outraged, Diana turns him into a deer and deprives him of his ability to speak. Thereafter, Actaeon falls prey of his own dogs, which kill him. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville.

overcome its crisis of identity. From this proverb we gather that, if we are open to lead a spiritual life, salvation might be found in a civilization that is about to collapse:

What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal (372-378)

In other words, these fallen cities create a spectacle of terror that lead us to question the possibility of human salvation and regeneration. The passage continues with the passion of Christ as well as the Vedic figures of Varuna and Indra, gods of the thunder and rain. These references from the *Upanishads* coincide with the sterile scenery of the desert, where the search for water becomes an imperative necessity to survive. It is the counterpart of a life lacking in faith and thus the water acts as the nourishment for a transcendental state of mind. This spiritual suffering is juxtaposed with the modern expedition to the Antarctic led by Ernest Henry Shackleton, a polar explorer who guided three expeditions. Both religious spirituality and adventures are significant to the extent that they end up in a vital discovery for the individual.

All the spaces described by Eliot in *The Waste Land* create a sense of displacement and alienation, given that they are rooted in distant times and spaces that defamiliarize the reader's perception. In this network of allusions the collage effect succeeds in conveying a multiperspectival vision of the world between the present and the past, the East and the West. This juxtaposition of myths, legends, cultures and personae might disorient the reader, yet they provide a plural understanding of the world based on the rejection of a single view of history.

Another expatriate poet was Ezra Pound, who contributed to fruitful transatlantic exchanges between European and American Modernists, promoting the work of poets such as H.D., William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway. Born in Hailey, Idaho in 1885, he studied for two years at the University of Pennsylvania and in 1905 he obtained a degree from Hamilton College. One year later he received an M.A. in Romance Languages from the University of Pennsylvania, and began his doctoral studies with the intention to write a thesis on Lope de Vega's plays. He took several trips to Spain, Italy and London, where he launched the Imagist movement in 1912, adopting leading positions in magazines such as the *Little Review*. He proposed to H.D., and eventually married the English Dorothy Shakespear. As a result of his British period,⁹⁰ he wrote poems such as *Personae* (1909) and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly* (1910) as well as *Rispostes* (1920), a book of criticism. In 1924 he settled in Italy,⁹¹ where he was attracted by Mussolini. In fact, he was found guilty of treason for broadcasting radio propaganda against the U.S. during the years of World War II. Pound spent almost 13 years confined in Saint Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C. During that time he received the Bollingen Prize for his *Pisan Cantos*. The support of Eliot, Frost, Hemingway, MacLeish made it possible that Pound was finally released from hospital in 1958, when he returned to Italy and died in 1972.

As we can see from Pound's life, familiarity with several countries will be particularly significant in defining a poetics of displacement that focuses on spaces that distance themselves from the U.S. Like Stein and Eliot, Pound takes advantage of the collage effect so as to register multiple locations and reflect the fragmentary state of the world in the aftermath of two World Wars. Building bridges between different cultures is perceived as an

⁹⁰ For a further view on Pound's British period, see Noel Stock's *The Life of Ezra Pound*, especially the following chapters: "London, 1908/1909;" "The Spirit of Romance 1909/1910;" "Imagism, 1912/1914."

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, see "Rapallo 1924/1929," "St Elizabeths Hospital 1945/1958" and "Return to Italy, 1958/1969."

antidote to the devastation created by politics of power and historical hierarchies. His *Cantos* respond to a problematic relationship with a multiple places. Divided into several sections, the poem manifests a historical dialogue with different cultures, literatures, myths and locations. The reader is thus faced with journeys, letters, documents, economic reflections, fertility rituals, personal memories and philological ideas (Kenner 532). Pound takes advantage of the ideogrammatic method to overlap styles and motifs separated in time and space, so that a dynamic parallel between the old and the new shines through. Inspired by the manuscripts of Ernest Fenollosa, whose widow sent to him in 1913, Pound believed Chinese writing to be superior to Western alphabetic forms, since it turns abstract ideas into concrete elements, preserving the etymology of the word and the picture. As Dasenbrock remarks, ideograms "are pictures, not of things, but of processes and relations" (110). The ideogrammatic principles structures history following a pattern that permits to disclose surprising connections. *The Cantos* is composed of a polyphonic structure where simultaneous voices appear and reappear, manifesting the protean nature of different characters and epochs, namely the Italian Renaissance and its rulers, the Classical world of China and Confucius as well as American modern panorama. Drawing on sculptural principles, Pound pursues the *forma*, that is, "the form behind ideas" (Davie 220). As Davie states, "what began as random associations are seen to organize themselves into constellations ever more taut and brilliant, and ultimately into the *forma*" (230). This tendency to the tactile aspects of sculpture attempts at rendering life an old tissue of civilizations that vanished in time. It appears that the world of the dead is revived in the collective memory of humankind.

The long poem begins with the translation of Homer's *Odyssey* by Andreas Divus and uses the meter of *The Seafarer*. In this first canto Pound informs of a journey to Hades, after setting sail from Circe's island:

And then went down to the ship,
 Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly seas, and
 We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,
 Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also
 Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward
 Bore us out onward with bellying canvas,
 Circe's this craft, the trim-coifed goddess.
 Then sat we amidships, wind jamming the tiller,
 Thus with stretched sail, we went over sea till day's end.
 Sun to his slumber, shadows o'er all the ocean,
 Came we then to the bounds of deepest water,
 To the Kimmerian lands, and peopled cities
 Covered with close-webbed mist, unpierced ever
 With glitter of sun-rays
 Nor with stars stretched, nor looking back from heaven
 Swartest night stretched over wretched men there. (C1/1-16)

In these lines the reader might observe that the canto begins as if it was continuing a previous narration. Then it describes the voyage that Odysseus and his crew took once they left Circe's island. They passed by the Kimmerian lands, a place located at the edge of the world and characterized by its unyielding darkness and mist as well as deep waters. Towards the end of the poem, we are introduced to Andreas Divus, an outstanding figure of the Renaissance who translated *The Odyssey* for the first time. This might be interpreted as a brilliant parallel between two different epochs and geographical spaces informing of splendor.

Next, the figure of Sigismondo Malatesta, soldier, lord and patron of the arts in the Renaissance, comes into scene. Built and decorated by Leon Battista Alberti, Piero della Francesca and Agostino de Duccio, the temple of Rimini is considered to be one of the milestones of the time.

*anywhere in the palace or
in the loggia of the Rialto under pain of ten soldi
or half that for kids, and if they wont pay
they are to be chucked in the water. (C25/1-10)*

The canto continues with the birth of lion cubs in the Palazzo Ducale, the limitations encountered by the doge's daughter when visiting her father and ends by referring to Titian's risk of forgoing his work for the Fondaco dei Tedeschi (Plant 291). According to Peter Robinson, this canto exemplifies the deterioration of patronage: "anti-usurious economic relations between artist and patron may derive only from the exceptional instances of extremely generous, enlightened princes" (134). In Pound's view, the Venetian Council was symptomatic of this corruption as he felt Titian to be exploited. However, interpretations of historical data evidence that the Italian painter constantly postponed his work given the high amount of commissions he received. Therefore, he should not be attributed such an innocent role (Robinson 135). The rest of the sections is charged with allusions ranging from Ovid, Propertius, Catullus, Provençal literature, etc. Pound establishes a connection between the intrigues of Medici's bank and the just practices adopted by Thomas Jefferson. At the heart of financial accounts lies Pound's preoccupation with usury and his search for role models that have the capacity of subverting the system. This tissue of historical references, especially about Italian Quattrocento painting and sculpture, Renaissance architecture, poetry and music, made an impact on Pound's conception of ideal patronage (Robinson 121). This collage of multiple perspectives leads to ethical questions of the world and the human condition.

Cantos XXXI-XLI builds upon writings of the "Founding Fathers" of the U.S., those being Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, among others. In Canto XXXI we are faced with a letter of Thomas Jefferson to

T.J. Washington regarding the "navigation of Lake Erie and the Ohio" that reduced the expenses of the transportation of goods between New York and the West (13). Additional remarks of Jefferson on the prohibition of slavery to the north of Maryland and the deregulation of tobacco business are indicative of the operations that affected the configuration of space in the U.S. in times of the "Founding Fathers." Pound perceived these figures as models of ethics that enter in stark contrast with the usury of the American banking system. Cantos XLII-LI speaks of the Sienese bank of the Monte dei Paschi, as it was symbolic of the non-capitalist ideal of the Arch Duke Pietro Leopoldo. Canto XLV remonstrates against the financial practices of bankers that tend to exponentially increase their wealth, as is evident in the Bank of England and its interest in making profit out of the granting of credit. After these fiscal disquisitions, Pound situates the action in the island of Circe, when Odysseus sets sail. Spatiotemporal connections between Rapallo and myths underlying natural processes of regeneration are at stake in the next sequence, which thinks over fertility rituals and agricultural practices. These activities of renewal contrast with the attacks on usury that Canto XLV projects so as to criticize legally questionable businesses. At this point Pound concludes with Chinese written characters, as an illustration of his ideogrammatic method.

The next section, Cantos LII-LXI, deals with the *Histoire generale de la Chine* by Joseph-Anna-Marie de Moyriac de Mailla, a French Jesuit who lived for 37 years in Beijing examining Confucian philosophy. The characters of Canto LIII make reference to the Hai dynasty and their interests in culture, yet it also introduces Confucius as a key figure that challenges the status quo and expands the field of action from a small to a great scale. The poem is imbued with Chinese characters that show Pound's ideogrammatic method and his interest in the visual order of things:

YAO 堯

CHUN 舜

YU 禹

These are the names of the kings that Pound thought to be a model of conduct, as their taxation requirements was fair, and in times of need they unloaded granaries to feed people. In line with Confucian thinking, Pound believed these kings to be illustrations of just rulers in search of the common good. As Qingjun Li states, these kings “followed the Confucian dao by making it new in his own age. Hence, his reign was stabilized and prosperous” (49). By using Chinese characters, Pound took advantage of the potential of the mirror image as a means of mimicking role models of conduct. He thought these emperors were significant to the point that they found a regenerating source in Confucius to be applied in the West. Eastern thinking aided in solving problems derived from politics and capitalist structures, which in turn rechanneled his takes on Christianity and Mussolini as a world leader. As Materer claims, Pound believed that in the Italian dictator he had found a man “capable of reforming the usurious economic system that prevents the production of genuine art” (*Vortex: Pound, Eliot and Lewis* 46). He also had faith in Mussolini’s potential to impose order upon a world in a state of chaos, although Pound hopes were eventually frustrated.

The Adams Cantos (LXII-LXXI), is a tribute to the figure of John Adams in terms of the prevalence of his political work. The next two cantos juxtapose the Italian context of Sigismondo Maltesta, Dante and Cavalcanti with modern figures such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden. Pound also attributes usury to the Jews in an anti-Semitic attitude. The Pisan Cantos (LXXIV-LXXXIV) and The Rock-Drill Section (LXXXV-XCV) are autobiographical accounts enmeshed in historical and mythical narrations. In the former Pound conveys his experience confined in a cage at the American Disciplinary Training Center, and contrasts it with Francesco del Cossa’s *March* fresco. The

latter informs of the trial in Washington and his admission to Saint Elizabeths Hospital, where he engaged in the translation of Confucius and Sophocles, while advancing the *Rock-Drill Cantos* by taking advantage of Chinese and American sources on history and economy. Thrones (XCVI-CIX), Drafts and fragments of Cantos CX-CXVII are the continuation of his experience at Saint Elizabeths Hospital and his final settlement in Italy, where he stayed until his death in 1972.

Pound's *Cantos* project a vision that expands our imagination and knowledge of the world. Imitating the collage effect, he acts as a collector that avails himself of fragments of history, mythical and sociocultural aspects that bring us closer to distant spaces and times. His enterprise lies in bridging the gap between the East and the West, the old and the new, the just and unjust so as to come to terms with ideas unknown to the European mind. Pound strives to unify human consciousness by reconciling disparate notions in the space of his poem as a means of opening our ego to the understanding of an other.

On the whole, the long poems by Stein, Eliot and Pound avail themselves of the collage effect to manifest a sense of displacement regarding their native land, which might be explained by the fact they became expatriate poets. In their works they defamiliarize the act of reading by overlapping cultures, epochs and literary works that transformed our perceptual faculty. Instead of speaking of our quotidian reality, they transport us to distant places so as to question the superiority of one civilization or aesthetic motif over another. Stein's *Tender Buttons*, Eliot's *Waste Land* and Pound's *Cantos* are illustrative cases of long poetry that challenge the reader into penetrating unknown places.

5.3. Conclusion

The sense of place or displacement defines the direction of Modernist American poetics. Whereas Williams, Stevens, Frost and Moore concerned themselves with disclosing the

essence of their own soil, Stein, Eliot and Pound went into exile and wrote poems about their sense of estrangement. The former were inspired by the European avant-garde that emigrated to New York, yet later they distanced themselves from models that prevented them from seeing the essence of their own land. In this search artists such as Stieglitz, O'Keeffe, Dove and Hartley as well as Sheeler and Demuth also contributed to the disclosure of the American land by showing the essence of cityscapes and natural spaces. On the other side of the Atlantic, the American expatriates expressed their sense of displacement by transforming their writings in Cubist assemblages that transport readership to locations and epochs other than those rooted in their familiar surroundings. All in all, the aesthetics created by both factions set precedents for rethinking American poetry in terms of attachment to and detachment from the native soil.

6. American Modernism, Poetry and the Mechanical Arts: The Ekphrasis of Light and Movement

This chapter proposes a definition of an ekphrasis of light and movement that explores how the mechanical image is presented in the poetry based on photographs by William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore as well as the poems originating in movies by Hart Crane, H.D. and Mina Loy. Ekphrasis, a rhetoric device originating in Classical Antiquity, stands for the literary description of a visual representation, especially of decorative elements. This concept is of interest to the study of Modernist poetics because in the era of mechanical reproduction, it extends to the new genres of cinema and photography, which happen to align themselves with mass-produced art. The abovementioned poets are pertinent cases for this study, since they were actively involved in the cinematic culture of Modernism. On the one hand, William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore participated in the circle of gallery 291 and they wrote poems based on photographs, as is the case of “Young Sycamore,” based on Stieglitz’s “Spring Showers” and Marianne Moore’s “To a Man Working his Way through the Crowd,” resulting from Edward Steichen’s portrait of Gordon Craig. On the other hand, Crane and Loy were fascinated respectively with the figures of Charlie Chaplin and Marie Dressler, whereas H.D. performed roles in films such as *Borderland*, wrote several reviews and familiarized herself with film making and editing techniques. Correspondingly based on silent movies, namely, *The Kid*, *Chang* and the filmic character of Marie Dressler, Crane’s

"Chaplinesque," H.D.'s "Projector" and Loy's "Film-Face," masterfully illustrate the mediation between words and moving images. Of course, I am not suggesting that all these literary pieces respond to a type of ekphrasis that realistically describes the abovementioned photographs and films. Strictly speaking, they are to be considered recreations or reinterpretations of the Classical rhetoric. The concept of ekphrasis is useful to articulate a discourse on the limit between the visual and the verbal that lends itself to further decipher the tensions between art and society, time and space, culture and nature.

We are thus led to consider important questions that are tantamount to the problematic relationship between the filmic image and the word, which I will accordingly address in this chapter. To begin with, movies and photographs are embedded in the entertainment culture of capitalism and as such they respond to social processes of modernization and marketplace exchanges the text records. In this respect, Peter Wagner remarks, "the new ekphrasis will have to consider the visual image as sign, as discursive work that comes from and returns to society" (35). That is, poetry based on movies and pictures needs to rethink social processes that register relations of production and consumption in the interpretation of inter-art discourses. In this manner, ekphrasis is at the heart of modernity, since it discloses new relationships that bridge the gap between the aesthetic and the social inasmuch as between the lower genre of the mechanical arts and the higher aesthetic category of poetry. Words in these poems give voice to silent moving and fixed images, and thus articulate a subjective mode of expression.

Secondly, photography and cinema concern themselves with opposing issues. A form of truth-telling, the photographic art discloses a part of a reality unknown to the eye of the beholder. In addition, it deals with death as it points to the absence of a referent that has vanished or mutated in time. Photography has the ability to disclose a lost moment of the past, and as such it constitutes an act of mourning. On the other hand, the screen of the

theater engages the spectator in a simulacrum that leads to the suspension of disbelief, insofar as the picture we are beholding is given motion and thus appears to be animated, that is, invested with life. But in reality it is a deception we willingly participate in. Modern ekphrastic poetry complicates this illusion when the seen image, mediated by words, does not find any ground in reality. Instead, it becomes a floating meaning that imagines the possibility of coming true. The interaction of visual and linguistic signs points to a meta-aesthetics that reveals the futile attempt to escape mediation in modern society. For this matter, ekphrasis presents itself as a useful device to rethink literature in terms of the ground gained by technology and its impact on new artistic creations.

The last issue this essay bears in mind is the projection of the gaze as constitutive of power relations that define the position of subjects and objects in view of spectatorship. As Margaret Olin puts it, "one gets to look at, to be master of the gaze; the other (or Other) is looked at" and forced to see itself the way the majority sees it (215). In a way, to see is to possess the thing beheld, and the purpose of the ekphrastic poem is to break free from those hierarchies that privilege the authoritative gazing discourse of cinema and photography in favor of alternative forms of viewing that consider taking a responsible attitude towards the beheld object. The word operates in terms of an emotional complex that gives voice to the mute image, bringing the reader/viewer into contact with a reality that partially resembles the one of the screen in fragments. The concern with ekphrasis in the age of mechanical reproduction responds to a desire to harmonize form and content by exploring the sensuous appeal of the mechanical arts and the intellectual components of the text. By doing so, sense perception and understanding ally themselves to recreate the relation of the self with the world.

The poems by William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Hart Crane, H.D. and Mina Loy address these three questions that I have mentioned above. Given the emergence of

cinema and photography in modern visual culture, literary criticism should expand the meaning of the ekphrastic genre to interpretive analyses that underlie the semiological constituency of the word and the cinematic image. Despite its ancient origins the rhetoric of ekphrasis is useful to reach a deeper knowledge of the evolution of art and society inasmuch as philosophical and ideological complexities ingrained in Modernism.

6.1. Verbal Recreations of Modern Photographs: The Power of the Camera Eye

At the outset of the twentieth century the advancements in technology allowed for the creation of the new artistic genre of photography. This is symptomatic of the several changes in the modern era, "when one of its chief activities is producing and consuming images" that make an impact on our perception of reality, while acting as "coveted substitutes for firsthand experience" (Sontag 119). In the U.S. it was Alfred Stieglitz who explored the creative possibilities of this technological breakthrough. Yet it was pigeonholed as popular art that contrasted with the elitist view of traditional aesthetic categories. As John Berger manifests, photography allies itself with the domain of publicity, which "recognizes nothing but the power to acquire," while transforming the act of seeing into an industrialized phenomenon that responds to techniques of reproduction (153). This mechanical art substitutes the traditional principles of authenticity for a diffusion of a plurality of copies that divest the artwork of auratic properties. As Walter Benjamin rightfully upholds in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction:"

For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the "authentic" print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic

production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice-politics. (226)

At stake is the authenticity based on ritualistic practices that the object is deprived of on account of mass-produced operations. The change in visual culture may be one of the reasons why photography was not considered an art from its inception, as it was associated with mechanical processes encountered in everyday life.

Given the experimental character of the nineteenth and twentieth century, art expanded its scope. Photography originated in France, where around 1826 Nicéphore Niépce imprinted an image on a metal plate after eight hours of exposure. Meanwhile Louis Jacques-Mandé Daguerre was carrying out similar tests and Niépce eventually contacted him in order to learn about his experiments with vapor of mercury and salt. They eventually formed a partnership that was continued by Niépce's son, when his father died. However intense their efforts were, Daguerre was more active and came to improve his process by adding a plate of copper covered by a film of silver. The exposure of this amalgam to light with various types of vapors and salt resulted in a well-defined image. These advances caught the attention of François Arago, a French scientist that encouraged the government to give an allowance to Daguerre and Niépce so that they could continue experimenting (Davenport 6-9). The progress made pertained the reduction of exposures, originally lasting minutes and ending in seconds. Further projects were brought to fruition by William Henry Fox Talbot. His calotype was a photographic process that produced a negative image sensitive to light by placing it on a second film of silver iodide (Davenport 9). Despite his breakthrough, daguerrotypes were more popular among the masses, as the image printed in the metal plate proved to be a more detailed version than the misty picture generated by the calotype on paper. In a time of dominating realism everybody was enticed by the accuracy of the

daguerreotype, especially when commissioning a portrait. Even artists utilized Daguerre's invention to render objectivity to their paintings.

By the 1830s Samuel F.B. Morse was living in France and had the opportunity to familiarize himself with daguerrotypes, introducing them to the photographic circles of New York. Mathew Brady, one of his students, opened a studio in New York with the assistance of his partner Alexander Gardner and they took portraits of the most notable national leaders of the time, ranging from Quincy Adams and William McKinley to Abraham Lincoln (Davenport 77-79). In the decade of the 1870s Edward Muybridge began taking photos of horses to register the impression of movement with the help of several cameras that could capture as much light as possible (Davenport 32-34). If all these methods were characterized by the use of wet plates, technology advanced to such an extent that dry plates found a place in the market. By 1888 George Eastman had already mastered the process and patented his photographs (Davenport 23-26).

At the brink of the twentieth century, several artists led by Alfred Stieglitz continued experimenting with photography, propagating their theoretical writings and artworks in American artistic circles, magazines and galleries. Precisely, an anonymous article in *Camera Work* titled "Is Photography a New Art?" drew the conclusion that it was indeed, because "the composition manifests to our senses" in such a way that it responds to a "scientific imitation of fragments of nature" (n.p.). The connection of the new art with the technological structures of modernity is based on the congealment of an image in an instant of time. Its grandeur is the disclosure of a viewpoint that was precluded to the eye of the beholder. Sontag claims that "photographs are a way of imprisoning reality" as it is perceived as remote in modernity. In the face of this, the outside world is impossible to be reached, but "one can possess (and be possessed by) images" (127-128). Reality is constantly mediated by

images, and photography reminds us of the misconception of having access to our surroundings.

Stieglitz was the founder of the Photo-Secession group, which later came to be known as 291. Its members included Edward Steichen, Gertrude Käsebier and Clarence Hudson White, who aimed at elevating photography to the category of art. In the first decades of the twentieth century the prevalent trend was pictorialism, based on the imitation of painting and the application of nebulous outlines. The main publication resulting from this group was *Camera Work*, a magazine characterized by promoting the photographic medium as a form of art as well as the work of European avant-gardists in line with Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso. The initial number contained an article written by Stieglitz as the editor and Keiley, Dallett and Strauss as associate editors. Titled "An Apology," the article begins informing that the magazine is in the service of pictorial photography, "though no reproductions can do full justice to the subtleties of some photographs" (15). Despite the fact that *Camera Work* publicized a type of art characterized by its likeness to painting, the contributors of the magazine gave priority to the eye of the camera over the hand of the artist, because according to Bernard Shaw

the camera is independent of this hand-drawing and this technique that a photograph is so much less hampered by mechanical considerations, so much more responsive to the artist's feeling, than a design. It gives you a direct picture where the pencil gives you primarily a drawing. ("The Unmechanicalness of Photography" 19)

The photographer is thus moved by feeling rather mechanical action, whereas the painter shows a higher degree of automatism. In that sense, photography proves to be more spontaneous than painting in that it takes snapshots of reality without having to execute a dexterous technique that reproduces the subject or object in question.

The most renowned photographers of 291 are Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen, who inaugurated two opposing approaches in the photographic field. The former adopts the analytical position of the scientist attempting to comprehend the events presented before his eyes, whereas the latter takes advantage of Nature to communicate his own subjectivity. In his article "Photography and Artistic-Photography," published in the 1913 issue, Marius de Zayas clarified the stylistic differences between both artists. Steichen "uses nature to express his individuality." , Meanwhile, Stieglitz "puts himself in front of nature, and without preconceptions, with the free mind of an investigator, with the method of an experimentalist, tries to get out of her a true state of conditions" (13). In other words, the former avails himself of the materials encountered in the natural world to bring to light the subjectivity of his mind. By contrast, the latter acts as a scientist that examines the properties of a given object.

In addition to this artistic activity in New York, Man Ray played an important role in innovating the state of art. In 1921 he travelled to Paris, where he familiarized himself with Dadaist and Surrealist groups that set precedents for Ray to design his rayographs, photograms and solarizations. These compositions are a symptom of the modern indifference towards the preservation of the original, which eventually govern our perception and thinking. According to Benjamin,

[to] pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose "sense of the universal equality of things" has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object of reproduction.
(*Illuminations* 225)

Man Ray's enthusiasm over photography answers for the impossibility of returning to the original object, the unlimited reproduction of the primary model and the potential modifications carried out in the laboratory. His portraits of renowned figures such as James

Joyce, Ernst Hemingway and Tristan Tzara point to the quest for the figure of the models, who fade away over time, leaving only a photograph reproduced multiple times in several mediums.

Similarly, his solarizations are innovative creations that point to technological progress. This technique builds upon printed images on a negative or a paper sensitive to light so that the tonality of the areas covered by the object will be reversed. In other words, dark areas appear as white and so do white parts become dark. Solarized portraits of Breton, Duchamp and Braque signal Ray's talent to harmoniously synthesize the physical and psychological character of the subject (Schwarz 283). Objects such as *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* [fig. 66] were reproduced in photographs to preserve their existence and prevent them from disappearing by circulating them in books, periodicals or magazines. As Adorno claims regarding the riddle character of artworks, Ray's enigmatic images might be read as “a picture to be solved,” given that what they conceal “is visible and is, by being visible, hidden” (*Aesthetic Theory* 121). Therefore, the camera brings the object to the fore by pervading the boundaries between the copy and the original. Ray also experimented with photograms, based on the arrangement of objects on a surface vulnerable to photographic material. These creations epitomize our relationships with daily objects and our attempt to make them permanent in a photograph.. Like photograms, Ray's rayographs consist of the juxtaposition and exposure of objects to light so as to create unusual forms to be dispelled by the imagination of the viewer. Through all these practices Ray celebrates the beauty of the everyday as an essential component of modern photography.



FIG. 66. Man Ray, *L'Enigme d'Isidore Ducasse*, Private Collection.

Aside from the active role played by Man Ray in the photographic field, the decades of the 1920s and 1930s were especially thriving for the evolution of the new genre, which took a turn to straight photography, as opposed to its preceding pictorialist style. Photographers were thus interested in disclosing the beauty of the ordinary. Paul Strand was an illustrative case of this style, based on the surrounding reality of modernity, namely urban landscapes, skyscrapers, machines, among others. According to Strand's remarks in "Photography" in issue 49-50 from *Camera Work*, the method of straight photography "is accomplished without tricks of process or manipulation." Reality is captured in its essence without having to decorate the scene or the object at hand. As he further argues:

It is in the organization of this objectivity that the photographer's point of view toward Life enters in, and where a formal conception born of the emotions, the intellect, or of both, is as inevitably necessary for him, before an exposure is made. (3)

The photographer pervades the outside world, capturing perspectives ignored by the viewing subject where affect and intellect intersect in the face of such outlook. The motifs and method of straight photography were also reproduced by the Group *f/64*, comprised of Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, Willard Van Dyke and Edward Weston. These photographers engaged in capturing the reality of the Great Depression and working conditions in the West. Their hard-edged shapes testify to this hyperrealism they attempted to hint at. One of the best documentaries of the straitened circumstances of rural areas is the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941). This work includes photographs by Walker Evans and texts by James Agee that show the hardship endured by farmers in times of the Depression (Davenport 66-67). As far as city life is concerned, Arthur Fellig, also known as Weegee, showed the deficiencies of a system that gave place to the criminal underworld.⁹² His main interest pivoted on the stories scattered through newspapers or tabloids.

The development of photography coincided with a moment of artistic and existential crises that displayed the mechanization of human life. As mass-produced art, photography was initially derided and pigeonholed as a popular aesthetic form. However, its acceptance within the masses made it possible to call into question the validity of traditional genres and judgements of taste. In the same manner it opened new avenues even in the field of ekphrastic poetry due to its scientific documentation of details.

⁹² See *Naked City* by Weegee for a deeper analysis of the atmosphere of the city in the late thirties and forties.

6.1.1. William Carlos Williams's "Young Sycamore"

The connection of William Carlos Williams with the photographic medium intensified after the opening of the Armory in 1913, when he paid frequent visits to the salons of photographers such as Alfred Stieglitz and Man Ray as well as Walter Arensberg and Alfred Kreymborg. In 1925 Stieglitz promoted the work of American artists, namely Georgia O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Charles Demuth, and the photographer Paul Strand (Halter 10). This group was characterized by its relationship with writers such as Waldo Frank, Paul Rosenfeld, and William Carlos Williams, who committed to promoting the uniqueness of an American aesthetics based on the particularity of the sense of place. This collaboration between artists and writers is noticeable in Rosenfeld's book *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns* (1924). Demuth's *Figure Five in Gold*, reminiscent of Williams's "Great Figure," and Williams's "Young Sycamore," based on Stieglitz's *Spring Showers* are also significant cases that show artistic cross-disciplinarity. In fact, Williams regularly frequented Stieglitz's gallery over the decades of the 1910s and the 1920s, which proves the impact of the documentary style of photography on his poetry. In his 1934 essay titled "The American Background," Williams claims that "[t]he photographic camera and what it could do were particularly well suited to a place where the immediate and the actual were under official neglect" (160). These words tie in with his theory of sensual encounter with American reality Puritan tradition rejected (Copestake 135). Later essays that left an imprint on Williams's photographic poetry are "Introduction to Charles Sheeler—Paintings—Drawings—Photographs" (1939) and "What of Alfred Stieglitz" (1946). His insight into the documentary art of these photographers was essential to his photographic poetry as, in Sheeler's words, Williams learn to capture a poetic vision "from the eyes outward" (77).



FIG. 67. Alfred Stieglitz, *Spring Showers*, *Camera Work* 36 (October 1911): n.p.

These photographic influences offered him the possibility of transforming poetry into an object that responded to the reality of the environment. As an example of this stylistic contamination Williams appears to have written an ekphrastic poem based on *Spring Showers* [fig. 67]. The title of Stieglitz's photograph focuses on the heavy rain in the spring season. In the foreground a sycamore dominates the scene, showing such an elongation that it cannot be totally reproduced within the boundaries of the photographic plane. In a Platonic gesture the tree, etherealized and imbued in a misty landscape, strives to reach out for the sky, defeating any limitation. On the left of the picture a man fights against the wind to perhaps open his umbrella. Other shapes in the background, confounded with the rainy weather, might correspond to the buildings, automobiles and passers-by of the city. Acting as a flâneur, Stieglitz strolls the streets of New York, discovering beauty in the ordinary. According to Sontag, "[p]hotographers were supposed to do more than just see the world as it is, including its already acclaimed marvels" (69). In this sense, Stieglitz elevated the rainy season to the category of the beautiful, freezing the commonplace instant and rendering it eternity. The photographer has a series of commitments and objectives that need to be applied. According to Dijkstra,

the artist must feel deeply and see clearly and without prejudice until the object opens itself to him in its full visual and tactile purity, revealing in its constitution the objective equivalence of the emotion which moves the artist.
(119)

That is, the object is to disclose itself in its totality so that its constituency merges with the subjectivity of the creative consciousness. This fusion of the outer world with the faculties of the mind opens up an in-between area where the senses of sight and touch play an important part in the development of an aesthetics that responds to an identification with the environment. This photograph manifests itself as an act of truth, understood in terms of the

Greek notions of *aletheia*, that is, a way of revealing the essence of things that opposes the Roman idea of *veritas* (or correctness of statements). According to Heidegger, this happening of truth within the artwork is embodied in the strife between the earth and the world. Thus, the earth strives to remain closed to the world, whereas the world, resting on the surface of the earth, seeks to surmount it. This strife acts as a rift, in that it brings together both contestants into a mutual force field, not allowing them to come apart. According to Heidegger:

The strife is not rift (*Riss*), in the sense of a tearing open of a mere cleft; rather, it is the intimacy of the mutual dependence of the contestants. The rift carries the contestants into the source of their unity, their common ground (38).

The tension of this unity is transmuted into the figure, through which the createdness of the work fixes truth in place. The earth, the original place of this painting, corresponds to New York. The world, the relational context of the work, evokes a usual rainy day of spring. The revealing or emergent truth stands for the urban soil of New York as an essential part of the artist. This is the moment of truth-telling as unconcealment coming to presence, which opens up the world to our eyes.

Whereas the title of Stieglitz's photograph centers on the phenomenon of spring showers, Williams's view is projected on the sycamore as the most important element of the composition.

"Young Sycamore"

I must tell you
this young tree
whose round and firm trunk
between the wet

pavement and the gutter

(where water
is trickling) rises
bodily
into the air with
one undulant
thrust half its height—
and then

dividing and waning
sending out
young branches on
all sides-

hung with cocoons
it thins
till nothing is left of it
but two

eccentric knotted
twigs
bending forward
hornlike at the top (William, *Collected Poems* 266-267)

The poem highlights elements concerning the roundness and unyielding trunk of the tree, which contrasts with the formlessness and porousness of the rain in street. Like Stieglitz, Williams stands out the stylized features of tree, distinguished by its “undulant thrust,” “height” and branches with cocoons gradually reduced to pliable and “knotted twigs.” As with the picture, “the inward eye is moving upward” in an attempt to arrive at a moment of transcendence that mesmerizes the mind (Halter 204). For the poet, the sycamore is the *punctum*, that piercing element that awoke his attention and thus he titled the poem after the tree. This is an illustrative example of Williams’s theory of contact, exposed in the magazine

that has the same name. As Williams argues in his *Autography*,

to come over into the tactile qualities, the words themselves beyond the mere thought expressed that distinguishes the modern, or distinguished the modern of that time from the period before the turn of the century. (380)

The composition thus synthesizes sensuous aspects of the environment and the efforts of consciousness to go beyond the limits of ordinary experience. Due to the detailed description of the sycamore, the poem is a case of ekphrasis that responds to a poeticized reproduction of the photograph. Despite the multiple coincidences, Williams adds subjectivity and lyricism to the literary composition, giving free rein to the free play of imagination. If it is inconceivable that the photograph is invested with speech, the ekphrastic poem gives voice to the image. In Heidegger's terms, this language happens as a way of saying, which, by disclosing the truth on the outside, becomes poetic. As unconcealment of truth, the poem mediates with the photograph by shedding light on the absent speech of the latter. This photographic ekphrasis allows us to discover the world of a rainy day in New York in a way that collects visual and verbal details.

6.1.2. Marianne Moore's "To a Man Working his Way through the Crowd"

Moore's interest in photography started in 1909 during a casual meeting with Miss Haviland, who invited her to New York. There the latter showed her two numbers of *Camera Work*, at whose photographs she marveled. However, Moore did not visit Stieglitz's 291 until 1915, when she took another trip to New York to visit Alfred Kreymbourg, who enthusiastically accepted her poems for publication in *Others*. One day after her appointment with the editor of the magazine, she attended 291, where she met Stieglitz. In her accounts of this encounter she manifests her amazement at the photographs Kreymbourg had already shown to her, and especially one of Gordon Craig, taken by Steichen:

I had not known there was anything in existence like Steichen's photograph of Gordon Craig—I said at all event I had never seen anything like it. "Well, there *is* nothing like it," he said. He told me to come in and take my coat off and look at the copies of *Camera Work*. He opened his knife and handed it to me, a plain wicked one with a ring in the end. (Rosenbach 13)

After 1915 Moore paid repeated visits to gallery 291 and dedicated columns in the *Dial* to the 1925 "Seven Americans" exhibit at the Anderson Galleries. In the best possible of her capacities, she attended and supported these shows, for which Stieglitz showed his gratitude. In addition, she familiarized herself with other photographers. Thanks to her friend Bertran Hartman, Moore was introduced to Paul Strand in 1921, who showed her his studio and photographs of urban landscapes (Leavell 35-37).

In addition to her familiarity with the photographic work of Stieglitz and his circle, Marianne Moore read *The Illustrated London News* in the period of 1932 and 1936, which shows her attention to artifacts of Classical Antiquity, international conflicts and mass-produced technologies. Moore took photographic images from the journal as referents for her description of natural and animal life, as her poem titled "Pangolin" suggests. According to Victoria Bazin, this animal resembles the war-like allusions on the pages of *The News*. H.M.S. Rodney's "The Last Word in Battledship Construction" and a picture of H.M.S. Barnham with illustrations of tank manoeuvres are other photographs encountered in the magazine. According to Bazin, "the photographic image, serves an explanatory function, revealing as it does the secrets of the physical world" to the point that it fixes "the world momentarily for the eye to behold" (160). This critic also demonstrates that in the year 1930 Moore cut a photograph of Louis XV candelabra that appeared in *The News* and drew it on a notebook. Then she read an article written in *The New York Times Magazine* by Percy Philip that spoke about the restoration in Versailles and inspired her poem "No Swan is so Fine"

(161). As biographical data show, Moore was in contact with the print culture of the time, and photographic sources that made an impact on the precision and detail of her poetry.

This is noticeable in ekphrastic poems such as "To a Man Working his Way through the Crowd" (1915), where Moore speaks about a portrait of *E. Gordon Craig* [fig. 68] taken by Edward Steichen and published in 1913 for *Camera Work*. It appears that Moore had the opportunity to see the photograph of the English writer and stage designer in gallery 291. A letter she wrote from New York confirms this fact and informs of the conversation she maintained with Stieglitz: "I said I had not known there was anything in existence like Steichen's photograph of Gordon Craig—I said at all events I had never seen anything like it. 'Well, there is nothing like it,' [Stieglitz] said" (*Selected Letters* 108). In the portrait, Craig appears to be seated in the corner of a room. His pale face contrast with the darkness of his apparel, a cape he wears on his back. He looks hunched and petrified, as if he were surprised acting oddly enough. As Susan Sontag puts it:

To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder—appropriate to a sad frightened time. (10)

Certainly, this picture has appropriated the persona of Craig, disclosing a moment he was unaware of. Paradoxically, the snapshot had the power to murder and eternalize him. The symmetrical distribution of chiaroscuro to the right and left of the picture catches our attention, which is complemented by the shadow of Craig projected on the wall and his own figure. This proportional distribution of forms and colors can be interpreted as a borderline area where life and death, reality and fantasy coexist.

These technical details form a part of what Roland Barthes came to call *studium*. But if this term ties in with the acquisition of competences through photographic training, the

affective component responds to an immediate reaction. Barthes named this detail the *punctum*, "that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (*Camera Lucida* 27). In this photograph the *punctum* is the unsettling gaze of Gordon Craig, who seems to be in compliance with the camera eye. If in Renaissance painting, the Gioconda has generated innumerable interpretations owing to her enigmatic smile, in modernity this photograph by Steichen lends itself to questioning the nature of visual perception. To quote Barthes, this image instills violence, as it "*fills sight by force*" while revealing what could never see in a real face (*Camera Lucida* 91). This picture illustrates the ethical implications of this mechanical art. Photography deals with lacerations between the present and the past that left the indelible mark of a referent suffering from the passage of time. As Susan Sontag gracefully describes in her essay "On Photography:" "All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability" (11). They are acts of mourning that constantly remind us of an irretrievable loss, of a transport to the past that signals that reality "is already dead," no matter how much the referent's body flickers (Barthes *Camera Lucida* 79-80). Ultimately, photography pertains to truth-telling and the seamless wound that the search of an intractable reality assumes. In her ekphrastic poem Marianne Moore thus conveyed the essence of the frozen image of Gordon E. Craig thanks to the power of her words, which intensified the picture.



FIG. 68. Edward Steichen, *E. Gordon Craig*, *Camera Work* (April/July 1913): n.p.

These ideas of photography are embraced in Moore's poem addressed to Gordon Craig. The composition uses the typical conventions associated with portrait painting, especially regarding the introduction with "to."

"To a Man Working His Way Through the Crowd"

To Gordon Craig: Your lynx's eye

Has found the men most fit to try

To serve you. Ingenious creatures follow in your wake.

Your speech is like Ezekiel's;

You make one feel that wrath unspells

Some mysteries some of the cabals of the vision.

The most propulsive thing you say

Is that one need not know the way

To be arriving. That forward smacks of retrospect.

Undoubtedly you overbear.

But one must do that to come where

There is a space, a fit gymnasium for action.

(*Egoist* 62)

In an ekphrasitic gesture, Moore captures the essence of the photographic *punctum*, that piercing detail that she identifies with Craig's "lynx's eyes" (2). The next verses might point to his usual duties as a skillful stage designer whose orders were followed by their co-workers. Particularly, Moore compares his speech to Ezekiel in that it had the ability to decipher "cabals of the vision" (7). If in photography the "missing voice," according to Sontag, "is expected to speak for truth," the poem reconstructs the power of Craig's voice to inadvertently transport us to another realm (84). And that look back on the past acts as a violent smack that alters the sequence of events, emphasizing the force of Craig's actions and

dominant attitude.

The poems by Williams and Moore are cases that illustrate the power of the camera eye on the poetic domain. Whereas "Young Sycamore" deals with a nonhuman element, "To a Man Working his Way through the Crowd" takes another direction and presents a human figure. Both compositions refer to the photographs *Spring Showers* and *E. Gordon Craig*, respectively taken by Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen. The implications of the motif chosen to be photographed are manifold. In the first place, the rainy scene with the sycamore goes hand in hand with the exploration of the world of objects, which ultimately mirrors Stieglitz's emotions. By the same token, Williams's poem acts as an entity that discloses itself to the speaking subject, who identifies with the outer world as well as the visual and tactile properties of the photographic object experienced thereof. As to Marianne Moore, her poem is meaningful to ekphrastic readings, in that she engages in the opening lines in the description of the *punctum*, which for her is the gaze of Craig. Her poem reproduces the emotional impact such picture made on her, thereby recreating the image with elements we cannot identify. These poems take the photographs as an inspiration to give free rein to the poetic imagination. Yet Williams's piece relies upon several of the elements of the photograph that correspond to the definition of traditional ekphrasis. By contrast, Craig's eyes in Moore's poetry are the only element that can be attributed to Steichen's picture. Be that as it may, both cases pose questions relative to the ineffable relationship between the subject and the object.

6.2. American Modernism and Cinematic Culture

Since the inception of cinema on 28 December 1895, when the Lumière brothers premiered *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*, there was excitement about the new invention and its relationship to new forms of perceptual experience that bore upon technological advances. In

Europe the Lumières developed their Cinématographe to project moving-pictures, whereas in America Edison created his Kinescope, later known as Vitascope. Indeed, the exposure to speed and alternative modes of visibility brought about by train travels made an impact on both cinematographic production and spectatorship alike (Goody *Technology, Literature and Culture*, 50). Motion pictures bear the imprint of capitalism as they reflect social relationships based upon the production, circulation and consumption of the filmic medium that also constitutes the self of the modern spectator. To quote Marx in his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859): "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (425). In other words, our selfhood cannot be set apart from society as, by nature, man is in contact with their environment and other human beings that form part of a plural reality. Along these lines, the apparatus of cinema circulates and exchanges representations that affect the social constitution of our self. In Marxist theory, relations of production, including the division of labor and property, condition the superstructure of a society, which extends to cultural institutions, political power structures, religion and the state, to name a few. As part of this superstructural activity, cinema determines the ideas derived from economic forces. This genre, in Terry Smith's words, is to be thought of as "a productive activity in which actual materials are transformed in order to communicate, or invite the consumption of, immaterialities such as images, feelings, and ideas" (240). In other words, cinema is a cultural production that reflects a consciousness as much as the evolution of aesthetics as a modality based on social relations.

At the core of this material network is a symbolic system that regulates the tastes of modernity. In this respect, a variety of cinematic production arose to call the attention of the modern spectator. The first films concern themselves not so much with the narrative but with the projection of people and things in movement, which none other art is able to reproduce.

In the period 1901-1920, the types of movies consisted of chase films, narrative and non-narrative avant-garde experimentations, the last of which were reduced most significantly to Sergei Eisenstein's montage editing. As to the former practices, Tom Gunning referred to them as "cinema of attractions," and are characterized by "its ability to *show* something" as well as its complicity with the spectator, as the actors constantly gesture or look at the camera (57). Around 1907-1913 the sense of attraction was replaced with intelligible storytelling and the psychological introspection of the character, noticeable in the cinematographic production of Classical plays. As opposed to narrative techniques, avant-garde filmmakers distort the moving image to alter perception and perturb the pleasant view (Goody *Technology, Literature and Culture*, 50-51).

The connection of cinema with processes of modernization and tastes of the middle classes renders this art as a form of mass entertainment originally linked to industrialization and the growth of urban classes who participated in the consolidation of this social phenomenon. The new medium defies the aesthetic precepts of the beautiful propounded by Kant and Schiller that focused on disinterested pleasure. Contrary to these views, as Bürger puts it, modern art such as cinema is embedded in the capitalist mode of producing entertainment, and thus is conceived as a method of making profit. However, the avant-gardists invented new cinematic strategies that challenged the sequentiality of the story as a means of reacting to superfluous recreational practices and lucrative purposes. Owing to their ability to animate the image by investing it with movement, films might be believed to be the most suitable means to reduce the interval between creative activity and reality. At the same time, their position in the marketplace can be read as a harsh critique to the traditional institution of art and museum culture.

The commercial value of cinema, added to the emergence of the bourgeoisie, conditioned the opposition between highbrow European art houses and Hollywood

mainstream. High and low art tastes contributed to the appearance of two types of spectators: one appealing to middle-class intellectuals and another to industrial workers in large cities. Particularly in Great Britain, the former were suspicious about commercial cinema and its association with low culture. Just as T.S. Eliot was not especially appreciative of the new art, given its tendency to congregate the masses, so too Virginia Woolf in her essay titled "Cinema" criticizes the new medium owing to the infantile states the spectator engages in. In similar terms, Lawrence attacks the penetration of movie industry in every aspect of our emotional life. Other intellectuals such as Ivor Montagu, a Cambridge graduate, created the London Film Society to promote avant-garde cinema as an alternative to British commercial trends (Connor 26-27). These are a few voices that offered resistance to the filmic genre given its immersion in the commodified culture of capitalism. Negative reactions to the movie industry may relate to the fact that it is generally associated with forms of use- and exchange-value that ultimately affects relations between people. As Marx notes in "Fetishism of Commodities" from *Capital*, whereas things take the position of the subject to the point of idolatry, the interactions among individuals become more and more objectified. This subversion of object and subject positions also affects the image in art, which adopts the attributes of a fetish to be marketed. Heretofore, part of the intellectual community refused to transform art into material to be consumed.

Nonetheless, several Modernist poets felt drawn toward the cinematic medium due to its capacity for communicating the shock experience of the present world. Ezra Pound used to frequent theaters and became enthusiastic about the potential of films in poetry. By the same token, Gertrude Stein admired Charlie Chaplin to such an extent that she came to admit his influence on her poetry regarding his bodily gestures. It is thus not strange to assume that the popularity of the new art resulted in the proliferation of cinema literature and film

magazines, including critical theory and 'oral' lectures that preceded the projection (Goody *Technology, Literature and Culture*, 51-52).

At this juncture Hart Crane, H.D. and Mina Loy are three representative figures that embody the admiration towards cinema as a platform to examine twentieth-century social forces while questioning the status of poetry. Crane was concerned with the "humdrum, rushing, mechanical" forces of the new century, which bears upon the accumulation of people in the cities and the transformation of work relations, leisure and international trade (Goldstein 45). The Industrial Revolution was significant in changing modes of mass entertainment, especially those bearing upon addictive sensual pleasures and violence, and cinema was the medium that best conveyed the anxieties of the time. In his poem titled "To Brooklyn Bridge" from *The Bridge*, Crane expresses his admiration for the new art in the following terms:

I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights
 With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene
 Never disclosed, but hastened to again,
 Foretold to other eyes on the same screen; (9-12)

In these lines, the American poet perceives cinema as a collective phenomenon that enchants the spectator's eyesight with the flicker of light and darkness projected on the screen. Movie-going was the sign of the times that reflected the significance of movement in all spheres of life. In addition, the subversion of this aesthetics into popular and democratic forms was significant in that it gave room to the masses.

All these changes of taste can be perceived in comic figures such as Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Harry Langdon and especially Charlie Chaplin, the last of whom made an impact on the poetry of Hart Crane. The first two actors produced characters that successfully evolved in their personal and professional life, a development that was coincident with the

interests of the middle classes in the U.S. Lloyd's *Safety Last* is an illustration of a type of comedy based on the quest for prosperity. In this movie the protagonist is a salesman that tricks his girlfriend into believing in his professional success to support her and her family, and thus she, along with her mother's encouragement, decides to move with him. Seeing his credibility in jeopardy, Harold is determined to earn money. The general manager provides him with such an opportunity, when Harold overhears the necessity to call the attention to the store where they both work. Harold remembers his friend Bill's climbing abilities and thus offers the stunt to his boss. However, when Bill is ready to climb the building, he notices a policeman he had trouble with in the past, and thus it is Harold that has to perform the acrobatics instead. The protagonist eccentric attitude, experience of danger and eventual luck were the defining traits of what Lloyd defined in terms of a "thrill comedy." If Lloyd's cinematic production shows the unexpected luck of the protagonist, Buster Keaton in films such as *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), *The Navigator* (1924) and *The General* (1926) are distinguished by chase and fight episodes that result in the explosion of laughter. What is most noticeable about this character is the contrast between the hieratic facial expression and the excess of corporeal movement. In addition, Harry Langdon embodies the role of the naïve man that effects uncontrolled pantomimes that provoke the audience. This is most evident in *Strong Man* (1926) and *Lost Pants* (1927), where the protagonist attempts to preserve his virginity in the face of the sexual advances of a woman (McCaffrey 109-125).

With his "excess of gesticulation," Chaplin was enthroned as a subversive symbol of modernity. Cognizant of his movies, Crane came to identify himself with the burlesque bombast of the actor, after recognizing the impact that *The Kid* made on him (Goldstein 42-43). As a result, Crane wrote his poem "Chaplinesque," which he sent to Chaplin. The actor mailed a letter to the poet so as to acknowledge the receipt of his piece and thank him for it. In the autumn of 1923, both artists came to know each other, when Chaplin was spending a

few days in Greenwich Village. There he met up with Frank Waldo, a mutual friend of Chaplin and Crane, and the actor suggested paying a visit to the poet (Wetzsteon 367-369). In a letter to a friend named Grace, Crane recounts the incident as follows:

I had just got my pajamas on last night when there was a rap on the door. I opened and in walked Waldo Frank—behind him came a most pleasant-looking, twinkling, little man in a black derby—"Let me introduce you to Mr. Charles Chaplin,"—said Waldo, and I was smiling into one of the most beautiful faces I ever expect to see. Well! I was quickly urged out of my nightclothes and the three of us walked arm in arm over to where Waldo is staying... All the way we were trailed by enthusiastic youngsters. People seem to spot Charlie in the darkness. (*The Selected Letters of Hart Crane* 165)

Chaplin was of interest to Crane in that the actor is the maximum representative of comedy, a genre that includes all classes of people and pays especial attention to the lower segments of society, which are often the center of jokes. Characters in comedies break with the hierarchical structure of tragedies so as to argue for a democratic manifestation of art that attempts to give room to the underprivileged. The relevance of comedy lies in its popular forms, as they are part of a collective imaginary that transcends categories of any type. As Crane puts it, "[C]omedy, I may say, has never reached a higher level in this country before. We have (I cannot be too sure of this for my own satisfaction) in Chaplin a dramatic genius that truly approaches the fabulous sort" (*The Selected Letters of Hart Crane* 65). In elevating Chaplin's figure of the tramp to a higher category, Crane comes closer to the disenfranchised, and the poet, according to him, embodies the suffering and rejection engendered in society.

If Crane was interested in cinema as a popular medium, H.D. concerned herself with the highbrow version of the avant-garde. Her involvement as a film critic, actor and editor was extremely prolific and dated as far back as 1927, when the married couple of Kenneth MacPherson and Bryer (H.D.'s female lover) founded POOL Productions, immediately after

Bryer inherited a shipping fortune. The three of them created *Close Up*, a Modernist magazine distributed in Territet, Switzerland, from 1927 to 1933. Within that time frame, H.D. published eight film reviews, three theoretical essays and two poems about films. *Close Up* was essential to the political and commercial ideologies underlying the theories of the image in Modernism, especially regarding national, racial and democratic issues. The magazine was also the medium that promoted POOL's films, to name a few, *Wing Beat* (1927), *Monkey's Moon* (1929) and *Foothills* (1929). Whereas *Close Up* was critical of Hollywood commercial trends and British mainstream cinema, it nonetheless exalted German Expressionist filmmakers of the decade of 1920s. Robert Wiene with *Das Cabinet des Dr. Calligari* (The Cabinet of Dr. Calligari, 1920), F.W. Murnan's *Nosferatu* (1922) and *Geheimnisse einer Seele* (Secrets of the Soul, 1926) by G.W. Pabst were POOL's role models, as they rejected sequential narrative in favor of distorted effects that were reminiscent of psychoanalytical methods. H.D.'s fascination with Pabst was evident in her reviews of *Die Freudlosse Gasse* (Joyless Street, 1925), *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney* (The Love of Jeanne Ney, 1928) and *Die Büsche der Pandora* (Pandora's Box, 1929), where she focused on the stylistic and intellectual values of German Expressionism rather than on social concerns (Connor 19-21).

Other experiments that were analyzed in depth were Impressionist narrative devices based on flashbacks and the superimposition of points of view, which delve into the inner self of the character. Germain Dulac's *The Souriante Madame Beudet* (The Smiley Madame Beudet, 1923) and Abel Gance's *Napoleon* (1927) are characterized by their manipulation of the camera lens to bring about shocking optical effects. These strategies were intrinsically connected with theories of the image circulating in London from 1918 to 1923, and influenced H.D.'s *Her*, a novel written in 1927. Of relevance to her poetry is the *photogénie*, an Impressionist cinematic concept that evokes the transcendence of the everyday (Connor

25). To quote Willemen, it is "a momentary flash of recognition or a moment when the look at something suddenly flares up with a particular affective, emotional intensity" (126). No doubt was the filmic experience of the spectator central to H.D.'s notions of the image as a visionary state where the mind transcends itself. By the time when cinema reached its apogee, the Imagists in London had already committed themselves to formulate a theory of the image based on congealing the immediacy of the moment in language. As Hulme puts it in "Notes on Language and Style," "it is this image which precedes the writing and makes it firm." In other words, "each *word* must be an image *seen*" (38-39). Pound gave also a definition of the image that evolve from being "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (200) to "a VORTEX, from which, through which and into which ideas are constantly rushing" (*Gaudier-Brzeska* 106). Ever since H.D. arrived in London in 1911, she familiarized herself with these notions of the image. Nonetheless, the emergence of cinema allowed her to continue her theorizations on a spiritual state of contemplation that allied itself with the experience of the spectator looking at the screen.

If Hart Crane was impressed by the character of Chaplin inasmuch as H.D. was actively involved in cinema production and theory, Mina Loy was no stranger to the filmic ambient of Modernism, and her active involvement finds its starting point in the visual arts—drawings, paintings, sculpture, assemblages, *objets d'art*—she exhibited in Europe and America. *The Dial*, *Art Review* and *Arts and Decoration* were only a few of the most significant journals that published her visual art. Her Bowery "Constructions" at the New York Bodley Gallery are illustrative of her interest in the derelict of society and its connection with individuals that transgress the limits of proper and accepted patterns of behavior. From 1932 to 1937, the moment when she arrived in New York, Loy commissioned her son-in-law's work for Julien Levy's gallery. Her stay in America enabled her to meet the greatest artists of Surrealism, namely, André Breton, Max Ernst, Marc

Chagall, among others. Not entirely persuaded by the creative concerns of the movement, she was nonetheless attracted to Luis Buñuel's *L'age d'or* (1930). This movie might have contributed to her increasing interest in the cinematic medium and its ability to innovate aesthetics. Notwithstanding, Loy also showed her most critical side with the technological apparatus of Hollywood industry and its tendency to commodify images and emotions. Her association with Marinetti's Futurism and his emphasis on the *immaginazione senza fili* (imagination without strings) played a part in her cinematic poetics, especially in its connection with the liberating potential media technology could effect in recording the instant perceptual experience as a way of undermining the division between mind and body. For Loy Marinetti's wireless communication was essential to emulate the technological experience of modernity, in that it takes part of simultaneous events that bring closer the machine force and the body to develop a new gender subjectivity that rejects the power of patriarchy to control women's body and thinking (Goody "Mina Loy and the Hollywood Industry," 77-78).

Loy's vision of modern aesthetics coincides with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the body as a machine producing desire. If psychoanalysis equated erotic and violent fantasies with representations of the unconscious liable to be judged in terms of religious guilt, the French philosophers rethink desire in terms of a factory, where the physical and the mechanical are part of a symbiotic relationship. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), Deleuze and Guattari maintained that every machine interrupts the flow produced by another to which it is connected. An organ is a machine attached to an additional artifact that sparks off a series of breaks-flows. Attached to an object, desire acts as a machine, and as such registers "a set of *passive syntheses* that engineer partial objects, flows and bodies that function as units of production" (26). Mechanisms of desire are defined in terms of production, rather than as a lack, given that group fantasies are eventually

materialized in a product that bears the imprint of social processes. Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the body as a desiring-machine go hand in hand with the Futurists' celebration of technology given that it helps the individual to exploit creative faculties. In this manner, cinema became part and parcel of the technological dimension. Loy's "Aphorisms on Futurism," published for the first time in photographer Alfred Stieglitz's magazine *Camera Work* in January of 1914, exalts the mechanical as an extension of the body and perceptual experience: "BUT the Future is only dark from outside. *Leap* into it—and it EXPLODES with *Light*" (*The Lost Lunar Baedeker Poems* 11-12). This burst of light is the epitome of cinema and modernity, as it suggests a state of illuminative consciousness that invites one to "expand to their fullest capacity" and adopt a semi-godlike figure that insists on the individual's determination to intensify and change the state of affairs.

Having assimilated the sociological and technological concerns of cinematic culture, the most notable influence for Crane, H.D. and Loy's poetry was Sergei Eisenstein with films such as *Strike* (1925), *October* (1928) and *The Battleship of Potemkin* (1925). What H.D. and the members of *Close Up* admire about the Russian director was his montage editing technique, not so much because it has the ability to raise political awareness by calling attention to strikes and uprisings, but rather because it was effective in maximizing action by engaging the spectator in a "higher dimension of thought" (Edmunds 116). According to Eisenstein, the montage is constituted by the combination of shots, the frame and the tempo.⁹³

⁹³ In filmmaking the shot consists of a series of frames running in a period of time. Shots aid in determining viewpoints, shifts and cuts that also bear upon the expression of emotion and ideas. The frame is one of the series of still images that form the complete picture in a film. Lastly, the tempo relates to the speed or pace at which the events develop. For a further view, see Sklar, *Film: An International History of the Medium*.

Orthodox montage is montage on the dominant. I.e., the combination of shots according to their dominating indications. Montage according to tempo. Montage according to the chief tendency within the frame. Montage according to the length (continuance) of the shots, and so on. This is montage according to the foreground.

The dominating indications of two shots side by side produces one or another conflicting interrelation, resulting in one or another expressive effect (I am speaking here of a purely montage effect). (*Film Form* 64)

Montage strategies also made an impact on British experimental cinema. This is evident in Oswald Blakeston's *I Do Like to Be Beside the Seaside* (1927) and *Light Rhythms* (1930). Without forgetting avant-garde formal innovations, various documentary movies funded by the state in the decades of the 1920s and the 1930s were drawn to the issues of class Eisenstein had already dealt with in his cinematic production. John Gieron's *Drifters* (1929) and Jennings's *Spare Time* (1939) were examples of a deep involvement with the use of montage editing and the ideology of Communism in the Soviet Union (Connor 22-24). For Eisenstein, this technique transforms the spectator into an active agent that struggles to make sense out of a conglomerate of images projected on the screen. This call for action carried within itself political overtones that promoted Communist ideology by inciting the masses to rebel and fight oppression.

These words lead us to consider questions of spectatorship that reflect on the sense of community in the form of rituals or empathetic relations between marginalized individuals. The phenomenon of collectivity can be traced back in the writings of Hart Crane, H.D. and Mina Loy. The former identifies the poet with the comedian and, more specifically, with the figure of Chaplin, in that both of them are "alienated from mainstream society" and thus develop a "counter-cultural sensibility" set apart from pre-established values (Goldstein 46). In a letter to William Wright, Crane manifests: "I am moved to put Chaplin with the poets (of

today); hence the 'we.' In other words, he, especially in *The Kid*, made me feel myself, as a poet, as being 'in the same boat' with him" (*The Selected Letters of Hart Crane* 70). His theory of spectatorship, if any, is to be compared to the symbiotic relationship of the poet with the tramp, as they both are the result of the anxieties created in modernity. To escape these constraints, Crane makes use of poetry while Chaplin takes advantage of humor. In his essay "Charlie the Kid" (1945), Eisenstein remarks that playfulness is essential to momentarily ignore life compulsions whether they are business, morals or domestic. What is remarkable about Chaplin is his "regress to infantilism," according to Eisenstein, "as a means of psychological escape from the limits of the regulated, ordained and calculated world around him" (119). In this sense, Crane identifies himself and the community of poets with the playfulness of kids so as to evade from a world that rejects all those comportments that entail an exception to the rule. This lack of empathy encountered in our surrounding reality can only be superseded by forgetting moral codes that dictate the paradigm of the proper and acceptable, thus leading one to participate in the freedom of the play. Chaplin and Crane are exponents of this position and apply it to their respective art mediums.

H.D. also theorizes on spectatorship practices that focus on a visionary state of consciousness distinguished by its sacredness. Despite his political commitment, Eisenstein set precedents in the conception a spiritual view that coincided with H.D.'s transcendental sense. The Russian filmmaker was drawn to develop a *Weltanschauung* of the image that shows its revelatory potential as much as it emphasizes the spiritual elements of public and private life: "The spectator witnesses the birth of an image as conceived by the author, the director and the actor and concretized by them in isolated elements of representation" ("Montage in 1938" 25). The immateriality of the image as a perceptual experience is rendered concrete in art. Eisenstein's theorizations on the image further resonate the religious

discourse of Judeo-Christian tradition, especially where Saint John writes: "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." In a similar fashion, Eisenstein remarks:

The image conceived by the author has become flesh of the flesh of the spectator's risen image. One that was born by me—the spectator, one that I myself have created. The image is creative not only for the author but also for me, the creative spectator. ("Montage in 1932" 26-27)

Likewise, H.D. in "The Mask and the Movietone" (1927) criticizes the addition of sound to the movies, as the image projected in the screen and the voice downplay the effects that can perform each by itself. As H.D. points out, "[t]he screen image, a mask, a sort of doll or marionette was somehow mechanized and robbed of the thing behind the thing that has grown to matter so much to the picture adept" (115). In order to avoid losing such enchantment, the moving picture needs to be contemplated in religious terms. She refers to the flicker of light and shadow on the screen as the conditional element that enables the spectator to reach a vision. For H.D., this process is strikingly similar to Eleusinian mysteries during the Hellenic era⁹⁴ and point to the quest for the marvelous and the congregation of believers: "The cinema has become to us what the church was to our ancestors" (116). In this manner, H.D. can be said to integrate the positive effects of cinema into her knowledge of Greek Classicism. This combination of modernity and tradition is central to her understanding of poetry as the medium that looks into the haecceity of things.

Mina Loy was also a connoisseur of Sergei Eisenstein and D.W. Griffith's techniques of montage, jump-cuts, flash-backs, cut-backs and close-ups. These artifacts helped her transform cinematic seeing into a play of presence and absence that denies cohesion and closure in addition to modes of spectatorship based on gender and class concerns. Eisenstein's strategies of fragmentation and juxtaposition form the poetics of the Imagists.

⁹⁴ These rituals evoke the abduction of Persephone by Hades, the god of the underworld, until she reunited with her mother Demeter. For an extensive view, see Hugh Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World*.

This connection is reinforced if we pay heed to the use that both of them made of the Chinese ideogram to lay bare an aesthetics of luminous details. Mina Loy was not an Imagist poet, but she appeared to be familiar with Eisenstein's cinematic innovations. Coincidentally, some of her poems in *Love Songs* inaugurated the first issue of *Others*, where Amy Lowell also published part of her work. Loy's pieces display the montage effect in terms of disruption and assemblage, traceable in the sequence of thirty-four poems, which first appeal to our sight and then to our intellect. Just as Eisenstein attributed to cinema religious overtones, Loy's *Love Songs* are commonly read through the gospel of Matthew, yet not disregarding the multiple encounters of the self as a spectator of twentieth-century ever-shifting reality. *Love Songs* is representative of a unique feminine technological imagination that breaks away from the masculine precepts of Futurism. This machinistic aesthetics is represented by Loy's engagement with cinema, where moving images are systematically produced and segmented so that the spectator can actively participate in collective forms of viewing that challenge bodily presence (McCabe 3).

In this sense, Loy is aware of the auratic properties that the screen attaches to its characters to the point of cult. Nonetheless, in the era of mechanical reproduction the transformative potential of the big screen disappears the moment the superficial culture of Hollywood industry comes into play. Marie Dressler, a Canadian American actress, was symbolic of the effects generated by mass culture. Despite her large and plain complexity opposed to Hollywood standard taste of beauty, she made her way in Broadway performing comedies. In 1914 she played the leading role in *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, where Charlie Chaplin and Mabel Normand also acted. The success of this film contributed to the consolidation of Dressler on the big screen as a farcical actress. She would even win the Academy Award for Best Actress in 1930-31 for *Min and Bill* (1932), coming to be named the top film star for 1932 and 1933. However, in the decades of the 1920s her popularity

declined, thereby being forced to live on her savings. It was precisely the replaceability and evanescence of Hollywood stars that Loy disparaged, as they are correlated with notions of use-, exchange- and surplus value, in addition to suffering the effects of devaluation attached to commodities. If Marie Dressler was once conceived as an unusual goddess with an unorthodox physical appearance that lost her corporeality on the screen, she ended up reduced to the detritus of society, and this is how she was collectively viewed. In Loy's opinion, the preservation of the physical is paramount to define a feminine project that emphasizes women's agency and subjectivity. For that matter, mainstream cinema needs to subvert the negative values of standardization of culture and tastes.

To summarize, Hart Crane, H.D. and Mina Loy were fully aware of the scientific breakthroughs and cultural practices of entertainment embodied in the decades of the 1920s and 1930s. Cinema was certainly one of those modes that transformed the high category of art into a popular medium that gave room to a variety of classes from the bourgeois to the proletariat. It also ruptured with the museum culture and enabled one to consider the effectiveness of the mechanical aesthetics of filmmaking and its impact on poetry. Hart Crane, H.D. and Loy are representative figures that lived and apprehended the essence of modern times, successfully translating this phenomenon into their theoretical or poetic writings. The following section will take into account three poems by these authors so as to look into the cinematic ekphrasis of poetry as well as its connection to a type of aesthetics of movement and popular genres.

6.3. Cinematic Poetry: The Art of Seeing Words in Motion

Hart Crane's "Chaplinesque," H.D.'s "Projector" and Mina Loy's "Film-Face" are poems based on early twentieth-century movies. The first is modeled on Chaplin's *The Kid*, whereas the second bears upon *Chang* and the latter on the filmic character of Marie Dressler.

Furthermore, these poems are coextensive with the filmic medium, in that they reproduce the illusion of movement. To quote Deleuze, "cinema does not give us an image to which movement is added, it immediately gives us a movement-image" (2). In so doing, it expresses a relation of change between the objects or parts that interact in time. Likewise, motion is introjected in Crane, H.D. and Loy's literary pieces by prompting a concatenation of spatiotemporal sequences that alter the whole. These poets appear to engage in ekphrastic practices, although they do not follow the traditional model to the letter. Instead of an objective description of *The Kid*, *Chang* and the cinematic figure of Marie Dressler, they offer a type of intertextual relationship that distinguishes between attributive and associative characteristics. As Robillard puts it, the first depends on naming the title of the visual work, the artist or genre, while the second "refers to the conventions or ideas associated with the plastic arts" (62). Although "Chaplinesque," "Projector" and "Film-Face" may indirectly appeal to scenes of the aforementioned films, they are not faithful descriptions, but rather recreations of the visual source that allow for different readings.

Furthermore, the ekphrasis resulting from the three poems rests upon the simulacra stemmed from modernity. If in the ancient discourse of Plato the image was mistrusted on account of its false likeness with the real, the twentieth century reaffirms the power of simulacra over icons and copies. To quote Deleuze:

The copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image without resemblance. The catechism, so much inspired by Platonism, has familiarized us with this notion. God made man in his image and resemblance. Through sin, however, man lost his resemblance while maintaining the image. We have become simulacra. We have forsaken moral existence in order to enter into aesthetic existence. ("The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy" 257)

At stake is the proliferation of images that circulate due to new methods of production

brought about by the alliance of capitalism and technology. As Lash and Urry point out, "what is increasingly being produced are not material objects, but signs" (15). Commodity production is not seen as process but rather as presentation insofar as it takes a turn to aestheticized models that represent cultural capital while disembodied modes of consumption (Smith 252). In line with Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, cinema bears the imprint of capitalism in that it relinquishes its elevated status by turning immaterialities such as images into mechanical models of commodity fetishism that become more democratic and accessible to the tastes of middle and lower classes.

As intangible as they are, images behave as commodities in the filmic medium, since movie-goers consume them, creating a network of relationships, spaces and attitudes that contribute to the reformulation of art. To put it in Bourdieu's words, cinema can be defined in terms of symbolic capital, as it hinges upon the accumulation of prestige, and movie stars are illustrative cases. Cultural capital, on the other hand, presupposes the internalization of a code that equips the individual with specific competence to decipher social relations or art objects. Museums are centers of cultural capital, as they entail a pedagogical activity promoted by group members and institutions. By contrast, mainstream cinema participates in social capital, as it develops a gigantic structure based on the production and reception of entertainment culture. It is also implanted in industrialized aesthetic models based on the consumption of moving images. This framework of structures resembles what Bourdieu defines as *habitus* and *field*. The former is frequently described as a 'feel for game,' in that agents react in unpredictable ways that adjust to particular situations even if this results in avoiding the rules of the play. In cinema, the interactions derived from directors, producers, actors and spectators constitutes the structure of the *habitus*, as they organize practices that are oriented towards an end, whether this be economic or symbolic. The *field* relates to the hierarchies that agents adopt and change in their competition for control (Johnson 4-7). In the

filmic medium, movie stars and directors interact and fight for recognition and economic capital, which at times appears to be incompatible.

Hence, cinema has become a novel social practice that embraces the habits of different classes and multiple patterns of technical reproducibility that deprive the cinematic image of aura, or ritualistic properties. Walter Benjamin explains this process as follows:

The unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value.... for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual" ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" 224).

The destruction of the aura corresponds to the disappearance of ancient hierarchical organizations and cultic practices thanks to the inception of technologies that contribute to the democratization of art. As such, ekphrasis, once deemed a rhetoric device aligned with beautiful objects, lends itself to popular means that rethink social relations and types of spectatorship, thereby elevating cinema to a higher category and poetry to a lower genre.

Crane and H.D.'s poems are illustrative examples that imbue *The Kid, Chang* and the iconic actress of Dressler in a quasi-spiritual dimension so as to celebrate the modern genre. On another note, films systematically reproduce images that do not possess a referent to point to. Their groundlessness responds to strategies of simulation that privilege an escape from reality, liberating the object from any textual or ocular dependence (Camille 41). Movies are precisely cogent artifacts of simulation as, in general, they are inventions lacking in any resemblance with the real. *The Kid, Chang* and the character of Marie Dressler are not built upon truthful stories, events or personas; they are fictions derived from the imagination of their filmmakers. To be sure, a spectator may identify with these cinematographic productions, but this does not mean that his or her life has been taken into account. The

ekphrastic transformation of these films into "Chaplinesque," "Projector" and "Film-Face" becomes even more muddled as these poems are to be interpreted as simulacra of the cinematic simulacrum. Everything becomes, according to Baudrillard, "a gigantic simulacrum: not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference" (5-6). In a reversal of Platonic mimesis, the real no longer exists, as it is substituted for a system of images that absorbs it. Cinema and its ekphrastic counterpart in poetry participate of a simulacrum that contributes to the effacement of referential possibilities. This immediately leads us to think over the connection of the image with modes of spectatorship that are confronted with the cinematographic production and the text. Seeing is the fundamental act that enables Crane, H.D. and Loy to decode the gaze and effect a subjective transformation in their poems by focusing on the grotesque, the Apollonian vision of the world and the critique of Hollywood industry.

6.3.1. Hart Crane's "Chaplinesque"

Crane's poem, written in honor of Charlie Chaplin after the release of *The Kid* [fig. 69] in 1921, might be interpreted in terms of what Bakhtin defined as grotesque body, that is, a body "in the act of becoming," which simultaneously "swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world" (317). Bakhtin's theories on Rabelais and the grotesque become even more important to the analysis of "Chaplinesque," if we take into account that Crane confessed in a letter to Gorham Munson the impact of the French poet's *Pantagruel* (1532) and *Gargantua* (1534) on his writing. In these works, Rabelais narrates the story of Gargantua and his son Pantagruel, two giants that devour everything they come across. Based on folklore and popular tradition, the stories are satires full of scatological humor and violence. The grotesque is what articulates the ekphrasis of "Chaplinesque," as it connects

the social modality of cinema—as a meeting point for the masses—and the literary aspects of the text, which are intrinsically rooted in the central position of the body as well as its pantomime. Chaplin's film begins with an unwed mother abandoning her newborn son in the back seat of an expensive car with a handwritten note that begged the discoverer to take care of her baby. However, the expectations of the mother take a turn for the worse when two thieves steal the vehicle. The offenders are shocked the moment they see the child and they immediately leave him on the street. At that point, the tramp, Charlie Chaplin, comes across the baby and, despite his poverty, he decides to take care of him. With the passage of time, the pair survives their scarcity by engaging in minor offenses. Their common trick is to have the child smash windows with a stone so that the tramp can repair them and obtain some remuneration for his job. In the meantime, the mother becomes a reputed opera singer, who also does charity work in the destitute neighborhoods of the city to compensate for the abandonment of her child. One day she even sees him, but does not recognize him. Later on, the kid will become ill and a doctor stops by to examine him. When he realizes the tramp is not the father, he conveys this information to the authorities so that the little boy can receive appropriate care and attention at the Council Hospital. After a series of attempts to separate the father and the kid, the film concludes with the two protagonists and the mother of the child living together at her wealthy household.

Given the subversive character of Chaplin, it is no surprise that Crane utilizes him to posit his text at the limit of popular and festive forms that are at the heart of what Bakhtin defined as grotesque. Just as cinema is the genre of the masses, "Chaplinsque" proposes burlesque practices that confront the seriousness of the official canon and integrate readership in the poetic experience. Modernity and its analogues—science, technology, industrial revolution, capital—have taken over organic and festive forms, ceasing to celebrate the carnival. Be that as it may, a regression to more primary states of consciousness is necessary

to regenerate the excess of rational thinking and individuality. For this reason, "Chaplinsque" encourages us to strengthen the festive sense of community—perhaps the one of poets—as individuals of great capacity to denounce injustice. The poem reads as follows:

We make our meek adjustments,
 Contented with such random consolations
 As the wind deposits
 In slithered and too ample pockets.

For we can still love the world, who find
 A famished kitten on the step, and know
 Recesses for it from the fury of the street,
 Or warm torn elbow coverts.

We will sidestep, and to the final smirk
 Dally the doom of that inevitable thumb
 That slowly chafes its puckered index toward us,
 Facing the dull squint with what innocence
 And what surprise!

And yet these fine collapses are not lies
 More than the pirouettes of any pliant cane;
 Our obsequies are, in a way, no enterprise.
 We can evade you, and all else but the heart:
 What blame to us if the heart live on.

The game enforces smirks; but we have seen
 The moon in lonely alleys make
 A grail of laughter of an empty ash can,
 And through all sound of gaiety and quest
 Have heard a kitten in the wilderness. (1-23)

Hart Crane's poem is not an exact ekphrasis of the film, but rather a grotesque recreation of the life of the community, where, according to Bakhtin, humans are brought together so as to celebrate rituals of renewal. This sense of collectivity is noticeable in the "we" of the poem, which might respond to the unity of the audience engaged in the images, ideas and emotions of the film. The first stanza opens as follows:

We make our meek adjustments,
Contented with such random consolations
As the wind deposits
In slithered and too ample pockets. (1-4)

In an ekphrastic manner, these lines evoke the poverty of the kid and the tramp, who are deprived of economic wellbeing, but this does not prevent them from enjoying the small pleasures life offers to them. By "slithered and ample pockets," Crane may be referring not only to the kid's hole-ridden clothing, but also to the daily difficulties both characters suffer to eek out a living. Despite their hardships, they "can still love the world," and show tenderness for a "famished kitten" that finds no place to hide in all "the fury of the street." In a letter to his friend William Wright, Crane precisely compares poetry to a "kitten" that embraces the deepest human feelings (*The Selected Letters of Hart Crane* 70).

Just as the grotesque pertains to those festive forms excluded from official cults, the poet and the characters of the film are on the margins of a society ruled by strict moral codes. Nevertheless, they possess a sense of ethics and affect that permits them to live according to their own principles. This is noticeable in the stanza where the poet creates a parallel between Chaplin's unusual behavior and his own. The "inevitable thumb" may be that of the city cop who points at the tramp to stop him. But when Crane speaks of chafing "its puckered index toward us," it is the censorship of *The Kid* and, by extension, of the work of art that is at stake (Lewis "Hart Crane and the Clown Tradition," 99). As he manifests in a letter to

Gohram Munson:

It was a year late in arriving in Cleveland, I understand, on account of objections from the state board of censors!!!! What they could have possibly objected to, I cannot imagine. It must have been some superstition aroused against good acting!" (*The Selected Letters of Hart Crane* 65-66).

These lines confirm Crane's identification of the poet with Chaplin, as both are marginal characters subject to judgement and derision. The tramp is also an embodiment of Pierrot, the seventeenth stock character of *Commedia dell'Arte*, a paradigmatic case of clownishness that affected the poetic expression of "Chaplinesque." Pierrot used to whiten his face and wear a white blouse combined with baggy pants. Like Chaplin he is seen as a fool distinguished by its naiveté and kindness. He usually "commented on the established power of the day, upon a rationalistic, heartless, belligerent, scientific, and industrializing society." At the same time, the poet and Chaplin become the mirror image of Everyman in fifteenth-century drama, as this individual "is a laughable entertainer" that gives voice to "sadness, even despair, muffled behind his clownish make-up" (Lewis *The Poetry of Hart Crane: A Critical Study*, 57-58).

As Lewis rightfully upholds:

The figure of the poet, the would-be producer of books in modern America, is the alter ego of the slippery, impoverished, and obscurely outlaw tramp. The poet, too, must seek refuge for his insufficiently nourished sensibility from the fury of contemporary life. (*The Poetry of Hart Crane: A Critical Study* 48)

In order for poetry not to be severely scrutinized, the artist must invent "poetic ways to sneak and slide around the obstacles to creative activity." Comedy and laughter are attitudes towards life that do not alter the reader's comfort zone. In an ekphrastic move, Chaplin's pantomime is recorded in the "fine collapses" and "the pirouettes of any pliant cane," emphasizing the clownish aspects that keep the human being alive. The poet, like the tramp, are outsiders that need to take care of their survival, the former by evading the law, and the

latter by preserving the legacy of his work for the future. This is intrinsically related to the subversiveness of the grotesque, as the filmic projection and Crane's text act out the excess and opposition to authority. The movie demonstrates the figures of the tramp and the kid as revolutionary ideals to counter bourgeois pre-established models, as they confront the system either by committing minor crimes to earn a living, or by fighting the authorities to avoid being separated from one another.

The grotesque also manifests itself in the ambiguity on the level of signification. With the word *obsequies*, Crane points to funeral rites that cancel the difference between life and death. As Bakhtin puts it: "the events of the grotesque sphere are always developed on the boundary dividing one body from the other and, as it were, at their points of intersection. One body offers death, the other its birth, but they are merged in a two-bodied image" (322). The ambivalence of the term, meaning obsequiousness or servile compliance proves that any slavish behavior annihilates a part of one's own self. This attitude is the counterpoint to the Greek *parrhesiastes*, that is, the truth-teller, that person whose behavior is in harmony with his or her speech. In the poem, Crane defends the power of passion and recklessness beyond ossified values and morals: "We can evade you, and all else but the heart:/ What blame to us if the heart live on" (17-18). In other words, we can shy away from our surrounding reality, except when we are confronted with our emotions. If we live to the fullest and in harmony with our feelings, nothing can be blamed on us.

The last stanza vindicates the idea of leading a life according to the commands of the heart, which "enforces smirks" and a self-assuring laughter resulting from "all sound of gaiety and quest." According to Bakhtin, laughter acts as a therapy that "purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from didacticism, naiveté and illusion, from the single meaning, single level, from sentimentality" (123). The act of laughing thus possesses therapeutic effects that release the individual from social constraints.

In this poem, Crane affirms himself by enjoying freedom to the fullest and creating a supernatural beauty out of the debris of modern life.



FIG. 69. *The Kid*, 1921.

6.3.2. H.D.’s “Projector”

If “Chaplinesque” is an ekphrastic illustration of the power of laughter and the grotesque, H.D.’s “Projector” manifests the tensions of the Apollonian and Dionysian. Influenced by *Chang* [fig. 70], a 1923 film, H.D.’s poem connects the movement-image with the expressive language of poetry. Her involvement with the aesthetics of cinema dates as far back as 1930, when she participated in the filmic production of *Borderline* in addition to contributing to the avant-garde journal *Close Up*. In this venue prominent figures such as Sergei Eisenstein defined the fourth dimension in terms of the joint parts of the montage—tempo, shots, frame, foreground—(64). According to Chisholm, Eisenstein’s theories made an impact on H.D., who associated the cinematograph with the “living hieroglyph of the unconscious” liable to being decoded by “some ‘shock’ of memory” (98).

FIG. 70. *Chang*, 1927.

In “Projector,” the language of cinema is masterfully epitomized by the metaphor of the Greek gods, Apollo and Dionysus. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche focuses on the Apollonian vision of the world. As he maintains, the source of Greek art is split into two antagonistic forces: the Apollonian responds to the play with the dream world and appearances, which is the origin of figurative art. The Dionysian, in turn, stands for trance-like effects that erode self-consciousness in favor of the fusion into the ecstasy and frenzy of the masses that cancel the identity of the individual. Based on these opposing forces, H.D.’s poem manifests the relations between the word and the movement-image as well as the philosophical implications resulting from the confluence of Western mythological tradition and the new technological art form of cinema. In “Projector” Apollo, rather than having been extinguished, has transformed himself into a technological invention of modernity. As H.D.

remarks:

light takes new attribute
and yet his old
glory
enchants (1-4)

In other words, the god of light and the Sun has left his traces in the screen of the theater, involving the audience in a play of illusion characterized by the simulacrum we willingly participate in while seeing a film. In ancient Greece, Apollo was called *Phoibos* or *Phoebus* ("Shining, Brilliant") and was commonly associated with art and culture. His epithet gathers importance in the modern era, becoming a symbol of the new light. Cinematography or, furthermore, photocinematography ("light-movement-writing") embodies the direction that ekphrasis adopts with the emergence of the filmic medium (Winkler 1-2). As H.D. points out in her essay titled "Restraint:" "Light speaks, is pliant, is malleable. Light is our friend and our god. Let us be worthy of it" (112). Light has a divine ability to transfix objects and hence its significance. The poem therefore appears to suggest that Apollo has evolved into a mechanical construct that still preserves his original "blazing splendour," able to capture the audience in an auratic dimension, to put it in Benjaminian terms.

For the German cultural critic, the aura harmonizes with "the uniqueness of a work of art," insofar as it is "imbedded in the fabric of tradition" ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" 52). Nevertheless, Benjamin claims that modern art has lost its ritualistic character by allocating it to larger publicity. The decay of the aura is a direct consequence of the democratization of art, and the film, "with an artificial build-up of the 'personality' outside the studio," responds to this emancipation from ritual. As H.D. writes, the image of Apollo may have shriveled and lost his initial attributes:

He left the place they built him

and the halls,
 he strode so simply forth,
 they knew him not (44-47)

Nonetheless, the deity still retains the "redemptive power of light" so as to turn mundane reality into a superreality that transcends itself beyond the human with the purpose of making us see the truth (Diepeveen 63-64).

The god has been deprived of his sanctuaries of Delphi and Delos, where he slew the Pythian snake, asserting his power before mortals. Now his shrine is located "in a little room," where his magnificent presence responds to a collective experience that accepts to let go of the demands of daily reality in favor of a short-lived fiction. Apollo epitomizes the movement of the dialectical image, which Benjamin defines as "that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (*The Arcades Project* 463). The past image of Apollo shines through and is rendered legible, only by building bridges with a past moment that allows for the construction of historical time and intelligibility. The juxtaposition of the mythological figure and the mass-produced art of film industry accounts for the regeneration of a past that could otherwise not be apprehended in its original form. For H.D. the god has mutated with the passage of time and his protean abilities are noticeable in the light projected by the screen and the dream-like effects Apollo is usually associated with. This induces the onlooker to lose consciousness about the concerns of daily life that lead to an engagement with the fiction of cinema. As H.D. puts it:

vision returns
 and with new vision
 fresh
 hope
 to the impotent (11-15).

The second part of the poem alludes in an ekphrastic gesture to *Chang*, a film shot on

location in Thailand by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack.⁹⁵ The literary piece is not an objective reproduction of the motion picture, but rather a recreation that shares the common intention of showing the dichotomy between wilderness and civilization, East and West. This is epitomized by the metaphor of the Dionysian and the Apollonian, which also contrasts Greek tradition with the modern world. The film begins by pointing to the dangers of the jungle as well as to the inability of Man, considered to be an intruder, to vanquish it. This destructive power of wilderness is evoked as follows in the movie: "Time and again fields, towns, great Empires were hacked out of the Jungle... They are forgotten... They always rose in its wrath and swallowed them." The treatment of the Dionysian force is embodied by the jungle in the cinematic production, which H.D. recreates in her poem by way of Impressionistic brushstrokes that point to its intensity instead of its descriptive precision:

vision of streams and path-ways
and small lakes;
streams,
cataracts
and valleys
and great forests; (16-21)

These exotic images, unfamiliar to the western spectator, can be boiled down to the fact that in some cults Dionysus is an outsider-god that arrives from Asia, precisely the continent where the film was shot. The deity and his followers inhabit spaces that escape social codes and reason, and thus the jungle embodies the chaos and danger resulting from the contact with the unknown. The film and the poem eroticized and fetishized the Asian other, turning it

⁹⁵ Merian Caldwell Cooper (1893–1973) was an American aviator, screenwriter, film director and producer. Ernest Beaumont Schoedsack (1893–1979) was an American cinematographer, producer and director. They both produced *King Kong* in 1933. See Mario Gerosa, *Il cinema di Ernest B. Schoedsack* and Mark Cotta Vaz, *Living Dangerously: The Adventures of Merian C. Cooper, Creator of King Kong*.

into an object to be enjoyed by the colonizing gaze of the West. The ekphrastic poem thus rethinks issues of power and desire that constitutes forms of spectatorship. The film participates of this discourse that makes the Eastern world a possession meant for the visual pleasure of Eurocentric audience, who views the other as subordinate and inferior. Nonetheless, H.D. challenges the western discourse of viewing by integrating both the Apollonian and Dionysian forces into her poem. As Margaret Olin puts it, "[t]he gaze, then, corresponds to desire, the desire for self-completion through another" (215). H.D. apparently argues for the return of the gaze, for both Apollo and Dionysus to look at each other so as to respond to forms of being and perception that acknowledge the presence of a radical alterity. At the heart of the direction of this look lies a profound respect for the other, and thus the ekphrastic poem is able to contest those hierarchical relations projected in the movie.

In effect, H.D. does not overlook the importance of the Asian god. Therefore, she continues describing the fusion of the self into the natural elements presented in her composition, which emphasizes loss of consciousness in favor of a hypnotic state that returns to the instinctual forces triggered by the god. As the poet says:

our souls are merged with quietness
or stirred
by tidal-wave
or earth quake (22-25).

The audience identifies with the cinematic image, internalizing the sensations that the abrupt landscape awakes. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche particularly refers to the potential of the Greek god to prompt intoxication and manic dancing that annihilate the *principium individuationis*, otherwise known as the obliteration of the will. This is especially noticeable in the following passage:

we sleep and are awake

we dream and are not here;
 our spirits walk elsewhere
 with shadow-folk
 and ghost-beast,
 we speak a shadow-speech,
 we tread a shadow-rock,
 we lie along ghost-grass
 in ghost shade
 of the hillock; (26-35)

These lines show the reverie generated by cinema, where the "we" is the enactment of the audience half-awake in interplay between light and darkness. In that sense, we participate in a dimension that reminds us of ancient rituals. As H.D. remarks in "The Mask and the Movietone" (1927):

We were almost at one with Delphic or Elucian candidates, watching symbols of things that matter accepting yet knowing these symbols were divorced utterly from reality. The mask originally presented life but so crudely that it became a part of some super-normal or some sub-normal layer of consciousness. (116)

Apollo is the giver of light, who emphasizes the power of a vision, but this is obscured by the Dionysian obliteration of the will, which extends to spectatorship. Just as in *The Bacchae*,⁹⁶ the Maenads, Dionysus's female followers, become deranged with the presence of the god and tear the King Pentheus apart, the audience in the theater is immersed in the illusion of the action of a movie. At the core of this fantasy is Apollo, whose temperance allows for a clear vision that generates "fresh shapes out of nothingness" and transports us to "realms of magic." The role of the big screen makes possible the emergence of forms that appeal to the

⁹⁶ *The Bacchae* is a Greek tragedy written by Euripides and premiered around 405. The plot centers on the god Dionysus taking revenge on the people of Thebes and, especially, on his cousin, the King Pentheus, who does not acknowledge him as a deity. During his stay, the god puts a spell on women, the Bacchae, who wreak havoc in the city. See Euripides, *The Bacchae*.

eye. In her poem, H.D. focuses on images that bear resemblance with those that are visualized in the film, namely, birds, insects, serpents, exotic flowers, reeds, ferns and bushes. Just as in psychoanalysis the phenomenon of transference is characterized by channeling emotions from one person to another, the poet has transferred to his literary piece the visual experience of the jungle, where unconscious desires are released.

Towards the end of the poem, Apollo makes appearance by exhibiting his intense light, which is the counterpart to the big screen in the theater room. Later on Castaglia, a nymph who the god transformed into a fountain at Delphi, is mentioned in order to refer to the state of inspiration to create poetry once one drinks from her waters or listens to her sounds. Then there is an intersection of animals that evoke the jungle of *Chang*, those being the snake, a well-known symbol for Apollo, as well as the leopard and the panther, which point to the figure of Dionysus. In the poem, it is the former who speaks about his brother Dionysus by invoking "evoe," an exclamation of Bacchic frenzy. As Apollo states, "your being is my grace," and he continues:

You are myself being free
as bird
or humming-bee;
you are myself being drawn
like any bee
along
a ray of gilded light; (142-149)

In other words, none of these deities could exist without the other, as life force is based on a well-balanced disposition of reason and instinct. A further conclusion is that, transposed to the present moment of H.D., poetry cannot be fully comprehended without any reference whatsoever to cinema and its motion images in modern artistic production. This makes even more sense if we consider Nietzsche's theorizations on Greek tragedy and how he contrasts

the Apollonian idea of form, beauty, and sight with the Dionysian principles of force, music, and intoxication. According to him, all greatest artworks are thus created out of the confluence of these two aesthetic forces.

6.3.3. Mina Loy's "Film-Face"

The last poem I will examine is Mina Loy's "Film-Face," and it is the most complex piece out of the three regarding an ekphrastic analysis. Loy wrote this piece as a tribute to well-known actress Marie Dressler in the year 1940, when she already settled in America and familiarized herself with Hollywood industry. Although this poem does not refer to a particular film played by Dressler, it is an illustration of an indeterminate ekphrasis that recreates fragments of her acting, thus becoming a cinematic portrait that not only focuses on Dressler's character but also on the negative reality of Hollywood, its mass-entertainment industry and the question of femininity vis-à-vis the position of objects silenced by the dominant history of ideas. The poem reads as follows:

As the Gods sat on Olympus
above the travail of clouds

it dominates the garbage-barge
loaded with clouds
of sanitation's chaos;

the enduring face of,
the ruined body of,
the poor people

on Marie Dressler (1-9)

Marie Dressler is an icon of Hollywood industry that stands for the negative effects of

commodification. As Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer state in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) that the culture industry is a form of "mass deception" that has the ability to standardize everything to such an extent that our everyday reality, including the simulacrum of cinema, become the same. Hence, the possibility of criticism vanishes the moment our judgement relaxes in the act of seeing a film. For Loy, Marie Dressler is a negative icon of mass culture, but she also carries within herself the possibility of revealing the blots of capital system, namely its tendency to alienate and depersonalize individuals by turning them into an abstraction. By the same token, Dressler embodies the movement of commodities in their use-, exchange- and plus-value. That is, at the peak of her career, the image of the Hollywood actress circulated in the marketplace as an object of entertainment and disconnect. This led to an increase in her value, but the audience eventually lost interest in her persona, thereby becoming devalued and depreciated, just as commercialized goods do too. As Irigaray remarks in "Women on the Market:"

[T]he social body would be redistributed into producer-subjects no longer functioning as commodities because they provided the standard of value for commodities, and into commodity-objects that ensured the circulation of exchange without participating in it as subjects. (174)

What is at stake in this economic system is the participation of women as objects rather than as subjects, and Dressler is the bearer of relationships that divest her of agency and subjectivity. The poem traces the trajectory followed by her iconic figure on the big screen, which ends up adopting the role of a supreme commodity invested with fetishistic overtones by being compared to the Gods at the Olympus. Immediately after, Loy transfers the reader to the detritus of society by alluding to the "garbage-barge" presided by Dressler, who is also representative of the poor people. The actress has suffered a depreciation of value akin to that of commodities when they do not find a privileged position in the marketplace.

Hence, leveling her with a "garbage-barge" as an extension of the underclass. Let us remember that by the time Loy wrote "Film-Face," she had experimented with three-dimensional collages built out of trash. It is thus not strange to see the influence of waste material on her poem as a harsh critique to Hollywood industry and its tendency to dispose of film stars, as if they were refuse, once they fall into oblivion. Her composition is formally reminiscent of montage editing techniques and cut-backs that disrupt the logical order of the sentence to alter states of perception and consciousness.

This allows Loy to contest capitalist models of literary production that turn man into a passive consumer. Their writing commits itself to democratic acts that put an end to the power of the author and allow the reader to engage in the quest for meaning. In addition, "Film-Face" attacks masculinist notions of the individual rooted in Western tradition, criticizing the position of women as objects and arguing for a unique feminine voice that recovers the body as central to the quest for agency and subjectivity as opposed to the stereotypes effected by the dominant phallogocentric culture of mass-entertainment. The image of Dressler Loy creates in her poem contrasts scopophilia or pleasure in looking attributed to Hollywood narrative films. According to Laura Mulvey, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly." Women are considered to be image, whereas man is the "bearer of the look" (162). In other words, male protagonists and spectators become possessors of the gaze and thus turn female characters into objects of desire. Loy is aware of the relations of power that the look has created in Hollywood, and thus purports to disembody them by transforming Marie Dressler into an image that no one wants to behold. By making allusion to the "enduring face" and "ruined body" of the actress, Loy holds in check scopophilic attitudes, as the audience is not interested in looking at her anymore.

Dressler is not the enticing figure she used to be, but rather an ensemble of debris that threatens to dismantle the voyeuristic gaze of Hollywood spectatorship and the pleasure issued from mass culture and entertainment industry. The declining figure of Marie Dressler on her "garbage-barge" appears to embody the figure of the "sublime" hysteric. According to Joan Copjec, this type of woman occupies a privileged position, as she is devoid of a superegoic structure that enables her to observe the "inauthenticity" of the world. Consequently, she becomes the superego and "feels justified in proclaiming the inferiority of all she surveys" (127). In other words, Loy adopts a responsible position, as she is determined to do justice to those individuals singled out by dominant social structures. However, this goal can only be achieved by creating a negative image of femininity that serves to bring to light the deficiencies of phallogocentric and capitalist structures promoted in mainstream cinema.



FIG. 71. *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, 1914.

The poem by Loy contributes to the redefinition of the traditional ekphrastic model by registering the effects of the cinematographic medium and gender-related questions in modernity. Loy is aware of the power embodied in looking, and thus purports to dismantle the voyeuristic gaze of spectatorship by transforming Marie Dressler into a figure that no one wants to behold. Though it does not point to a specific movie play by Marie Dressler, the ekphrasis of the poem might be considered to be a critique to Hollywood celebrity culture and the negative image of femininity derived from it.

6.4. Conclusion

To conclude, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Hart Crane, H.D. and Mina Loy revised the traditional notion of ekphrasis in order to adapt the mechanizing processes of early twentieth century to their poetry, and the mechanical arts were the maximum expression of modernity. Their ekphrastic practices are not identical with the models of Classical Antiquity, but rather literary recreations that respond to a visual consciousness. Whereas Williams was inspired by Alfred Stieglitz's ability to capture commonplace objects and events in the urban world, Marianne Moore reveals the existential constituency of photography by writing about Edward Steichen's portrait of Gordon E. Craig. As for cinema, Crane, H.D. and Loy are inspired by the filmic images projected in *The Kid*, *Chang* and the several movies of Marie Dressler in order to convey the systemic crisis brought about by the excess of capital and technical progress. The tension between the word and the sign is thus central to the development of a radical American poetics in that it helps articulate a discourse on the limit that reveals sensory, philosophical and ideological complexities.

General Conclusion

This investigation has discussed the visual identity developed by Anglo-American vanguardism in the advent of European experimental movements and the emergence of media and the culture industry. I have focused on the genre of poetry given that it is illustrative of the tendency towards visuality in literature. What I have discovered is that there exists an intrinsic relationship between the proliferation of images and the perpetuation of capitalism. Even when pictures present spiritual or natural topics disengaged from market society, they utilize abstraction as means of promoting avant-garde aesthetics. The marketplace needs to advertise its product and the consumer's attention is more effectively captured by appealing to eye-oriented perception rather than rational thinking. The text works hand in hand with the visual, which becomes a supplement in the practice of reading and writing. Literary production thus reveals the superficiality of entertainment industry, as consumer society has transformed images into commodities that participate in marketplace transactions.

In order to examine the impact of visual culture on modern poetry, I have concentrated on the transatlantic exchanges generated between Europe and the U.S. This transnational framework has allowed me to explore the origins of the avant-garde, its diaspora and its assimilation in different locales, which leads to thinking over the implications of the image as a cultural product when it shifts places. In this research I have

argued that modern Anglo-American poetry draws on the graphic language of European vanguardism—Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, German Expressionism, French Surrealism—as a means of reaching the same effects as advertising techniques or the fine arts. As it is surmised from my study, Modernist poetry in Great Britain and the U.S. builds upon the visual techniques utilized by the European avant-gardists, as they mimicked models of production that took advantage of the visual potential of advertisement or plastic techniques to promote and eventually sell a product. On these grounds, I have found that experimental poetry and art are better understood by examining the relationship between consumer society, visual experience and the development of abstraction. Through a fine-grained interdisciplinary and transatlantic analysis of avant-garde poetry, I have demonstrated that, in fact, images are used to disclose alienating attitudes as well as the opposition between the urban and rural life. Modern trends also blend high and low genres so as to question traditional notions of aesthetics based on judgements of taste.

The first issue I have explored in this research is the interconnection of European vanguardism with capital and modern visual culture. I have analyzed movements such as Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism, Dadaism and Surrealism regarding theories of the avant-garde posed by Poggioli, Adorno, Bürger and Greenberg. Setting background of the state of affairs raises awareness of modern art and poetry and its transplantation in Great Britain and the U.S. through successful transatlantic exchanges. Whereas Poggioli considers the avant-garde as a political reaction to the bourgeois, Bürger centers on its potential to question the institution of art and its separation from society. On another note, Adorno criticizes the homogenization of art given the power of mass culture. Finally, Greenberg establishes a differentiation between the banality and lucrative purposes of kitsch as opposed to the critical attitude of the avant-garde. By reviewing these theories I have concluded that Cubist artists such as Picasso in painting and Apollinaire in poetry were supported by educated young

consumers that purchased their works or financed their art through exhibits and magazines. In the same vein, Futurism was based on the capitalization of the future, understood in terms in of the advancement of the processes of modernization taking place in the life of the metropolis. As far as Expressionism is concerned, it is the phenomenon of alienation as constitutive of modern society that I have analyzed, especially regarding the struggle for resources and political power derived from World War I. The last movements I have considered is Dadaism in Switzerland, Germany, France and the U.S. as well as Surrealism, given its implications in the culture industry and iconoclastic practices that aimed at subverting the symbolic power of language in favor of an alternative form of cultural capital. As I have shown, these movements participate in the marketplace and processes of industrialization, creating a new type of aesthetics that distances itself from questions of taste and retinal art.

After considering this overview of European experimentalism, I have moved on to the examination of the phenomenology of the image in the constitution of Imagism. What I have sought to prove is that the movement hinges upon the phenomenology of perception, which discloses the relationships between the observer and the perceived thing in the phenomenal world. The image is thus the conduit that establishes such connection and is especially noticeable in the printing culture of little magazines, where poems are embedded in the advertising industry. The engagement of Imagist poetry in these mass-produced practices reveals that this movement was dependent on the structures that regulated commercial institutions, whether they belonged to the small or large press. Another issue I have looked into was the return to Antiquity, whether this be from Greece or China, as it is part of a phenomenology that projects the past onto the present. Pound, H.D., Lowell, Flint and Aldington, among others, aided in the renovation of poetry by taking the essence of the origin.

If Imagism set a precedent for considering perceptual experience as a phenomenon imbued in the print culture of selective magazines that relied upon advertising and the revival of the past in modernity, Vorticism is imbricated in mass-market processes that turned the image into a cultural product. The conclusion I have drawn is that the Vorticists were influenced by European experimentalism as regards the usage of mass culture and the machine aesthetics. This was the case since they decided to react to the obsolescence of Victorian aesthetic models. Yet the Vorticists ended up attacking the main avant-garde trends in the continent, namely Cubism and Futurism, since the latter overshadowed the British movement. In light of this, Vorticism radicalized its position regarding the Imagists not without politicizing its national identity. This analysis has proved that this remonstrance produced a series of original works of art, poems and manifestoes concentrated on the elevation of Great Britain to a force field of creativity on an international level. Yet it did not achieve the desired visibility the main artists and theorists expected, those being Pound, Lewis and Gaudier-Brzeska. Of special interest for further studies are the abstract photography of Coburn, Saunders's and Dismorr's feminine works.

Loy's ekphrastic poetry on Lewis and Gaudier-Brzeska is another question this research has engaged with. The interpretation of the primitive nature of these works is essential to introduce feminist criticism. Of special importance is the assessment of feminine reality and reproductive roles as an alternative to masculinist conceptualizations. These creations might open new avenues for examining the role of Vorticism within European vanguardism taking into account radical innovations and gender issues.

In addition to the exploration of the impact of European vanguardism on Great Britain, my research has also examined the rise of American Modernism through transatlantic exchanges. As it is inferred from my analysis, the visual identity of the U.S. emerged thanks to the interactions with émigrés from France and Germany, who introduced their artistic

findings in galleries such as 291 and the Armory Show, where Alfred Stieglitz made known Picasso, Matisse and Cézanne, to name a few, in addition to artists born in the U.S. such as Demuth, Sheeler, Hartley, Dove and O'Keeffe. It is also noteworthy of attention the fact that the latter group of American artists also travelled to Europe. As an alternative the meetings at the households of art patrons such as Kreymborg and Arensberg were the breeding ground of novel ideas. The insight into transatlantic exchanges has revealed that eventually American artists distanced themselves from foreign aesthetics so as to search for their own identity, which was rooted in the sense of place. In other words, poets in line with Williams and Crane as well as the group of the Precisionists engaged in the discovery of their native soil, which for them was found in the urban architecture and industrial landscapes. Likewise, Stevens and Moore in the poetic field, and Dove, Hartely and O'Keeffe in painting concerned themselves with the sublime potential of natural spaces in America. In their works they showed a sense of place that coincides with a profound love of their land. Opposed to this aesthetics is the displacement to foreign spaces that we find in the poetic works of Stein, Eliot and Pound. These authors manifest ambivalent attitudes of attachment to and detachment from the land that are at issue in the two aesthetic lines followed by American Modernists. This finding has determined that despite this divergence, aesthetics in the U.S. responds to a strong relationship with their own ground as a univocal expression of their national identity.

The last idea that I have investigated is the ekphrasis of the mechanical arts. As I have explained, poems about photographs are based on the ability of the latter to speak of truth and a past moment congealed in a negative, whether this be a person or an object. Regarding cinema, I have proved that it revolves around the deception derived from light and movement. The animation propounded by cinema is closer to life, whereby the spectator is under the impression of experiencing a real-life event. My conclusion is that poems on

photographs express the tension between the past and the present, but always make us see the object by force. As I have shown, this type of ekphrasis is divided into two types: a faithful description of the photograph of a landscape, as Williams shows in "Young Sycamore" and a recreation of the picture of a person, as is noticeable in Moore's "To a Man Working his Way through the Crowd." Whereas the former fixes perspectives of the rainy street as shown in the Stieglitz's shot, the latter recreates the emotion originating in the contemplation of the photograph of Craig. Regarding cinema, the poems by Crane, H.D. and Loy are interpretations of the emotions aroused by the protagonists of certain movies like Chaplin or Dressler, as well as the parallel between the ritualistic overtones and the mechanical experience of seeing a movie. What I have demonstrated is that poetry avails itself of the philosophical implications of motion and fixity, given that they appeal to the tensions between life and death, deception and truth, collectivity and individuality.

In this project I have proved the existing correlation between twentieth-century visual culture and Modernist artistic production in Great Britain and the U.S. in the aftermath of European vanguardism. The tendency towards abstraction is remarkable in setting precedents for a type of aesthetics that becomes fashionable in experimental circles, in opposition to the mimetic forms of representation utilized by mainstream art. The rise in the culture industry is also significant to acknowledge the imbrication of mass market in artistic production. This made possible reactions against institutional art by introducing functional pieces into the museum that respond to the technological apparatus of modernity, such as those by Duchamp and Picabia. Likewise, the emergence of cinema, where the proletariat and the bourgeois meet, reveals novel relationships, spaces and patterns of behavior that make a direct impact on the democratization of culture. This new sense of aesthetics participates in visual structures of capitalism, opening up models that emulate the free circulation of commodities, whether they are tangible or intangible. Images are representations of reality,

not reality itself, and when they are disseminated by media technologies, the viewer is confronted with the problem of finding the original thing in a twofold way. On the one hand, the real object might be lost and thus the distribution of photographs or replicas, as in Duchamp's readymades, point to alternative realities. By contrast, images of the original thing and its duplicates open a wider detachment between reality and artistic creation, which ultimately causes spectatorship to think over the problematic relation between art and truth in modernity.

In my final remarks, my intention is to open a preliminary discussion that explores how this topic might be extended to movements originating after the 1950s. Given its interdisciplinary concerns and the avant-garde influence, the New York School lends itself to further study. Born in the 1950s, this movement integrated by poets, painters, dancers and musicians is significant to the extent that it continued with the preceding aesthetics of Surrealism and the present-day movements of Abstract Expressionism, jazz and performance. The poets of this school are John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Barbara Guest, Ted Berrigan, among others. Distinguished by its cosmopolitanism and spontaneity, their style responds to the aesthetics of postmodernity in that it appeals to eyesight to present vibrant images of the city life and urban world. Therefore, the intersection of visual culture with the reality of modernity might be advanced. In addition, painters such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning might have helped the poets of the New York School to conceive the word as action, an idea that goes hand in hand with Pollock's pictorial technique of dripping. This is noticeable in works such as *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1975), where Ashbery recovers the long-standing notion of ekphrasis and adapt it to his own interests.

Another movement that proves the imprint left by the European avant-garde and the culture industry is Neo-Dada. Inspired by Dada, this tendency of the 1950s experiments with trash in everyday life, and thus the combines of Robert Rauschenberg and junk sculptures of

Richard Stankiewicz evoke the assemblages of Kurt Schwitters in Dada. The counterpart in poetry is found in the circle of the Netherlands, where the non-poetic aspects of reality are explored to question traditional judgements of taste. If Neo-Dada created art out of mass-produced objects, pop art emerged as the radicalization of the previous tendency. Its main concern was to parody items belonging to the realm of consumer society and advertising. Andy Warhol's Coca-Cola cans and Campbell soups are illustrations of the encroachment of commodifying attitudes in the realm of art that lend themselves to an intriguing analysis of the advertising industry and mass market after the 1950s.

Ultimately, the analysis of avant-garde visual culture and its evolution over the 1950s is intrinsic to the development of Anglo-American poetry and art since it engages the reader in decoding the social meaning of words and images in modernity. This investigation arrives at a new benchmark for comparative criticism, as it gives added consideration to the sense of sight to explain the prevalence of images in modern poetry as an extension of media culture in the age of technological experimentations. On another level, it presents a transatlantic analysis that examines the transformation of European experimentalism in the U.S. as well as its contribution to the international avant-garde.

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