MARCEL DUCHAMP, GERTRUDE STEIN, AND THE MODERNIST LOSS OF AUTONOMY

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Semyon Khokhlov

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Stephen Fredman, Director

Graduate Program in English

Notre Dame, Indiana

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Abstract

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Semyon Khokhlov

Marcel Duchamp, Gertrude Stein, and the Modernist Loss of Autonomy proposes a new understanding of modernist autonomy and the ways in which it conditioned the features of modernist texts and works of art. Rather than positing it as a strictly textual phenomenon, a hallmark of both canonical and revisionary modernist criticism, I locate modernist autonomy within the biographical experience of Duchamp and Stein as they navigated the modernist cultural field. With Duchamp, I examine the way he competed with other artists for cultural capital and his embattled relation to exhibiting his work; with Stein, I look at her tense engagement with the act of lecturing and the consequences of her attempt to win general acclaim through an accessible work of autobiography. In all of these experiences, Duchamp and Stein forfeited or were stripped of a particular form of autonomy – what I am calling impersonal autonomy – that was central not only to their biographical experience but also to their works. They sought to remain unidentifiable, to avoid the publicization of their biographical selves, an aim that conflicted with their commitment to forging successful modernist careers. The loss of autonomy that emerged,

again and again, out of this contradictory position resulted in works of art and literature in which the qualities commonly associated with the aesthetics of modernist autonomy are embattled and transformed. These works are marked by the following four features: the reassertion of autonomy; the presence of the authorial/artistic self; the manifestation of an array of "ugly feelings"; and a hostile relation to the reader/viewer. In exploring these features, I show the way that modernist autonomy – when considered at the level of biographical affective experience – becomes a generative force in the wake of its loss.

To My Parents and Emily

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of autonomy once served as the defining characteristic of twentieth-century modernist aesthetics. It posited that modernist works of art and literature were at a transcendent remove from the forces of modernity and the products of mass culture, which were seen as comparatively degraded. In the free-standing modernist work, the subjective experience and presence of the author or artist are transformed into objective formal relations. In this way, the work achieves the condition of self-sufficiency and escapes the limits and restrictions of social experience within modernity.

The possibilities claimed for modernist autonomy, particularly its capacity for transcendence, became decidedly suspect, however, as modernist scholarship came out from the influence of New Criticism and embraced socio-historical methods and perspectives. Modernist autonomy is now seen as a market value, a strategy modernist artists and authors deployed in order to cultivate distinctive positions within the modernist cultural field. What is notable, however, about this new view is that while it has radically recast the significance of modernist autonomy, it has largely absorbed canonical descriptions of the ways autonomy is translated into aesthetic form. That is, the qualities detailed above are still seen as constitutive of modernist art and literature, even if those qualities now add up to involvement in, rather than transcendence of, the social conditions of modernity.

With a focus on Marcel Duchamp and Gertrude Stein, this dissertation proposes a new understanding of modernist autonomy and the ways in which it conditioned the features of modernist texts and works of art. Rather than positing it as a strictly textual phenomenon, a hallmark of both canonical and revisionary modernist criticism, I locate modernist autonomy within the biographical experience of Duchamp and Stein as they navigated the modernist cultural field. With Duchamp, I examine the way he competed with other artists for cultural capital and his embattled relation to exhibiting his work; with Stein, I look at her tense engagement with the act of lecturing and the consequences of her attempt to win general acclaim through an accessible work of autobiography. In all of these experiences, Duchamp and Stein forfeited or were stripped of a particular form of autonomy – what I am calling impersonal autonomy – that was central not only to their biographical experience but also to their works. They sought to remain unidentifiable, to avoid the publicization of their biographical selves, an aim that conflicted with their commitment to forging successful modernist careers. The loss of autonomy[1] that emerged, again and again, out of this contradictory position resulted in works of art and literature in which the qualities commonly associated with the aesthetics of modernist autonomy are embattled and transformed. These works are marked by the following four features: the reassertion of autonomy; the presence of the authorial/artistic self; the manifestation of an array of "ugly feelings"; and a hostile relation to the reader/viewer. In exploring these features, I show the way that modernist autonomy – when considered at

[1] It should be noted that the phrase "loss of autonomy," unless indicated otherwise, always refers to Duchamp and Stein's affective experience of losing autonomy. I am, therefore, not concerned with whether or not autonomy is actually lost in the instances I describe; all that matters, for my purposes, is that in those instances Duchamp and Stein feel that it is lost.

the level of biographical affective experience – becomes a generative force in the wake of its loss.

I rethink the concept of modernist autonomy through an analysis of Duchamp and Stein because they were iconoclastic modernist figures with a particularly strong investment in both impersonal autonomy and the pursuit of cultural capital. Considering them together also makes it possible to see the way two figures who seemed to occupy the same position in the modernist culture field were, in fact, oriented toward the market in very different ways. Duchamp produced avant-garde art and always sought to occupy an elite and distinctive cultural position within the avant-garde. Stein, too, produced avant-garde work but she was never content to be "the admired of the precious" and throughout her career sought to achieve mass fame.[2] Thus, if in the case of Duchamp there was an exact match between aesthetics and cultural-positioning, to use the vocabulary of Pierre Bourdieu, in the case of Stein the two were not aligned.[3] This difference, in turn, produced different versions of the conflict between impersonal autonomy and the pursuit of success in the modernist marketplace. For Duchamp, the two terms were commonly intertwined, creating a contradictory dynamic in which actions that asserted impersonal autonomy also advanced his interest in a distinctive cultural position. For Stein, on the other hand, the two were commonly represented by opposing options – e.g. to lecture or not; to appeal to a mass audience or not – leaving her suspended between the two. A further reason for grouping Duchamp and Stein is that modernism

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[2] Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961.), p. 70.

[3] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field (*Palo Alto, Stanford UP, 1996).

was a movement in which experiments in art and literature fed off of one another. Drawing together an artist and an author, then, makes it possible to bring out the connections between modernist literature and art and to more accurately represent the modernist cultural field.

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It may come as a surprise that my investigation of modernist autonomy is carried out through analysis of the lives and works of two preeminent twentieth-century avant-garde figures. The concept of autonomy, after all, has been deployed as a dividing line between high modernism and the modernist avant-garde. Whereas the former has been seen in terms of a commitment to transcending the social conditions of modernity, the latter has been construed on the basis of its effort, in Peter B*ü*rger's influential formulation, to "reintegrate art into the praxis of life."[4] A major contention of my dissertation, however, is that avant-garde modernism was significantly invested in high modernist principles of autonomy, particularly the notion that the modernist work does not reflect its creator's biographical self.

In canonical accounts of modernist autonomy, this notion informs the cultural significance accorded to aesthetic objects as well as the way in which they are produced and the formal features they possess. In T.S Eliot's "Impersonal theory of poetry," the author is likened to a piece of platinum that catalyzes a chemical reaction whose end

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[4] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* trans., Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 22.

product "contains no trace of platinum."[5] The author functions as a kind of medium in this equation, and, as Eliot stresses, the success of his work depends largely on the degree to which he transmutes his own personal passions into objective aesthetic relations. The socio-political stakes of this process of objectification were theorized by Theodor Adorno. In his dialectical investigation of lyric poetry within modernity, Adorno posits that it is the lyric's very investment in purity that constitutes its "idiosyncratic opposition…to the reification of the world, to the domination of human beings by commodities."[6] The lyric's capacity to mount a transcendent response to the constricting social conditions out of which it emerges is based on its capacity to embody the objective and purposeless forces of language as such. The key to this operation is the impersonalization of the lyrical subject. It is when "the subject submerges itself in language"[7] that it becomes possible for the lyric to figure a different, liberated reality.

Authorial impersonality as the bedrock of aesthetic form was an idea that had general currency within modernist aesthetics, bringing together not only high modernism and the avant-garde but also literature and art. In Charles Altieri's account of modernist poetry, the ultimate point of reference is Cezanne, whose work broke away from both symbolic and realist representation by foregrounding the materiality of painting.[8] Cezanne made his paintings a little hard to see; techniques such as the merging of

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[5] T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. ltd., 1920), p. 48.

[6] Theodor Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," *Notes to Literature: Volume One*, ed., Rolf Tiedemann, trans., Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), p. 40.

[7] Ibid, p. 44.

[8] Charles Altieri, *The Art of Twentieth-Century American Poetry: Modernism and After* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).

foreground and background impede sympathetic identification with the subjects of his work. Similarly, modernist poets sought to eliminate their own subjective presences from their works so as to foreground the materiality of language. Within this framework, meaning is no longer a received entity referred to by language but is rather generated in and through the formal permutations of language itself. The poetic text thus becomes a high-energy construct marked by acts of immediate perception that create possibilities for new ways of thinking and seeing.

The urge to do away with subjective presence informed a broad range of aesthetic experiments within modernist art and literature. Some of the most aesthetically radical literary work in this line was produced by Gertrude Stein. Through formal techniques such as repetition within difference Stein broke with mimetic representation and created textual surfaces marked by the compositional energy of a continuous present. She stripped words of received associations and arranged them in such a way as to multiply the arrow of reference. Subjectivity, in her work, is decentered and in a constant state of becoming, which is both a cause and effect of her investment in linguistic constructions that are always fluid and unpredictable. As Ulla Dydo has written, "Stein's [are]…the perfect texts for…doing away with the link between text and author" (19).[9] In place of identifiable subjective presence, there are objective and mobile acts of perception within language, generating new constructions that are "free of the regimentation of the world."[10]

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[9] Ulla Dydo, *Gertrude Stein: The Language that Rises, 1923-1934* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2003).

[10] Ibid., p. 22.

In relation to the radical manifestation of a subject-less aesthetic, Marcel Duchamp can readily be seen as Stein's counterpart in the world of modernist art. Committed to remaining undefined and uncontained as an artist, Duchamp was invested in freeing his art from the signs of individualized aesthetic choice and labor. From his early chance-based work, such as *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913-1914), to his use of mechanical drawing for his monumental *Large Glass* (1915-1923), to his breakthrough ready-mades, where making of any kind was replaced by the process of nomination, he sought to do away with personal expression by eliminating the artist's touch: "Forgetting the hand completely, that's the idea."[11] Duchamp's ambition to evacuate personal presence from his work was supported by his idea of art as a vehicle for deracinated thought and his investment in affective neutrality. It is on the basis of such features that Duchamp's aesthetic commitments can be aligned with those of figures, like Eliot and Adorno, who would seem to occupy a different space of modernist aesthetics.[12]

In the last several decades, the autonomy of the modernist work of art and the capacity of modernist authors and artists to remain indeterminate and evade the constraints of modernity have been challenged by a large and influential body of criticism that examines modernism as a socio-cultural formation. A major component of what has

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[11] Marcel Duchamp, interview with Calvin Tomkins, qtd. in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), p. 127.

[12] See Marjorie Perloff, "Duchamp's Eliot: The Detours of Tradition and the Persistence of Individual Talent" in *T.S. Eliot and the Concept of Tradition*, ed. Giovanni Cianci and Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007). In this article, Perloff links Duchamp and Eliot, writing: "Thus, we can think of Eliot's famous sentence, 'The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality,' as a kind of call to arms, not, as is usually thought, only for such conservative New Critical poets as Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren, but for the avant-garde as well" (179). See also Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," in *Marcel Duchamp, Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Oxford UP, 1973). In this essay, Duchamp cites Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" to conceptualize the artist as "a mediumistic being" (138).

been called the "new modernist studies," this critical wave has concentrated on the material underpinnings of modernism, focusing on the institutions of publicity, circulation, and support that propelled cultural production. This direction in modernist studies was initiated by Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide* (1986).[13] In that work, Huyssen posits that whereas modernism was defined by its opposition to mass culture and commitment to the principles of aesthetic autonomy, postmodernism, following the lead of the historical avant-gardes, is invested in bridging the great divide between high and low and art and life. Huyssen thus frames modernism as a reactionary movement by demonstrating the ways it aggressively distinguished itself from an allegedly degraded mass culture.

Scholars have since questioned the rigid and oppositional character of the great divide, revealing how modernism, in spite of its claims to purity, was deeply invested in the commercial marketplace.[14] Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism* (1998),[15] for instance, shines a light on the ways canonical modernist figures were involved in the creation of an exclusive field of cultural production. He reveals that modernists cultivated powerful patronage networks and deployed various reputation building strategies to

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[13] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986). Cited in-text from here on out.

[14] Aside from the ones I directly engage with in this introduction, important works in this critical wave include: Jennifer Wicke, *Advertising Fictions* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988); Kevin Dettmar and Stephen J. Watts, eds. *Marketing Modernisms* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1996); Mark Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2001); Faye Hammill, *Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture Between the Wars* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2007); Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* (123:3), 2008; Aaron Jaffe and Jonathan Goldman, eds., *Modernist Star Maps: Celebrity, Modernity, Culture* (London: Ashgate Publications, 2010).

[15] Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999). Cited in-text from here on out.

transform literary texts into elite commodities so as to accumulate economic and cultural capital. A key methodological innovation that informs Rainey's work is the concept of "not reading." That is, Rainey does not enga ge in traditional close reading of modernist texts because, in his view, they obscure the socio-economic conditions in which modernism emerged. Rainey's analysis of those conditions leads him to argue that modernism, far from resisting commodification, is "a strategy whereby the work of art invites and solicits its commodification" (3).

Subsequent scholarship has focused on exploring the mechanics of that strategy by interpreting it through the lens of celebrity studies.[16] An exemplary work in this vein is Aaron Jaffe's *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005).[17] Jaffe, who adopts Rainey's practice of "not reading," introduces the concept of the "textual imprimatur," a kind of star image that translates an author's signature style into an elite brand name. With a focus on what he calls "secondary literary labors" (3) – e.g. anthologies, introductions – Jaffe argues that canonical modernists cultivated distinctive and exclusive positions within the modernist cultural field by deploying their autonomous values as promotional vehicles. He discloses, in other words, the "deep resemblances between public literary persona and the ideal, magisterial author presupposed in modernist theories of literary production" (4). The latest evolution of this scholarship has involved

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[16] Celebrity studies field has been fast growing in the last ten years and there's been particular attention to Gertrude Stein as a modernist celebrity: Timothy Galow, *Writing Celebrity: Stein, Fitzgerald, and the Modern(ist) Art of Self-Fashioning* (Ne York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Bryce Conrad. "Gertrude Stein in the American Marketplace." *Journal of Modern Literature* 19.2 (Fall 1998): 215-233); Kirk Curnutt, "Inside and Outside: Gertrude Stein on Identity, Celebrity, and Authenticity." *Journal of Modern Literature* 23. 2 (Winter 1999-2000): 291-308); Karen Leick, *Gertrude Stein and the Making of an American Celebrity* (New York, Routledge, 2009)

[17] Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010). Cited in-text from here on out.

demonstrating that modernist texts, neglected under the sign of "not reading," are in fact animated by the pursuit of exclusive distinction. In *Modernism is the Literature of Celebrity* (2011), for instance, Jonathan Goldman argues:

> Modernist style, an objectified version of Jaffe's authorial imprimatur, serves to identify the authorial subject with the text. By situating the subject within writing, modernism, we might say, fantasizes that it can insulate the subject from material culture. Modernism thus advances the idea of the author, and therefore the celebrity, as a paradigmatic subjectivity, all the while replicating the process by which one turns the self into an object. As this subjectivity is located within writing and not the body, it might be said to in fact constitute the text, which therefore emerges as a variation on the celebrity sign.[18]

In his characterization of this modernist "fantasy," Goldman turns a critical eye on canonical formulations of the autonomy of the modernist text and the process of objectification that constitutes it. For Goldman, as for Rainey and Jaffe before him, it is theorists like Adorno who are the target. What becomes apparent, though, is that Goldman's thesis inverts Adorno's. That is, modernist aesthetics, in Adorno's thinking, is defined by the process of turning the empirical self into a textual object. Under the conditions of modernity, the modern subject is always already stripped of his autonomy. Objectification into textual form, therefore, constitutes a corrective response to this state of affairs by offering the possibility of liberation from social constraints. As Adorno famously wrote, "the office of art… [is] to resist by its form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men's heads" (80).[19] Goldman and others

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[18] Jonathan Goldman, *Modernism is the Literature of Celebrity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011): 10-12. Cited in-text from here on out.

[19] Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," *Notes to Literature: Volume Two*. ed. Rolf Tiedemann (New York: Columbia UP, 1992).

acknowledge the process of objectification as fundamental to modernist aesthetics but put a radically different spin on it. For them, this process was part and parcel of modernism's collusion with celebrity culture. The commitment of modernist figures to aesthetic autonomy and impersonalization constituted the means by which they transformed themselves into magisterial market successes. Thus if for Adorno the modernist text is a means of liberation, for Goldman it is nothing more than "a variation on the celebrity sign."

What has supported the thesis that modernist autonomous values are at the service of promotional ends is the notion that those values are imaginary. The trajectory of scholarship concerned with modernism as a socio-cultural formation has been animated by successive efforts to amplify the porousness of the Great Divide. We can witness this trend even in the titles of successive critical works in this vein. Jaffe's *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity*, which merely suggests a relation between the two, leads to Goldman's *Modernism is the Literature of Celebrity*, which posits the movement's complicity in the commercial marketplace. It is this trend that compelled Huyssen to revise his initial conceptualization of the Great Divide:

> Much valuable recent work on the editing, marketing, and dissemination of modernism has misconstrued my earlier definition of the Great Divide as a static binary of high modernism vs. the market. My argument was rather that there had been, since the mid-nineteenth century in Europe, a powerful imaginary insisting on the divide while time and again violating that categorical separation in practice.[20]

[20] Andreas Huyssen, "High/Low in an Expanded Field." (*Modernism/Modernity* 9 (2002): 363-74.)

Insistence on the divide is imaginary because, arguably, it has no reflection in the material practices ("editing, marketing, and dissemination") of cultural modernism, or, if it does, it serves only as a vehicle for accomplishing the aims of those practices. The implication of Huyssen's position is that the Great Divide and the autonomous values that constitute it are a strictly textual phenomenon. This idea represents the connecting link between canonical formulations of modernist autonomy (such as Adorno's) and those within the recent tradition of materialist modernism. Adorno, after all, also construed modernist autonomy as imaginary because, in his view, autonomy from the pervasive conditions of modernity could only be achieved in and through particular formal permutations in modernist texts. Thus, although both Adorno and critics such as Goldman differ radically about the significance of modernist autonomous subjectivity, they both adhere to the latter's notion that such "subjectivity is located within writing and not the body" (12).

The intent of this dissertation is to show the analytical value of locating modernist autonomy – particularly autonomy from the display of the biographical self – within the very material contexts from which it has been deemed to be absent. Rather than positing modernist autonomous subjectivity as strictly a textual phenomenon, I show the way it informed the biographical experience of two exemplary figures as they navigated the modernist cultural field. Duchamp's and Stein's commitment to impersonality within their aesthetic experiments was matched by their intention to be public figures who could avoid publicizing their private selves. The desire for personal freedom within modernity and modernism, in other words, was interwoven with the drive to be indeterminate or detached within their texts. Remaining public but unidentifiable, however, was a

precarious balancing act that persistently conflicted with Duchamp's and Stein's investment in forging successful modernist careers. The various forms of market activity they undertook – tapping networks of publicity to transform themselves into desirable commodities; competing with other artists for cultural capital; catering to the tastes of mass audiences – threatened their sense of autonomy and revealed the profound contradictions of their positions. They simultaneously sought market success and personal freedom. In this dynamic the latter was persistently lost, surrendered or abandoned, as Duchamp and Stein engaged in cultivating distinctive positions within the modernist cultural field.

My focus in this dissertation is on the critical moments when autonomy is lost and the long chains of consequences (both in terms of socio-cultural positioning and textual aesthetics) that issue from that loss. To discern and understand those consequences it is necessary to ground analysis at the level of affective experience. The moments when Duchamp and Stein came up against the exposure of their biographical selves resulted in a host of "ugly feelings" such as anxiety, boredom, and anger. I follow Sianne Ngai's conceptualization of ugly feelings and, in particular, her insight that the examination of such feelings can shed light on the condition of suspended agency. I thus approach Duchamp's and Stein's ugly feelings "as unusually knotted or condensed 'interpretations of predicaments' – that is, signs that not only render visible different registers of problem (formal, ideological, sociohistorical) but conjoin these problems in a distinctive manner."[21] For Duchamp and Stein, losing autonomy led to a state of suspended agency

[21] Siannge Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p.2.

that short-circuited the process of creating texts and works of art that were invested in the principles of aesthetic autonomy. If the cornerstone, as we have seen, of the autonomous modernist work is "a subjectivity that turns into objectivity" (Adorno, 43), the affective experience of losing autonomy functioned to prevent this transformation from taking place. By paying attention to Duchamp's and Stein's ugly feelings, therefore, it becomes possible to distinguish aesthetic modes in which the qualities that traditionally belong to works invested in modernist autonomy – magisterial authorship, affective neutrality, self-sufficiency of language or the pictorial imagination – are embattled and transformed.

A consideration of affect in relation to the experience of autonomy is largely absent from the body of criticism that analyzes modernism as a socio-cultural formation. Within that framework, modernist figures are interpreted in terms of reputation-making strategies that are deployed for the sake of market success. When affective experience that reveals a commitment to autonomy is considered, it is read through a hermeneutics of suspicion that renders such experience as nothing more than another strategy in the pursuit of distinction. This kind of treatment of affective experience derives ultimately from Pierre Bourdieu, whose sociological analysis of culture has constituted a crucial point of reference for Rainey through Goldman.

In *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1996) Bourdieu provides an alternative to philosophically motivated accounts of aesthetics that portray artists as singular creators and works of art as autonomous entities.[22] Through his analysis of the historical development of an autonomous cultural field, Bourdieu derives a model

[22] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*. Citedin-text from here on out.

of cultural production demonstrating that autonomous values are relationally determined through strategic socio-cultural position-taking (that is, modes of production, circulation, and publicity) defined by the pursuit of elite cultural capital. Bourdieu's field theory involves reconstructing the space in which position-taking occurs but he is careful to note that the critical perspective thus gained is not available to the author or artist in the course of position-taking: "The space of position-takings that analysis reconstitutes does not present itself as such to the writer's consciousness; that would oblige us to interpret his choices as conscious strategies of distinction" (93). Bourdieu thus acknowledges that there is a fundamental difference between the experience of position-taking and its critical reconstruction. He addresses this analytical problem by locating the *illusio,* his term for the experience of position-taking, within his field theory model: "But nevertheless it must not be forgotten that this *illusio* is part of the very reality we are concerned to comprehend, and that one must put it into the model designed to account for it, along with everything which combines to produce it and maintain it" (231). In effect, Bourdieu addresses the gap that he has identified between the *illusio* and his model of critical reconstruction by erasing it. To place the *illusio* into the model is equivalent to tearing "oneself out of the *illusio*" (231) given that the model runs counter to the fundamental premises of the *illusio*. The model accounts for the *illusio* by seeing through its surface, by presenting it as what it is not.[23]

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[23] This critique is informed by the notion of surface reading as developed by Sharon Marcus and Steven Best, "Surface Reading: An Introduction" (*Representations,* Vol. 108, No. 1 (Fall 2009)). It is a way of accounting for affective experience as expressed in a text "without construing presence as absence or affirmation as negation" (75) ("Surface Reading," qtd. in Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007)) Surface reading as a model links up with Bruno Latour's pragmatic mode of sociological analysis, which has functioned as a critique of Bourdieu's critical sociology (Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007). Latour rejects totalizing frameworks and symptomatic reading to

Rather than erasing the distinction between the experience of position-taking and its critical reconstruction, I highlight and preserve this difference because it constituted a generative problem for modernist cultural production. As I show through my analysis, Duchamp and Stein were at one and the same time committed to accumulating cultural capital and to preserving the integrity of their biographical selves. They thus occupied contradictory positions that were brought into relief in particular instances when they experienced the loss of their personal autonomy. Duchamp and Stein were both significantly invested in impersonality and in transforming themselves into magisterial textual objects. The affective experience of losing autonomy, however, frustrated the process of transformation and led to texts and pieces of art marked by that frustration.

This dissertation defines and explores four primary features that distinguish the works produced by Duchamp and Stein in the wake of losing their autonomy. The first feature – reassertion of autonomy – describes the particular kind of intent that animates these works. Stein and Duchamp seek to regain the impersonal autonomy they have forfeited or been stripped of, an effort that imbues their texts and works of art with the general mood of loss. This mood is particularized in and through the second feature I identify – negative affect. In place of affective neutrality, there is an array of ugly feelings – boredom, anxiety, desperation, mourning, melancholia – that inform their works with a sense of tension and entrapment that derives from their condition of suspended agency. The expression of ugly feelings is rooted in the third major feature of

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describe a methodology that deploys rather than delimits the various, conflicting ways in which the experience of social actors is produced and registered. In this approach it is imperative "to follow the actors themselves" (12) to study the way they create meaning, and this shifts the idea of surface from a vehicle for ideology that the critic decodes – (e.g. "silk is for high-brow, nylon for low-brow" (40)) – to a material layer that will "transform, translate, distort, and modify" (39) any social message it encounters.

these works – the presence of authorial/artistic personality. Duchamp and Stein carve out positions of visibility for themselves as they seek to reassert their autonomy and express the pain of losing it. Such presence, however, constitutes a source of profound anxiety seeing as it contradicts the object of reasserting autonomy. In effect, the process of reobjectifying themselves in their works is tensely intertwined with the insistent presence of suspended subjectivity. The fourth and final feature is the distinct and hostile relation to the reader/viewer that emerges as a result of the loss of autonomy. It is common for critics to posit that Duchamp's and Stein's aesthetics offer the reader/viewer the opportunity of active engagement and unrestrained play. The idea is that since their works are not invested in transparent representation they do not pin the reader/viewer down to a particular pictorial or linguistic narrative.[24] This thesis, however, applies only to those works in which impersonal autonomy is an achieved object. In the works that are investigated in this dissertation, that achievement is frustrated and transforms Ducham'sp and Stein's relation to the reader/viewer. The loss of autonomy informs an aesthetic that confines the reader/viewer to narratives of that loss. Further, in some of the works under consideration, the reader/viewer is figured as a source of that loss and thus becomes an object of hostility.

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[24] See Juliana Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity* (University of Alabama Press, 2001), who emphasizes the openness of Stein's work and its capacity to give the reader a sense of democratic inclusiveness. See also Duchamp's "The Creative Act," where he identifies the agency that his work gives the spectator, who "brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act" (140).

This dissertation builds on recent critical works that are likewise invested in rethinking the modernist concept of autonomy.[25] Of particular relevance is Andrew Goldstone's *Fictions of Autonomy*, in which modernist autonomy is redefined as a relational value.[26] Working within the emerging methodology of sociology as literature,[27] Goldstone focuses on a wide-array of transnational modernist works to examine the ways in which they attempt to assert relative autonomy "from four kinds of constraint: labor, personality, political community and linguistic reference" (xii).[28] In this formulation, modernist autonomy does not constitute absolute and total freedom from these constraints but is rather a form of relative independence that "draws on and engages with the social world" (3). As Goldstone argues, "Modernism represents autonomy as a distinctive, relatively independent mode of relation with the very domains that seem to constrain it" (15).

The notion of autonomy as a relative value is central to my analysis. Combining the methodologies of the sociology of literature and literature as sociology, the chapters that follow are concerned with examining the relation between impersonal autonomy and the pursuit of market distinction.[29] As has been demonstrated, scholarship in the

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[25] See, for instance, Lisa Siraganian, *Modernism's Other Work: The Art Object's Political Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012).

[26] Andrew Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013).

[27] See David Alworth, "Supermarket Sociology," *New Literary History* (41 (2) 2010: 301-327).

[28] Mark Wollaeger and Kevin J. H. Dettmar, "Series Editors' Foreword," in Andrew Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013).

[29] In his book, Goldstone's focus is "on the way the pursuit of autonomy leads modernism into domains other than the market," (23) but he calls for projects, such as this one, that study modernist autonomy as a relative value in the modernist market: "It is my hope that further work on twentieth-century

materialist modernism vein construes this relation as one in which autonomy is at the service of the pursuit of distinction. Since such scholarship tends to be invested in the critical reconstruction of position-taking à la Bourdieu, autonomy, in this relation, is defined as a strategy for achieving distinction. But if we take autonomy seriously as a distinct value in its own right, then the contradiction that informs this relation begins to emerge. This requires, as I've shown, locating autonomy at the level of affective experience. At that level, the capacity of autonomy to be at the service of distinction is perceived as contradicting its capacity to ensure personal freedom, a perception that functions as a generative force for aesthetic production. I also draw attention to instances of impersonal autonomy – particularly in the chapters devoted to Stein – that are experienced as being entirely counter to the pursuit of distinction. That is, in these instances the commitment to impersonal autonomy is seen as coming at the expense of the pursuit of cultural capital. This demonstrates that even if, at a structural level, autonomy can always be shown to be at the service of distinction, this kind of relationship can remain unregistered at the level of affective experience.

In Chapter One I focus on Duchamp's embattled relationship with the Dada movement. My analysis is based on redefining the concept of detachment as a combination of an investment in impersonal autonomy and a commitment to the pursuit of a distinct position in the modernist cultural field. I show that in the 1920s, Dada threatened Duchamp's detachment by drawing attention to him and seeking to appropriate him as a Dada artist. This left Duchamp in a state of suspended agency

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literature and the marketplace can profit from using the more complex, ramified analysis of autonomy I am proposing" (23).

dominated by the ugly feeling of boredom. It also resulted in a number of works that are invested in what I call the aesthetic of boredom. In those works, marked by aggressive critique and personal presence, Duchamp seeks to reassert his impersonal autonomy. At the same time, these works demonstrate that Duchamp's pursuit of detachment was constituted by a potent contradiction that was the ultimate source of the aesthetic of boredom: all of his attempts to avoid recognition (assert impersonal autonomy) only made him more recognizable within the modernist avant-garde (pursuit of distinction). Thus, the works I consider indicate Duchamp's vexed realization that he himself is responsible for being seen.

In Chapter Two I continue my investigation of Duchamp by exploring his conflicted engagement with the act of exhibiting his work. I focus, initially, on the late 1910s when he decided to stop participating in exhibits. This decision constitutes an exception to the detachment framing that otherwise applies to Duchamp given that it carried the potential of altogether removing him from the modernist market and, thus, threatened his pursuit of distinction. Duchamp responded to this threat of market invisibility by becoming a cultural facilitator and attempting to put on an exhibit of Cubist art in Buenos Aires. As I show, under pressure from his patron, Duchamp was forced to give up his opposition to exhibiting his work. This loss of autonomy would come to inform Duchamp's alienating curatorial practice (encompassing exhibits in 1920, 1938 and 1942), in which he sought to affirm his detachment. Making this effort, however, ultimately brought Duchamp back to the problem of detachment as a contradictory position. His drive to remain unseen would make him only more recognizable.

In Chapter Three I switch gears and turn my attention to the crisis of writing and identity that Gertrude Stein experienced in the wake of achieving popular fame with *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). I begin by situating this experience in relation to an earlier moment, in 1926, when Stein refused, only to eventually to reconsider, giving a lecture at Cambridge. I read Stein's initial refusal as an expression of autonomy constituted by gendered opposition to appealing to audiences by putting her personality before her work. Her ultimate agreement to lecture constituted the loss of her autonomy, an affective experience that would inform *A Novel of Thank You* (1926), a work that was unprecedented in its manifestation of ugly feelings and other markers of unresolved tension. I continue my analysis with a focus on two works of accessible autobiography – "And Now" and *Everybody's Autobiography* – that Stein wrote in the wake of gaining fame. While it has been argued that in these works Stein successfully crosses the Great Divide, I contextualize this crossing as a compulsory performance that violated her autonomous opposition to the display of authorial personality. I show that in both works Stein disrupts her performance of crossing by repurposing her signature experimental style to evacuate meaning and defy the general reader expecting clarity and coherence.

In Chapter Four I consider the way Stein's vexed experience of fame affected her experimental work in the 1930s. Focusing on *Blood on the Dining Room Floor* (1933) and *The Geographical History of America Or The Relation Of Human Nature To The Human Mind* (1936), I demonstrate that these two works do not, as critics have posited, bridge Stein's experimental and accessible styles but rather hectically vacillate between them. I argue that Stein is therefore suspended between the two styles, with the former representing her commitment to impersonal autonomy and the latter her interest in

retaining the general audience that she had won through *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas.* The particular form of suspended agency that Stein experienced is translated in these two works through the presence of the affect of sadness. What is notable about Stein's expression of sadness is that it is persistently subjected to the mechanism of repression. I invoke Freud to account for this repression and demonstrate that in these works Stein is suspended between mourning and melancholia.

CHAPTER 1:

MARCEL DUCHAMP VS DADA:

THE PROBLEM OF DETACHMENT AND AESTHETIC BOREDOM

Marcel Duchamp and his works are defined in terms of detachment. This quality "permeates his personality and works" and sums up the keywords (indifference, freedom, neutrality) that are applied to describe his special brand of iconoclasm.[30] For Duchamp, to be detached was to be unencumbered by social, cultural or aesthetic exigencies. Through detachment, he sought to remain undefined and uncontained as an artist and to free his art from the signs of individualized aesthetic choice and labor. Over the course of his career, he sought to do away with personal expression by eliminating the artist's touch: "Forgetting the hand completely, that's the idea."[31] This ambition to evacuate personal presence from his work was tied to his commitment to affective neutrality. These essential qualities of Duchamp's aesthetics also defined his approach to life and his career: his go-to phrase in the face of external demands was "that is of no importance."

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[30] Richter, Hans, "In Memoriam of a Friend," *Studies in the Twentieth Century* (no. 2 Fall1968), p. 149. Cited in-text from here on out.

[31] Marcel Duchamp, interview with Calvin Tomkins, qtd. in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), p. 193. Cited in-text from here on out.

Within Duchamp studies, the power of detachment as an explanatory force has resulted in the assumption that Duchamp's embodiment of this quality was categorical. Marjorie Perloff speaks of "the fabled Duchampian indifference."[32] Indeed, Duchamp's commitment to keeping at a remove has been transformed into a kind of fable in which detachment is always a secure achievement. In this chapter, I intend to qualify and deepen our understanding of Duchamp's detachment by treating it not as a given but as the contested and contradictory value it actually was. This approach is based on reconceptualizing his detachment as a combination of two intertwined but fundamentally separate commitments. On the one hand, Duchamp's detachment reflected his investment in impersonal autonomy; on the other, it stood for his interest in securing a distinct (meaning singular, elite and unaffiliated) position within the cultural field of the modernist avant-garde.

In the 1920s, Duchamp's commitment to detachment was challenged because of the attention he was receiving from artists associated with the Dada movement, particularly Tristan Tzara and André Breton. By embracing the anti-art aesthetic that Duchamp was known for, and by characterizing him as an important precursor to its own efforts, Dada effectively sought to appropriate him as a Dada artist. In light of this pressure, Duchamp's work and affective condition in the 1920s came to be informed by a quality that can be regarded as the negative twin of detachment: boredom. While both detachment and boredom are emblems of disengagement, the former is associated with freedom, while the latter is a symptom of constraint. Detachment is an affect-neutral

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[32] Marjorie Perloff. "Dada without Duchamp / Duchamp without Dada: Avant-Garde Tradition and the Individual Talent," Stanford Humanities Review, 7.1 (1999). Cited in-text form here on out.

position; boredom, conversely, plays host to an array of ugly feelings that emerge from the predicament of suspended agency.

I argue that Duchamp responded to this predicament with what I am calling an aesthetic of boredom. As manifested in his art magazine *New York Dada* and the Dada necklace project, this aesthetic is characterized by qualities that distinguish it significantly from Duchamp's detached mode. Impersonal neutrality is replaced by aggressive critique that, in targeting the Dada project, registers Duchamp's suspended agency and seeks to reassert his status as a detached figure at the leading edge of the modernist avant-garde. The bored aesthetic demonstrates, as I will show, in particular, through readings of *Wanted: $2,000 Reward* (1923) and *The Monte Carlo Bond* (1924), that Duchamp's pursuit of detachment was constituted by a powerful and productive contradiction. In these works Duchamp responded to the fact that Dada's attention – in the form of such reverential essays as Breton's "Marcel Duchamp" – served to identify him as an individual, publicly circulating, in effect, Duchamp's biographical self. This loss of detachment not only occasioned an effort by Duchamp to win it back; it also marked the recognition that he himself was responsible for the loss. His pursuit of detachment was based on the quality of elusiveness – i.e. it was a manifestation of his commitment to impersonal autonomy. Yet this pursuit was also intended to make it possible for Duchamp to become *recognized* as an elite artist. Remaining unidentifiable functioned, in effect, as a means of securing a distinctive and visible position within the modernist cultural field. The ultimate source of the aesthetic of boredom, therefore, was that Duchamp's position of detachment was constituted by a contradiction between his investment in impersonal autonomy and in a distinctive cultural position. While he was

ultimately successful in resisting the efforts of Dada to absorb him, the generative tension between his drive to both evade and attain recognition would remain unresolved.

In the 1920s, the most advanced wing of the modernist cultural field included Duchamp as well as up-and-coming avant-gardists who viewed him as a touchstone figure. For younger artists such as Tzara and Breton, he was an emblematic avant-garde artist whose provocative work offered inspiration for their own attacks upon the status quo. Duchamp, for his part, seems to have been uninterested in the destructive manifestoes and spectacular displays of his artistic bedfellows. "The Dadas," he reported in a 1921 letter to his friend Ettie Stettheimer, "made too much noise at a Futurist (sound effects) show…from afar, these things, these Movements take on a kind of appeal they don't have close up, I can assure you."[33] This kind of blithe dismissal, where Duchamp affirms his detachment, has dramatically influenced the way critics have interpreted his position vis-à-vis the younger avant-garde generation. Jerrold Siegel, for instance, asserts, "Duchamp's mood of quiet irony, always bordering on indifference, would keep him coolly apart from those – dadas and surrealists – who sought to fire up the engines of artistic rebellion at the end of WWI."[34] Meanwhile, Pierre Cabanne generalizes this attitude in arguing, "throughout his life, [Duchamp] has rejected, as much as one can, that game of rivalry which makes so many modern artists uneasy and angry, or bitter."[35]

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[33] Marcel Duchamp, *Affectionately, Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp,* Eds. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk Ludion, Trans. Jill Taylor (Ghent: Ludion Press, 2000), p.99. Cited in-text from here on out.

[34] Jerrold Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: Desire, Liberation, and the Self in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 146-147.

[35] Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, Trans. Ron Padgett (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p 8. Cited in-text from here on out.

Reading Duchamp's relation to other artists in terms of detachment, however, risks elevating him to a transcendent position over and above the modernist cultural field. It is a fundamentally dehistoricizing operation that replaces actual social relations with the myth of unencumbered, autonomous being. Cabanne himself implicitly acknowledges the blind spots of the detachment framing through his qualification that Duchamp did not fully reject the rivalry game but only "as much as one can." This important qualification, if pursued, reveals that although Duchamp did not engage in the kind of overt and vehement rivalries that marked the careers of, say, Tzara or Breton, he was, nevertheless, invested in distinguishing himself from other avant-gardists. There is a subtle example of this in his evaluation of the Dada performance cited above, where he not only affirms his distance from Dada but also suggests that their noisy performances are inferior to his own relatively quiet and subtle brand of iconoclasm.

Duchamp's investment in rivaling Dada and his effort to mask this very objective are evident in his extensive interviews with Pierre Cabanne toward the end of his life. Looking back on his career, Duchamp gives the following description of how he came to be aware of Dada:

> In Tzara's book, *The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Fire Extinguisher*. I think he sent it to us, to me or to Picabia, rather early, in 1917, I think, or at the end of 1916. It interested us but I didn't know what Dada was, or even that the word existed. When Picabia went to France, I learned what it was through his letters, but that was the sole exchange at that time. (55)

It is a testament to how plugged in Duchamp was within the global avant-garde network that his first encounter with Dada, via Tzara's book, happened not long after it emerged as a movement in 1916 at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. Curiously, this encounter, as Duchamp goes on to elaborate, did not give him a sense of what Dada was.

This knowledge came through his subsequent correspondence with Picabia, but even then, as Duchamp implies, his engagement with information about the movement was limited ("that was the sole exchange at that time"). Duchamp thus acknowledges early awareness of Dada only to immediately downplay that awareness. He emphasizes his detached relation to Dada in order to maintain his position as a one-of-a-kind modernist artist, a position that depended on the idea of his elevated detachment. This performance of purity becomes unsettled, however, when Cabanne suggests that the idea for the little art magazines *The Blind Man* (1917) and *Rongwrong* (1917), which Duchamp put out with Walter Arensberg and Henri-Pierre Roché, came from Dada. Duchamp counters by disclaiming the connection: "But, you know, it wasn't at all after seeing Dada things that we did it" (56). Cabanne then presses the point, saying, "it was nevertheless in the Dada spirit," which leads to this knotty reply from Duchamp: "It was parallel, if you wish, but not directly influenced. It wasn't Dada, but it was in the same spirit, without, however, being in the Zurich spirit, although Picabia did things in Zurich" (56). This response is telling not only because it indicates that Duchamp knew more of Dada at the time than he has let on but also because of the great pains he takes to deny the possibility that his work was in any way directly indebted to Dada. His embattled and contradictory insistence on detachment demonstrates that if we look through his performance of purity we can see that he was anything but "coolly apart" from the younger artists. He sought continually to distinguish his artistic practice from that of Dada because the movement posed a threat to his detached position within the modernist avant-garde.

Marjorie Perloff has convincingly argued that Duchamp's aesthetics did not overlap with Dada given that he did not work in any of the emblematic Dada genres: "He

composed neither simultaneous collaborative poems nor 'abstract' phonetic ones. He wrote no manifestoes, produced no group exhibitions, did not make collages or photomontages from newspaper fragments and everyday objects…or create abstract 'unconscious' compositions" (4). Further, Perloff makes the point, following Thierry de Duve,[36] that "the general category of Dada 'negation,' the rebellion against all established art forms and their discourses, applies to Duchamp only superficially" (4), since Duchamp sought to negate not art as such but rather only "retinal art."

The distinctions that Perloff draws are legitimate but they also overlook the fundamental alignment between Dada and Duchamp within the space of modernist cultural production. Whether Duchamp was intent on negating art as such or "retinal art," he sought to break with aesthetics of the past, a radical position that placed him squarely within the parameters of Dada. "Dada's rejection of all traditions, its nose-thumbing attitude toward social values (including art), its indifference, and at a deeper level its denial of art's interpretive function – Dada demanded that art be a part of life rather than a commentary on life or an improvement on life – all this was very close to Duchamp's own thinking" (Tomkins, 192). Whether in its heyday or afterlife, Dada always sought to claim Duchamp as one of its own. In his insider's account of the movement, Hans Richter states that Duchamp's supposed fatalism vis-à-vis art animated a central dimension of Dada, and, on this basis, argues, "Duchamp's discoveries belong to Dada" (91). For the Dadaists, Duchamp was a precursor whose work was cited as a guarantee of avant-garde radicalism – as when Tristan Tzara, at a Dada event in 1920, used Duchamp's bicycle

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[36] Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

wheel as a prop in performing *The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Fire Extinguisher* (145).[37]

The attention Dada lavished on Duchamp functioned to fortify his position in the modernist avant-garde by singling him out as a notable artist. Duchamp acknowledged this attention by working on behalf of Dada, including selling and distributing copies of the magazine *Dada,* which brought the movement to the attention of the New York art world. Yet if Dada made Duchamp a more notable artist, it also qualified his claim to detachment within the modernist avant-garde. It is not just that Dada and Duchamp, with their overlapping commitments to anti-art, occupied the same cultural space but that they were locked into competition with one another. From his emergence as a radical artist, Duchamp came to occupy a position in what Bourdieu has called the "unconsecrated avant-garde"[38] – that is, the purest area of the cultural sphere allowing for the greatest amount of artistic freedom and the highest potential for elite cultural capital. This position, however, became precarious when Dada came on the scene. By classifying Duchamp as an important precursor it threatened to shift him into the "consecrated avant-garde" – that is, the area of the cultural sphere occupied by avant-garde figures who have become established, whose initial radicalism has been recognized and absorbed by the cultural field. From this perspective, the fact that Dada mined different genres from Duchamp only intensified the competition between them. Indeed, Dada performances, with their spectacular erasure of the distinction between art and life, could readily be seen

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[37] Marius Hentea, *TaTa Dada: The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014). Cited in-text from here on out.

[38] Bourdieu, p. 120.

as an attempt to rival and outdo Duchamp's ready-mades, the works that originally sought to undermine that distinction. Having followers, therefore, undercut Duchamp's claim to detachment. It should come as no surprise, then, that in his interviews with Cabanne, he sought to retrospectively contain that threat by insisting on his detached position:

> *Cabanne*: Your position was considered exemplary, but was hardly followed.
>
> *Duchamp*: Why would you follow it? You can't make money with it.
>
> *Cabanne*: You would have disciples.
>
> *Duchamp*: No. It isn't a formula for a school of painting in which one follows a master. In my opinion, it was a more elevated position. (43).

But this was not merely a retrospective position. Duchamp's embattled relation to Dada comes to the fore in the single-issue magazine he edited and published with Man Ray: *New York Dada* (1921).[39] The appearance of this magazine derived in no small part from the efforts of Tzara, Dada's energetic impresario, to establish the movement as a global phenomenon. From the beginning, Tzara coordinated what Marius Hentea has called "the postal internationalization of Dada" (75). He busied himself with sending issues of Dada publications (*Cabaret Voltaire, Dada)* to members of the international avant-garde with the intention not just to signal the existence of the movement but to lay the groundwork for the emergence of Dada outposts throughout the world. *New York*

[39] Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, *New York Dada* (New York). Monoskop.org. Accessed 6/18/2016. Cited in-text from here on out.

Dada can thus be seen as a product of this global effort. But if the publication functioned to diffuse Dada's anti-spirit, it also critiqued the movement in a way that reflected Duchamp's interest in distancing himself from it.

New York Dada differs from Dada magazines of the period in terms of its commitment to parodying consumer culture. While other Dada publications, as Emily Hage has argued, subverted the strategies and language of mass consumer periodicals, this effort commonly encompassed discrete components interspersed amidst content that clearly marked the magazines as avant-garde publications. "*New York Dada*, on the other hand, is steeped in the American mass print culture that surrounded it…more than simply imitating and referencing certain parts of commercial publications, the editors of New York Dada appropriated the genre as a whole."[40] *New York Dada* not only assumed the material markers (like page size and price) of commercial publications but also featured content and "advertising" that aped the strategies of such publications. In so doing, the magazine pointed up the way in which mass consumer publications targeted and manipulated their female audiences. Among the content in this issue is a satirical piece – "Pug Debs Make Society Bow" – which figures the artists Marsden Hartley and Joseph Stella as debutantes and mimics the society column's finicky obsession with appearances: "Master Marsden will be attired in a neat but not gaudy set of tight-fitting gloves and will have a V-back in front and on both sides. He will wear very short skirts gathered at the waist with a nickel's worth of live leather belting" (3). This immersion in gendered discourse served not only to critique mass consumer publications but also Dada itself. By

[40] Emily Hage, "The Magazine as Readymade: New York Dada and the Transgression of Genre and Gender Boundaries," (*The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, Volume 3, Number 2, 2012), p. 178.

aligning the movement with markers of femininity, Duchamp emphasized the fact that Dada, for all its commitment to breaking through any sort of social categories, was a male-dominated movement. As Hage has argued, the magazine "thus effectively leveled the Dada journals with magazines increasingly targeting women, revealing the many similarities between the two in a manner that even the Dadaists, who prided themselves for breaking down divisions between art and life, might have found unsettling" (190-191).

New York Dada is disruptive as well in the way it handles the issue of authorship. The magazine does not feature a masthead and nowhere is it indicated that Duchamp and Man Ray were responsible for its structure and most of its content. The decision to mask their involvement expressed, as Man Ray would later explain, "our contempt for credits and merits" (cited in Hage 188). Indeed, evading authorial attribution was by this point a hallmark of Duchamp's artistic and social practice. Deriving from his general commitment to negating the artist's touch, this tactic was a notable feature of Duchamp's infamous *Fountain* (1917), which he prominently signed with the name "R. Mutt." Duchamp's drive to evade direct association with his own work became subsequently linked with the fluid performance of gender through his female alter ego Rrose Sélavy. This figure first appeared in 1920 when Duchamp attached her name to a readymade – *Fresh Widow* (1920) – which consists of a miniature French window with pieces of black leather covering the eight glass panes. The title and "authorial signature" appear at the base of the piece in large stenciled letters: FRESH WIDOW COPYRIGHT ROSE *SELAVY* 1920. By attributing copyright to a fictional persona, Duchamp undermined the relationship between creation and possession while, simultaneously, troubling the

distinction between male and female. This effect is also produced in *New York Dada*, whose cover features an assisted readymade consisting of an image of Riguad perfume on which Duchamp superimposed a headshot of Sélavy and the punning label "Belle Haleine – Eau de Voilette."[41] This piece not only blurs the boundary between content and advertisement, but also, through its presentation of Duchamp as Sélavy, a veiling that the label emphasizes, points to the magazine's investment in cutting through the circuits of authority and authorship (See Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, *New York Dada* (New York). Monoskop.org. Accessed 6/18/2016.

[41] "Belle Haleine" – literally, "beautiful breath" – puns on "beautiful Helen"; "Eau de Voilette" – literally, "veil water" – puns on "eau de violette," or "violet water."

Given this investment it is curious, then, that one of the items in the magazine is an authorization by Tzara allowing Duchamp and Ray to use "Dada" in the title of their magazine. Duchamp himself requested this authorization in a letter (January 20, 1921) to Francis Picabia about his plan to start *New York Dada*: "Would you be kind enough to ask Tzara for a short publishing authorization that we could put on the magazine?" (95). The exaggerated politeness of the language here hints at the evident mischievousness of Duchamp's request. Dada was presented as an anarchic and decentralized movement whose global ambitions were markedly non-authoritarian. As Hantea has pointed out, Tzara's letters publicizing Dada emphasized that "the recipients of the correspondence could do with Dada whatever they wished" (75). Compelled to perform a speech act that contradicts the spirit of Dada, Tzara opens by insisting that his authorization is unnecessary: "You ask for authorization to name your periodical Dada. But Dada belongs to everybody" (2). Tzara then proceeds to explain that Dada as a concept is an empty signifier and that the movement is far from another "ism": "For Dada was to say nothing and to lead to no explanation of this offshoot of relationship which is not a dogma nor a school, but rather a constellation of individuals and of free facets" (2). For all this insistence on Dada as an unbounded force, however, the movement in fact was anything but an unregulated free for all. In diffusing Dada throughout the world, Tzara, as the Dada poet Richard Huelsenbeck recalled, positioned himself as the movement's leader: "He packaged, boxed and set: he bombarded letters to Frenchmen and Italians; little by little, he made himself the 'center'" (cited in Hentea, p. 81). Tzara zealously patrolled the boundaries of Dada, dictating the scope and nature of Dada publications and performances as well as who was in and who was out. By having Tzara authorize *New*

York Dada, therefore, Duchamp pointed up the fact that Dada largely belonged to Tzara. Meanwhile, Duchamp's own authorial absence from the magazine served as a stark point of contrast. It functioned to challenge the narrative that Dada was advancing beyond him and to thwart the possibility that he would be relocated into the consecrated avant-garde. The impetus for Duchamp's critical take on Dada can be further illustrated by noting that his name does in fact appear in the magazine. It is there in Tzara's authorization, which includes a lengthy list of Dada collaborators with Duchamp's name just one among many.

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Duchamp's career in the 1920s stands out not only because of his involvement in a relational competition with Dada but also because his mood during this time became dominated by the negative affect of boredom. Associated with such symptoms as dullness, tedium and irritation, boredom emerges from an ontological absence of desire that denies investment in productive activity. This condition of immobilization (Ngai, p. 270) is evident throughout Duchamp's letters to family and friends in the 1920s. His correspondence is peppered with abrupt and emphatic exclamations that, as he writes in a letter to Francis Picabia, he is "doing nothing" (126). Duchamp persistently links his profound state of inertia with a sense of disgust and repulsion that is characteristic of the way boredom forecloses the possibility of entering a positive affective state. He opens a letter to his friend Henri-Pierre Roche, for instance, with the negative affirmation, "No, I really don't feel like broadening my horizons" (105). Here and elsewhere, Duchamp

voices an aggressive lack of interest that is antipodes apart from the placidity of detachment. To engage with the world is an irritating prospect because, under the condition of boredom, the world and its myriad possibilities are utterly devoid of significance. Duchamp captures this leveling effect of boredom when he writes, in a letter to his friend Ettie Stettheimer, "Wherever I am, I feel like I'm in a waiting room. It's tiring because the train is always very late" (141). By describing his felt experience of boredom in terms of waiting for a delayed train, Duchamp poignantly alludes to a central preoccupation of his artistic career. The idea of delay informed many of his most celebrated and iconoclastic works, most notably *The Large Glass*, which he subtitled "A delay in glass." In that work, the two constituent parties, the bride and the bachelors, are engaged in an erotic interaction whose consummation is continually forestalled. The delay of gratification produces a liberatory effect. As Seigel has argued, "The personae of *The Large Glass* remain forever in the condition of the window-gazer, whose state of being is expanded and animated by desire without ever experiencing the regret and disillusionment that follow from material possession" (97). In a state of boredom, however, Duchamp's concept of delay is utterly transformed. There is no desire or expanded being in the waiting room he occupies; delay serves not to prevent but to represent disillusionment and a sense of profound fatigue. In her study of literary modernism in relation to women's boredom, Allison Pease states, "At root, boredom is a problem of meaning. The bored subject cannot make or does not find his or her situation meaningful" (Pease 4).[42] It is the all-encompassing nature of this problem that Duchamp

[42] Allison Pease, *Modernism, Feminism, and the Culture of Boredom* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012). Cited in-text from here on out.

identifies through his waiting room simile. Boredom is a negative affect that does not merely discourage activity but also empties any experience of meaning. No matter what Duchamp does or where he is, the enervating feeling and perspective of boredom is with him. His sense that he is doing nothing is extrapolated by the force of boredom into his persistent conviction that there is nothing to do.

In his correspondence from this period, Duchamp's experience of boredom and his vexed relation to Dada become interwoven. This occurs prominently, but not exclusively, in his exchanges about the Tzara authorization. Immediately succeeding the overly gracious request indicated above, Duchamp writes: "Here, Nothing, eternally Nothing, very Dada" (95). Duchamp's use of Dada to express the emptiness of his experience of boredom is, on the surface, peculiar. Dada, with its emphasis on destroying extant institutions and systems of thought, was a nihilistic project, but the nothingness of boredom was the antithesis of the clean slate that the Dadas were vehemently calling for. Duchamp, then, does not use Dada in this instance in order to define his condition with greater precision or clarity; at the same time, the allusion cannot be taken as merely a joke. In a subsequent letter to Tzara, Picabia, and Germaine Everling, the conflation of Dada and Duchamp's own personal boredom is linked again to his effort to secure Tzara's authorization: "Tzara, I'm probably going to have your authorization translated so that everybody can 'understand' it. My ambition is to be a professional chess player (anti-fesses Lionel)" (96-97).[43] These two consecutive sentences can be read as a narrative of Duchamp's embattled relationship with Dada. His decision to obtain Tzara's

[43] In this pun, Duchamp substitutes *anti-* for *pro-;* in French, *fesses* is slang for ass; and Lionel stands for the last part of *professional*.

authorization functioned as a means of striking back against a movement that sought to enfold his aesthetic practice within its own program. The second sentence, then, for all its appearance as a non-sequitur, serves as an extension of the first. Duchamp would indeed go on to quit art in favor of playing chess, and here that decision is cast as a rebuttal to Dada. Duchamp's complicated pun on "professional" is much more than a bit of self-deprecation. With his ready-mades, he had originated the anti-art position that Dada, with Tzara at the helm, had gone on to assume and instantiate in spectacular ways. For all its evident radicalism, however, Dada's version of anti-art was still invested in the cultural markers of art making. Duchamp's intention to quit art, therefore, would constitute a relatively purer manifestation of the anti-art position, and, in the process, allow him to advance beyond Dada and claim a heightened form of detachment within the modernist avant-garde.

Boredom is thus linked in Duchamp's case with the notion that Dada functioned as a constraint on his detached position. This speaks to the idea that boredom is an ugly feeling that registers the condition of suspended agency. The verb "bore" entered the English language originally as a marker of "that which pierces, perforates, makes a hole, or makes something hollow" (Pease, 2). As the condition ("-dom") of being bored, then, boredom describes a violent experience, as Pease has argued, in which the self is not only contained within circumscribed limits but also pierced through to the point of profound destabilization: "it is useful to understand boredom not simply as an experience of disgusting weariness (tedium), but importantly as a moment in which that which contains one as a discreet entity has been pierced" (4). Duchamp himself explored this idea of boredom, and prefigured his experience with Dada, through the ready-made he titled

Trébuchet (1917) (Figure 1.2). This work, whose title translates as "trap," was a coatrack that Duchamp initially bought for its stated purpose, only to transform it into a ready-made by bolting it to the floor of his apartment in New York. In an interview in 1953 he explained what brought him to make this work:

> [It was] a real coat hanger that I wanted sometime to put on the wall and hang my things on but I never did come to that – so it was on the floor and I would kick it every minute, every time I went out – I got crazy about it and I said the Hell with it, if it wants to stay there and bore me, I'll nail it down."[44]

The decision to leave a coat rack on the ground as opposed to hanging it up turned an ordinary household item into a threatening implement. With its four iron hooks facing up, the coat rack functioned not only to impede Duchamp's movement but also to produce bodily harm. It is appropriate, then, that Duchamp describes his experience vis-à-vis the coat rack in terms of boredom, a condition that is likewise marked by a sense of piercing entrapment. Duchamp illustrates another defining characteristic of that condition through his temporal relationship to the coat rack. His exaggerated account of how often he would come in contact with it ("I would kick it every minute") points to the way boredom swallows up temporality, creating an "enervating sense of time passing slowly" (Pease, p. 4). This sense of entrapment culminated, for Duchamp, with an access of ugly feeling ("the Hell with it") that provided the motivating force to transform the coat rack into a ready-made. In this process of transformation violence was met with violence. Duchamp nailed down the threatening implement in a physical action that carried profound symbolic overtones. Turning the coat rack into a work of art meant fixing its

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[44] Qtd. in David Joselit, *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp, 1910-1941* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), p. 160.

identity as a boring object. To nail it down was thus to perform a critical act of definition that served Duchamp as a means of asserting himself in relation to an object that limited his movement and bored through his subjectivity.

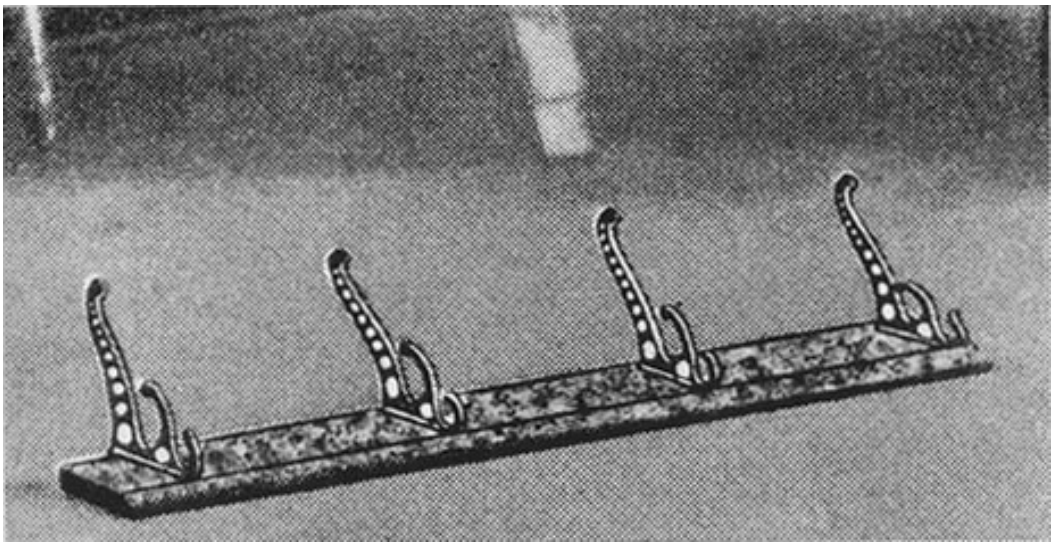

Figure 1.2 Marcel Duchamp. *Trébuchet. 1917, New York. Lost.* Toutfait.com. Accessed 6/11/2016.

It is this kind of retaliatory definition that Duchamp deployed against Dada in response to the boring constraints that it placed upon him. A notable instance of this was his proposal of the Dada necklace project. In an October 1922 letter to Tzara, Duchamp outlines "a big project which might well make some money" (125). It involves mass producing a metal charm out of the four letters in Dada and selling it for a dollar throughout the world. Before launching into this proposal, Duchamp indicates that he has seen Tzara's recent article on Dada in *Vanity Fair*, an article that suggests the grounds for Duchamp's parodic critique. The fact that the article, "Some Memoirs of Dadaism," was published in *Vanity Fair* – a middle-brow publication that provided consumable accounts

of avant-garde aesthetics for a general audience – speaks to Tzara's evident ambition at this time to take Dada into the mainstream.[45] This ambition alienated many artists affiliated with the movement, including Francis Picabia, who expressed "discomfort with the growing popularity of Dada: the capitalist system and the processes of mass celebrity would invariably incorporate, and thus neutralize, it" (Hentea, 144). Tzara's article, indeed, leaves itself open to this critique through his evident attempts to glamorize Dada and associate it with celebrity culture, as when, describing a Dada performance, he emphasizes that "all the Paris celebrities were present."

Duchamp's description of the Dada necklace pinpoints and critiques the way in which Tzara sought to transform Dada from a global avant-garde into a global mainstream phenomenon. Adopting Tzara's strategy of "postal internationalization," he proposes that "a mouth-watering leaflet" be distributed on a vast scale in order "to get people from the provinces from all different countries to buy the insignia for a dollar or equivalent in other currencies" (125). He also targets Dada's destructive critique of consumer culture, which was one of the primary ways in which it asserted its radicalism. In his writings, Tzara often framed Dada perversely as a consumer product, as when, in the authorization, he says, "Dada belongs to everybody. Like the idea of God or of the tooth-brush" (3). It is, subsequently, defined as a kind of miraculous panacea: "Dada abolishes 'nuances'… Dada is an anti 'nuance' cream…Dada offers all kinds of advantages." Dada, in effect, is presented as a kind of snake oil; it is an empty signifier that points up the outsized promises of consumer culture and the profound lack that

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[45] Tristan Tzara, "Some Memoirs of Dadaism," *Vanity Fair*, July 1922. Oldmagazinearticles.com. Accessed 6/18/2016

resides at its core. Duchamp, in turn, deploys Tzara's idiom but applies a very different intention. In suggesting ideas for the leaflet, he writes: "You'll get the idea: nothing 'literary,' 'artistic' – pure medicine, universal panacea, fetish, so that if you have a toothache, go to your dentist and ask him if he's Dada" (126). This would be merely an extension of Tzara's deployment of Dada if it were not for the fact that the Dada necklace project was about literally turning the movement into a cheap, glittery product. It was a recipe for blowing up Dada by selling it out. If there was already discomfort about the popularity of the movement, Duchamp's project would serve only to ratchet up that alienated feeling. Actually creating and distributing the necklace would propel Dada into greater prominence at the cost of its position within the avant-garde, thus relieving Duchamp of a constraint on his pursuit of detachment. Duchamp's strategy, then, is that of the con artist, or, more specifically, the snake oil salesman, who seeks to convince his mark to swallow a remedy whose actual effects are not as advertised, all the while keeping himself at an aggressive remove: "If you are interested, you should start drafting a rough leaflet. I'll send you some ideas if I have any" (126).

Duchamp's critical effort to nail Dada down involved striking a contrast between the movement's investment in identifiability and his own elusiveness. The message of *New York Dada* and the Dada necklace project is that Dada, as represented by Tzara, is wedded to authorization and public celebrity while Duchamp is not. Indeed, Duchamp's effort to assert and, in the face of the threat posed by Dada, reassert his detached position within the modernist avant-garde was always based on escaping identification. We can discern this ambition in his efforts to avoid being associated with his own work (as in *New York Dada* or *Fountain),* his determination to use artistic techniques that eliminated

his own personal touch, and his investment in eluding the public eye. He was delighted, for instance, that when he arrived in New York in 1915, two years after his "Nude Descending a Staircase" had become the controversial star of the 1913 Armory show, the media attention that he attracted affirmed that while the "Nude" was in the public eye Duchamp the artist was not.[46] "'Duchamp' meant nothing. There was no connection between the painting and me…I really lived over there [in New York] without being bothered by the painting's popularity, hiding behind it, obscured. I had been completely squashed by the 'Nude'" (Cabanne 45). This desire to remain hidden and unidentified was challenged, however, by the attention he received from Dada and the artists associated with it. The movement, in effect, encroached on Duchamp's detached cultural position by making a fetish out of his name and his biographical self.

This operation can be witnessed in the critical labors of André Breton, beginning with his 1922 essay "Marcel Duchamp."[47] At the time, Breton, who had been an enthusiastic Dadaist, was in conflict with Tzara and seeking to stake out an independent position within the avant-garde, an effort that would culminate with his inauguration of Surrealism in 1924. Breton recognized that his movement-making efforts would be furthered by aligning himself with Duchamp, and it is this subtext that informs the hero worship of the essay: "It is around this name, a veritable oasis for those still searching, that a particularly devastating assault might be waged, one capable of freeing modern consciousness from that terrible mania for fixation that we have always denounced" (85).

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[46] Take, for instance, the following headline from an interview with Duchamp in the September 12, 1915 issue of the *New York Tribune*: "The Nude-Descending-a-Staircase Man Surveys Us."

[47] André Breton, "Marcel Duchamp," in *The Lost Steps: André Breton*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997). Cited in-text.

That the subject of this opening sentence is Duchamp's name illustrates vividly the cultural capital that that name had accrued through its circulation within avant-garde networks. Moreover, in this resounding opening, and, in fact, throughout his essay, Breton reproduces the message of detachment that constituted the content of the name he glorifies. Thus, Duchamp's role within the cultural field is metaphorized as an oasis in a desert. He is presented as a one-of-a-kind artist "who reaches the critical point of ideas faster than anyone else" (86). The so-called originality of other avant-garde figures "largely derives from him." Breton even pinpoints Duchamp's exceptional effort to keep himself at a distance from rising avant-garde movements: "let us note that Marcel Duchamp's situation with respect to the contemporary movement is unique in that the most recent groups more or less take his name as an authorization…and…we see him detach himself from these groups with complete freedom" (86).

The irony of Breton's emphasis on Duchamp's detachment and elusiveness is that the essay, by drawing such intense attention to him as a notable name, functions to circumscribe those qualities. That is, the affirmation of detachment poses a threat to that detachment. Breton stakes a claim to Duchamp's name and figures it as a rallying point for up-and-coming avant-gardists like himself. It is this kind of attention that fueled the relational struggle that Duchamp was engaged in, a struggle from which, as I have argued, he did not detach himself with the "complete freedom" that he is here credited with.

In his essay, Breton also singles out Duchamp's appearance, to which he devotes a full paragraph of lapidary detail and reverential praise:

> A face whose admirable beauty cannot be attributed to any particularly affecting feature, just as anything one might say to the

> man dulls against a slab so polished that it reveals none of what is going on deep down; a twinkling eye to go with it, without sarcasm or self-indulgence, which dispels the slightest shadow of concentration and evinces a concern for remaining, externally, utterly amiable; elegance at its most fatal, and beyond elegance a truly supreme ease – that is how Marcel Duchamp appeared to me on his last visit to Paris: Duchamp, whom I had never seen and whose intelligence, thanks to the few details I'd picked up, struck me as marvelous. (85).

Here again the emphasis is on Duchamp's rare qualities. Breton presents him as a magisterial modernist artist. He is a figure of elegant surfaces that seem to prevent the beams of external curiosity, such as Breton's, from discerning "what is going on deep down." What becomes apparent from the way Breton identifies Duchamp is that the latter is a figure of fascination precisely because of his elusiveness. Duchamp's intelligence, for instance, strikes Breton as "marvelous" not because he has experienced it in its full capacity but rather because his experience of it has been limited to just a "few details." Those details, however, are evidently tantalizing; scarcity, as Breton inadvertently reveals, is a driver of value. Duchamp's very effort, therefore, to cultivate a detached position in the avant-garde was what transformed him into an attractive figure with whom Breton and others sought to affiliate and identify themselves.

The constraining attention that was directed at Duchamp the individual became the catalyst and subject of a work that is emblematic of the boring aesthetic: *Wanted: $2,000 Reward*. This work is notable because it marked the first time that Duchamp integrated his own portrait into his work. It is a joke poster that he doctored by pasting two passport photos of himself in place of the original images and by changing the last line of the text so that it would read: "known also under name Rrose Sélavy." By placing this work in the context of his embattled relation to Dada artists, *Wanted* can be read as a

reflection of the fact that at this moment Duchamp was in great demand. He had become a scarce and lucrative commodity – Katherine Dreier had recently paid exactly $2,000 for *The Large Glass* – and it is this condition that he reifies through the poster. But Duchamp does not only seek to register the state of being wanted but also strives to undermine the demand that would pin him down. The crime that he has purportedly committed, according to the poster, is fraud. "Bucket shops" were operations that facilitated derivatives trading so that individuals could make bets on stocks they did not own. The opaque way in which these shops operated meant that fraud was rampant, and by the 1920s the US government had instituted laws banning them. The logic of the poster, then, is that Duchamp, the figure who has inspired such overwhelming admiration, is in fact nothing more than a petty criminal. The magisterial modernist artist is a fraudster. The implication is that those, like Breton and Tzara, who invested confidence in him and his aesthetic production, have been defrauded and now he's on the lam.

Wanted is a potent illustration of Duchamp's persistent effort to unsettle attempts to claim and identify him. It seems that by using his passport photos he has finally acceded to revealing himself, but this is only a ruse, a moment of revelation that is simultaneously a profound act of self-concealment. The question that the poster poses without resolving is who are we looking at? Duchamp's name is nowhere to be found; instead, the man in the photos is identified as "George W. Welch, alias Bull, alias Pickens etcetry. etcetry." Fixed identity is replaced by a fraudulent joke, which is extended when we learn that another alias of the wanted man is Rrose Sélavy. The two photos themselves, moreover, serve as means of evasion by obscuring the features that were so

alluring. Breton's Duchamp – he of the beautiful face and the twinkling eye – is replaced by a generic visage.

Figure 1.3 Marcel Duchamp. *Wanted: $2000 Reward.* New York, 1923. Collection Louise Hellstrom. Toutfait.com. Accessed 6/11/2016.

At the same time, however, we know exactly who we are looking at: Marcel Duchamp, the one of a kind artist. For all the self-obfuscation that constitutes *Wanted*, the work could not but be readily associated with Duchamp within the modernist avant-garde. Moreover, the effort to conceal his identity within the work would only serve to make him more wanted, more in demand as an artist, given the equation of scarcity with value. What *Wanted* pinpoints, therefore, is the productive contradiction at the heart of

Duchamp's pursuit of detachment. To attain and preserve his impersonal autonomy, he made art that was bereft of personal presence and navigated the cultural field in such a way as avoid detection. Yet the effort to remain unidentified was also the means by which Duchamp sought to gain the distinctive position he wanted. This end, in effect, ran counter to the means that produced it. Duchamp himself was responsible for the constraining attention he received from Tzara and Breton. Thus, another way of reading the criminal theme of *Wanted* is that it communicates the message that Duchamp is guilty of being seen. Every attempt that he made to evade the public eye or to disclaim the attention of other avant-gardists made him only more identifiable. Duchamp's condition of boredom and the bored aesthetic it gave rise to, then, do not only derive from the fact that the Dadaists sought to claim him as one of their own. They also express the state of being contained within a contradictory position. Duchamp was equally invested in being and not being seen and it was the tension between these two positions that animated his aesthetic and cultural positioning in the 1920s.

Duchamp's pattern of attracting, deflecting, and attracting attention again reached a climactic point with his decision, in the mid-1920's, to quit making art. While this decision has been read as a further instance of his cool and untroubled detachment,[48] I argue that it was instead part of his relational struggle with the Dadaists. By nominally removing himself from the game of art he secured for himself a detached position within it. In other words, his abandonment of art constituted the ultimate trump card in his efforts to resist being absorbed by Dada. Although Perloff has noted that "the emphasis

[48] See Joselit, p. 158; Seigel, p. 201-202.

of avant-garde studies has been on movements rather than individuals," Duchamp, through all his strategic maneuvering, has become a significant exception to this rule. He is not, as he could easily have been, a mere node in the constellation of Dada, but rather, as the title of a critical work on him asserts, "Artist of the Century."[49]

But if, by quitting art, Duchamp was able to preserve his detached position within the modernist cultural field, the central contradiction of that position remained intact and informed a work called the *Monte Carlo Bond* (1924) (Figure 1.4). One of the final works he made before abandoning art, and serving as an emblem for that decision, the *Bond* was connected with Duchamp's scheme to break the bank at Monte Carlo. He had come up with a gambling system for roulette and created the *Bond* as means of raising money for that endeavor. On the one hand, the *Bond* was a legitimate financial document that indicated that Duchamp intended to raise 15,000 francs by issuing 30 bonds at 500 francs apiece (he would sell just a few of the bonds and wound up forsaking the scheme). On the other hand, the work subverts its own legitimacy. The front of the *Bond* shows, as background, Duchamp's pun ("moustiques domestiques demistock") repeated many times in small (or rather fine) print. It is signed and dated by both Duchamp and Rrose Sélavy. The dominant feature of the *Bond* is a photo of Duchamp's head, superimposed on a roulette table, his face lathered with soap and his hair shaped into two devilish horns. This ridiculous portrait not only produces a comedic effect but also marks the conflicted nature of Duchamp's position at the time. To quit art would seem to be a way of escaping public attention and asserting impersonal autonomy. Yet, in Duchamp's case, this move

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[49] Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann , eds.,*Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

served only to bolster his distinction within the world of art. Just as the multiple signatures and the face covered in soapsuds do not, ultimately, conceal Duchamp's investment in this work, his decision to stop making art does not actually make him unidentifiable. Thus this comedic work carries the message that to seek impersonal autonomy by quitting art is as ridiculous as trying to conceal one's identity with soapsuds.

Figure 1.4 Marcel Duchamp. *Monte Carlo Bond*. 1924, Paris. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Toutfait.com. Accessed 6/11/2016.

By way of concluding, I'd like to turn to a work – *Étant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage* (*Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas*) (Figure 1.5) – that Duchamp completed while nominally retired from making art and which demonstrates the lasting impact of the problem of detachment on his work. Created in secret between 1946 and 1966, and then installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art after Duchamp's death in 1968, *Étant donnés* has inspired critical confusion and dismay because it seems to be so at odds with his other works.[50] It consists of a large wooden door at one end of a dark and windowless room. The door features two peepholes which reveal a graphic three-dimensional scene. One sees a lifelike naked female body, her legs spread, lying in a thicket and holding an antique gas lamp that glows weakly against a backdrop of sky, woods, a pond and a waterfall that glitters in the sun.

[50] As the critic Joseph Masheck (*Marcel Duchamp in Perspective* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2002) writes, "[*Étant donnés]* seems startlingly gross and amateurish. It dissolves into a senile hobby, altogether private in its psychological function, out of place and embarrassingly unengaging when shown even to friends. It is not a masterwork of any kind" (23).

Figure 1.5 Marcel Duchamp. *Étant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage.* 1946-1966. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Toutfait.com. Accessed 6/11/2016.

Étant donnés has been seen as a kind of companion work to *The Large Glass* (Figure 1.6) as the two share a number of elements. The waterfall and gas that figure as linguistic and pictorial elements in the former play prominent roles in the latter. Yet, as has been noted, in a number of crucial ways the two works are polar opposites.[51] *The Large Glass* is invested in abstraction and the notes that accompany it demonstrate the kind of neutral affect and objective aesthetic relations that are synonymous with the autonomous modernist text. The narrative that the notes unravel about the bride, located in the top half of the work, and the bachelors, occupying the bottom, foregrounds the delay of gratification: "The bride, the bachelors, and by implication the onlooker as well are suspended in a state of permanent desire" (Tomkins, 11).

[51] Tomkins sums up the critical consensus that "*Étant donnés* is the antithesis to *The Large Glass*" (455).

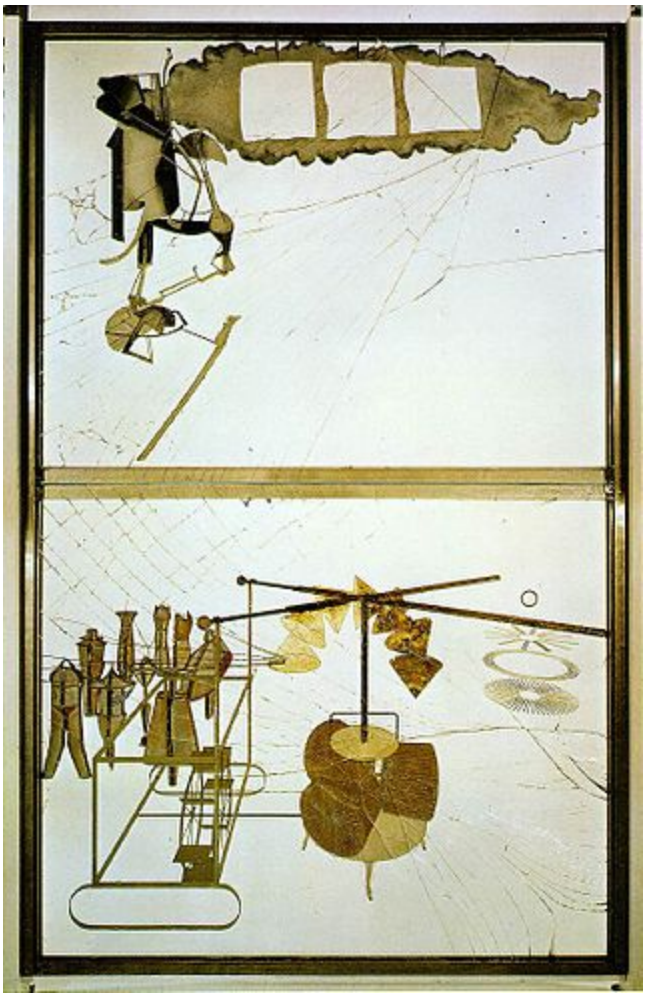

Figure 1.6 Marcel Duchamp. *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*. 1915-1923. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Wikipedia.org. Accessed 6/11/2016.

Étant donnés is distinct from *The Large Glass*, and, indeed, from all of Duchamp's work in the detached mode, in that it is figurative and representational. He took great pains on the plaster cast of the nude figure and covered it with pigskin so that it would have "the quality 'of skin as opposed to the sculpture of bones and volumes'" (cited in Tomkins, 366). The backdrop, meanwhile, embodies the exact kind of "realistic" illusion that Duchamp, with his commitment to negating "retinal art," was thought to vehemently oppose. Further, the nude figure, in exposing herself fully (and

pornographically) is antipodes apart from the bride of *The Large Glass*, whose "blossoming" is perpetually delayed.

The challenge of accounting for *Étant donnés* and situating it in relation to Duchamp's other works can be addressed, however, if it is read in terms of the aesthetic of boredom that I have described in this chapter. Throughout his career, Duchamp was wanted. Figures such as Tzara and Breton, in seeking to claim him for their aesthetic projects, constrained him with their attention, which was geared toward bringing him into view. *Étant donnés,* a work of unadulterated exposure, can be seen as an aggressive response to such attention. By transforming the disembodied and resisting bride of *The Large Glass* into the yielding and embodied nude of *Étant donnés,* Duchamp, from one perspective, gives in to the demand to be seen. But he does so in a way that turns the tables on the viewer by unexpectedly turning him into a voyeur. Thus Duchamp imposes guilt on the act of seeing. At the same time, he bears the guilt of being seen because just as the *Étant donnés* installation – with its dark room and mysterious door – draws the viewer in, he has, through his very cultivation of elusiveness, drawn attention to himself. Made during the time when he had nominally given up art, and seemingly committed himself to not being seen, this work fundamentally exposes the contradictory nature of Duchamp's storied detachment.

CHAPTER 2:

BITING THE SELF: MARCEL DUCHAMP'S ALIENATING CURATORIAL PRACTICE AND THE PROBLEM OF DETACHMENT

On May 19, 1921, Marcel Duchamp wrote a letter to his sister Suzanne and her husband, the artist Jean Crotti, addressing their request, on behalf of Tristan Tzara, that he participate in the Salon Dada exhibit at the Galerie Montaigne in Paris. In declining this invitation to exhibit, Duchamp wrote: "As you know very well, I have nothing to exhibit – that the word exhibit [exposer] is like the word marriage [épouser] to me." Tzara, disappointed by this response, encouraged Crotti to try Duchamp again, which resulted in a telegrammed reply consisting of a succinct and hostile pun – "PODE BAL" – meaning "balls to you."[52] These were aggressive responses to the constraining attention that Dada directed at Duchamp, but they also reflected a distinct source of tension: Duchamp's embattled relation to exhibiting his work.

For approximately three years in the late 1910s, Duchamp refused to participate in exhibits, a remarkable stance, which he designated "a principle," given that at the time he was still a young artist on the make. This notable biographical fact has attracted little attention among critics, but, as I show, it sheds light on his cultural activities –

[52] Duchamp Letters, p. 98. Cited in-text form here on out.

particularly his subsequent work as a curator of exhibits featuring modernist art – and how those activities relate to his aesthetic practice. The refusal and the long chain of consequences it initiated also provide a new perspective on the problem of detachment and how it informed Duchamp's career.

His decision to cease exhibiting his work was animated by his commitment to impersonal autonomy. As suggested by the quote above, which pejoratively links exhibiting and marrying, Duchamp conceived of exhibiting as a particular form of constraint. For him, to exhibit his work meant to exhibit himself; it meant bringing himself into public view. What is notable about the decision, however, is the way it ran counter to his investment in cultivating a distinctive position within the modernist cultural field. In the last chapter, I conceptualized Duchamp's detachment as a combination of that investment and his commitment to impersonal autonomy. I then demonstrated the contradiction between these two components in Duchamp's aesthetic of boredom. However, in Duchamp's refusal to exhibit, this contradictory relationship is absent because the refusal fulfilled his commitment to impersonal autonomy in an excessive way. That is, it carried the potential of altogether removing him from the modernist market and, thus, threatened his pursuit of distinction.

I examine this predicament as it unfolded in a transnational context as Duchamp left New York for Buenos Aires where, to compensate for his perceived market absence, he sought to stage an exhibit of Cubist art. Serving as a cultural facilitator, however, posed a problem for him as it undermined both his commitment to impersonal autonomy and his distinct status in the modernist cultural field. It was while he was in Buenos Aires that Duchamp was compelled, by his patron Walter Arensberg, to drop his refusal to

exhibit, which placed him in a state of suspended agency and prompted an access of ugly feelings. In this chapter, I focus in particular on the way Duchamp responded to his loss of autonomy through three exhibits that he curated over the course of his career. These exhibits, in which Duchamp's own work was included, were marked by an alienating design aesthetic calculated to make the art, and, by extension, the artists who made it, difficult to see. This response, however, ultimately brought Duchamp back to the problem of detachment as a contradictory position. Seeking to deny access to the work, a means of concealment, would once again serve the end of public revelation.

In a letter to Jean Crotti from July 8, 1918, Duchamp announced his intention to quit New York for Buenos Aires: "My plan, as yet very vague, is to stay there for a long time, several years probably, i.e. really make a clean break with this part of the world" (56). The desire not just to leave but to leave everything behind was a dimension of Duchamp's commitment to detachment that had manifested itself several times already in his young life, most notably in his stay in Munich in 1913 and then, in 1915, his decision to go to New York. As he wrote to Henri-Pierre Roche shortly before his departure for Buenos Aires: "Off I go again, it's getting to be a habit" (57). In interviews conducted toward the end of his life with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp indicates that he left because of the heightened climate of patriotism in America after its entry into the war and the possibility that he would be drafted.[53] In Duchamp's letters from the period, he never mentions this motivation explicitly, but does state that "things are much changed here, atmosphere and everything. Constraint the order of the day" (56). It is difficult to say

[53] *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp,* p. 59.

precisely what these constraints involved, but it is likely that aside from public displays of jingoism and the possibility of conscription Duchamp also sought to put some distance between himself and his patron Walter Arensberg as the relationship had become somewhat strained.[54]

The will to resist "regimentation, unification, or rigid classification" that T.J. Demos has identified in Duchamp's peripatetic ways and, in particular, his decision to leave for Buenos Aires, can also be located in his stance vis-à-vis exhibiting in the late teens.[55] While from 1912 to the first half of 1916 Duchamp participated in fourteen exhibitions in Europe and America, from the second half of 1916 to 1919 he participated in only one, and that exception was in fact an articulation of his negative stance on exhibiting in this the period. In 1917, under the name Richard Mutt, Duchamp submitted his infamous urinal *Fountain* to the Society of Independent Artists show, an intentionally provocative action whose immediate effect was to test the Society's dedication to its own stated policy of inclusivity.[56] The "sculpture," predictably, was rejected, while Duchamp's involvement in the affair, which generated a great deal of publicity, was kept a secret from all but a few of his friends (even in writing about the affair to his sister, Suzanne, Duchamp kept up the ruse in attributing *Fountain* to one of his female friends) (47). While *Fountain* has been extensively interpreted as a destabilizing act, whether

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[54] Duchamp refers to this, though cryptically, in the letter to Crotti explaining his decision to leave NY: "Several reasons you already know about. Nothing serious, just a sort of fatigue on the part of the A's [Arensbergs]" (55).

[55] T.J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), p. 74.

[56] See Jerrold Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp,* pp. 134-138.

targeting the institution of art[57] or the condition of painting,[58] little attention has been paid to the affair as an expression of Duchamp's new orientation toward exhibiting. In not attaching his own name to *Fountain,* Duchamp manifested his commitment to eliminating the artist's touch by asserting his distance from the public circulation of aesthetic goods.

At the same time, entirely refusing to exhibit was categorically different from his evasion of attribution in the case of *Fountain.* After all, Duchamp's responsibility for that iconoclastic work was not kept completely under wraps, thus making it possible for him to advance his effort to cultivate a distinctive position in the modernist cultural field (though this placed him in the kind of contradictory position – where evasion of publicity leads to publicity – that I described in the previous chapter). Withholding his works from being seen at this early stage in his career, however, was a comparatively extreme assertion of detachment that created a unique problem for Duchamp. By refusing to exhibit he put himself in a precarious position: while the decision allowed him to realize his commitment to impersonal autonomy, it posed a threat to his interest in gaining rarefied cultural capital in the modernist marketplace. Instead of deepening his aura and generating greater fascination among the cultural elite, his lack of public presence could make the attention of the art world move on, thus removing him from the market completely.

Refusing to exhibit thus advanced Duchamp's commitment to impersonal autonomy and provoked a sense of market anxiety. These two feelings became tensely

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[57] Bürger, pp 51-53.

[58] Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism.*

intertwined as he prepared to leave for Buenos Aires. In the letter to Crotti cited above, written a month before his departure, Duchamp gives an indication of what he intends to do while abroad: "I will try to give some French lessons over there, as I don't expect to find modern-art lovers and have no intention of exhibiting anything, although it would no doubt be an entertaining country to cultivate in that sense" (56). In laying out his plans, Duchamp asserts his refusal to exhibit in a way that functions paradoxically to sanction an imaginative consideration of market opportunities. He baldly flaunts the violation of his real world practice of refusing to exhibit because, as he directly implies, he will not enact that violation. Aside from demonstrating his capacity to brave temptation, Duchamp also consolidates the power of his position by suggesting the significant sacrifice that it involves. Yet the possibility of market success is not entertained only for the sake of demonstrating the strength of his refusal to exhibit. The statement also articulates a claim to worldliness, suggesting that he experienced his particular opposition to the market as both a state of desirable autonomy and a state of disengagement needing an imaginative corrective. Through his refusal to exhibit he denied himself the kind of recognition-bearing meaning that participation in the market conferred. This is a lack he attempts to make up for in his implication that in Buenos Aires his art would be a financial success, implying that in spite of his abstention from the market objects bearing his name would still be recognized by it.

For Duchamp, however, involvement in the market did not remain imaginary during his time in Buenos Aires. Writing on November 8, 1918 to Arensberg, Duchamp informs him that he intends to realize his commercial ambitions:

> I wrote to Barzun a few days ago asking him to get some canvases together for a Cubist exhibition here where the people are as stupid

> as they are ignorant. Barzun will give you the low-down, and make sure you tell de Zayas, who, in short, will be the largest supplier, to choose good things and you could even give him some guidance. I would really like to get together 30 good things. I have found galleries here which, because of the newness of the thing, would be prepared to let us have the rooms for free. Let me make it clear that I am not asking you to send any of your own canvases because I told Barzun that I think only things that are for sale should be sent. It could be a good break for them, the dealers**.** I will not exhibit anything myself, as is my principle. (It is also understood, naturally, that you will not exhibit anything of mine, if you don't mind, should anyone ask you to lend anything in NY. Just an aside.) (66).

Far from making a clean break with the New York art scene, Duchamp sought to leverage his connections within that scene to capitalize on an opportunity to expand modern art into a new and potentially fertile market. In so doing he assumed the role of cultural intermediary, thus compromising his manifestation of autonomy (through his refusal to exhibit) through a decidedly unbohemian mode of artistic being. The notion of Duchamp as a bohemian artist is one that he propagated himself (mainly, it should be emphasized, in his interviews with Cabanne where he said such things as "I like living, breathing better than working" (72)) and it has become, in various guises and in connection to the larger notion of Duchamp's detachment, an important dimension of critical conceptions of Duchamp and his work. Jerrold Seigel, for instance, connects 19th-century bohemians to Duchamp arguing that they "were at one with Duchamp in valuing the idea of being an artist more than the actuality of it."[59] While it would be inaccurate to argue that the bohemian mode of being an artist was not endorsed or actualized by Duchamp, it is important to recognize that such a mode was not exclusive or constant. In his letter to Arensberg, he indicates that he has assumed the role of intermediary in the

[59] Seigel, p. 214.

circulation of cultural goods, developed a plan for introducing Cubism to a new market, leveraged his connections in New York, and paved the way for an exhibit by finding galleries in Buenos Aires willing not only to host it but to do so for free.

For Duchamp, the move from imaginatively considering market opportunities in Buenos Aires to actually doing so involves the affirmation of his refusal to exhibit his own works. In its role as a means of sanctioning his involvement in an exhibit of Cubist art, the refusal attains greater consolidation by being designated as a principle. It is further reinforced by the condition that he imposes on Arensberg, who, at this point, owned a significant number of his works, not to lend any of them to exhibits in New York. Engaging in an activity directly opposed to his particular form of enacting impersonal autonomy also entails more subtle forms of sanction. It is noteworthy that neither in this letter or others does he directly frame his participation as a means of personal profit; when he speaks of potential profit he either does not identify a specific beneficiary (referring abstractly, for instance, to "financial success") or indicates that it would be those involved in the circulation of modernist work (as he says in his letter to Arensberg, "It could be a good break for them, the dealers"). Duchamp rhetorically elides the profit he would likely receive as facilitator of the exhibit thus seeking a claim to disinterestedness within his involvement in the market. All of this obfuscation reveals the insecurity that came with being a cultural facilitator. Compelled to promote the circulation of others' works in order to offset the absence of his own from the market, Duchamp occupied an awkward and uncomfortable position. It's not just that putting on the exhibit cut into his commitment, as manifested by his refusal to exhibit his own work, to achieving a powerful sense of impersonal autonomy from the art market; it also

threatened his distinctive position within the modernist cultural field since that position depended on the idea of him as a figure of exceptional detachment.

Coincidentally, it was precisely Duchamp's position at the top of the cultural heap that made him recognize the potential lucrativeness, in terms of both cultural and economic capital, of staging an exhibit of advanced art in Buenos Aires. In describing his impressions of the city in letters to friends in New York, Duchamp depicts Buenos Aires as a provincial capital dependent on European urban aesthetics and commercial goods. In a November 12, 1918 letter to his friends the Stettheimer sisters he says that "everything [is] bought in Europe, right down to the stone they build their houses with. Nothing is manufactured here: to the extent that I found French toothpaste here I'd completely forgotten about in NY" (68). For Duchamp, that reliance on European modes of living meant that Buenos Aires lacked a discrete, identifiable identity; in his view "Buenos Aires does not exist" (68). While Buenos Aires lacked tangibility because of its lack of independence with regard to architecture and consumer goods, when it came to the question of the kind of art being made and appreciated there, the city proved to be dependent in a way that rendered it provincial and outside of the modern current.

Writing to his friend Walter Pach on November 15, 1918, Duchamp says,

> "The 'painter species' is of no interest whatsoever. Zuloagas and Anglada Camarosas (sic). All students, more or less. One or two galleries of significance, with sure sales and high prices. The few people I have met have 'heard of' Cubism, but are ignorant of everything that the modern movement can mean. I immediately thought of holding an exhibition here next winter. (71).

In pinpointing the Spaniards Anglada Camarasa and Ignacio Zuloaga as the standard-bearers for the art scene in Buenos Aires, Duchamp disclosed that that scene was still significantly dependent on Spain as a cultural capital. In Pascale Casanova's

postulation of an international literary space defined by competition and the unequal distribution of literary capital, Spain's cultural domination of Latin America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century served as an obstacle for writers from that region seeking to participate in literary modernity, given that "Spain…stood out as one of the most conservative and least autonomous spaces in all of Europe, oblivious to the literary upheavals taking place around it."[60] For writers such as the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío, who embraced French Symbolism in fashioning the late-nineteenth-century movement *modernismo*, breaking out of a position of cultural dependency and attaining international, rather than parochial, recognition involved appealing to and embracing the literary norms of Paris, which Casanova classifies as "the capital of capitals," functioning, at least until the middle of the twentieth century, as the ultimate point of reference against which all literary productions were judged.

Duchamp's description of the art scene in Buenos Aires demonstrates that the hierarchies and relations of force constituting international literary space were also present in what can be called the international space of art. In that space, Paris was also the capital of capitals, demonstrating its cultural domination as the site where arguably the most powerful and influential avant-garde movement, Cubism, took shape. Buenos Aires's significant distance from the cultural center of the international space of art meant that it was out of step with artistic time, lagging behind the present of the modern. Camarasa and Zuloaga were both born in the early 1870s and spent time in Paris in the 1890s producing works that testified to the influence of Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec.

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[60] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004), p. 111.

That the work of such artists was regarded as a standard in the late 1910s indicates that while the art scene in Buenos Aires was not entirely confined to an insular nationalist aesthetic mode imported from Spain, it was attached, through its dependence on Spain, to an international style that was several decades removed from being innovative. Duchamp's position within the cultural field allowed him to perceive the significant opportunities present within the art scene in Buenos Aires. He detected that while there was ignorance about new trends in modern art there was also curiosity about them as well as, crucially, an institutional infrastructure that could support their introduction and circulation.

In her essay on Duchamp's time in Buenos Aires, Graciela Speranza, notes his perception of the art scene there as out of date. However, she then writes, "and yet, for some reason, the city awakened in Duchamp the impulse to go on a crusade to 'cubify.'"[61] Such an impulse can be ascribed, based on letters to Pach and others, to the significant benefits he felt he could gain from spearheading the introduction of Cubism in Buenos Aires. In spite of Duchamp's implied and compensatory disinterestedness in relation to the proposed exhibition, he realized that if it succeeded, he would attain both financial profit as well as, more certainly, increased standing among dealers in New York. While Duchamp's refusal to exhibit and removal to a culturally isolated space constituted powerful, particular strategies to achieve autonomy from the art market, he did not seek to disappear from it entirely. The importance for him of retaining a position within it is evidenced by the fact that his disengagement from the display of his work is

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[61] Graciela Speranza, "Out of Field (Fuera de campo) Marcel Duchamp in Buenos Aires" (*Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 4:1 (2010)), p. 5

consistently accompanied by, and, indeed, makes necessary, his investment in the market by other means. Writing to Pach he says that "Buenos Aires is a city where anything that's new (to them) is a financial success" (84). Duchamp understood that such success would be a particular boon ("a good break") for dealers in New York where, by 1918, the market for modernist art had significantly cooled. Through helping the dealers Duchamp could remain a vital actor in the network through which avant-garde art was circulated and recognized. Moreover, aside from the doubled form of profit he could potentially attain through helping out the dealers, there was also the benefit to be enjoyed from increasing the visibility and cultural power of modern art, on whose fate his own status as an artist depended. Although acting as a cultural intermediary constituted a threat to his investment in impersonal autonomy and to his capacity to remain a distinctive avant-garde figure, his refusal to exhibit was evidently a threatening value in its own right. In upholding this value Duchamp risked disappearing from the marketplace entirely, a relatively extreme form of establishing independence that he was not interested in.

Speranza's description of Duchamp's intention to hold an exhibit as "a crusade to cubify" is particularly apt given that Duchamp sought to create a market in Buenos Aires for a relatively successful form of avant-garde modernism that had been certified by Paris and embraced in New York. But Duchamp's activities involved a particular form of cultural imperialism; given that Buenos Aires was already culturally colonized, the proposed exhibit would not constitute the introduction of European cultural dominance but rather the replacement of an outdated Paris influence (filtered through Spain) with the newest version. In his ultimately unrealized ambition to "cubify" Buenos Aires, Duchamp anticipated by several years the emergence there of local artists and writers

(e.g. Oliverio Girondo and Jorge Luis Borges) attuned to contemporary European avant-gardes and thus capable of entering the international space of cultural production.[62]

In deciding to hold a Cubist exhibit Duchamp demonstrated his market savvy as Cubism was one of the most recognizable and lucrative modernist avant-gardes. But for him to be involved in the market as a cultural mediator on behalf of Cubism was an especially charged proposition, given that in this period his own artistic practice and rhetorical position-taking was profoundly rooted in both advancing beyond and denying Cubism. While there were several factors underlying his move from Paris to New York in 1915, one of the most decisive was the need to get out of an art scene dominated by the norms of the Cubist aesthetic. In Paris, Duchamp was in the shadow of his more established and more accomplished older brothers Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon. The brothers ran a salon at Jacques' home in the Parisian suburb Puteaux which counted among its attendants Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger whose theoretical work *Du Cubisme* (1912)[63] was the first major treatment of the movement. The Puteaux group worked in isolation from Picasso and Braque, whose status as originators of Cubism allowed them a position in the avant-garde field that did not require the kind of overt publicity-seeking that the Puteaux Cubists, as latecomers, depended upon. As Calvin Tomkins writes in his biography of Duchamp:

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[62] Indeed, as Speranza speculates, such entry could have occurred during Duchamp's stay, if, in his exploration of the Buenos Aires cultural scene, he had come across figures who would play a role in shortening the distance from Paris: "And we may well conjecture, for instance, that Duchamp's encounter with the poet Oliverio Girondo might have anticipated, by at least five years, the landing of the European avant-garde on the banks of the Rio de la Plata" (6).

[63] Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, *Cubism* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1913. Hathi Trust. Accessed 6/18/2016

> Working in virtual isolation from other artists, Picasso and Braque had created the new pictorial language of Cubism without recourse to theories, manifestos, or verbal explanations of any sort…Picasso refused to show in the big Paris salons, and Braque had stopped showing in them after the 1908 Salon d'Automne.[64]

In the Paris scene, Duchamp's attempts to push beyond Cubism were met with opposition (the Puteaux group regarded his *Nude Descending a Staircase* as a mockery of their version of Cubism and refused to accept it for the 1912 Salon des Indépendants) or were re-inscribed as Cubist work (the same painting was shown one month later in Barcelona at "the first important Cubist exhibition outside Paris" (Tomkins, p. 83) organized by the Puteaux group).

In New York, on the other hand, Duchamp's *Nude* was the controversial star of the 1913 Armory Show, and, given the city's distance from the norms of Paris, Duchamp could find there the encouragement to more forcefully challenge Cubism. While it was in Paris that Duchamp had started to bring everyday objects out of their ordinary uses (the *Bicycle Wheel* dates from 1913), it was only in New York that it became possible for him to conceive of them as readymades, objects targeting Cubism's continued affiliation with retinal art.[65] The kind of freedom from and opposition to Cubism that Duchamp could assert in New York is reflected in remarks he made to a reporter in 1915:

> But that word cubism means nothing at all, it might just as well, for the sense it contains, have been policarpist. An ironical remark of Matisse's gave birth to it. Now we have a lot of little cubists,

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[64] Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), pp. 48-49. Such refusal to exhibit, it should be noted, was not total as it would be with Duchamp. Tomkins notes that Picasso and Braque confined themselves to showing their work at the Galerie Kahnweiler.

[65] For the notion that Duchamp's time in America contributed to the emergence of the readymades see Seigel, Chapter 5. For an illuminating discussion of Duchamp's opposition to "retinal art" as "a critique of realism and not of the visualness of painting" (25), see de Duve.

> monkeys following the motions of the leader without comprehension of their significance.[66]

This response appears to implicate Cubist figures such as Gleizes and Metzinger whose theorization of Cubism furthered its concretization as an adoptable aesthetic program, a banner under which a race of "little cubists" could gather (it is noteworthy that in the same article he nuances Picasso's affiliation with Cubism: "They call Picasso the leader of the cubists but he is not a cubist strictly speaking. He is a cubist today – something else tomorrow.").[67] Yet if Duchamp objected to Cubism both through public assertions and his own artistic practice, his decision to hold a Cubist exhibit demonstrates that his cultural activity did not exclude reliance upon Cubism as an identifiable avant-garde movement. For the exhibit to succeed in Buenos Aires, a market with little awareness of modern art, Duchamp recognized that he would need the cultural power and salability of the very movement that, in his own work, he was trying to surpass.

The three-year period during which Duchamp refused to participate in exhibits, and successfully denied those who owned his work the right to publicly show it, came abruptly to an end under pressure from Walter Arensberg. In a letter (March 1919) to him and his wife, Louise, Duchamp writes:

> It's already some time since I received your last letter with the check you so kindly sent me. I wired you immediately, acknowledging receipt of the letter and to reply to your 'exhibit or not exhibit' ultimatum. I think the exhibition must be open by now and I would be amused to hear how this officialization of Cubism actually went down. As you know, I have found galleries here where an exhibition could be held. But Gleizes and Barzun are so indifferent, I have no

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[66] "A Complete Reversal of Art Opinions by Marcel Duchamp, Iconoclast." *Arts and Decoration,* September 1915, pp. 427-28, 442; rpt. in Studio International, 189 (January-February 1975), 29.

[67] Ibid.

> word (and I sent a cable in February), it makes me think it will not happen. De Zayas' idea is a possibility, but I would need to see the officials here and would do so with pleasure (having the right 'connections' to be properly introduced). If the idea of bringing the exhibition over here still applies, have instructions cabled to me through de Zayas. I could go and see the officials and keep you posted. But in any case, my impression is that nobody here would be willing to help financially and that the chances of selling anything are microscopic. I plan to leave Buenos Aires in June (first part of June), so the most I could do now would be to put de Zayas or other officials in touch with the ones over here (77).

Duchamp's decision to allow Arensberg to include his works in an exhibit testifies to the influential role that Arensberg played in his life and career. Duchamp was introduced to him shortly after his arrival in New York and Arensberg became not only his primary patron, but also, through the salon he hosted with his wife, which was one of the centers of the avant-garde in New York in the teens, facilitated Duchamp's introduction to major figures in the New York scene and provided him with a platform for consolidating his cultural position. Significantly, out of all the patrons and collectors Duchamp dealt with in the 1910s, Arensberg was the only one who supported his turn to the readymades, and, in fact, directly participated in the *Fountain* affair.[68]

Duchamp's manifestation of autonomy in relation to exhibiting his work was evidently registered by Arensberg as a form of opposition that was problematic for his own interests as a collector and patron of provocative avant-garde art. In the absence of Arensberg's letter, the exact kind of pressure he exerted can only be speculated upon, but the fact that the letter included a check indicates that Arensberg sought to sway Duchamp, in part, through a financial inducement. That the check likely served that

[68] Arensberg helped Duchamp pick out the urinal and defended its inclusion in the exhibit.

purpose is remarkable given that Arensberg was seeking permission to exhibit art that belonged to him. In light of this demonstration of excessive generosity, Duchamp yielded (and promptly, by wire). Indeed, in this situation he could only yield because in alienating Arensberg he not only ran the risk of losing further patronage but also losing any say in what was done with the numerous works of his that Arensberg owned.

While the precise details of the exchange between Arensberg and Duchamp are murky, the "ultimatum" incident demonstrates how a relationship of dependence involved the imposition of constraints that forced Duchamp to give up a particularly advanced means of realizing impersonal autonomy. In the letter, the impact of this loss, and how he attempts to rhetorically compensate for it, can be measured by the way that Duchamp satirizes the exhibit that his works will be part of as well as the way he frames the exhibit he was planning in Buenos Aires. The exhibit, organized by Marius de Zayas, was called "The Evolution of French Art: From Ingres and Delacroix to the Latest Modern Manifestations," and was held at the Arden Gallery in New York (29 April – 24 May 1919). Duchamp, whose name in the catalog was inexplicably misspelled as "Marcelle Duchamb" was represented by the first version of *Nude Descending a Staircase* and two drawings: *Combat de Box* and *The King and the Queen*. While the exhibit featured Braque and Picasso it only tentatively proposes Cubism as the latest manifestation of French Art. De Zayas, in the introduction, refers only to "the work of certain of the so-called Cubists."[69] And yet, for Duchamp, having anything to do with

[69] *The Evolution of French Art: From Ingres and Delacroix to the Latest Modern Manifestations,* exhibition catalog, Rare Books in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Libraries, http://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16028coll4/id/18627

Cubism at all compounds his loss of a heightened form of autonomy and provokes satire whose exaggeration implies his displeasure ("I would be amused to hear how this officialization of Cubism actually went down.").

Duchamp's assumption of excessive purity in refusing to exhibit his work provided sanction, as I argued above, for his attempt to put on an exhibit of Cubist art in Buenos Aires. In yielding to Arensberg's ultimatum, that sanction dissolved, making it all the more necessary for Duchamp to frame the character of the exhibit and his participation in it in terms of detachment. Contrary to what he had said in previous letters, and to what he would say in a subsequent letter (June 6, 1919) to Walter Pach, he tells Arensberg that the sales potential of the exhibit is "microscopic." By thus describing the potential exhibit as a financial lost cause, it becomes possible for Duchamp to imply that his participation in it is disinterested, a move serving as a response to his submission to Arensberg's constraints. While refusing to exhibit was as problematic for Duchamp as it was desirable – given that it involved the risk of disappearing from the marketplace – being forced to abandon this position was not an ambivalent experience for him but rather an unequivocal loss.

Throughout the 1920s Duchamp would seek to recoup that loss although the material possibilities for doing so were becoming more and more limited. In certain cases, such as the inclusion of his early paintings and drawings in exhibits centered on the collection of the late John Quinn in 1926 and 1927, there was nothing that he could do about participating (as in "The Evolution of French Art" exhibit). It was also becoming more difficult to convince living owners of his work not to exhibit it. Nevertheless, in spite of these circumstances, Duchamp persuaded his patron Jacques Doucet not to lend

Rotary Demisphere to the "Exposition Surréaliste" (Galerie Pierre, Paris, 1925) organized by André Breton. Writing to Doucet, Duchamp explains his reservations in this manner: "[Robert] Desnos has asked me, on behalf of Breton, to exhibit the globe you have, saying that you have agreed to lend it. To tell you the truth, I'm not keen on the idea and I'll only do it if you really want to. All painting and sculpture exhibitions make me sick. And I would like to avoid being associated with them" (152). As we saw in the previous chapter, Duchamp experienced the attention that Surrealism and Dada lavished upon him as a threat. The evident disgust that marks his stated refusal to exhibit, then, is informed not just by the loss of impersonal autonomy that exhibiting symbolized but also because in this case it was a question of including the *Rotary Demisphere* in an exhibition of Surrealist work. The confluence of these two constraints exposed Duchamp's condition of suspended agency and provoked particularly aggressive eruptions of negative affect as exemplified by his responses, with which I began this chapter, to the invitation to exhibit his work as part of the 1921 "Salon Dada" exhibit in Paris.

Duchamp's ugly feelings about exhibiting were compounded by the fact that refusing to exhibit had compelled him to assume the role of a cultural facilitator. Duchamp's persistent effort to portray his involvement in putting on a Cubist exhibit as disinterested illustrates the way in which that role threatened his pursuit of a detached position in the modernist cultural field. In the 1920s this threat became more pronounced because Duchamp increased his participation in the market (due, in part, to his decision to retire from making art). He began to facilitate the transmission of cultural goods from European artists and dealers to American collectors and became an investor in art when he and Henri-Pierre Roche bought up a large collection of Brancusi's work, which

Duchamp would profitably sell off piece-by-piece for the duration of his life. It was through such work that Duchamp was able to secure an important form of artistic freedom. He had always been afraid, as he put it in a letter to Walter Pach, "of getting to the stage of needing to sell canvases, in a word, of being a painter for a living" (37). Becoming a cultural facilitator allowed him to avoid that fate but it also placed him in a vulnerable position that endangered his reputation as a detached avant-garde artist. For instance, the photographer and art promoter Alfred Stieglitz, who was a kind of unofficial arbiter of modernist purity, became "disillusioned with Duchamp…when he heard that he had become involved in the art market (in a letter to Ettie Stettheimer he called Duchamp a '*Salesman of Art*'" (109). This kind of negative assessment not only impinged on Duchamp's standing in the modernist cultural field but also affected the way in which he perceived the values of that field. In a letter (November 5, 1928) to his patron Katherine Dreier, Duchamp wrote,

> The more I live among artists, the more I am convinced that they are fakes from the minute they get successful in the smallest way. This means also that all the dogs around the artist are crooks. If you see the combination <u>fakes and crooks</u> how have you been able to keep some kind of a faith (and in what?) (169).

This outburst of ugly feelings can be read, in part, as a defense mechanism. After all, the cynical way in which Duchamp describes modernist artists and cultural facilitators could be applied to himself, and it is likely the personal stakes of this issue that drive his vehement (and painfully ironic) excoriation of the modernist art world.

Duchamp's response to the suspended agency he experienced was not limited, however, to rhetorical negativity and continued efforts to avoid exhibiting. One of the most notable ways in which he enacted the role of cultural facilitator was by serving as a

curator. His first experience in this line was the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibition (the very same that rejected his *Fountain*). Motivated by principles of inclusiveness, the organizers of the exhibition had decided that anyone could participate so long as they paid the six dollar entry fee. The result was an enormous exhibit, featuring over 2,000 works by amateur and professional artists representing a variety of artistic styles. Duchamp, as head of the hanging committee, sought to highlight the diversity of works represented in the exhibit by arranging them in alphabetical order based on artists' last names. While some artists at first objected to this organizational schema, which made for some incongruent pairings, it ultimately received general acceptance as being in the spirit of the exhibition as a whole.[70] Duchamp's subsequent curatorial designs, however, would prove to be markedly more destabilizing and alienating. In describing this evolution, David Joselit writes,

> Perhaps Duchamp's conceptually elegant mode of installational estrangement [for the Society of Independent Artists show] was too easily recuperated…For whatever reason, though, his design for the Société Anonyme's inaugural exhibition, in 1920, produced a more ineffable and embodied experience of defamiliarization. In this regard it modestly prefigured Duchamp's more dramatic installations of Surrealist exhibitions in 1938 and 1942 (39).

The change Joselit indicates can be accounted for by locating Duchamp's curatorial efforts within the context of his embattled relation to exhibiting. Between the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibit and the 1920 Société Anonyme show,

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[70] As Walter Pach, a director of the exhibit, wrote in a letter to Katherine Dreier, "Many artists who were at first doubtful about the alphabetical system of hanging have been fully convinced of its wisdom. The idea that instructive comparisons would result from hanging together the work of all schools, and of men of different ages, from the most distinguished to those beginning their careers, has been successfully demonstrated" (qtd. in David Joselit, "The Artist Readymade: Marcel Duchamp and the Société Anonyme," in *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America*, ed. Jennifer Gross (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 2006), p. 39.

Duchamp was compelled to drop his refusal to exhibit his own work, which meant giving up an advanced means of realizing impersonal autonomy. This negative experience translated into a deliberately alienating curatorial practice that was geared toward frustrating the easy consumption of works of art and of the artists who created them. Refusing to exhibit constituted a particular manifestation of Duchamp's general investment in remaining unidentifiable. For him, the act of exhibiting his works meant displaying himself. What made Arensberg's ultimatum especially poignant, then, was that it forced Duchamp to be seen. In the three exhibits he would go on to curate, this particular loss of autonomy would play a significant generative role. In each of them, Duchamp responded to his loss by deploying a variety of what may be called interceptive methods to frustrate the viewer by making the work hard to see.

The Société Anonyme, the first cultural organization devoted to modern art in America, was formed in 1920 by Katherine Dreier, Duchamp, and Man Ray. For the inaugural exhibition of various examples of Cubist art, Duchamp transformed the exhibit space into a feminine sphere. As described by the art critic Henry McBride, "the Société Anonyme, Inc., has covered its walls with a pale bluish white oilcloth than which nothing could be purer, and tinted the fireplace and woodwork to match. The floor covering is of gray ribbed rubber."[71] The space was furnished with "some nice wicker chairs" and tasteful electroliers. The effect of Duchamp's design, as McBride knowingly indicates in his review, was to create a volatile contrast between a feminized space and the hard edges of Cubist work (commonly gendered as masculine): "I have used the word 'neat' more

[71] Henry McBride, "News and Views of Art, Including the Clearing House for Works of the Cubists," *New York Sun and Herald*, May 16, 1920, p. 8.

than once in this description of the new rooms, but…the pictures are not the kind that Academicians permit their wives and daughters to see. Danger lurks in this neatness." Duchamp, however, did not limit this aesthetic of neatness to the floors and walls (the stage) of the exhibit space but incorporated it into the work itself. All of the paintings on display were framed with strips of paper lace (see Figure 1). Joselit has persuasively argued that the lace border functioned to produce a "leakage" between the feminized environment and the masculine-coded paintings. The destabilization that Duchamp creates, however, is not entirely encompassed by his effort to undo the masculine/feminine binary. Precisely because lace is constituted by "a pattern of gaps," it differs markedly from traditional frames which, no matter how elaborate, commonly present a solid surface. Whereas such frames focus the viewer's attention on the work, the lace frame, with its gaps, draws attention to itself. In this way, then, Duchamp's lace frames functioned not just to unsettle the viewer but also to distract him and prevent the work from being fully seen.

The kind of threat that Duchamp faced in serving as a cultural facilitator can be witnessed in his discussions with Pierre Cabanne about his involvement in the *1938 International Exposition of Surrealism*:

> *Duchamp:* I don't ascribe to the artist that sort of social role in which he feels obligated to make something, where he owes himself to the public. I have a horror of such considerations.
>
> *Cabanne:* You did exactly the opposite by participating in the Surrealist Exhibition of 1938 in Paris.
>
> *Duchamp:* It wasn't the same thing. I was part of a team, a group, and I gave advice. Two times…
>
> *Cabanne:* How did you, such an independent man, accept the Surrealist draft?

> *Duchamp:* It wasn't a draft. I had been borrowed from the ordinary world by the Surrealists. (81).

As I suggested in the previous chapter, what is notable about Duchamp's conversations with Cabanne as a whole is that he projects a purity of social being that surpasses his actual experience. The issue, though, is not so much that Duchamp seeks to obscure his significant involvement in the show, for which he was designated as the "generator-arbitrator"; it's rather that his claim to disingenuous detachment ("I gave advice. Two times") conceals the conflicts and painful feelings that animated the way in which he curated the exhibit.

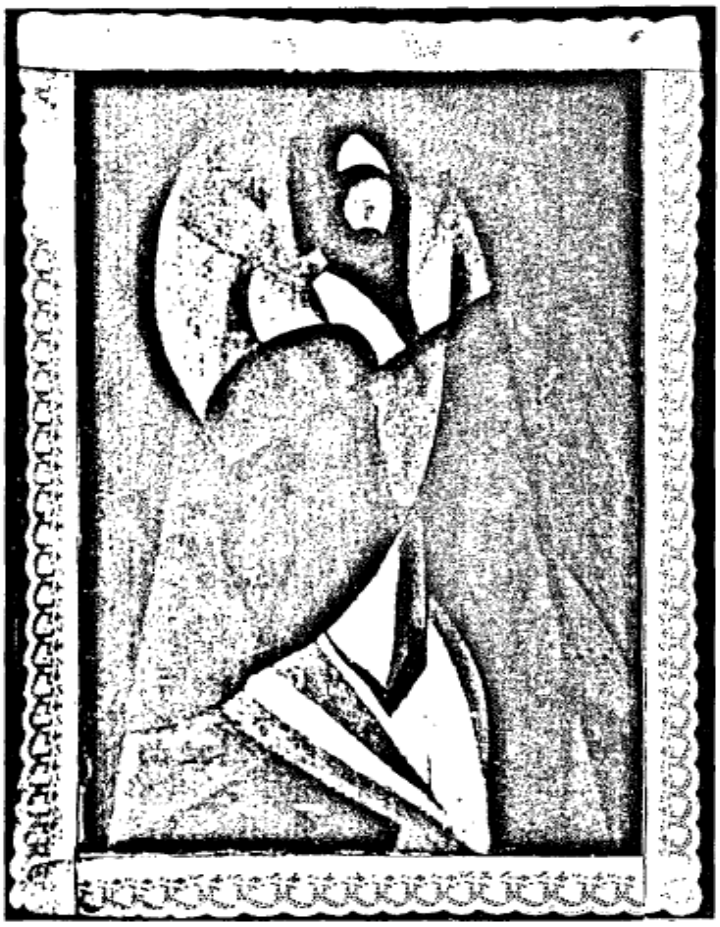

Figure 2.1 Marcel Duchamp. Postcard showing Jacques Villon, *In Memoriam*, 1919, with lace frame. Photograph by Man Ray, 1920. Reproduced in Joselit, p. 40.

Ever since his introduction to Duchamp, André Breton was intent on involving him in his artistic projects. For years, Duchamp kept his distance as part of his effort to retain his autonomy and his distinctive, unaffiliated position in the modernist cultural sphere. Breton's ability to persuade him to not only put on the exhibit but also to show five of his works[72] under the rubric of Surrealism can be attributed to the fact that by

[72] Those were: *9 Malic Moulds*, *Rotary Demisphere*, a replica of *Bottle Rack*, *Pharmacy*, and *The Brawl at Austerlitz.*

1938 Duchamp's position had become fairly secure. By this time he had entered what can be called the retrospective phase of his career, symbolized by his work on the *Boite-en-valise* (1935-1941), a portable collection of miniature reproductions of works spanning the extent of his production as an artist. Still, though the possibility of being absorbed by the Surrealists had decreased, Duchamp sought to maintain his detachment by skipping out on the crowded opening so as not to be seen with the Surrealists and taken for one of them. The way Duchamp arranged the exhibit, however, was informed less by his competition with the Surrealist and more by his vexed experience with exhibiting.

On the one hand, the exhibit was a spectacle along Surrealist lines. Duchamp transformed the spacious Galerie des Beaux-Arts in Paris into a fantastical environment. The outer lobby featured Salvador Dali's *Rainy Taxi,* a Paris cab engineered to emit a light drizzle in its interior and featuring, in the back seat, "a blonde-wigged mannequin whose evening dress was festooned with heads of lettuce and chicory and hordes of live extra-large Burgundy Snails" (Tomkins, 312). Duchamp lined the corridor of the space with twenty mannequins each costumed outlandishly by an artist participating in the exhibit. He hung real and imagined (e.g. "rue de la Transfusion du Sang"/ Blood Transfusion Street) street signs on the walls and scented the air with roasting coffee beans.

As for the art, Duchamp had it displayed in the main gallery, which he "transformed into a fantastic subterranean cave" (Tomkins. 313). More than a thousand coal sacks, filled with newspapers and scattering a fine coal dust, were affixed to the ceiling and dead vegetation littered the floor. The claustrophobic effects of this artificial environment were enhanced by the near total lack of light. In fact, "the only light in the

room came from a rather dim bulb hidden inside a large coal brazier, which was mounted on a dais under the coal sacks" (Tomkins, 313). Duchamp had initially planned on installing "electric eye" sensors that would light up a painting when someone stood in front of it, but this idea proved unworkable, and, indeed, its quixotic nature suggests that Duchamp's commitment to it as a practical measure was far from sincere. Given the murky conditions of the exhibit space, on opening night exhibit visitors were given flashlights, to catch glimpses of the art, but the supply was quickly exhausted. The art that did not hang obscurely on the walls was attached to revolving partitions that Duchamp had designed specifically for the exhibit. What Duchamp created, then, was an art exhibit in which the art could hardly be seen. He worked within the framework of a Surrealist exhibit and met its demands of spectacular presentation that could attract attention and generate news, but he introduced his own personal preoccupation with thwarting the capacity of the viewer to take in the art and the artists behind it.

This same preoccupation was on display in Duchamp's curatorial work on the 1942 *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition, where he deployed a new means of denying direct visual engagement with modernist art. Held at the Whitelaw Reid mansion on Madison Avenue in New York, the exhibit brought together a wide array of Surrealist work at a time when many of the artists associated with the movement were living in exile in the United States. Tasked with installing the show, Duchamp spent his very limited budget on seventeen miles of string, of which he would use about one mile to wrap the space and the art within it in a dense web (see Figure 2.2). The result of this curatorial intervention was that it made it difficult for exhibit visitors to come near the art let alone see it with any sort of clarity. Artists represented in the exhibit were dismayed

by the conditions in which their art was being shown; Duchamp had to "fight… some painters [who] were actually disgusted with the idea of having their paintings in back of lines like that, [because they] thought nobody would see their paintings" (cited in Demos, 107). For critics already skeptical of Surrealism, the exhibit design served only to affirm their views: "least of all are its [Surrealism's] obscurities clarified by the placing of some of the paintings assembled for this affair behind a web of white string. A device of that sort is merely absurd."[73] Duchamp further intensified his diversionary tactics by arranging for a group of eleven-year-olds to be present at the opening of the exhibit, so that when guests arrived for this formal affair, "they found the premises already inhabited by a dozen boys and girls in athletic gear, kicking and passing balls and skipping rope and chasing each other around and through the barriers of string" (Tomkins, 333).

[73] Royal Cortissoz, *George Bellows and Some Others*:. New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962) New York, NY 25 Oct 1942 E5.

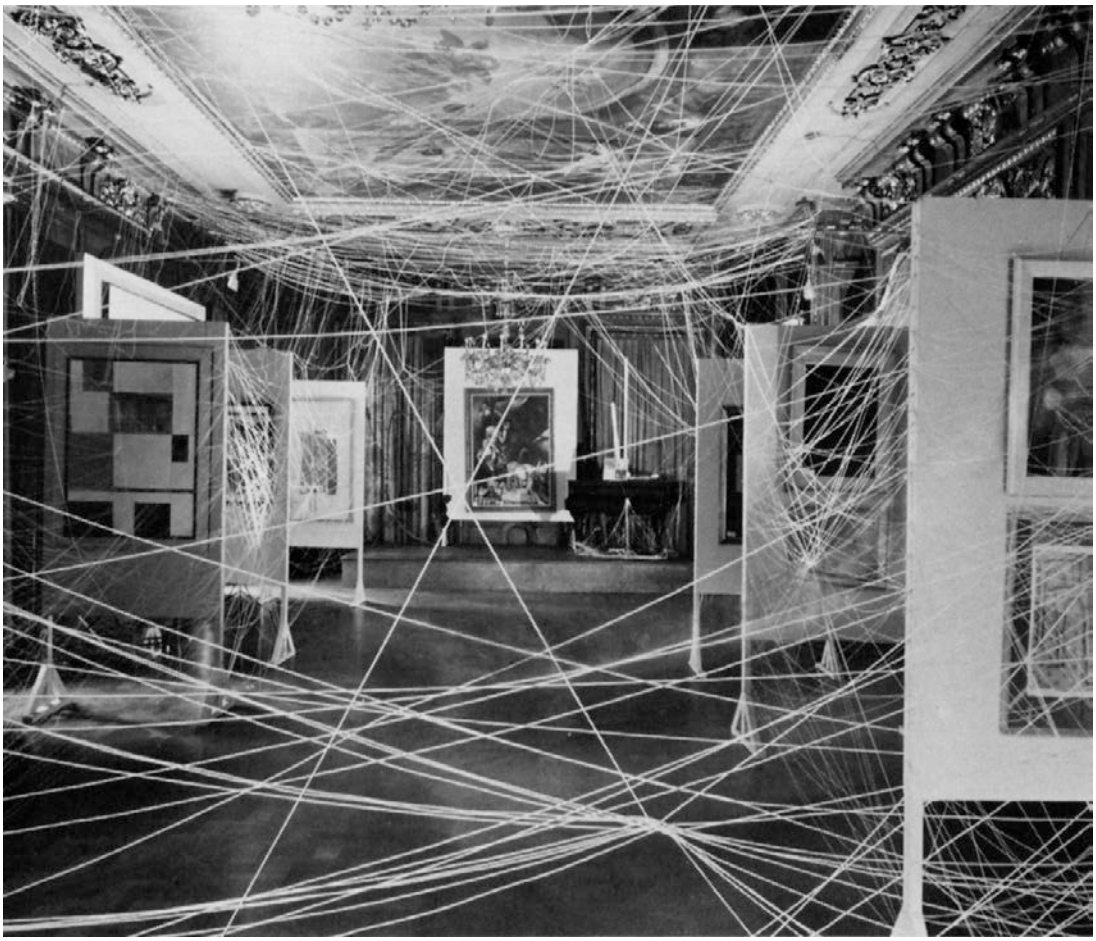

Figure 2.2 John D. Schiff. Installation view of *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition, showing Marcel Duchamp's *His Twine* 1942. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Tate.org. Accessed 6/2/2016.

In effect, Duchamp created a disorienting environment in which exhibit visitors were forced into uncomfortable positions and prevented from fully engaging with the art on display. As T.J. Demos has argued, the exhibit disrupted the possibility of a direct relation between the viewer and the art "by restricting visual access to the paintings, effectively dislocating objects from their visible exhibition, and subjecting the gallery

space to a stubborn and disorienting labyrinth of string."[74] Demos makes this point as part of a larger argument that through his strategies of dislocation Duchamp critiqued a new direction in Surrealist thought, initiated by Breton, that emphasized a quasi-religious investment in ideas of security and stability that would transcend the ideological contradictions and geopolitical upheavals of the wartime period. I agree with this assessment but argue that to account for the material vehicle of Duchamp's critique – i.e. the use of string to spin a web that blocked the vision of exhibit visitors – it is necessary to situate that critique in relation to his prolonged and embattled personal experience with exhibiting.

What motivated Duchamp to produce the curatorial effects I have described was the affective experience of being forced to give up his refusal to exhibit. He sought to compensate for this loss by staging exhibits in which the work was obscured. By denying access to the work, he could deny access to the artists behind it. This was both a general aim that applied to all the artists represented in the exhibits he curated and a personal one, given that his own work was featured in these exhibits. To prevent his work from being seen was a way for Duchamp to remain unidentifiable. However, just as with his competition with the historical avant-gardes, his attempt to assert his detachment vis-à-vis exhibiting was an effort shot through with contradiction.

The nature of this contradiction can be clarified by comparing it with Duchamp's prior refusal to exhibit. That stance, on the one hand, allowed him to embody the condition of impersonal autonomy, but, on the other, it posed an obstacle, as I've shown,

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[74] T.J. Demos, "Duchamp's Labyrinth*: First Papers of Surrealism*, 1942," *October* (Summer 2001, No. 97), p. 94.

to his pursuit of a distinctive cultural position. Refusing to exhibit, therefore, did not involve fulfilling both components of his detachment and thus it did not constitute a contradictory position. The same cannot be said, however, about Duchamp's alienating curatorial practice. While that practice was geared toward affirming his impersonal autonomy, that affirmation served only to emphasize his distinctive cultural status. In other words, eliminating his own presence from the space of exhibition, by making his work hard to see, would not make him more unidentifiable but just the opposite – he would become more alluring and more visible within the modernist cultural field.

The contradictory nature of Duchamp's detached relation to exhibition design comes to the fore in the catalog he created for the *First Papers* exhibit. A section of the catalog features a work by each of the artists participating in the exhibit along with his or her "portrait." I use scare-quotes because rather than providing photographic images of the artists, or using some other means to create an accurate depiction of what they looked like, Duchamp chose to go with what he called "compensation-portraits." Thus, Giorgio de Chirico is represented by a bust, seen in profile, of what could be a Roman general; Alexander Calder, meanwhile, is "identified" by a photo of a non-descript nineteenth-century bourgeois man. Duchamp's own "compensation-portrait" is notable for several reasons. For one, unlike the other examples, where the gender of the artist and that of the figure in the photo match, he is represented by a close-up of a woman's face (see Figure 2.3). Clearly, this falls within the parameters of Duchamp's gender-bending play, and, indeed, as Calvin Tomkins suggests, we may be looking at Rrose *Sélavy* (there is a remarkable resemblance between the woman depicted and Duchamp). But there is also something else going on. The photo Duchamp chose for himself was taken by the

photographer Ben Shahn as part of his work, during the Great Depression, with the Farm Security Administration. Along with such photographers as Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, Shahn chronicled the desperate conditions of those times through photographs of the people who endured them. This context, along with scrutiny of the photo, reveals that this photo of a woman's face is a portrait of desperation.

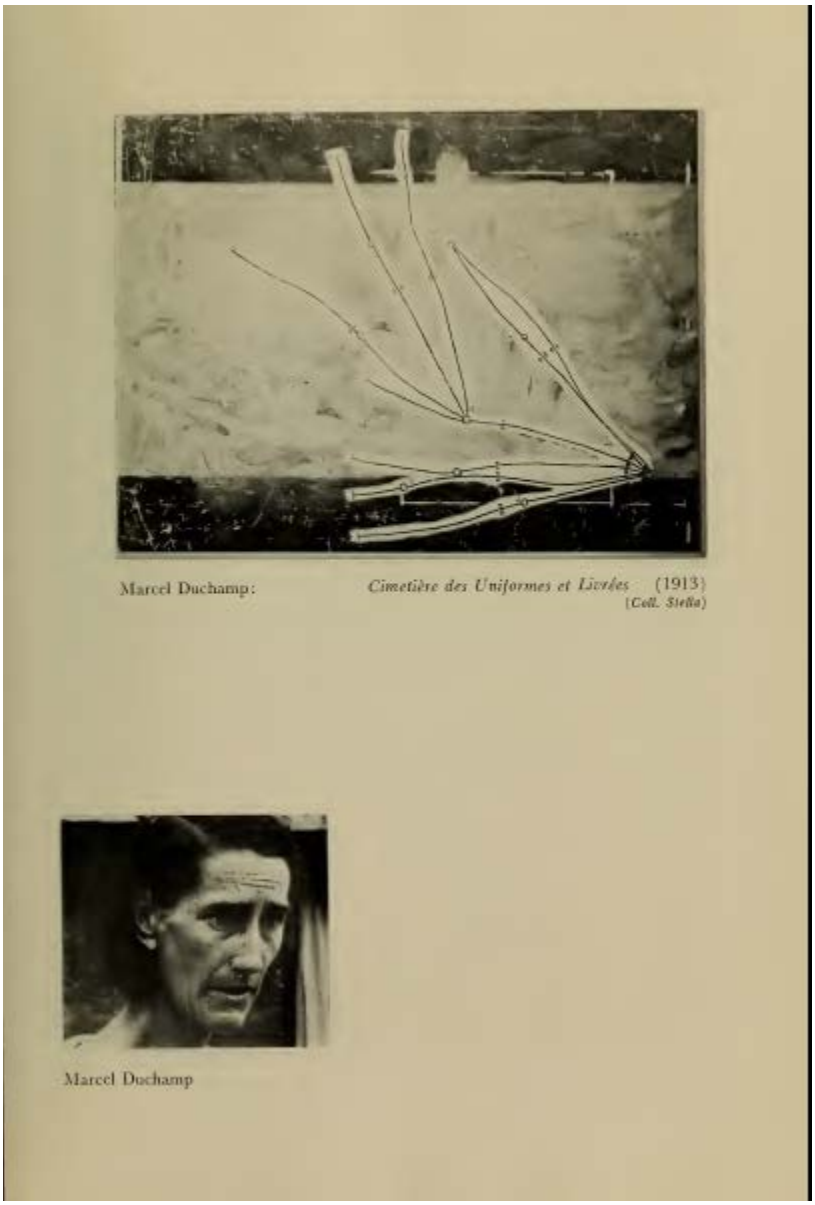

Figure 2.3 *First Papers of Surrealism: hanging by Andre Breton, his twine MarcelDuchamp.* Catalog of an exhibition held at the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, Inc., New York, Oct. 14-Nov. 7. Archive.org. Accessed 5/20/2016.

Duchamp's decision to use this image, with its keen affective dysphoria, can be understood by locating it in relation to his contradictory state of detachment. His use of a "compensation portrait" can be seen as part of his effort to compensate for the experience of being thrust into the public eye as a result of having to drop his refusal to exhibit. Yet as the page in the catalog devoted to Duchamp demonstrates, his effort to remain unidentifiable in fact fed into his public recognition. The use of another's face as his own public image would not actually divert attention from Duchamp the famous avant-garde artist; rather, it would amplify it within the elite modernist cultural field in which he sought distinction. This contradictory dynamic, in which means do not line up with the ends they produce, is represented in the catalog. Duchamp's diversionary compensation portrait is surrounded by his own name (given twice) as well as one of his works of art.[75] The face of desperation, then, functions as a symbol for Duchamp's own affective state in the moment of recognizing that his effort to remain unidentifiable places him in an impossible, contradictory position.

All three of Duchamp's exhibits exemplified the aesthetic of boredom. Marked by discomfort and irritation, boredom is an affective state that curtails activity. It is, in other words, a trap. Just as *Trébuchet*, as I argued in the previous chapter, functioned to constrain Duchamp's movement in his apartment, the three exhibits that he curated served to drastically limit the viewer's experience. The state of boredom involves the evacuation of meaning, and this is just the sense that Duchamp imposed on those who visited his deliberately alienating installations. In effect, Duchamp transferred his own

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[75] Although the caption says that the work depicted is *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries* (1913), it is actually *Network of Stoppages* (1914) that is shown.

experience of suspended agency onto the viewer. To experience those exhibits, then, was to experience the contradictory state of wanting and not wanting to be seen.

In describing Duchamp's aesthetic of boredom, in this chapter and the previous one, I have sought to present a new understanding of both his life and work. Criticism on Duchamp is dominated by the idea that he was a figure of supreme and transcendent detachment. This has led to readings of his work and cultural activities that stress qualities such as affective neutrality, placid autonomy, and personal absence. What I have shown, however, is that Duchamp's oeuvre encompasses another important dimension whose qualities invert those listed above. The works and cultural activities I have focused upon feature the reassertion of autonomy, ugly feelings, personal presence and hostility toward the viewer. My object has not been to entirely displace the understanding of Duchamp as a detached artist (which, as I've shown, is relevant for understanding such works as *The Large Glass*) but rather to pinpoint the numerous instances where his ambition to be such an artist was frustrated. Those instances of frustration constituted Duchamp's affective experience of losing autonomy and generated a slew of art works and exhibit designs marked indelibly by his sense of personal entrapment.

CHAPTER 3:

CROSSING AND UNCROSSING THE GREAT DIVIDE:

GERTRUDE STEIN'S AUTONOMOUS RESISTANCE TO SELF-DISPLAY

In 1933 Gertrude Stein attained her abiding goals of fortune and mass fame through the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (*Autobiography*), a book whose notable accessibility contrasted sharply with her preceding work.[76] Success, however, was accompanied by writer's block and a profound sense of self-alienation that produced marked effects on the way Stein formulated her aesthetic and navigated the modernist literary field. In analyzing the after-effects of Stein's success critics have generally confined themselves to Stein's activities and writings in the wake of the *Autobiography*. In this chapter I intend to expand this perspective by demonstrating that the issues at stake in the post-*Autobiography* period can be illuminated by an analysis of their manifestation in an earlier moment. I consider Stein's initial refusal to lecture at Cambridge in 1926 as a gendered expression of autonomy against appealing to audiences by putting her personality before her work. Stein's ultimate agreement to lecture and her decision to write the *Autobiography* can both be seen as an abrogation of her commitment

[76] Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961.) Cited in-text from here on out.

to impersonal autonomy that resulted in a condition of suspended agency. Critics have noted Stein's profound and unrealizable ambition to be known strictly by her work,[77] but little attention has been paid to the way the frustration of this ambition affected Stein's aesthetic experiments and her relation to her audience. In my examination of *A Novel of Thank You (NOTY),*[78] which Stein wrote during the period of refusing and then agreeing to lecture, I demonstrate how overriding her investment in impersonal autonomy gave rise to the vocabulary of ugly feelings that informs the work. This marks a significant shift in her aesthetic, which had been, up to this point in her career, notable for its affective neutrality. The experience of losing autonomy by way of lecturing also accounts for Stein's imperative, within the text, to regain what she has lost by creating a textual surface that emphasizes the primacy and self-sufficiency of her aesthetic. This effort, however, proves to be contradictory because it is marked by acute self-consciousness. In reasserting her autonomy, her desire to be seen only in and through her abstract aesthetics, Stein makes herself and her biographical difficulties with publicity visible within the text. The text is thus replete with unresolved tensions stemming from the position of presence Stein carves out for herself in the course of seeking to persuade the reader to recognize her only in the work itself.

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[77] Ulla Dydo, *Gertrude Stein: The Language that Rises: 1923-1934* (Evanston: Northwestern UP); Bryce Conrad, "Gertrude Stein in the American Marketplace" (*Journal of Modern Literature*: Fall 1998; 19, 2)

[78] Gertrude Stein, *A Novel of Thank You* (Normal: Dalkey Archives Press, 1994). Cited in-text from here on out.

My analysis continues with a focus on two works – the article "And Now"[79] and *Everybody's Autobiography (EV)*[80] – that succeeded the *Autobiography* and that constituted a seeming return to Stein's audience-friendly style. In these works Stein presents her difficulties with fame as a past struggle she has overcome so that now she can write in an accessible style to a mass audience without a sense of threat. Her affirmation of reconciling high and low has led to an understanding of these works as records of recovery that resume the jaunty mood and mode of the *Autobiography* (Curnutt 295, 302).[81] More broadly, "And Now" and *EV* are framed in terms of Stein's career-long endeavor to "accommodate[ ] modernism to mass culture."[82]

In this chapter I reevaluate Stein's crossing of the Great Divide in "And Now" and *EA* by locating it within the immediate and insufficiently considered material conditions in which these works were produced. I emphasize that both were contractual obligations, written in order for Stein to have the chance to publish her experimental work, which was much more difficult for publishers to sell. Stein did not choose to do these works so much as she was compelled to do them. As I argue, the fact of obligation was compounded for her because it involved once more abandoning her hard-earned, demanding aesthetic and violating her autonomous opposition to the display of authorial

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[79] Gertrude Stein, "And Now." *How Writing is Written*. ed. Robert Bartlett Haas (Santa Rosa:Black Sparrow Press, 1974). Cited in-text from here on out.

[80] Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (Cambridge: Exact Change, 1993). Cited in-text from here on out.

[81] Kirk Curnutt, "Inside and Outside: Gertrude Stein on Identity, Celebrity, and Authenticity" (*Journal of Modern Literature* 23.2 (Winter 1999-200), p. 295, p. 302.

[82] Loren Glass, *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), p. 118.

personality. In "And Now" and *EA* she was bound to write in an audience-friendly style whose linguistic clarity ran counter to her aesthetic principles and practice. This style was put at the service of an obligation to reveal her life and personality, which is precisely what she sought to avoid given that as a female writer she struggled to have her work taken seriously and was concerned, throughout her career, that she was more talked about then read.[83] The success, however, of "And Now" and *EA*, as well as her career at this point, depended on her conveying the impression that reconciling high and low was something she had already successfully accomplished. I therefore read this effort as a compulsory performance. It is not, however, a performance that is seamless. In both "And Now" and *EA* the main narrative is consistently disrupted by a counter-narrative of anxiety suggesting that Stein's troubles with fame are not a thing of the past. Such disruption is amplified in these works by the way Stein repurposes her signature experimental style to evacuate meaning and defy the general reader expecting clarity and coherence. In these ways, Stein resists fulfilling her contractual obligations to produce more accessible autobiography.

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By the mid-1920s Stein was an established member of the transatlantic avant-garde, having forged a name for herself on the basis of her hermetic and difficult work as well as her status as a cultural intermediary in the Paris art scene. Her relation to avant-

[83] As Stein writes in *EA*: "It always did bother me that the American public were more interested in me than in my work" (51).

garde cultural figures and institutions, and her ambitions for her career, however, often ran counter to the values that inhered in her position. If, in the first quarter of the 20th century, other prominent modernist artists and authors – e.g. Marcel Duchamp, T.S. Eliot, Alfred Stieglitz – positioned themselves against mainstream fame and fortune, Stein is notable because of her openly expressed desire for both. Even before her career as a writer had properly commenced, she was fixated on renown; as her friend Mabel Weeks recollected, "As early as 1900, Gertrude was most outspoken about wanting glory from life. I remember her telling me about it on the Grand Canal…she repeated it again and again 'la gloire.'"[84] The challenging and experimental nature of Stein's works meant that they were positioned within the cultural sphere of the avant-garde and yet her idea of glory always exceeded the possibilities offered within that sphere. Although Stein was affiliated with avant-garde publishing venues from the start – her word portraits were first printed in Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work* and *Tender Buttons* was published by Donald Evans' *Claire Marie* press – this was more a matter of opportunity than real commitment. In the 1910s and 1920s most of Stein's publications came about as a result of the intervention of friends active within avant-garde networks. Stein usually took advantage of these opportunities as she was eager to appear in print but, as Ulla Dydo has shown, she herself always aspired to place her work with established mainstream magazines and publishing houses, whose editors typically responded to her submissions with befuddlement and sarcasm.[85] For Stein, who rejected an offer to appear in Wyndham

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[84] Cited inn Janet Hobhouse, *Everybody who was Anybody: A Biography of Gertrude Stein* (London: Arena Books), p. 22.

[85] Dydo, pp. 13-14.

Lewis' *BLAST*, publication in the mainstream and middlebrow national magazine the *Atlantic Monthly* became a symbol of bona-fide success, and she tried for years to get her work accepted there until finally succeeding with the serialization of the *Autobiography*. Stein's pursuit of popular fame and success was accompanied and bolstered by her conviction that her difficult, often obscure work could be appreciated and enjoyed by readers across the spectrum of the literary field. In the *Autobiography* Stein asserts this notion, expressing frustration over the limitations of her avant-garde position, in writing that "it has always been rather ridiculous that she who is good friends with all the world and can know them and they can know her, has always been the admired of the precious. But she always says some day they, anybody, will find out that she is of interest to them, she and her writing" (70).

Stein, therefore, was not interested in the kind of distinctive position within the modernist cultural field that Duchamp sought to cultivate throughout his career. But if she was singularly unencumbered by the taboo on mass fame and fortune[86] that constituted such a central value of both high modernism and the modernist avant-garde, she was linked to other modernists by her commitment to impersonal autonomy. As with Duchamp, both Stein's aesthetics and the way she sought to navigate the modernist cultural field were intertwined with the pursuit of remaining unidentifiable. In Stein's case, however, this goal was motivated by a particular concern that did not apply to Duchamp. Her antagonism to the display of authorial personality was a function of the

[86] Critics (Dydo, pp. 413-414; Galow, p. 33) have described how Stein would mask her desire for fame and fortune, as when she claimed, in a letter to her friend and advisor Ellen DuPoy, that unlike Ernest Hemingway, who had recently become a best-selling author, she did not concern herself about success. As I argue, however, such instances were relatively rare and dwarfed by the numerous instances where Stein openly and unabashedly proclaimed her desire for mass success.

challenges she faced as a female author seeking to establish herself within the largely masculine world of modernism. Stein's desire not to be seen, then, was not merely a response to the constraints of modernity but also a product of seeking to have her work taken seriously in a field that privileged the literary and artistic abilities of men.

In 1925, Stein was invited to give a lecture at the Cambridge Literary Club, an opportunity engineered by the British poet and critic Edith Sitwell, who had committed herself to promoting Stein. At this point in her career Stein was struggling to find publishers for her work. She was indeed much discussed, though often with derision, but little read. Sitwell contended that a lecture in England explaining her work would allow Stein to counter blithe dismissals of her aesthetic and pave the way for publishing opportunities. As Stein had an intense interest in furthering her career, it is notable that she initially rejected the invitation. Although Stein's response to the invitation is unavailable, it is possible, as Ulla Dydo has argued,[87] to gain an understanding of what motivated her recoil by examining the way Sitwell, in her correspondence with Stein, frames the value of lecturing. Upon learning that Stein had decided to accept the invitation after all, Sitwell celebrated the news, stating that "I have discovered that the average semi-intelligent person judges pioneer work largely by the personality and appearance of the writer. And impressive and magnetic personality wins half the battle."[88] Stein certainly possessed a magnetic personality and she deployed it strategically to maintain the loyalty and support of cultural intermediaries such as Sitwell. Yet with such

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[87] Dydo, pp.78-81.

[88] Edith Sitwell. Letter to Gertrude Stein. Jan. (?) 1926. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

ties Stein could reasonably assume that allegiance, while reinforced by the charms of her personality, was founded on belief in her work, and, indeed, her personal relationship with Sitwell began after the latter published a positive assessment of her writing. The lecture, however, would involve an audience largely unfamiliar with her work, curious about Stein as an eccentric avant-garde figure, and Sitwell emphasizes that success with such an audience would be attained more through Stein's personal presence, encompassing her manner and dress, than the quality of her work. As Dydo has noted, "[Sitwell] advocated precisely what Stein most distrusted – appeal by personality…To Stein, personal appearance before an audience, such as the lecture required, spelled self-display antagonistic to art…As a woman, she was sure to be admired less for her work than for her personality" (80). Deploying her personality in the context of lecturing, as well as in the round of lunches and teas organized by Sitwell, constituted a form of self-publicity that for Stein occasioned anxiety and resistance. One can get a sense of her state of mind from a letter to Carl Van Vechten she wrote shortly before departing for England: "As for me I leave for England on Sunday, a little nervous, never having been in that kind of thing before, but I manage not to think of it so there we are, I am all dressed anyway so that is always that."[89] Although Stein professes to be unconcerned the lecture clearly weighs on her mind, and the bitter irony of the last clause, whose imprecision is telling, suggests her discomfort at the prospect of presenting herself to the public.

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[89] *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten*, edited by Edward Burns (New York: Columbia UP, 2013), p. 128.

Given that Stein was not invested in attaining an elite position within the modernist cultural field, her anxiety over lecturing and her initial refusal of the Cambridge invitation cannot be read as a strategy for accumulating elite cultural capital.[90] These autonomous responses, in fact, constituted an obstacle to the kind of marketplace success – i.e. mass fame and fortune – that Stein sought throughout her career. Her refusal ran counter to this ambition in that it threatened to alienate a cultural facilitator, Sitwell, who had expended a great deal of effort in promoting Stein's work in England and was convinced that the surest recipe for success with "the propaganda" was for Stein to make a personal appearance. In her letter replying to news of the refusal she emphasizes how "bitterly disappointed" she was.[91] Stein's autonomous response was also, of course, problematic for Stein herself since it conflicted with her own interest in advancing her career and attaining success. Her refusal was especially notable because, in the modernist cultural field, lecturing, particularly within the context of a university, was not generally seen as being inconsistent with the value of impersonal autonomy. Figures such as Pound and Eliot, for instance, engaged in lecturing without constraint, as did Sitwell herself. Stein's refusal was thus an excessive manifestation of impersonal autonomy, informed by her particular affective experience as a female author. The singular importance, for her, of avoiding self-display can be measured by the effects of her ultimate agreement to lecture. These effects not only constituted the anxiety that this

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[90] I thus disagree with Timothy Galow (Writing Celebrity: Stein, Fitzgerald, and the Modern(ist) Art of Self-Fashioning. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) who gives such a reading in his examination of Stein's orientation toward the marketplace in the wake of attaining success through The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas.

[91] Edith Sitwell. Letter to Gertrude Stein. Jan. 1 1926. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

decision provoked in Stein as a historical figure but also came to inform *NOTY*, which she was writing at the time. In this work Stein not only registers her anxiety but also, in response, seeks to replace interest in her personality with interest in her work, a highly self-conscious and tense operation. It not only involves a charged engagement with issues of gender but also marks the interruption of her investment in textual impersonality and produces a relationship with her audience that differs markedly from her previous works.

NOTY is devoted to an exploration of the conditions and possibilities of the novel genre. In place of determinate narrative and characters there are ever-shifting patterns of activity and decision related to personal pronouns and proper names that float in and out of an array of potential meanings. While countless narratives are presented and left incomplete in the thickets of the novel's abstract language, a narrative related to Stein's experience of going public in England assumes a form of discernible presence. *NOTY* is unusual among Stein's works, as Dydo has indicated,[92] in that its surface play is studded with an affective vocabulary. "Anxiety," "fear," and "nervousness," among other descriptors of emotional alarm, recur throughout the text registering, at various levels of clarity, Stein's preparation for and response to giving the lecture. The invitation from Cambridge arrived at a point when Stein had already completed a little less than half of the book, but even in that section hesitation and concern are present in relation to motifs of coming and going, making and receiving visits: "To be worried about whether to be worried about whether whether to be worried whether to be worried whether and they went to go. Whether they went to go. They went to go whether they went to go and repeat

[92] Dydo, p. 87.

easily whether they went to go" (47). Here, as in other places in the novel, Stein's characteristic insistent repetition becomes a concentrated force that trains its attention on anxious decision-making, and then, in a self-referential command, seeks freedom ("repeat easily") from the emotional distress it embodies. Before the formal invitation from Cambridge, Sitwell had proposed several times that Stein visit England for the purposes of "propaganda," and Stein's American friends had also, around that time, suggested that she visit her native country, where there was much curiosity about her. Clearly, the text cannot be neatly aligned with such biographical details; in its use of "they," whose obscure reference is constantly changing, and refusal to provide basic information (What is the worry about? Go where?), the text evades any attempt to definitively locate Stein and her particular concerns with publicity. Nevertheless, the resonance of this moment in *NOTY*, especially when read alongside other like moments in the novel, is illuminated by relevant biographical contexts, which reveal how notably close Stein is to the surface of the text, a closeness, or presence, motivated by her experience of the lecture.

Invocations of fear and mantras about not being afraid become even more prominent once Stein receives the invitation: "Having carefully arranged that they will never be frightened they have carefully arranged that they will never be frightened and having carefully arranged that they will never be frightened and having carefully arranged that they will never be frightened" (113). The sentence begins with a subordinate clause indicating measures taken to allay fear, but the independent clause that follows merely repeats that act of taking measures thus leaving the pursuit of ease in suspension. A few sentences after the one above, the text assumes a metacritrical position, imagining responses to the reception of its experimental form:

> Supposing they come, then they certainly do come and supposing after all that they wish to come, from now on everything that is said will have some connection… Everything that will be said will have a connection with paper and amethysts with writing and silver with buttons and books. In this way she knows what I mean and he knows what I mean and I know what I mean. (113).

The passage begins with anxiety over whether anyone will come hear Stein speak and fear that they will. As if confronting criticism that her work constitutes merely a collection of disparate parts, Stein, as it were, promises reform, that "from now on" those parts will be interconnected, with the suggestion of an ultimate coherency. Dydo, in her analysis of this passage in relation to the bibliographic codes of the manuscript (Stein commonly wrote in themed French cahiers; the theme of the notebook containing this passage is "Exploration"), indicates generally that Stein is suggesting "advances into and retreats from dangerous terrain for explorer or writer" (86). The specific danger that Stein confronts, I argue, is the accusation that her work does not add up, and in the final sentence of the passage a kind of anxious reassurance takes place, extending even to Stein herself. Throughout her career, Stein endured negative, often gender-motivated assessments of her work that questioned her sincerity and even ability to write, and in the run-up to going public the threat of those assessments becomes acute. Confidence that her work means something, which underlies confidence in the value of her work, is destabilized here, just as it will be, on an even larger scale and with greater consequence, in the wake of her attaining fame and fortune by means of the self-publicity constituting the *Autobiography*.

In *NOTY,* the event of being asked to give an address is imagined in distinct guises and styles formulated along gendered lines. In the first instance, the subject is female:

> It happened that the one who was the heroine had been asked to go if it were not troubling her unduly was asked to come and if at that time there had been no use if at that time it had been of no use asking would it perhaps not be at all and more when there could be no difficulty might she not present herself (123).

In designating the female figure "a heroine" Stein suggests a Victorian novelistic model of guarded femininity. The proposal to address is itself narrated in a prolix and polite form of address recalling the style and gender politics of 19th-century sentimental novels. As in such novels, politeness is mixed in with insistence, and the passive resistance of the heroine ("if at that time it had been of no use asking") is easily trumped by the initiator of the invitation ("there could be no difficulty"), which turns out to be *merely* a matter of the heroine presenting herself. While Stein was in certain respects opposed to Victorian models of femininity, she was not entirely insusceptible to their norms, as her anxiety about going public reveals. This clearly parodic presentation of her dilemma at once acknowledges and seeks to skewer that susceptibility. In this regard, it is instructive to strike a comparison between Stein and Sitwell, who lurks not far below the surface of this passage. While Sitwell, who was thirteen years younger than Stein, could sympathize with Stein's inhibitions about going public, it is clear from her correspondence that such inhibitions did not have any serious claim on her. There is implied disapproval in her assessment "that publishers judge far more by people's personality than by their writing," but given that Sitwell embodied a different model of female authorship this is evidently not a state of things that could elicit the kind of alarmed response that was particular to Stein.

Almost immediately succeeding the above passage, after a chapter consisting solely of the phrase "Invited to address," Stein reimagines the event of invitation as pertaining to a male figure:

> Invited to address them. / They made them ask them ask him ask him would he be able to address them. / He made them ask them would they be willing to have him address them. / He made them ask them would they ask him would he be willing to address them. / He made them they asked him would he be willing if they asked him would he be willing to address them. (124).

In this version of the event repetition serves not for the sake of conveying parodic anxiety and politeness but rather suggests a process of negotiation conducted in terms of a contemporary now. The male invitee is active within this process; while a "they" works on his behalf to secure an invitation, he himself compels "them" to render it. The passivity of the heroine is thus replaced by the unreserved interest of the male figure in a transformation that suggests how Stein would have liked to engage in the process of invitation. It is important to emphasize that for all her autonomous hesitation Stein understood the utility of doing the lecture as a means of taking a positive step toward her abiding goal of fame and fortune. The privileges and possibilities of male identity were a source of fascination for Stein both on and off the page throughout her career, and here she imagines a scenario where her reservations about a certain form of self-publicity (reservations occurring not only because she was a female author, if we recall Sitwell, but also because of her particular habitus) are dispelled by the assumption of masculinity.

As Barbara Will and Catherine Stimpson have argued, however, Stein's affiliation with maleness was ultimately not the basis on which she sought to formulate her

identity.[93] Will writes that "while undoubtedly she [Stein] saw in her fellow male modernists a privilege and intellectual freedom denied women, her projection of self seems less concerned with 'maleness' as the standard against which she measures herself, than with an exceptionality that lies beyond gender" (58). It is such exceptionality that Stein eventually assumes in reckoning with the event of the invitation. After cycling through the active male response, deployed to counter the passive heroine, she comes to formulate the situation in terms of an "I":

> I am taking it I [am] certain that you will be very pleased to have me tell you why I did thus and so. As you may easily know it is not at all difficult to remain here all the time. They come to stay. At the same time it becomes increasingly unnecessary to know that if they had not been pleasing to them they would after all not have been obliged to have ended this here for them and they did not they made it obligatory. To see and to see here. See here. You know as well as I do that it does not make it different. It does not make it different and it worries me (124-125).

The "I" conveys acceptance of the invitation with an assurance more than verging on compensatory bravado. The interlocutor "you," standing in as well for the imagined audience that will hear her lecture, is no longer politely persistent but rather pleased to have Stein not merely present herself but explain her work. This subtle replacement of interest in her person with interest in her work is the crucial element not only of this passage but of the entire novel as it grapples with going public. A distinction is made between "to see" and "to see here," or, in other words, between seeing Stein in the context of lecturing, as actual presence, with certain particularities of dress and

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[93] Barbara Will, *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of "Genius"* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000); Catharine R. Stimpson, "The Mind, The Body, and Gertrude Stein" (*Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 3, No. 3 Spring, 1977), pp. 489-506.

appearance, and "seeing" her in this ever-shifting text whose indeterminacy undermines the formulation of fixed identity. The potential lecture attendee (as well as the reader) is authoritatively commanded to see Stein only here, in the text, "See here."

Stein's insistence in this regard is what underlies the translation, throughout *NOTY,* of her regular formal procedure of breaking down difference – disrupting social and linguistic classification schemes and integrated identity – into a legible and prominent motif. The disruption of difference-making is a prime focus in *NOTY,* as with the following interrogative statement that doesn't end with a question mark: "Is there any difference between William and Edwin between Clara and Martha between Helen and Anna between Henry and Raoul…(61)" In the text an array of names is deployed that ceaselessly edge one another out of position so that it becomes impossible, to answer Stein's non-question, to strike a secure difference between William and Edwin or Clara and Martha. The disruption of difference-making, in this work, becomes self-conscious (not just, as in previous work, an unnamed practice but a motif) and its value is emphasized because it is threatened by the prospect of Stein going public. Stein reveals that upending difference, making textual subjectivity indeterminate, has been the means by which she has been able to maintain the difference between herself as personality and her work, and now the worry is that "it does not make it different." Thus the threat that the lecture poses is that Stein's explanation of her work will be read through and marked by live readings of her personality. This kind of real-world conflation has nothing in common with the disruptions of difference in Stein's texts because rather than opening out into vast possibilities of meaning it works to narrow meaning down to matters of

dress and appearance. It militates against Stein's desire for self-concealment and against her ambition to compete and distinguish herself in a literary field dominated by men.

Stein's response in *NOTY* to the threat of conflation posed by the lecture is to persistently emphasize the text as a self-sufficient field that can absorb and reformulate the significance of external events. Throughout, there is an intense leveling of reference to the parameters of the text, as when, in the passage on the heroine, vocal expression and elements of the object-world are enfolded in markers of textuality: "Everything that will be said will have a connection with paper and amethysts with writing and silver with buttons and books" (113). In *NOTY*, there is constant coming and going among signifiers of personhood, but this movement is contained and anchored by rhetorical stress on staying within the bounds of the text. A recurrent motif is the call to "Remain here. Remain here remained here" (73), a call that applies to both Stein and the reader. She writes, "Another way of staying is this, that this is this that this is for" (143), in an anaphoric passage that accentuates the possibilities of remaining in place and through a pun – "another way of staying," when repeated, invokes "another way of saying" – seeks to conflate "to say" and "to stay" as though nothing can be said outside of the text. During this period the notion of staying put was one that preoccupied Stein, particularly in relation to her conception of saints in *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1927). As Stein, reflecting on the work in *Everybody's Autobiography*, puts it, "A saint a real saint never does anything,"[94] and what is notable about her depiction of Saint Therese is the emphasis on the saint being seated, everything happening where she is according to her own terms.

[94] Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (Cambridge: Exact Change, 1993).

Everyone comes to her, there is no reason to go anywhere and so she is "staying on quite continuously."[95]

Stein's insistence on being seen only within the text of *NOTY* provides a different understanding of her relation to visuality and visual culture. Critics have noted that her involvement with modern painting greatly influenced her development of a literary aesthetic that eschewed transparent representation.[96] This influence manifested itself in Stein's formal techniques, which owed a debt to Cubist experimentation, as well as in her numerous, abstract word-portraits. Her relation to modern painting was characterized not only by emulation but also competition; she sought to outdo the painters by countering their static images with densely intertwined accumulations of language whose movement and capacity to convey internal rhythms (not just external particularities) provided for three-dimensional representations.[97]

In *NOTY*, however, Stein's rejection of visuality extends beyond her generic competition with the painters to encompass a reformulation of seeing that can counter the threat to her own self-concealment. This intent, and all its urgency, can be discerned when Stein writes: "Let me alone. / After Dorothy after Caroline Carry and Edith after Edith Amelia and the rest left me alone let me alone. Now and then popular when when will I be popular as you see me" (193). Written after she delivered the lecture, Stein suggests the impositions of that experience and, now that she is free of all those

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[95] Gertrude Stein, *Four Saints in Three Acts* in *Last Operas and Plays* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977).

[96] Wendy Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1978).

[97] Goldman, pp. 105-108.

embodied names, demands that the reader let her, as personality, alone. It is not that Stein desires obscurity; she wants to be known but only as the "figure" the reader sees in the composition. In other words, she wants, and asks, rather despairingly, when she will receive popularity based on the work alone. As part of the effort to undo the visuality she subjected herself to in the lecture, Stein, toward the end of *NOTY*, relocates (and reimagines) the experience in such a way that it takes place in the text. The last part of the book is littered with "thank yous" – "And thanks to you / Thank you / Thank you very much" (214-215). – that clearly suggest expressions of gratitude for being given the opportunity to lecture: "it is now an occasion for an expression of gratitude in the form of thank you very much" (213). Yet just as clearly this giving of thanks does not point outward beyond the text; Stein can express unadulterated gratitude, can let go of the desire to be let alone, because she confines the event of the lecture to the text, and can present herself to her audience strictly in terms of her work.

But if readers are meant only to see Stein here, in the text, the question remains: what exactly do we see? On the one hand, the constant indeterminacy underpinning *NOTY*, the instability of objects and figures, means that Stein is present in the text only as a consciousness responding moment-by-moment to the possibilities of language. Such authorial positioning is equivalent to utter impersonality, a consciousness may be directing the play of language but its lack of particularity means that language may as well be directing itself. Just as the text dismantles social and linguistic classificatory schemes, so too it dismantles identity and the authority on which it is based. This kind of reading of Stein's work has lately been challenged by scholars working within the framework of modernist celebrity studies. Jonathan Goldman, for instance, has argued

that the destabilization of perception and consciousness in Stein's work in fact served Stein as a means of fortifying her own authorial position within the modernist literary field: "Stein's linguistic play is but an aspect of her project of accruing cultural capital. She destabilizes meaning to produce herself as an author who rejects linguistic or cognitive convention."[98] According to this logic, Stein's identity-disrupting work functioned to produce what Jaffe has called the modernist "imprimatur," a textual signature – i.e. an author's characteristic style – wedded to the author's name, and serving as a form of currency, as a marker of cultural production circulating and consolidating itself within the modernist literary marketplace.[99]

NOTY certainly *seeks* to participate in the reification of Stein's style into the commodity called 'Gertrude Stein,' but this ambition is frustrated by the self-conscious way in which it is conducted, as when she issues the command (which appeared in several other texts from this period) "when this you see remember me" (139). Stein's open and aggressive bid to achieve durability as an elite name produces a version of modernist authorship that diverges from the figure of the impassive, magisterial author that was the common object of modernist imprimaturs. What distinguishes her ambition in *NOTY* to be known only by her work, to transform herself, in Jaffe's words, into a "formal artifact," is that this procedure is everywhere inflected and stymied by her affective experience of the lecture.

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[98] Jonathan Goldman, "Gertrude Stein, Everybody's Celebrity" in *Modernism is the Literature of Celebrity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), p. 101.

[99] Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005).

The decentering of identity in *NOTY* constitutes not the assertion but the reassertion of impersonal autonomy. The consequence is that instead of being a self-contained, affectively neutral text, *NOTY* is replete with gaps in which Stein assumes a legible form of biographical presence. There is thus tension between an unidentifiable consciousness invested in linguistic play and the discernable presence of Stein as historically-rooted, specific consciousness grappling with involvement in a form of self-publicity that evoked an autonomous response. In allowing herself and her conflict to be discerned, Stein forfeits a position of total impersonal autonomy within the text. The affective intensity of *NOTY* is thus a function not only of the presence of references to the unsettling event of the lecture but also of the fact that Stein makes it possible to relate this conflict to herself.

Will has argued "that the position required of the reader within the Steinian universe…is a position that reproduces the position of the author herself while she is engaged in the act of writing" (87). The position of Stein in the act of writing is the position of writing itself – that is, it is a position of impersonal autonomy. What makes *NOTY* notable, then, is that because of the conflict at its core it cannot provide the reader such a position; instead, the reader is granted a position for recognizing and responding to Stein's fraught navigation of the modernist cultural field. Stein's ultimate purpose, of course, in granting this unusual position, where sympathetic recognition becomes possible, is to enjoin the reader to take the one that Will describes. We are allowed to discern her struggle with self-revelation so that we will comply with her desire for impersonal autonomy. Stein allows us to see her conflict to convince us to abandon that vision, to abandon curiosity in her person, to see her here, not as personality but as

consciousness immersed in and inseparable from the indeterminacy of language. Yet this objective is frustrated because of its contradictory nature. The result is a text constituted by an unsettled aesthetic of tension and anxiety as Stein seeks to have her audience unsee what it has seen.

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With *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* Stein finally attained the popular acclaim that she had long sought. The book first appeared in installments in the *Atlantic*, fulfilling Stein's abiding wish to appear in that magazine, and quickly became a bestseller upon its publication in 1933. While Stein's experimental work had either been ignored or ridiculed in the American mainstream press, she herself was an object of curiosity and fascination given her status as an American expatriate in Paris connected to prominent and provocative modern artists. Friends and cultural intermediaries had long encouraged Stein to capitalize on this interest and publish her memoirs. After years of resistance, motivated by repulsion from self-display, Stein acquiesced and delivered a work that was calculated to appeal to a wide popular audience.

Departing starkly from the recondite aesthetic of Stein's previous works, the *Autobiography* is written in a relatively accessible style and has a clear narrative progression.[100] It is chatty and full of anecdotes about the figures in Stein's social orbit,

[100] It is on the basis of such features that I agree with Stimpson's assessment: "Despite some shrewd narrative tricks, [Stein] does not write modern art itself" (161) in the *Autobiography*. Stimpson argues that in that work Stein conceals her lesbian identity for the sake of market acceptance while leaving hints along the way. It is this kind of doubled relation to writing autobiographical prose that I am claiming for Stein in "And Now" and *EA*.

characteristics which positioned the work squarely within discourses on the personal lives of modern celebrities. The *Autobiography* lavishes attention on the doings of such figures as Picasso and Matisse, but it is Stein herself, as critics have argued,[101] who occupies pride of place in the work, a position that is reinforced rather than diluted by the use of Toklas as narrative voice since this technique places Stein "firmly in the objective unfolding of historical events."[102] Stein, adhering to the generic conventions of the celebrity memoir, provides readers with tid-bits about her personal life and personality, which serves, as Bryce Conrad has argued,[103] as a vehicle for her main aim: to convey the impression of herself as a serious and important writer and to cultivate a readership for the texts that constituted what she considered her real work. Stein uses the *Autobiography* to assert her genius and commitment to her craft. She underscores the injustice of her many professional frustrations, the difficulties she's had in finding publishers for her work and the ridicule she's faced, by regularly referring to the numerous admirers who have voluntarily praised her work and provided her with various forms of assistance.

The effect of making claims to literary importance in a work geared for mass public consumption, however, is that the seriousness of those claims became colored by the market imperative of personal relatability. This is evident in the description of how Stein came to write her breakthrough word portraits:

> This is how portrait writing began. Hélène used to stay at home with her husband Sunday evening, that is to say she was always willing to come but we often told her not to bother. I like cooking, I am an extremely good five-minute cook, and beside, Gertrude Stein liked

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[101] Goldman; Glass, pp. 115-137.

[102] Glass, p. 115.

[103] Conrad, p. 224.

> from time to time to have me make American dishes. One Sunday evening I was very busy preparing one of these and then I called Gertrude Stein to come in from the atelier for supper. She came in much excited and would not sit down. Here I want to show you something, she said. No I said it has to be eaten hot. No, she said, you have to see this first. Gertrude Stein never likes her food hot and I do like mine hot, we never agree about this. She admits that one can wait to cool it but one cannot heat it once it is on a plate so it is agreed that I have it served as hot as I like. In spite of my protests and the food cooling I had to read. I can still see the little tiny pages of the note-book written forward and back. It was the portrait called Ada, the first in Geography and Plays. I began it and I thought she was making fun of me and I protested, she says I protest now about my autobiography. Finally I read it all and was terribly pleased with it. And then we ate our supper. (*Autobiography* 113-114).

A significant artistic breakthrough is swallowed up, as it were, by a narrative of eating habits. Stein strategically forgoes any description of how the portrait was written; the experience and effort of creating it is supplanted by a deliberately anticlimactic moment of revelation. The genius comes down from the mountain top for supper. Throughout the *Autobiography*, Stein also plays on the sensibilities of the general reader by writing within the parameters of popular conceptions of literary creativity and authorial life: "It was during these long trips that she began writing a great deal again. The landscape, the strange life stimulated her…She wrote at that time the poem of *The Deserter,* printed almost immediately in *Vanity Fair*. Henry McBride had interested Crowninshield [editor of *Vanity Fair*] in her work" (185). Blending easy sentimentality with testimonies of professional accomplishment, Stein fully and unabashedly embraced a popular literary style to sell a marketable version of herself in the *Autobiography*.

After decades of discouragement, Stein celebrated her success. She reveled in the adulation and financial profit that came with renown. Achieving public recognition gave her "what the French call a *cœur léger,* it makes me not light-hearted but it leaves me

unburdened."[104] Stein had never subscribed to the avant-garde logic that literary and monetary success were inversely related,[105] and thus the windfall from the *Autobiography,* aside from allowing her and Toklas to indulge in various luxuries, served as proof that she had finally made her mark. The success of the *Autobiography* also allowed Stein to fulfill the practical intention that had motivated the work. At that point, much of her output remained unpublished and works that had been published were out of print. The *Autobiography* led to contracts with established publishers, and one can sense Stein's excitement about achieving this practical aim in her announcement that Random House would be reissuing her early work *Three Lives:*

> I cannot tell you how pleased I am. Bennett Cerf [editor at Random House] has written a letter making a formal offer for Three Lives for the modern library and Carl VV is to do the introduction my agent Bradley and he are [arguing?] the details, and I am as happy as happy can be. I will tell you a dark secret, I am adoring being successful completely and entirely adoring it.[106]

Stein's particular orientation to modernist values is evidenced by the playful manner in which, in the concluding sentence, she raises the specter of the avant-garde taboo on success. She designates her enjoyment of her triumph "a dark secret," an instance of exaggeration implying how little the taboo applies to her. But while making light of the taboo, as well as claiming absolute satisfaction in success, reflected a real

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[104] Gertrude Stein, "The Story of a Book," in *How Writing is Written*, ed. Robert Bartlett Haas (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1974), p. 62.

[105] Pierre Bourdieu describes this phenomenon in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), p. 142.

[106] Letter to Lindley Williams Hubbell. June 2, 1933. Box 136, Folder 3147. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. 8 August 2014.

dimension of Stein's experience of fame and fortune, they also fulfilled a compensatory function. Her enjoyment of renown was intermixed with practical and psychological turmoil in the form of an unprecedented writer's block and a profound sense of self-estrangement.

Success itself was not the problem for Stein; rather, it was that gaining it involved abandoning her hard-earned experimental aesthetic and putting her personality on display. The situation was more acute than it had been when she agreed to lecture at Oxford and Cambridge not only because this violation of her commitment to impersonal autonomy involved the utter transformation of her aesthetic but also because praise for the *Autobiography* centered on the fact of Stein's self-revelation. In a letter to Stein about the book, Ellery Sedgwick, editor of the *Atlantic*, exemplified this attitude: "During our long correspondence, I think you felt my constant hope that the time would come when the real Miss Stein would pierce the smoke-screen with which she has always so mischievously surrounded herself."[107] The publishing opportunities that emerged for Stein also served as a reminder of how much hinged on her continuing to engage in accessible self-display, given that editors were willing to publish her experimental work only on the condition that she would provide more audience-friendly fare. In November 1933, to convince a representative of the publisher William Heinemann to put out *Three Lives* and *The Making of Americans* in England, Stein offered to write a work in the mode of the *Autobiography* called "Confessions." The negotiations did not work out and

[107] Qtd. In Conrad, p. 225.

the "Confessions" were started but not finished; however, an excerpt from that text was published as "And Now" in the September 1934 issue of *Vanity Fair*. [108]

Vanity Fair, at the time, was a middlebrow magazine whose contents spanned the spectrum between serious modernist literature and Hollywood gossip. It was the only mainstream magazine to publish Stein's work, with her first appearance occurring in 1917 with an abstract word portrait of Henry McBride, "Have They Attacked Mary. He Giggled." As Conrad has argued, *Vanity Fair* marketed Stein as an exotic commodity, using rhetoric similar to that in advertisements for new-fangled versions of household goods, and laid stress on her Parisian life and association with Matisse and Picasso.[109] It was appropriate, then, that the magazine would print "And Now," a work in Stein's newly developed popular idiom. The premise of "And Now" is that Stein is picking up where she left off in the *Autobiography* and providing an account of her life in the wake of success. She begins by admitting that she had faulted others for experiencing sterility as a result of success, but that now, given what has happened to her, she knows better, "It does cut off your flow."[110] What she means, as she goes on to elaborate, is that success resulted in the loss of her self-containment: "Well you see I did not know myself, I lost my personality. It has always been completely included in myself my personality as any personality naturally is, and here all of a sudden, I was not just I because so many people did know me" (64). Stein connects being the object of wide-scale attention to not being able to write as her awareness of a large, interested public led her, for the first time in her

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[108] Dydo, p. 573.

[109] Conrad, p. 222.

[110] *How Writing is Written,* p. 63. Cited in-text from here on out.

career, to the self-conscious consideration of how her work would affect others. Stein states that her inability to write did not frighten her at first since "I was enjoying myself I was spending my money" (64) but then, when the dollar fell, and her spending power suddenly decreased, she says "somehow I got frightened, really frightened" (64). The fear, though, served as a stimulant and woke her out of her malaise. She informs the reader that she has now recovered from the block and the self-consciousness: "I write the way I used to write in *The Making of Americans*" (66).

In his analysis of "And Now" Timothy Galow has argued that in this piece Stein seeks to negotiate a position that bridges the gap between elite and popular cultural production. Galow interprets the writer's block as a "trope" that Stein deploys in order "to emphasize her status as an elite artist who has strong reservations about the literary marketplace" (46). At the same time, the fact that Stein delivers this message in an accessible idiom in a middlebrow publication aimed at a general audience indicates a commitment to her newly-won position within mass culture. What makes it possible, according to Galow, for Stein to mediate between the high and low is that she presents her writer's block as a condition she has overcome. That Stein's recommitment "to her internal process of art" (65) is asserted within a popular context demonstrates that she does not need to choose between participating in mass and elite culture. She can do both; she can write as she used to and write to her audience. All of her work, given her self-containment, is equally valuable, with the implication being, as Galow argues, "that there is no significant difference between her popular writing, such as 'And Now,' and her supposedly more complex works, such as *Four in America* or the *Making of Americans*" (66).

Yet if in "And Now" Stein crosses the Great Divide between high and low,[111] she also subtly negates that crossing and destabilizes her assertion of self-containment. A careful examination of Stein's rhetoric of recovery demonstrates that, contrary to what several critics have argued,[112] it is far from unqualified. In the passage where Stein declares her return to form, she writes:

> And I have come back to write the way I used to write and this is because now everything that is happening is once more happening inside, there is no use in the outside, if you see the outside you see just what you look at and that is no longer interesting, everybody says so or at least everybody acts so and they are right because now there is no use in looking at anything (66).

In Stein's conceptualization of the "inside" and the "outside," the latter is associated with the display of personality and the public image that results from that display. To be invested in the "outside" is to be committed to audience expectations, it is to produce a work like the *Autobiography* or "And Now," and it involves a form of self-consciousness intertwined in Stein's crisis of writing and of self. What is significant is that in this passage Stein does not mediate between the "outside" and the "inside" but rather opposes the two and aligns herself with the latter. Yet what would seem to be an instance of self-containment is profoundly unstable since the notion that "there is no use in the outside," a notion on which the commitment to the "inside" depends, is not internally motivated but rather emerges from the "outside" – it is valid because

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[111] Huyssens, Andreas, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

[112] See, for instance, Kirk Curnutt, "Inside and Outside: Gertrude Stein on Identity, Celebrity, and Authenticity" (*Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 23 No. 2, Winter, 1999-2000), pp. 291-308. Curnutt writes "'And Now' ends on a happy note, however, as Stein affirms her artistic resilience by describing how she recovered from this crisis" (295).

"everybody says so." Stein affirms what everybody says in a particularly dejected formulation – "now there is no use in looking at anything" – whose significance becomes apparent in the last sentence of the paragraph, which dramatically swerves from the preceding content: "Incidentally, there is a new young painter and when I know more about him I will tell about him" (66). This sentence, so strangely casual, runs absolutely counter to and undermines Stein's previous affirmation that the "outside" no longer matters. Writing to a popular audience in an accessible style carries an obligation to "the outside" that compels Stein to cap her philosophical musings by suggesting the kind of amusing anecdote that propelled the *Autobiography* to mass popularity. Her recognition that in the context of "And Now" "the outside" fundamentally matters is what produces the dejection and sense of futility in her preceding denial of the "outside."

"And Now" does convey the notion that Stein has overcome her writer's block and that she can confidently cross the divide between the elite and mass literary fields. But to understand Stein's relation to this performance of crossing it is necessary to read it in terms of its underlying conditions and obligations. Her career at this point hinged on her being able to mediate high and low since to find publishers and an audience for her difficult, experimental texts she needed to continue providing the kind of personality-driven work that ran counter to her autonomous principles. Moreover, in such work, Stein was obligated to present the difficult if not impossible task of mediation as a fait accompli that may have bothered her once but not anymore. The stress of this bind is reflected by the fact that her overt narrative of security and inclusion is subtly disrupted by what it must exclude: the opposition between the "inside" and the "outside" and idea that the "inside" is not contained. Thus while Stein fulfills her obligation to her audience

by providing entertaining anecdotes and casting her reservations as a thing of the past, she consistently – though, of necessity, obscurely – demonstrates the tension involved in once more putting herself before her work.

The surface of "And Now" is disrupted not only in Stein's utilitarian framing of her experience of fame but also in the anecdotes she provides. Although she is nominally continuing the narrative of the *Autobiography*, Stein often defies this premise and retrieves stories beyond the recent past. In one of these, she describes how Janet Scudder, a sculptor who had decided to paint, submitted a painting to a salon under Alice B. Toklas's name. When Picasso saw the catalog with the painting Stein teased him into thinking that it was not only Toklas's painting but also the first one she had done. His response was outrage: "It is not possible he said angrily, it is not possible…He said that would upset everything if it were possible" (66). When Stein clued him in his relief was immense: "I knew he said that it was not possible. It just could not be possible otherwise nothing would have any meaning" (66). Meaning, though, is ultimately not saved because in the punchline Stein reveals that "even now A.B. Toklas gets catalogues of paints sent to her faithfully by art shops in hopes that she will yet paint another picture" (66). In this seemingly innocent anecdote Stein points to and displaces anxiety about the disjunction between image and value wrought by the modern culture industry. The meaninglessness that Picasso feared did not go away but persisted in the commercial market. For the art shops, the question of whether Toklas could have made the painting was irrelevant, actual value was irrelevant; what mattered, rather, was reputation, even if, as in Toklas's case, that reputation was founded on nothing. This is related to and covertly expresses Stein's

experience of transformation into a set of saleable characteristics in the *Autobiography*, and the dissemination of her as image by the outside forces of mass media.[113]

Yet Stein does not confine herself, in the counter narrative of "And Now," to intimations of anxiety and instability. She also actively seeks to disrupt the enjoyment and titillation that she is nominally providing to the general reader of *Vanity Fair*. While it has been argued that the mediation Stein effects between high and low in this piece makes it unnecessary for her to assume a condescending attitude toward the mass market (Galow 65), in an anecdote about Picabia she adopts just such an attitude (though again by way of implication).The anecdote itself is an insubstantial thing. Stein tells that Picabia's cousins, whom he didn't see anymore, would ask the old family concierge what Picabia was like, their curiosity piqued because he had recently gained the Legion of Honor. When Picabia asked the concierge about his response he learned that he had been compared to his grandfather. It's a very slight anecdote, interesting only because it concerns a famous painter. It is curious, then, that Stein concludes it by saying, "And that is the true story of something that has been important in painting" (64). This clearly ironic remark is the closest Stein comes to allowing the counter narrative of "And Now" to supplant the main one. Here Stein engages in an active response to her bind by evacuating meaning from the kind of winning anecdote that had won her fame. In so doing, Stein momentarily and obscurely places the reader hungry for snippets of the lives of the famous into an awkward and uncomfortable position. In the *Autobiography* Stein does not say that the anecdotes she provides are important to the development of modern

[113] Conrad, p. 229.

painting but at the same time, crucially, she does not say they are unimportant to that development. To call out the anecdotes as trivial and merely amusing would be not just to spoil the reader's fun but also to skewer him for preferring the story of modern personalities to the story of modern art and literature. This is exactly what Stein does in her qualification of the Picabia anecdote, engaging in what can be called autonomous revenge. In "And Now" Stein is compelled to once more engage in self-display, to accessibly describe her life and personality, which means violating her commitment to impersonal autonomy. She responds by subtly pointing up the meaninglessness of the work she must present to the public in order to expand the reach of her real work. This response can also be read as a way of striking back at the critics that praised the accessible style of the *Autobiography* while continuing to ridicule her experimental work and deem it meaningless (Curnutt 298).

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Not long after the publication of "And Now," Stein embarked on a publicity and reading tour of America. The calls for her to do a tour had begun in the twenties and became increasingly insistent in the wake of the *Autobiography*. Much like her response to appeals for her to write her memoirs, Stein initially resisted out of concern over the personal impositions that such a tour would entail but eventually acquiesced (Conrad 227-228). The tour was a great success. Stein was feted as a person of renown and lecture halls were packed with people to hear her speak. The *Autobiography*, with its focus on personality, had paved the way for her celebrity, but Stein devoted her lectures to her

experimental work, explicating its mechanics and theoretical principles. While accessible in comparison with such work, the lectures are written in a challenging form whose rhetorical coherence is developed through a version of Stein's technique of repetition within difference. Stein sought to distance herself from the form and focus of the *Autobiography*, but she did not want to miss this opportunity to cultivate an audience for her difficult work, and after writing the lectures she expressed concern about whether the presentation of her poetics could have persuasive appeal: "The lectures are good…but they are for a pretty intelligent audience and though they are clear very clear they are not too easy."[114] Stein's effort to challenge but not alienate her audience can be discerned in the texts of the lectures, particularly in the numerous asides she makes to encourage her audience and credit it with comprehension: "Oh yes you all do understand. You understand this."[115] Although the lectures, in light of such solicitousness, were clearly written with an audience in mind, they are not, as Dydo has argued, "audience writing" – that is, they cannot be categorically aligned with the *Autobiography*.[116] Rather than attempting to titillate and write down to her audience, Stein sought to elevate it to the level of her serious work.

Succeeding in this endeavor, however, meant not only appealing to audiences but also convincing publishers that such work was saleable. Recounting a conversation during the tour with Alfred Harcourt, Stein insisted to him that "this extraordinary welcome that I am having does not come from the books of mine that they do understand

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[114] Cited in Hobhouse, p. 119.

[115] Gertrude Stein, *Writings 1932-1948* (New York: The Library of America, 1998), p. 295.

[116] Dydo, p. 627.

like the *Autobiography* but the books of mine that they did not understand, and he called his partner and said listen to what she says, and perhaps she is right."[117] Critics have cited this recollection to demonstrate Stein's awareness "of the relation of her impenetrability to her fame."[118] Her experimental work, however, had not produced the wide-scale recognition that Stein sought, and, at this time, her fame and the concomitant possibility of significant book sales rested on the success of the *Autobiography,* which substituted appealing openness for impenetrability. The notable feature of her statement to Harcourt is thus its disingenuousness. Stein desired celebrity status, especially with regard to the financial opportunities it offered, but it has not been emphasized enough that for her celebrity was important as a means to a particular end. Attempting to convince Harcourt that her popular celebrity was an expression of her modernist celebrity – i.e. that her celebrity was ultimately based on the difficult work – Stein sought to get her real work into print with a mainstream publisher. The disingenuous argument she used on Harcourt speaks to the great difficulties she encountered, even after the publication of the *Autobiography,* in getting her real work published. Harcourt rejected *Four in America* and *Portraits and Prayers,* with Donald Brace, Harcourt's partner, writing that "we want in general to confine ourselves to publishing what may be called Miss Stein's more open books."[119] Stein had more success with Bennett Cerf of Random House who offered to

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[117] *Everybody's Autobiography,* p. 6.

[118] Glass, p. 127; Bob Perelman, *The Trouble with Genius: Reading Pound, Joyce, Stein, and Zukofsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 152.

[119] Dydo, p. 601.

publish all of her works, one per year, so long as Stein agreed to provide another autobiography.

The resulting work, *Everybody's Autobiography* (*EA*), was thus a contractual obligation. It continues where the *Autobiography* left off and devotes a great deal of space to recounting her experience of the American tour. Given its (apparently) accessible style and focus on anecdotes and personalities, *EA* has been read by critics as a return to the light and effervescent mood and mode of the *Autobiography*. Kirk Curnutt argues that the work demonstrates Stein's recovery of her self-possession: "Instead of lamenting its burdens, *Everybody's Autobiography* announces that celebrity is no bother at all because, as Stein continually demonstrates, she is attuned to her inner essence" (362). The advent of fame upended Stein's aesthetic procedure and her relationship to her writing and the world. The notion that these disruptions are no longer a concern is a pretense that allows Stein to fulfill her obligation to her publisher and audience. Reading closely, it becomes possible to detect how her present views are shaped by her experience of fame as well as the way she repurposes techniques she developed in her real work to retaliate against her audience and the compulsory task of self-display.

In describing the difficulties she experienced as a result of her popular fame, Stein writes:

> Before one is successful that is before any one is ready to pay money for anything you do then you are certain that every word you have written is an important word to have written and that any word you have written is as important as any other word and you keep everything you have written with great care. And then it happens sooner and sometimes later that it has a money value I had mine very much later and it is upsetting because when nothing had any commercial value everything was important and when something began having a commercial value it was upsetting. (40).

Stein here reformulates the rhetoric of the "inside" and the "outside" in terms of producing work, such as the *Autobiography*, that people will pay for versus producing work that has no monetary value. This distinction is tied up with the issue of identity, and elsewhere Stein notes that the experience of suddenly having a paying public meant that she was no longer the same as she had been.[120] Just as "money volatizes identity,"[121] it also disturbs Stein's conception of her own writing. Before success there was a principle of equivalence in place according to which every word was as important as every other word, a principle that was rooted in and supported by the tight relationship between the private, internally motivated act of writing and the words emerging on the page. This principle of equivalence was crucial for Stein not only because it defined her relationship to her writing but also because it described a central dimension of her poetics. In "Composition as Explanation," a lecture that constituted her first attempt to explicate her work for an audience, she writes: "it is natural that if everything is used and there is a continuous present and a beginning again and again if it is all so alike it must be simply different."[122] In Stein's experimental work units of syntax and diction are subject to constant repetition with minute variation. The notion of beginning again and again produces a textual field where new forms of difference emerge out of sameness. The principle of equivalence, carried out through insistent repetition, underlies the

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[120] She writes: "It is funny about identity. You are you because your little dog knows you, but when your public knows you and does not want to pay for you and when your public knows you and does want to pay for you, you are not the same you" (122).

[121] Glass, p. 122.

[122] Gertrude Stein, "Composition as Explanation" in *Gertrude Stein: Selections*, ed. Joan Retallack (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 221.

spatialization of time and the patterns of movement that constitute the avant-garde work. It is, in short, the productive principle of the way the work creates meaning.

Stein, above, affectively designates the advent of commercial value based on self-display as an upsetting experience. In the paragraph that follows Stein elaborates: "Before anything you write had commercial value you could not change anything that you had written but once it had commercial value well then changing or not changing was not so important" (41). In effect, a new, negative principle of equivalence took the place of the old productive principle. In other words, "everything being the same, everything is naturally different"[123] was transformed into: everything being different, everything is naturally the same. According to this dispirited logic, there was no longer any necessity to Stein's words, every single one was as insubstantial as every other one. Gaining fame resulted in self-consciousness that came to intervene between the act of writing and the words emerging on the page. Another way of thinking about the role of sameness in Stein's unhampered language use is that it referred to the source from which the words emerged: herself. Once her words attained commercial value, though, they no longer referred to this source thus becoming for Stein not only different from one another but entirely indifferent as well.

While Stein uses the past tense to describe the dissociations of language and identity, throughout *EA* the negative principle of equivalence is present in her discussion

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[123] A very neat illustration of this principle is provided by Stein in her recollection, in the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, of the question-and-answer session after the lecture: "Then up jumped one man, it turned out afterwards that he was a dean…another man, a don, next to him jumped up and asked something else. They did this several times, the two of them, jumping up one after the other. Then the first man jumped up and said, you say that everything being the same everything is always different, how can that be so. Consider, she replied, the two of you, you jump up one after the other, that is the same thing and surely you admit that the two of you are always different" (235).

and formulation of present views. Her experience of fame and of the tour, where she was regularly greeted on the street and saw her name in lights in Times Square, led her to conceive of the world as populated by a pressing crowd. Differentiating her current view from the one active during *The Making of Americans*, she writes:

> At that time I did not realize that the earth is completely covered over with everyone. In a way it was not then because every one was in a group and a group was separated from every other one, and so the character of every one was interesting because they were in relation but now since the earth is all covered over with every one there is really no relation between any one and so if this *Everybody's Autobiography* is to be the Autobiography of every one it is not to be of any connection between any one and any one because now there is none. (102).

Stein's intention with *The Making* was to write a book that could encompass and classify all people, implying conviction in the fundamental interconnection of everyone. Now, however, the logic dictating the lack of unity among words is extended to her conception of people as isolated, disconnected units. Furthermore, this view, just as it does with language, leads to a position of indifference: "anybody can know that the earth is covered all over with people and if the air is too what is the difference to any one there are an awful lot of them anyway and in a way I really am only interested in what a genius can say the rest is just there anyway" (122). Assertions such as this run counter to readings of *EA*, such as Juliana Spahr's,[124] that emphasize the democratic inclusiveness and openness of the work.[125] While Stein does, in places, invite the reader in, this is, more than anything else, what *Everybody's Autobiography* is as a whole: a contractual

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[124] Juliana Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001).

[125] See Galow p. 93.

obligation. Writing in the popular mode that resulted in her disconnection from language and people, Stein describes a grim view of the world and an exceptional, isolated position for herself.[126]

Stein's articulation of the negative principle of equivalence, expressing the bind of fame, also functions to strike back at the reader expecting a work like the *Autobiography*. In the *Lectures* she is solicitous of the reader, wanting and hoping that he can follow along and come to appreciate her difficult work. Here, on the other hand, she works actively to undermine expectations and deny satisfaction. While *EA* trades in anecdotes and famous names, its packaging of tid-bits replaces the limpidity of the *Autobiography* with unstable signification. In the introduction to the work, Stein writes, "That is the way any autobiography has to be written which reminds me of Dashiell Hammett. But before I am reminded of Dashiell Hammett I want to say that just today I met Miss Hennessy and she was carrying, she did not have it with her, but she usually carried a wooden umbrella" (1). Miss Hennessy, an unknown who remains unparticularized, is not only incongruously paired with Dashiell Hammett, a known commodity whom Stein's audience would have been familiar with, but also diverts narrative attention away from him. Stein thus teases her audience by suggesting an anecdote about Hammett only to shift away from it in favor of a slight, amusing story about a woman, whose relation to Stein remains obscure, and her impractical wooden umbrella. Stein does eventually turn to Hammett but only after creating a flat, strange

[126] Galow alludes to the dark nature of *EA*, but sees it as a peripheral, rather than, as I am arguing, a constitutive, characteristic of the work: "The fear and uncertainty that linger at the edges of Stein's otherwise playful autobiography…" (107).

suspense that is prevalent in *EA*. Narrative instability is combined with descriptive instability. Stein writes that Miss Hennessy, when she saw her today, was carrying an umbrella only to immediately negate this fact and then add that she usually did carry one. These quick-fire reversals create a knotty grammatical structure that undermines transparent representation, the easy translation of signifier into signified, and thus denies the pleasures that a "tell-all" nominally affords.

The same process and consequences can be discerned in Stein's description of a soirée: "Nobody had been invited but everybody came it always happens like that or it sometimes happens like that and when it does well it does" (20**).** Here, as in the other example, a position is asserted only to be instantaneously contravened, creating confusion in what should be a straightforward statement. This technique of disrupting signification, I argue, is a watered-down, differently aimed version of one that is fundamental to Stein's experimental work. Beginning again and again, in such work, manifests itself through reversals, linguistic units are constantly subject to formulation and immediate reformulation – e.g. "No one can change / Not no one can change"[127] – in a process that productively ramifies signification. The use of this technique in the context of *EA*, however, does not produce meaning but rather eliminates it; it is productive only of confusion. Galow, in his analysis of *EA*, seeks to align that work with Stein's avant-garde texts based on the notion that both are invested in the disruption of referentiality. Yet it is important to notice that such disruption is put toward very different ends in the real work and the audience-friendly fare, making it necessary to posit the kind of distinction

[127] *Last Operas and Plays*, p. 360.

between the two that Stein herself upheld. In Stein's experimental texts the disruption of signification is productive and it is this that makes them open and inclusive. In *EA*, on the other hand, openness is only apparent: Stein's denial of the pleasure rooted in transparent representation also shuts down possibilities for readerly play. In a text that requires Stein to once more forfeit her investment in impersonal autonomy, she responds with an inversion of her aesthetic that both registers her unease with the project and defies the reader.

Given these factors, it is not surprising that *EA* was a commercial failure. Random House issued no more copies after an initial print run of 3,000. In comparison, the first printing of the *Autobiography*, comprising 5,400 copies, sold out nine days before the book was officially published (*EA* viii). Reviews of *EA* were generally mixed, as opposed to the largely positive reception of the *Autobiography*, with critics registering a change in the style of the follow-up as well as the way it was positioned toward its audience: "Anyone expecting the unalloyed deliciousness of 'Toklas' will be disappointed…In 'Toklas' she surprised us by writing for the reader: now she goes part way back to her clumsy, comma-less, meandering, unpruned sentences" (Hall). The differing publication and reception histories of the two books correlate with their diverging relations to the Great Divide. While it can be said that Stein "accommodates modernism to mass culture" (Glass 118) in both, there is a stark difference in the conditions and significance of this operation from one text to the other. In the *Autobiography*, Stein unambiguously commits herself to writing in the mode of accessible self-revelation, while *EA*, like "And Now," is profoundly marked by the collapse of this possibility.

In writing against her contractual obligation to satisfy the demand of the mass market, Stein manifested a form of autonomous opposition that constituted a central dimension of the culture of modernism. Recent criticism has rightly questioned the notion that modernist authors and artists could effectively resist mass culture through aesthetic innovation. But if this development has been salutary, deepening and broadening our understanding of modernism, it has also involved overlooking the role of autonomous opposition within modernist cultural practice, and, by extension, the particularity of that practice. By construing opposition as a response to the loss of local and particular forms of autonomy, it becomes possible to discern the way such opposition functioned in relation to market participation. The fact that modernist authors and artists continually crossed the Great Divide is only one layer of a larger and more complicated narrative of cultural negotiation. The story of modernism is as much a story of uncrossing as it is of crossing.

CHAPTER 4:

BETWEEN MOURNING AND MELANCHOLIA:

GERTRUDE STEIN'S "REAL WORK" IN THE 1930S

Just a few months before Stein wrote *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,* she completed *Stanzas in Meditation.* Although the works were written around the same time the vast difference between them cannot be overstated. The former is accessible, defined by clarity and an eagerness to please a general audience; the latter is profoundly obscure and abstract, the culmination, as Donald Sutherland has written, of Stein's "heroic experimentation with the essentials of writing.[128] With the *Autobiography* Stein finally attained the glory she had long sought, but her success was accompanied by a profound crisis of writing and identity. The previous chapter showed the ways in which this crisis affected her subsequent popular autobiographical writing in the 1930s. This chapter seeks to demonstrate the effect of the crisis on Stein's "real work," as she characterized it, during the same period.

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[128] Donald Sutherland, Preface, *Stanzas in Meditation and Other Poems [1929-1933],* by Gertrude Stein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), p. v.

Marianne DeKoven has argued that such work "does not represent a repudiation of or release from experimental writing" (150),[129] rather, it is a "rapprochement of the experimental with the conventional" (151). In effect, DeKoven suggests that Stein's work in the thirties brings together the divergent strands of *Autobiography* and *Stanzas in Meditation* into a harmonious whole. With a focus on *Blood on the Dining Room Floor* (1933) (*Blood*)[130] and *The Geographical History of America Or The Relation Of Human Nature To The Human Mind* (1936) *(GH),*[131] I intend to show that these works do not bridge the experimental and the conventional but rather hectically vacillate between these two modes. Critics such as Timothy Galow have illustrated the way Stein's non-autobiographical works in the 1930's are informed by tension as she seeks to come to grips with the conditions of fame which imposed an obligation to a popular audience that conflicted with her commitment to a self-motivated aesthetic.[132] This critical position, however, involves an underlying assumption that such tension is conveyed within sustained stylistic coherence. My object in this chapter is to demonstrate that both *Blood* and *GH* are in fact constituted by two styles that are in conflict with one another. There is, on the one hand, what I am calling a compromise formation style, which is a diluted, audience-friendly version of her experimental writing and can be thought of in terms of

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[129] Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

[130] Gertrude Stein, *Blood on the Dining Room Floor*. http://www.gertrude-stein.com/Book.PDF. Cited in-text from here on out.

[131] Gertrude Stein, *The Geographical History of America Or The Relation Of Human Nature To The Human Mind,* in Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946 (New York: The Library of America, 1998).

[132] Timothy Galow (*Writing Celebrity: Stein, Fitzgerald, and the Modern(ist) Art of Self-Fashioning.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

DeKoven's notion of rapprochement. On the other hand, there is Stein's experimental style, the kind that marks her most avant-garde linguistic explorations. In both works Stein is suspended between the two styles, incapable of mediating them or occupying either one fully, because the two represent mutually exclusive commitments.

While the compromise-formation style manifests Stein's interest in retaining the general audience that she had won through the *Autobiography,* the experimental style reflects her continued investment in advanced modernist aesthetics and the value of impersonal autonomy that they make possible.

For Stein, the immediate cost of gaining fame was the condition of suspended agency: "I was not just I because so many people did know me."[133] A subsequent manifestation of this condition, as the previous chapter demonstrated, was that she was compelled to produce more accessible work in the vein of the *Autobiography,* which meant that she was obligated to repeat the loss of her autonomy. In *Blood* and *GH,* a new mode of suspended agency appears that is informed by Stein's incapacity to commit herself to either the compromise-formation style or the experimental style. The nature of this predicament is illuminated by the particular negative affects it engenders. While anxiety is present in these works, the dominant affect is sadness, which is expressed through an imaginary of tears. What is noteworthy about Stein's articulation of sadness in these two works is that it is subject to the mechanism of repression. Tears are blocked or not allowed to fall. Relying on Freud's conceptualization of mourning and melancholia, I demonstrate that for Stein tears are synonymous with bidding farewell to her

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[133] Gertrude Stein, "And Now." *How Writing is Written*. ed. Robert Bartlett Haas (Santa Rosa:Black Sparrow Press, 1974).

experimental writing and embracing the compromise-formation style. She therefore resists this act of mourning and seeks to reassert the experimental style, with its promise of impersonal autonomy, but this proves to be a melancholic operation since it means trying to hold on to a way of being and writing that she has lost in the wake of fame (and which militate against her desire to be a figure of general acclaim). The result is that in these works Stein is suspended between mourning and melancholia.

According to Stein's own account, she broke out of the writer's block she experienced after the *Autobiography* by writing the detective novel *Blood*. An avid reader of popular detective fiction, Stein discriminated among works in the genre in a way that was informed by the principles and techniques underlying her avant-garde writing. In the article "Why I Like Detective Stories" (1937), she singles out the popular writer Edgar Wallace for praise because his work in her view "does not really have any detecting" (149).[134] For Stein, an emphasis on detection, such as in the Sherlock Holmes tales, means an investment in a delimited narrative as well as the elevation of the detective figure into a "hero" who stands over and above other characters. Implicitly using her own aesthetic as a standard, she privileges Wallace's work because its nearly total avoidance of the narrative of detection results in the distribution of attention among an abundance of textual details. Even in the case of Wallace, however, detective fiction provides answers to the mysteries it engineers, which leads Stein, in another article from the period, to distinguish the genre from newspaper accounts of real crime that conclude without resolution. Instancing the notorious Hall-Mills murders and the Lizzie Borden case, Stein

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[134] Gertrude Stein, "Why I Like Detective Stories," (*Harper's Bazaar* [London] XVII November 1937).

argues that what makes them memorable is precisely the fact "that nobody finds out anything about who did it" (103).

Stein's take on the true crime and detective fiction genres constituted them in such a way that they could serve as fertile ground for her aesthetic, which prioritized the equivalence of textual details and the production of a continuous present. The possibility of creating a work that could fuse the two genres, combining narrative promiscuity with lack of resolution, emerged after the summer of 1933, whose strange and disturbing events provided the content for *Blood on the Dining Room Floor*. Stein and Toklas spent the summer at their country home in the hamlet of Bilignin in eastern France. The trouble began with the servants. After engaging several who came and went because they were idiosyncratically ill-suited for the work, they found a couple, a Polish woman and a Czech man, who seemed to fit the bill. Then, in quick succession, a number of eerie events occurred at the house: a guest's car was sabotaged, the telephone would not work, Stein's own car was disabled. There was no proof that the couple had done it but suspicion was strong and they were dismissed. Later in the summer a tragedy occurred, the mysterious death of a local hotel keeper's wife, Madame Pernollet. She had fallen from a hotel window and the small community became consumed with rumor and speculation about whether it was murder, an accident, or suicide. A local horticulturalist family was involved – the daughter was having an affair with Monsieur Pernollet while the eldest son Alexander claimed that Madame Pernollet had walked over the edge in her sleep – but their precise roles in the death were unclear.

Stein's decision to write detective fiction after the summer of 1933, however, cannot be entirely explained by her experience of events suitable for the genre. The

serialization of the *Autobiography* in the *Atlantic Monthly* began in May 1933 and it was an instantaneous success. Throughout the summer the fan mail and adulation poured in, giving Stein the sense that she had at last attained the wide-scale glory she had long sought. The praise also presented an opportunity. As Ulla Dydo has argued, Stein perceived that the climate was right for another popular book, and given the prominent place of detective fiction in the cultural marketplace, a foray into the genre seemed to be an effective means of capitalizing on her new found fame (563). Carrying out this ambition and producing another bestseller would prove to be extremely difficult, however, given Stein's pronounced ambivalence about the public attention that came with success. On the one hand, it was gratifying; on the other, debilitating, leading to a sense of self-alienation and the first writer's block of her career.

According to Stein's own account, her writer's block set in after she completed the *Autobiography* and lasted until the writing of *Blood,* a period of about seven months. This narrative has been qualified by Dydo, who has convincingly argued that the block actually lasted a shorter period, around three months, and that, moreover, Stein's lack of output during that span could be attributed at least partly to the various editorial, promotional and financial responsibilities brought on by the *Autobiography*. Further, in the months before writing *Blood,* Stein completed various shorter pieces as well as a longer work, *Byron a Play*.[135] These facts have stimulated fruitful critical reevaluations of the block that question its authenticity.[136] But if the writing block was not exactly what

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[135] Gertrude Stein, "Byron a Play." *Last Operas and Plays* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1949).

[136] See Galow, pp. 44-46.

Stein made it out to be, her difficulties with fame were real and had a profound impact on the remainder of her career. To understand those difficulties better I propose a shift in critical focus away from the question of the writer's block and its extent and toward the way Stein's embattled experience of fame influenced the stylistic and affective dimensions of her subsequent works.

In determining such influence it is useful to consider those works in relation to the chronology of Stein's experience of fame, which can help to clear up some apparent inconsistencies about the impact of her writing difficulties. How is it, for instance, that Stein could produce a successful work within her aesthetic – *Byron a Play* – at a time when she had allegedly lost her sense of self and was beset by a crisis of writing? *Byron a Play* focuses on Stein's recently deceased dog, Byron, and consists largely of false steps and frustration as Stein seeks a means of calling forth the dead animal into the present of her text. Rather than embodying the struggles of a writer who has lost her grip on her craft, however, the instability of *Byron* is firmly rooted in Stein's abiding thematic and formal preoccupation with the process of writing.[137] It is animated rather than hampered by the question of how a play can be written (the same question that informed her earlier work *Three Saints in Four Acts*). That this is the case can be explained by the fact that *Byron* was written after Stein had submitted the *Autobiography* for publication and received an overwhelmingly positive response but before the work was serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Thus, at that juncture, Stein was not writing beneath the specter of a large audience that knew her. While she does anticipate the kind of debilitating self-

[137] Dydo argues that "*Byron A Play*…is almost certainly the last piece of great writing altogether in Stein's voice" (572).

consciousness that public attention would bring – writing, "No one can say that a soliloquy is addressed to the world. And of course it is" (370) – it is not enough to disturb the consistency of her voice and style. By the time Stein came to write *Blood*, however, she had become a known entity, with the proof pouring in through the mail every day. Furthermore, while she had not intended *Byron* to be a popular work and could thus write it in her unadulterated experimental aesthetic, when she chose to write a detective novel she had to engage with the audience expectations of a popular genre. And as she was eager to produce another bestseller, those expectations demanded consideration.

It would seem, though, that Stein ultimately turned her back on her popular audience and committed herself to creating a work structured according to the features of the detective novel genre that aligned with her experimental aesthetic. *Blood* is a detective novel without a detective or much in the way of cumulative detection. The narrator depicts a crime only to suggest it may not be a crime at all but an accident; suspects are sketchily presented through repetitive structures that prevent the accumulation of knowledge; clues abound but are rendered indistinguishable from extraneous information. Committed throughout to depicting an obscure atmosphere of crime and unanchored suspicion, the novel does not end but rather merely stops without a hint of resolution. Such features have led critics to contend that *Blood* parodies detective novels by upending the conventions of the genre. As Ellen Berry argues, "By delaying truth indefinitely, refusing to posit an origin or an end to the mystery, Stein exhausts the defining feature of detective fiction."[138] Rather than leading the reader logically toward a

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[138] Ellen Berry, *Curved Thought and Textual Wandering: Gertrude Stein's Postmodernism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 146.

revelation that connects the dots, Stein, according to Matthew Levay, "leaves us fumbling to get our bearings…we are left to make what we can of the scattered bits of information proffered by the narrator, a figure who remains just as ill-defined as the novel's other characters."[139] The motor of uncertainty and confusion in the novel is deemed to be an unwavering aesthetic that frustrates clear exposition: "Consistently parts or sequences of sentences do not hang together and do not progress logically or grammatically. Actions, phrases, clauses, details, comments seem bent to a queer way of moving in sentences" (Dydo, p. 567).

Critical accounts of *Blood* contend, whether implicitly or explicitly, that the work is dominated by a single consistent style. What I would like to propose, however, is that Stein's strange detective novel is in fact comprised of two conflicting styles. The work is informed by an aesthetic ambivalence that speaks directly to Stein's troubled experience of fame and the incompatible commitments it brought on. Critics have of course registered that the work reflects a tumultuous state of mind, with James Mellow, for instance, noting, "The aimless and distracted style of the book suggests that her difficulties in writing may have been very real."[140] This perspective is based on reading Stein's writing difficulties strictly in relation to her writer's block, but, as I suggest above, those difficulties can be seen in a new and more nuanced light if they are contextualized and interpreted on the basis of individual works Stein wrote in the wake of fame. Given her interest in writing a bestseller, Stein could not, in *Blood*, turn her back

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[139] Mathew Levay, "Remaining a Mystery: Gertrude Stein Crime Fiction, and Popular Modernism (*Journal of Modern Literature* Vol. 36, No. 4 Summer 2013), p. 15.

[140] James Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), p. 364.

on the expectations of a popular audience, leaving her with a significant conundrum: How could she write a detective novel in her experimental style that would appeal to a mass audience? It is this difficult question that animates *Blood* and accounts for the presence of a style that can be best understood as a compromise formation – i.e. a style that emerges from Stein's effort to keep her experimental aesthetic in check. This effort, however, is in constant tension with her drive to realize that aesthetic and write a detective novel to a popular audience on her own terms. The result is constant vacillation: Stein can neither fully assume nor abandon either style.

The opening chapter of *Blood,* devoted to a description of troublesome servants and the history and death of the hotel keeper's wife, is largely written in a mode that occupies a middle region between Stein accessible and experimental aesthetics. The first paragraph of the work is as follows:

> They had a country house. A house in the country is not the same as a country house. This was a country house. They had had one servant, a woman. They had changed to two servants, a man and woman that is to say husband and wife. (1)

In this passage the narrative is apparent, the referents are obscure but stable and there's coherence among and within sentences. But if these features add up to produce the effect of clarity, it is far from the kind of accessibility that constitutes the *Autobiography.* It is not just the absence of a jaunty mood that distinguishes this second foray into pop writing, but also the halting progression and commitment to repetition. The presence of these features can be attributed in part to the genre of the work, which carries the demand that language be eerie and suspenseful. Yet in meeting this demand Stein is also producing an accessible version of her experimental aesthetic. Repetition with minute variation, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, is crucial to that

aesthetic, serving as a means of defamiliarizing language and bringing difference out of sameness. The second sentence of the first paragraph, therefore, can be read as an object lesson: "A house in the country is not the same as a country house." Stable meaning is ruffled in this sentence but not abandoned as it is in Stein's experimental work. The sentence is puzzling but in the way a riddle is puzzling: it does mean something.[141] A similar effort to introduce features of her avant-garde aesthetic without alienating the general reader can be discerned in Stein's sketch of the hotel-keeper: "Long ago, that is before this war, long ago, not so very long ago after all because she was not forty, but anyway some time ago there was a hotel-keeper who had succeeded his father, who had succeeded his father, who had already succeeded his father" (11). In her experimental work, quick-fire reversals of language abound, statements are made only to be immediately negated, which allows Stein to foreground the generative instability of language. Here, the same principle is in effect but in a muted form. The narrator vacillates between whether what she is relating happened long ago or not, finally settling on the latter though the rationale is somewhat unclear. Nevertheless, transparent representation is retained so that the instability of this statement can be attributed to the circuitous ruminations of a narrator rather than the play of language.

Throughout the first chapter, however, there are instances where Stein breaks with the compromise formation aesthetic and turns to a way of using language that characterizes her experimental aesthetic. A notable example occurs when she initially introduces the suspicious death of the hotel-keeper's wife, Madame Pernollet:

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[141] One can imagine, for instance, that Stein is making a categorical distinction between a country house as a vacation home and a house in the country as a primary residence.

> Mind with her mind, she withered with her mind.
>
> All please a face which smiled in case that she did mind.
>
> For which if she did mind. She fell upon the pavement of cement in the court and broke her back but did not die nor did she know why. In five days she was dead.
>
> Do you see what I mean. A country house is not the same as a house in the country and a hotel in the country is not the same as a hotel in a town but is it in a small town. (3)

In the passage immediately before this one Stein talks of people in the village going to a funeral and indicates that she will present "how they saw what they saw" (2). This preparatory phrase emphasizes the process rather than the object of sight, an emphasis that is then performed in the first three sentences of the passage above. It's unclear, particularly in the second and third sentences, what exactly the focus of attention is; the language is unsituated and invested in punning on "mind," truly leaving the reader without a way of orienting himself. Such effects are central to Stein's experimental aesthetic, where, as here, there is no tether to a controlling signified, the arrow of reference has been multiplied and sent in countless directions. Stein then takes a step back, as it were, returning, in the two sentences that follow, to the compromise formation aesthetic to indicate the circumstances of "her" death. Still, the intrusion of the untethered play of language must be taken up, and thus Stein asks the reader if he has understood, if he can follow this different way of making meaning. To facilitate understanding she gives, in the final two sentences, a version of the object lesson with which she opened the novel. This time the terms are switched: "a house in the country is not the same as a country house" gives way to "a country house is not the same as a house in the country." Stein thus demonstrates her generative principle of equivalence in the compromise

formation aesthetic and then amplifies it with the "hotel" example. But with the final whimsical question – "but is it in a small town" – she disrupts the lesson to suggest a desire to pursue her experiments with language not in the relatively accessible compromise formation aesthetic but in the rigorous and potentially alienating style of her truly avant-garde work. She cannot commit herself to the former because it can only be a kind of introductory lesson to the real thing.

Yet she cannot abandon it, either, given her interest in writing a bestseller and her awareness of a popular audience and its expectations. The text of *Blood* is thus constituted by constant vacillation as Stein moves hectically between patches of writing in which representation is ruffled but to some degree retained and those where it is jettisoned. The interplay of these two styles leads to moments of schizophrenic writing that encompass the diverse and conflicting imperatives of the text. Not long into the work Stein begins addressing the reader directly, asking him if he remembers this or that detail of the "narrative" she has unraveled. In chapter three, which is particularly replete with such questions, she asks: "Do you remember way back when the servants went mad, and the house was strange, and the young man was there and a great many said he was sweet, but he really was not. He was scotch and he had given it all away" (13). All of these details are in fact present at the beginning of the text but it remains entirely unclear as to why Stein is drawing our attention to them, a confusion that is not cleared up in the paragraph that follows, which moves on to other things. This kind of empty signposting can be explained by the conflict between appealing to the general reader and an aesthetic of the continuous present, where there is nothing to recall.

Particularly in the second half of the novel, Stein's drive to recapture that aesthetic without equivocation becomes more and more pronounced. Toward the end of chapter six, she writes:

> You will say to me it has not happened and I will answer yes of course it has not happened and you will dream and I will dream and cream…Finally decry all arrangement and still, it has not happened. This where I alone finish finally fairly well, I exchange it has not happened for it has not happened and it gives me peace of mind. Like that" (22).

Given that up to this point it has been overwhelmingly conflicted, it is the writing itself that has not happened. Stein commands herself "to decry all arrangement," to cease attempting to write in a way that could appeal to the general reader, but this does not release the writing. Finally, she produces for herself the kind of lesson in insistent repetition that she had earlier provided to the reader. To "exchange it has not happened for it has not happened" is to perform a central tenet of her aesthetic – i.e. to produce difference out of sameness – which leads here to peace of mind. In the passage that immediately follows she enacts freedom from the conflict by writing in a way that is undetermined by the transparent logic of a signified: "Any little thing pleases any one and in any way it is extraordinary in any way that at once of course in any way the whole thing has changed" (22). The chapter that follows, significantly shorter than any of the previous ones, continues in that mode. Here it is in its entirety: "Certainly yes does not matter considerably. / Anybody could be just as angry as pleased about Alexander. Oh Alexander / And yet Alexander, if not Alexander who can differ, or be poignantly fastened to alike. / Oh think it pleases" (23). Alexander, the horticulturalist, is the subject of this chapter but his name is deployed in such a way that it loses all connection to a discernible figure as potential meanings ramify. In the fourth sentence, for instance, the

name hovers uncertainly between a tool and a part of grammar that can be "fastened to alike."

Yet, ultimately, Stein returns to the compromise formation aesthetic and the conflict between it and the actual way she wishes to write reemerges and remains until the end. She cannot turn her back on her audience, a predicament she articulates by writing, "How often could I add so many cases to as many more. But she said if I add will anybody hover as they do hover from cover to cover and so they shall be careless as she the old woman brought instead of a hare four little tiny chickens which might have come from a hen" (27). Affirming a capacity to produce language in a heightened state of play, where instead of one possible meaning there are many, she quickly points out the danger of fully enacting this capacity: it would prevent the creation of a whole narrative, a work that the reader would read from cover to cover. This danger, however, is not strong enough to prevent Stein from continually reverting back to her avant-garde aesthetic whether in the work as a whole or even this sentence, whose second half demonstrates her drive to "add so many cases to as many more."

The persistent aesthetic and socio-cultural conflict that underlies *Blood* is manifested acutely through the vehicle of negative affects. This aligns the work with past efforts where Stein introduced a tense emotional vocabulary of anxiety and distress into her usually impassive aesthetic. As discussed in the previous chapter, the presence of such a vocabulary in *NOTY* (1925-1926) was triggered by Stein's troubled experience of lecturing, where she felt a threat to her autonomy in presenting herself to the public. As Dydo has argued, in the years immediately preceding the publication of the *Autobiography*, Stein would turn to the affect of anxiety to register "doubts about her

achievement and frustration about publication" (411). Continuing in this line, which links authorship and anxiety, *Blood* features charged emotional language that reflects Stein's vexed experience of fame. This new experience, which changed her authorial status and impinged on her commitment to impersonal autonomy like never before, resulted in a new form and content for the expression of anxiety. What is particular about affect in *Blood* is that it is manifested in a vocabulary of *crying* and *tears*, terms that rarely appear in previous works. In his examination of affect in *Blood*, Levay argues that Stein deploys such terms for the sake of "an inquiry into the place of affect within the practice of reading genre fiction" (17). According to him, she is interested in whether "the crime novel…[can] provoke an empathetic response in its readers separate from the feelings of suspense and titillation that the latter genre typically elicits" (17). Stein is certainly interested in the possibilities of the detective novel genre, but this view overlooks the way affect is connected with the conflicted nature of *Blood* and Stein's deep ambivalence about her newly attained fame. Plumbing this connection requires working through the peculiar way in which *crying* and *tears* are persistently repressed. *Crying* in the text is an act that strangely requires effort and its power to afford any kind of relief or resolution is consistently questioned: "There is no use in trying, if there is no use in crying."

Death and loss are central elements and themes of the crime story that constitutes *Blood* and they also relate to Stein's status as an author at the time when she was completing the work. Stein often described her negative experience of fame as involving the loss of her sense of self, a loss that is the source of the conflict in *Blood*. To better understand why expressions of that loss through crying and tears are seen as pointless, it is helpful to bring in Freud's conceptualization of the difference between mourning and

melancholia.[142] Mourning is a response to the loss of a loved one or some cherished ideal that is characterized by the painful process of withdrawing attachment from the lost object and displacing it onto another. Melancholia is also a reaction to loss but it is distinct from mourning in that within it the process of moving on is interrupted. As a result of ambivalence toward the lost object, libidinal energy is not withdrawn from that object and sent elsewhere but rather pulled back into the ego. The lost object is thus not relinquished but retained and prevents the development of new attachments.

Melancholia is an affective experience of suspension, which is exactly the nature of Stein's conflict in *Blood*. In her analysis of Djuna Barnes's novel *Nightwood* through the lens of melancholia, Katherine Fama argues that this disorder shapes the work's "compulsive repetition" which "hampers teleological momentum."[143] A similar effect is present in *Blood* particularly in Stein's repeated non-question of "do you remember," followed by a hectic list of details already covered but without any specific purpose. Repetition is of course central to Stein's experimental aesthetic as a generative mechanism, but in *Blood* it becomes perverted given her struggle with irreconcilable commitments. Mourning and melancholia, according to Freud, are symptomatically identical except for the self-reproach that is present in the latter but not the former. Retaining the ambivalent lost object leads the ego to turn on itself. As Freud writes, "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (248). Self-reproach is present in *Blood* in its constant demonstrations of self-

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[142] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1956-1974).

[143] Katherine A. Fama, "Melancholic Remedies : Djuna Barnes's Nightwood as Narrative Theory" (*Journal of Modern Literature* ; 37 (2014)).

inadequacy and insecurity. Above, I discuss the way Stein asks the reader ("do you see what I mean") whether he can follow when she suddenly introduces writing invested in her experimental mode. This instance of consideration for the reader is ringed with anxiety that becomes more acute as Stein's text becomes more and more embattled, until toward the end when she asks, "Do you understand anything" (34), which attributes an inability to understand to the reader but also implies that Stein has failed to make understanding happen.

In *Blood* the inability to mourn is especially prominent in Stein's presentation of Madame Pernollet's life during the time when her husband was fighting in World War I: "She cried when she tried but soon she did not try and so she did not cry" (5). To cry the tears of mourning for a husband at war requires effort because it involves anticipating the death of someone who, though exposed to danger, may very well return home alive, as indeed Madame Pernollet's husband would. Mourning is appealing because it can cut through the uncertainty, provide relief in the form of a new attachment, but it must be blocked because the object has not yet actually been lost. A consequence of this refusal to mourn, as the text goes on to illustrate in relation to Madame Pernollet, is the kind of monotonous repetition that is associated with melancholy: "As a day was a day it came to be that way… Every day had a day in its way" (5). In describing Madame Pernollet's state of suspension, Stein suggests that occupying a conflicted middle zone between her compromise and experimental aesthetics is related to the affective experience of being suspended between mourning and melancholia. This becomes apparent in a passage nominally about the horticulturalist Alexander toward the end of chapter one:

> This is not a description of what they did because nobody saw them do it. Once the eldest brother with a watering can, a kind of apron

> on, and a watering can which he waved and between him and the one that came, was a man. Who was the man. A stout man, all the others were thin, a walking man, all the others bowed and ran. Who was this man, and he was in between.
>
> I feel I do not know anything if I cry.
>
> Slowly they could see their way.
>
> Everybody proposes that nobody knows even if everybody knows.
>
> There is no difference between knows and grows.
>
> Gradually they changed the garden. (8).

The first paragraph of this passage bears the hallmarks of Stein's compromise formation aesthetic. There is play on repetition and the ramification of meaning, with the mystery man accruing various forms of significance as the passage goes on, but the paragraph stops short of the experimental aesthetic in that it is grounded in a representational situation of encounter. What is fascinating about this passage as a whole is that after the paragraph of compromise Stein immerses herself in the experimental aesthetic, whose details bear upon the narrative of crime but also lift away from it to suggest other possibilities. The hinge between these two passages is the reflexive sentence: "I feel I do not know anything if I cry." This sentence comments on the compromise formation aesthetic through the logic and imagery of mourning. To cry the tears of mourning is to embrace the compromise formation aesthetic as a new attachment. This involves relinquishing her old attachment to the experimental aesthetic, which means jettisoning years of knowledge and starting anew. In returning to the experimental aesthetic in the last four sentences of the passage, Stein aligns herself with Madame Pernollet in refusing to mourn, refusing to give up the object that, after all, does not have

to be lost. Yet ultimately Stein cannot write consistently in the experimental aesthetic because, working in the context of a popular genre, she cannot ignore the expectations of her newly gained mass audience. Those expectations make her ambivalent about the viability of the experimental aesthetic, and such ambivalence makes it impossible, in the wake of fame, to recover that old attachment.

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As was pointed out in the previous chapter, Stein was notable within the modernist cultural field because of her unabashed interest in literary fame and financial success. Her lack of commitment to an inverse relationship between literary and monetary achievement, a fundamental avant-garde logic, was mirrored by her association with cultural figures who occupied a diverse array of positions in the modernist cultural field. While avant-garde figures generally relied on the support of bourgeois cultural intermediaries (such as patrons), it was uncommon for them to establish and cultivate relationships with popular and middlebrow artists and authors. Stein ran counter to this form of cultural parochialism by investing herself in abiding relationships of mutual appreciation and support with such figures as the popular journalist Mildred Aldrich and the cultural impresario and mass market novelist Carl Van Vechten. These relationships were crucial for Stein in furthering her career and became especially important in the wake of gaining fame with the *Autobiography*. The publication of that accessible and popular work can be seen as the culmination of her career-long resistance to embodying the imaginary restrictions of the avant-garde. The notion that she had fundamentally

betrayed those strictures was spectacularly affirmed through the publication of "Testimony Against Gertrude Stein" (1935).[144] This denunciatory work, with contributions by such luminaries as Georges Braque, Tristan Tzara, Henri Matisse, and André Salmon, skewered Stein's account of her involvement in the rise of the avant-garde in Paris in the early part of the century. She was accused of engaging in "tinsel bohemianism," and the *Autobiography* was deemed, in the words of Maria Jolas, co-publisher of the influential avant-garde magazine *transition*, to be Stein's "final capitulation to a Barnumesque publicity" (8).

Stein responded aggressively to these accusations while also characteristically noting, in a letter to Van Vechten, that the controversy would likely be a boon for sales of the *Autobiography*: "my French publishers are naturally very pleased."[145] As someone who always sought mass appeal and bemoaned her renown among only "the precious few," Stein could weather the testimony of the *transition* group. Still, if her commitment to certain avant-garde cultural values was always limited, her investment in avant-garde aesthetics was not, which demonstrates the kind of mismatch there can be between cultural positioning and textual aesthetics.[146] The *Autobiography* was an instrumental work, a concession to mass-market expectations geared toward winning the large general audience that Stein had always sought. With the success of the book, she embarked on

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[144] Georges Braque, Eugene Jolas, Maria Jolas, Henri Matisse, André Salmon and Tristan Tzara, *Testimony against Gertrude Stein* (The Hague: Servire Press, February 1935).

[145] Burns, Edward, ed., *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten* (New York: Columbia UP, 2013), p. 407.

[146] Stein thus presents an intriguing counterexample to Bourdieu's model in which the two are rigorously aligned.

the difficult, conflicted effort of introducing that audience to what she considered her "real work." She received crucial support in this effort from Thornton Wilder, whom she met in Chicago during her tour of America (1934-1935). It was an odd association in many ways. Stein was twenty-three years older than Wilder and they had little in common as far as background or aesthetic interest. Wilder wrote philosophically-minded, accessible work that was praised from the start by the critical establishment; he made his name in 1927 with *The Bridge of San Luis Rey,*[147] a bestseller that won him the Pulitzer Prize. While his work was antipodes apart from Stein's, they discovered mutual sympathy based on their ambivalent experiences of mass fame. Wilder quickly became an important ally for Stein, interceding on her behalf with skittish publishers and serving as a critical interlocutor. After the tour, he visited her in France, where on extended walks they would work through her ideas on fame and coming to grips with it, ideas that would come to constitute *The Geographical History of America Or The Relation Of Human Nature To The Human Mind (GH).*

Wilder became one of the first readers of *GH*, and his unstinting praise – "What a book! I mean What a book!"[148] – was important for Stein at a time of uncertainty about whether she could retain her popular standing without making the kind of aesthetic concessions that marked the *Autobiography*. That uncertainty can be measured by Stein's assiduous effort to apply Wilder's imprimatur to the work. After learning that he had "begun a vast apparatus of penciled glosses" (64) on the text, she encouraged him to

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[147] Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (New York: Boni, 1927).

[148] *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Thornton Wilder,* eds., Edward M. Burns and Ulla E. Dydo with William Rice (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 61.

continue with the effort and proposed that his glosses be included as a detailed explanatory guide in the final published version of *GH*. Stein, in fact, became so enthusiastic about the idea that she began to think of the work, at least in correspondence with Wilder, as a collaboration. Writing him at a point when he was expressing reservations about having his glosses included in *GH* (he would ultimately contribute only an introduction), she pleaded for his participation: "and please please please do not weaken about your half of the book, it is to me as if it were only lopsided if it did not have that gracious and decorative half" (68).

Stein suggests that Wilder's proposed contribution would serve as an audience-friendly counterpart to her own effort, which, as she implies, is neither gracious nor decorative. This negative comparison would seem to indicate that with *GH* Stein had reassumed the difficult style that characterized her pre-fame work and, indeed, scholars have tended to frame *GH* just in this way. Timothy Galow, for instance, has argued: "Free from the formal confines of the lecture format and the pressures of an immediate audience, the GH returns to the obscure, but playful, meditative style that characterizes many of Stein's earlier works" (81). *GH* is indeed not an audience-friendly work, and it was the recognition of this fact that drove Stein to encourage Wilder to provide his glosses for the sake of facilitating mass consumption. It is, however, a work that is profoundly marked by audience expectations of accessibility and clarity, and as such it must be distinguished from the earlier work, where such pressures were absent.

GH is motivated by and consumed with an intellectual effort that had preoccupied Stein since her ascension to fame: to distinguish literary production shaped by external demand and constrained by authorial personality from literary production that emerges

out of the ahistorical and atemporal activity of the creative mind. In the lecture "What is English Literature," Stein designates the two oppositional terms as "serving Mammon" and "serving God," and links the creation of masterpieces, works that live on far beyond their moment of creation, with the latter.[149] In *GH*, she reformulates the terms as Human Nature and the Human Mind, and seeks to argue that the two are absolutely distinct. Stein is thus writing philosophy, which carries the expectation that terms and concepts will be defined and developed. This was particularly the case since Stein sought to position the book as popular philosophy, modeling herself in this way on Wilder's position in the most advanced and revered echelon of modernism's mainstream field. The qualities associated with such positioning – maleness, seriousness – would confer on Stein the authority she sought as she pursued the possibility of establishing herself as a living icon of advanced but accessible modern thought.

In his introduction to the first edition of *GH*, which functions as an apologia for the work, Wilder neatly summarizes the qualities possessed by the terms Human Nature and the Human Mind, demonstrating, thereby, the basis for the distinction that Stein seeks to make:

> Human Nature clings to identity, its insistence on itself as personality, and to do this it must employ memory and the sense of an audience. By memory it is reassured of its existence through consciousness of itself in time-succession… The Human Mind, however, has no identity; every moment 'it knows what it knows

[149] *Lecture I*, in *Gertrude Stein: Selections*. ed. Joan Retallack (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

> when it knows it.' It gazes at pure existing. It is deflected by no consideration of audience.[150]

The very fact that *GH* is susceptible of such schematic summarization speaks to the work's investment in accessibility and its departure from Stein's pre-fame writing, which yields to summary only in terms of its formal procedures. Stein's philosophizing in *GH* is informed, in part, by an effort to meet the expectations of the genre and of her popular audience. The result is a style that recalls her lectures, in which her experimental techniques, such as repetition within difference, function to emphasize rather than upend discursive coherency. As Stein develops her distinction between human nature and the human mind, she hits upon the notion that writing is characteristic of one but not the other, communicating this insight in the following way:

> Has one anything to do with the other is writing a different thing, oh yes and this is so exciting so satisfying so tender that it makes everything everything writing has nothing to do with the human speech with human nature and therefore and therefore it has something to do with the human mind. (382).

Here, in spite of a run-on structure that manifests Stein's principle of beginning again and again, sense is evidently retained, and, indeed, throughout *GH*, Stein establishes clear guideposts to affirm the overriding idea of the work: "The human mind has no relation to human nature at all" (376).

In *GH*, however, Stein's investment in transparent exposition is particular; it diverges from the style of the lectures in that it is not consistently maintained. Instances of clear philosophical investigation are intermixed with sentences, paragraphs and,

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[150] Thornton Wilder, Introduction, *Gertrude Stein, The Geographical History of America; Or, The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind* (New York: Random House, 1936), pp. 7-8.

particularly in the middle of the work, even whole pages where Stein deploys her experimental style of ungrounded abstraction and quick-fire logical reversals. In such passages the terms of Stein's investigation either drop out or are related in abstruse ways to indeterminate meditations that Wilder characterizes as a "private language" that has "so far exceeded the delighted but inadequate powers of this commentator.[151] One of the characteristic effects of such passages is to disrupt Stein's ostensible position on the relation of the human mind and human nature. For instance, after asserting, in the sentence quoted above, that there is no relation between the two, Stein quickly upends this notion:

> The question has been asked is it the relation of human nature to the human mind or is it the relation of the human mind to human nature. The answer is there is no relation between the human mind and human nature there is a relation between human nature and the human mind. (376).

The style of this passage recalls the compromise formation style of *Blood*, where Stein was intent on providing the general reader with an accessible introduction to her experimental aesthetic. In *GH*, however, the effect is too disruptive to be pedagogical given that by suddenly linking human nature and the human mind Stein subverts the core logic that informs the philosophy of the work.

Putting forward a proposition only to reverse it immediately was one of the central ways in which Stein, particularly in her work from the 1920s on, sought to test and question aesthetic and social classificatory distinctions. In the poem "Patriarchal

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[151] pp. 10-11. Indeed, it is the presence of such potentially alienating passages that prompted Stein to ask for Wilder's mediation, which, as the above quote illustrates, consists in putting forward the notion that the difficulty of the work provides the grounds for heightened readerly pleasure (Wilder's powers of comprehension may be frustrated but remain "delighted").

Poetry" (1927),[152] as Laurel Bollinger has argued,[153] Stein formulates gender and linguistic binary oppositions and then dismantles them in a process that demonstrates the artificiality of such oppositions and points up the positive and liberatory possibilities of interconnectivity. In much of Stein's writing up to her ascension to fame, binary opposition is thus accorded value only to the extent that it serves as an object to be disrupted. In Stein's writing after the *Autobiography*, however, it evolves from a target of critique into a mode of perception and analysis that appears to provide Stein with a way of managing her crisis of identity and writing in the wake of fame. Positing no relation between human nature and the human mind, and, concomitantly, privileging the latter over the former, constituted a means for her of formulating and reasserting the writerly autonomy that she could treat as a given before she was captured by the eye of the mass public. The problem, though, with this operation is that it would require Stein to invest herself in the very sort of binary opposition that she had previously resisted. Furthermore, carrying out this opposition along clear philosophical lines, required by Stein's awareness of the expectations of her new mass audience, would mean shackling her hard-earned experimental aesthetic. Stein responds by resisting such containment and continually disrupting the very distinction between the human mind and human nature that she seeks to establish. It is this bind that renders binary opposition in *GH* functionally different from its incarnation in previous works, and it is this difference that underlies the discourses of melancholia and mourning that inform the work.

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[152] Gertrude Stein, "Patriarchal Poetry," *Gertrude Stein: Selections*. ed. Joan Retallack. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

[153] Laurel Bollinger,"'One as One Not Mistaken but Interrupted': Gertrude Stein's Exploration of Identity in the 1930s." *Centennial Review* (43.2 (1999): 227-258).

Stein conceives of the human mind as a dimension of immutability and purity, free from the distracted inclinations of human nature: “Forgetting is not an action of the human mind neither is remembering,” she writes, expanding the definition by adding that “the human mind no the human mind has nothing to do with age” (373). These qualities suggest a present-centered state of transcendence whose possibility of wholeness and containment becomes the grounds for aesthetic and existential pleasure: “The human mind when it is altogether the human mind what a pleasure to me” (374). This condition, however, is precisely pleasure and not the jouissance that Stein’s experimental writing before the advent of fame could produce. The reason for this is that there is significant ambivalence when it comes to the human mind, from its incapacity for multiple attention – “the human mind can not do the two things at once” (369) – to its abandonment of fundamental human sociality: “I wish I could say that talking had to do with the human mind” (375). If the human mind is attractive for Stein because it is apart from the travails of human nature – “the human mind has nothing to do with sorrow and disappointment and with tears” (375) – it is also in itself a source of sorrow. Descriptions of the human mind and the possibilities it offers are linked persistently with imagery of tears. Stein, for instance, punctuates her claim that the human mind is free from memory and age with a short declarative confessional sentence: “As I say so tears come into my eyes” (373).

The human mind is a vehicle for sadness not merely because it constitutes a non-human condition but also because it entails a mode of expression that runs counter to the experimental aesthetic that Stein privileged. While the human mind is associated with presentness, a quality that is fundamental to the experimental aesthetic, establishing it as an entity absolutely separate from human nature necessitates an investment in stylistic

clarity and grammatical consistency. The human mind can thus be seen as a new attachment meant to replace the old in a process of mourning that is manifested through tears and an emphasis on loss. But, just as in *Blood*, tears are not allowed to flow, there is a block on mourning that indicates Stein's refusal to fully commit herself to a new non-avant-garde way of making meaning and literature. Above, tears do not fall but rather come into her eyes, and, in a later moment, even this suggestion of mourning is retracted: "Tears do not come into my eyes they are the feeling of tears my eyes are the feeling of tears" (381). The feeling of tears rather than the experience of crying and the potential relief it could bring indicates that in the very act of establishing a new attachment in the form of the human mind Stein distances herself from this process of mourning.

However, Stein is not content to articulate her resistance to the human mind through images of contained tears in the compromise formation style. She arrests mourning, and, in the process, risks alienating her general audience by muddling the clarity of her philosophical investigation with her experimental aesthetics. This is especially noticeable in the middle section of *GH*, which Wilder, in his introduction, singles out for its impenetrability. In that section, Stein shifts away from organizing the text by chapter and disrupts the generic expectations of a philosophical investigation by adopting the structure of drama and of the detective story. Stein's oeuvre contains numerous plays, and the genre appealed to her literal imagination because it functioned as an invitation to play with language, upend hierarchies, and produce new possibilities for aesthetic and social meanings. "Just like a play. / Girls curl. / A grandmother uses napkins to make a dress" (400). This is a demonstration of self-sufficient linguistic invention and it leads to another brief section (titled "Another Play") where Stein

continues to write in sentences without mentioning human nature or the human mind, moving very close to the act of making sense but then muddying the surface of transparent representation: "It does not make any difference what happens to anybody if it does not make any difference what happens to them" (400). Stein's interest in playing with genres is that it aligns with her principle of beginning again and again, which commands active reader response and creates a present-tense aesthetic.

After toying with plays, she starts over: "And now I am really not really but truly yes really and truly yes I am to begin again" (409). This instance of renewal is noticeably hesitant, a function of foregoing audience expectations by continuing to pay oblique attention to the terms of her philosophical investigation. Further, this indication of starting anew ushers in a new genre, the detective story, which she had wielded to such ambiguous effect in *Blood*:

> The whole book now is going to be a detective story of how to write. A play of the relation of human nature to the human mind. And a poem of how to begin again And a description of how the earth look as as you look at it which is perhaps a play if it can be done in a day and is perhaps a detective story if it can be found out.(409).

Here the work becomes generically plural without overt connections among the genres. It signals that the philosophical investigation into the human mind and human nature, which had occupied the loci of attention, is now intermixed with a host of other engagements in a flattened textual landscape. This riot of genres serves as a prelude to a number of "detective stories" that nominally concern her philosophical terms – "Detective story number 1. About how there is a human mind. And how to detect it"(411) – but then provide highly abstract and oblique illustrations. *Pigeon* and *Pigeons* assume the role of empty but often amusing signifiers enmeshed in an obscure allegory: "Well it

is astonishing to see a pigeon where you had not expected ever to see one…pigeons come to parties and when they come there is no reason that they come excepting that it is the first time that they come" (412-413). Here Stein is engaged in the multiple possibilities that her experimental aesthetic affords, but, just as in previous instances involving this aesthetic in the post-fame years, she cannot sustain this melancholic mode of writing. Her interest in crime stories aligned with her experimental aesthetic because the former, like the latter, could be present-centered, non-teleological. Telling a crime story in this way, however, would run counter to her interest in writing a popular work of philosophy, and so she suspends this kind of promiscuous investigation: "And so a crime story is ended because I look at the end. Begin being ready to find the human mind" (415). This time beginning again amounts to returning to the compromise formation style, which predominates across the rest of the book though without ever entirely crowding out the experimental aesthetic, which continues to emerge in disruptive bursts.

Caught between mourning and melancholia, between the compromise formation style and the experimental aesthetic, and incapable of definitely occupying either, Stein expresses her bind through a vocabulary of depression that also functions to disrupt her classification of the human mind and human nature. After the compromise formation style is ambivalently reassumed, there are numerous instances where she deliberately strips her philosophical meditations of any claim to meaningfulness: "It is easy to see that it has nothing to do with anything and that most things have not, have not anything to do with anything…this has nothing to do either with human nature or the human mind" (418). Through such pronouncements Stein suggests that human nature and the human mind are not as exhaustive of human experience as had previously been posited. There is,

implicitly, a third term that goes unnamed, a kind of categorical vacuum in which meaningful associations between "things" become impossible. She writes that "romance had nothing to do with the human mind nor with human nature" (439) and that "superstition has nothing to do with either human nature or the human mind" (425). Such avoidance of fixed definition is, of course, a major characteristic of her experimental work, but here there is an indication of futility and dejection that is missing from that work. Whereas, before, indeterminacy of meaning served as a way to create greater possibilities for meaning-making, it serves now to convey profound negativity. The third term goes unnamed but it does not constitute an opening out into meaning; rather it suggests a closure of interest synonymous with depression.

Texts like *Blood* and *GH* stand out in Stein's oeuvre because they are charged with negative affect. In place of the affective neutrality that predominates in so much of her work, there is anxiety, depression, and, especially, sadness. Another crucial feature that sets these works apart, and which forms a foundation for all these ugly feelings, is that within them Stein's biographical self occupies a position of visible presence. The melancholic experimental style, with its increasingly faint promise of impersonal autonomy, contends with the compromise-formation style whose relative transparency reveals Stein's embattled experience with the consequences of fame. The conflict between the two styles, a proxy for Stein's contradictory commitments to mass fame and impersonal aesthetics, represents the frustration of the process by which subjective feeling and experience is transformed into objective aesthetic relations.

My account thus diverges from other critics who posit that Stein's "real work" in the 1930's is marked by a rapprochement or reconciliation of her experimental and

conventional styles. She is, instead, suspended between the two, which reflects the particular nature of her manifestation of the conflict between impersonal autonomy and market success. In the case of Duchamp, the conflict is constituted by a sense of entrapment given that every attempt he made to evade recognition was a means of getting it. When it comes to Stein, however, the conflict is conditioned and made distinct by the fact that unlike Duchamp she was never interested in elite cultural capital. This difference accounts for her experience of the loss of autonomy as a state of suspension, which, in turn, provides the grounds for the mood of sadness that permeates *Blood* and *GH*. This mood also encompasses a distinctive yearning that is present in these works. Stein seeks to write the way she used to, an endeavor that is continually frustrated given the new and constraining audience expectations she contended with after achieving fame.

CONCLUSION

My intent, in this dissertation, has been to provide a new understanding of modernist autonomy as a generative force that is activated in the wake of its loss. For Duchamp and Stein, the affective experience of losing impersonal autonomy inspired attempts to regain it through aesthetics that are marked by the frustration of the process by which subjective experience is transformed into objective formal relations. The resulting works of art and literature are invested in a variety of ugly feelings and are oriented in a hostile manner toward the viewer/reader. In this way I reconceive the concept of modernist autonomy as a response that leads to conflicted aesthetic modes that depart significantly from those that are commonly associated with traditional conceptions of modernist autonomy.

In focusing on two canonical avant-garde figures, I have sought to trouble the distinction that is often made between high modernism and the modernist avant-garde. The concept of autonomy has been used as a kind of dividing line between the two, embraced by the former and rejected by the latter. What I have shown, however, is that when thought of in terms of impersonal autonomy, the concept serves as a vital link between the aesthetic and socio-cultural concerns of high modernism and the avant-garde. My investigation of the consequences of losing autonomy also provides a new perspective on the notions of modernist resistance and subversion. Like autonomy,

these concepts have been largely dismissed within the new modernist studies or presented in terms of complicity. Indeed, the kind of wholesale resistance to the market or mass culture that was claimed by canonical modernist theorists and authors does not hold up when modernism is studied as a sociocultural formation. That said, resistance and subversion, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, have an important, though much more modest, place within modernism. In his response to the constraining attention of Dada as well as the ultimatum that made his refusal to exhibit untenable, Duchamp engaged in autonomous resistance. The same can be said for Stein and her refusal to fulfill her contractual obligation to cross the Great Divide. It is crucial to register and take seriously such local and situational forms of modernist resistance given that they illuminate the affective experience of artists and authors as they navigated the modernist cultural field and the kind of works of art and aesthetic modes that emerged out of that experience.

Aside from the interventions it makes in the study of Stein, Duchamp and modernist autonomy, this dissertation is also invested in making a methodological intervention. That is, I am interested in how we do modernist criticism. As part of this effort, I make an argument, throughout the dissertation, for a particular kind of biographical criticism. Although it commonly goes unnamed, such criticism is a staple of scholarship in the new modernist studies. The theoretical focus on institutions and the processes of production, circulation and publicity is usually carried out through narratives of modernist authors and artists responding to the possibilities of the marketplace. It's unsurprising, then, that Lawrence Rainey concludes the introduction to *Institutions of Modernism* with a defense of narrative as a critical method:

> Narrative is thought to be a linear and monologic form that offers factitious coherence at the cost of analytic complexity, storytelling a form of pandering to popular tastes depraved by mass media…But is it necessary to remind literary critics that a story is not an object that has merely been happened upon? No less than expository prose, stories are complex and contradictory artifacts. The apparent ease with which they may be recounted should not be confused with a resistance to analysis. Stories *are* analysis – by other means. (8-9).

Rainey was responding to the pressures of writing narratives at a moment when English Studies was still dominated by the nonlinear and dialogic critical modes of poststructuralism. The analytical complexity of those modes, he argues, is not absent from narrative- or story-based criticism. Stories, the primary form of biographical criticism, "are complex and contradictory artifacts" and allow for multifaceted analysis. It is the capacity of the story to embrace contradiction and register detail both small and large that has made it a privileged form of recent attempts to formulate alternatives to critical theory. For Bruno Latour, "A good [Actor-Network-Theory] account is a narrative or a description or a proposition where all the actors do something" (128). His injunction "to follow the actors themselves" (12) is a prescription for a mode of local analysis that moves slowly and deliberately to capture the unexpected, multidimensional stories told by actors and the material worlds they inhabit.

But if this kind of biographical, story-based criticism has been important for the new modernist studies, it is often deployed in a way that overlooks key dimensions of the experience of the subjects under consideration. Given that the biographical subject has become an essential unit for analyzing modernist culture, it is crucial to register not just the strategies he or she deploys in navigating the modernist cultural field but also his or her affective experience in relation to those strategies. Biographical criticism is well-equipped to capture that experience in all of its complexity. Affective analysis, as I've

shown in mobilizing Sianne Ngai's concepts of "ugly feelings" and "suspended agency," deepens our understanding of what it was like to navigate the material conditions of modernism and sheds light on the way personal experience is translated into aesthetic form. Affect is, therefore, an important source of evidence, and my aim in this dissertation has been to show that it can be comfortably situated within the study of modernism as a socio-cultural formation. Examining the affective dimension of the pursuit of cultural capital is a means of addressing a gap in Pierre Bourdieu's influential field theory. In *Distinction*[154] and *The Rules of Art* Bourdieu addresses subject experience in a limited way that is often isolated from his theorization of the way the social is constituted by a relational struggle for cultural and economic capital (in *Distinction* this is literally the case as descriptions of various individuals within the French class system are confined to sketches that are set off from the main body of the text). By harnessing biographical criticism to focus on the affective experience of individual authors and artists it becomes possible to discern the ways in which they responded to the cultural marketplace and how that response informed the art and literature they produced. This should not be taken to mean, however, that I am advocating for an alternative to field theory. On the contrary, as my dissertation demonstrates, I recognize and rely on the explanatory power of Bourdieu's framework. That said, I think it is important to wield that framework without the presumption that it possesses *total* explanatory power. What I am calling for, essentially, is a more flexible form of field theory that can accommodate

[154] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1996).

evidence – such as that of affective experience – that does not fit neatly into, or may even run counter to, its rigorous logic.[155]

Of course, it is not enough to only take into account the affective experience of biographical selves; it is also necessary to invest credence in that experience. This does not mean forgoing critical analysis but rather affirming that such analysis must account for the evidence of affective experience without seeing through it and transforming it into something else. I have sought, throughout this dissertation, to make this point with the intention of demonstrating the kind of new knowledge that can emerge about Duchamp, Stein and the culture of modernism if the hermeneutics of suspicion are suspended. By recognizing, for instance, that Duchamp's resistance to Dada was at one and the same time a strategy to cultivate a position of distinction *and* an expression of impersonal autonomy, it becomes possible to discern that he experienced that resistance as a contradictory position, which opens up new ways of interpreting his work. When it comes to Stein, it is important not to translate instances of autonomous resistance – such as refusing to lecture or to fulfill her contractual obligation to produce another accessible autobiography – into the pursuit of elite cultural capital. That is because, as I have demonstrated, Stein was never interested in the kind of distinctive avant-garde position that, for instance, motivated Duchamp. In my chapters on Stein, this fact has served as the basis for distinguishing the particularity of Stein's contradictory position between the drive to assert impersonal autonomy and the desire to attain general acclaim. My

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[155] This is also the stated intention of Latour, who does not posit Actor-Network-Theory as a replacement for critical sociology; rather, he frames it as continuing the work of complex sociological description that the latter took up but failed to fully develop because of its commitment to a particular version of what constitutes the social: "The two traditions can easily be reconciled, the second being simply the resumption of the task that the first believed was too quickly achieved" (14).

examination of the contradictory positions and ugly feelings that inform Duchamp and Stein's works of art and literature is thus informed by a central principle of surface reading: "*Attention to surface as a practice of critical description.* This focus assumes that texts can reveal their own truths because texts mediate themselves; what we think theory brings to texts (form, structure, meaning) is already present in them."[156] The methodology I use in this dissertation is precisely geared toward treating the text or work of art as a site that develops its own interpretation. My object has been to show the powerful insights that can be gleaned once works of art and literature, as well as the authors and artists who created them, are allowed to speak for themselves.

[156] Sharon Marcus and Stephen Burt, "Surface Reading," p. 11.

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