

MEMENTO

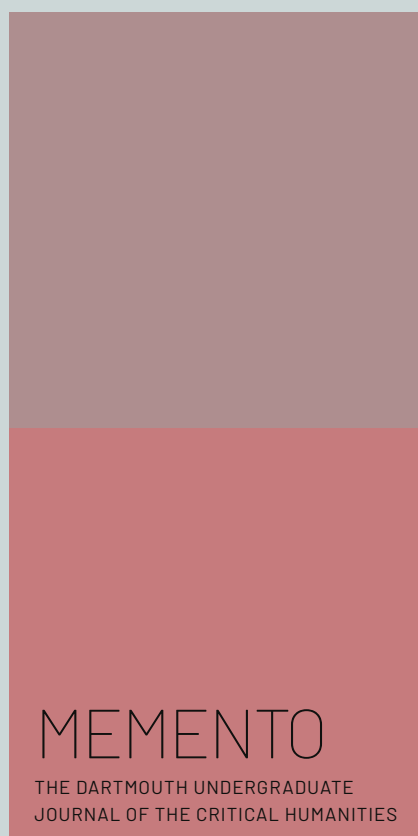
THE DARTMOUTH
UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL
OF THE CRITICAL HUMANITIES



Volume 1
Number 1
Spring 2021

Viktor Witkowski
Figure 10, 26" X 20"
Oil on Paper, 2019

Spring 2021



Volume 1

CONTENT

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS	5
THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF ITS MISINTERPRETATION: WALTER BENJAMIN, EUGÈNE ATGET, AND PROBLEMATIC PORTRAITURE Thomas Knight	8
"UPSIDE-DOWN AS IN A CAMERA OBSCURA": THE POSSIBILITY OF AN INTERNAL SPACE OF ALTERITY IN MARXIST CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS Leah Casey	32
URBAN LANDSCAPES, NATURE, AND SEXUALITY: THE BEATNIKS AND MORTON'S ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS Kendall Milendar	46
"A MASK" VERSUS <i>PARADISE LOST</i> : MILTON'S CONSTRUCTION OF DISTINCT SPACES FOR FEMALE TEMPTATION Alexandra Limb	58

MASTHEAD

Editor-in-Chief

Kamren Khan

Deputy Editor

Zachary Lang

Managing Editors

Fionnuala Murphy

Ana Noreiga Olazabal

Mohammed Safi Udin Riaz

Ananya Vaidya

Gokul Srinivasan

Associate Editors

Jessica Feltrin

Ethan August

Ian Hou

Faculty Advisor

Alysia Garrison

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

This publication is proud to present its first issue to the Dartmouth community and beyond. Our hope, as an editorial collective, is that you will find yourself both deeply engaged and intellectually challenged by the words herein contained.

In the process of assembling this collection of writings, analyses, and reflections—as well as in the labor of creating a new vanguardist platform—a fundamental question arose: what, beyond perfunctory and elementary generalizations, is *critique*? Such a concept, we believe, will not submit to a universally applicable, succinct, or precise definition. Instead, we offer the following thoughts for your consideration as you reckon with the essays that follow.

First, drawing on Michel Foucault, we recognize that “resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.”¹ Critique is then necessarily situated within the structures of power and oppression towards which it is directed. Put differently, critique emerges from within the distortions and abuses of what feminist philosopher Allison M. Jaggar terms the “unjust meantime,” carrying with it a horizontal vision of transformation and revolution.²

As such, we believe it is of utmost importance to refer to both *theory and practice*, not as distinct and peripherally related abstractions, but rather, as intimately connected and correlated concepts. In our view, in order to embody a spirit of critique, it is necessary to wrestle with both concepts as an interdependent pair. It is not enough to simply theorize from an ivory tower as we passively dwell in the unjust meantime. Instead, said theorization must be met with practice.

To take a step further, we must now ask what constitutes practice. Again, our question eludes a complete answer. Broadly, we recognize two general, overlapping dimensions to practice. The first of which is those practices that engage with our material or political reality. The second of which is what Judith Butler, in her reading of Foucault’s methodology, refers to as the process of self-forming. That is, the self-forming that occurs when the self “risks its deformation as a subject, occupying that ontologically insecure position which poses the question anew: who will be a subject here, and what will count as a life, a moment of ethical questioning which requires that we break the habits of judgment in favor of a riskier practice that seeks to yield artistry from constraint.”³ We do not recognize these attempted definitions

1. Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*. Translated by Robert J. Hurley, New York: Vintage-Random House, 1990, pp. 95.

2. Jaggar, A. M. “Thinking about Justice in the Unjust Meantime”. *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 2, July 2019, doi:10.5206/fpq/2019.2.7283.

3. Butler, J. “What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue”, *The Judith Butler Reader, 2001*, edited by S. Salih, pp. 302–22. *The Judith Butler Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

of practice to be mutually exclusive nor do we present them as exhaustive. Further, we emphasize again that these practices, and the theory that informs them, emerges from within, and are thus implicated in, the systems, institutions, and discourses of power against which they are directed.

We believe, ultimately, that any work which challenges established conventions, proposes a new point of view, or goes beyond those who came before, is adding to the spirit of the new era—that which allows for critique to exist and thrive. However, these proposals and challenges must always point forward, never backwards. This specification is of great consequence, for, as Peruvian Marxist and cultural critic José Carlos Mariátegui argued, “the false faith and dogmatism found in the old order is often confused with the passionate, risky, and heroic faith of those who fight dangerously for the victory of a new society.”⁴ A project seeking to work towards the unity of theory and practice becomes futile, even counterproductive, if such theory—and the sentiments that guide it—are not critical, bold, and daring, completely unafraid to challenge the current order and all of its existing social conditions.

Critique, to us, thus means to be intentional and forward in our openly *revolutionary and vanguardist spirit*—defined as such because it unapologetically seeks to attack and break with oppressive and colonial structures, all the while proposing futuristic blueprints for a different type of world. That is the task of the present era.

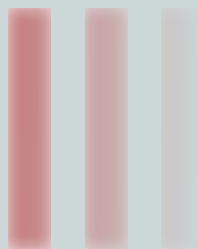
Turning finally to the words herein contained, you will find first Thomas Knight's reproach to Walter Benjamin's reading of Parisian photographer Eugène Atget which addresses the intersection of ideology, academic scholarship, and aura. Second, Leah Casey explores the possibility of a space of alterity within Marxist materialism, questioning whether consciousness can be formed outside of the production of class consciousness. Next, Kendall Milender explores the Beatniks' conflation of nature and feminine sexuality, employing Timothy Morton's environmental aesthetics. Finally, Alexandra Limb engages in the scholarly debate on Milton's gendered concepts of temptation, morality, and agency.

In closing, we thank the writers featured in this article who were so generous with their time and labor as well as the many others who submitted essays this cycle. We are grateful to Viktor Witkowski for allowing us to feature his artwork. We also thank the Department of English & Creative Writing and our faculty advisor, Alysia Garrison, for their support.

Sincerely,

Memento Editorial Collective.

4. José Carlos Mariátegui, *The Artist and the Era*, “Is There a Unique Sentiment in our Era?”. Lima: *Amauta*, 1959.



The Work of Art in the Age of its Misinterpretation:

Walter Benjamin, Eugène Atget, and
Problematic Portraiture

Thomas Knight

To die—literally or metaphorically—in the gutter, uncelebrated, unloved, and unappreciated, has become an irreplaceable part of the artistic cult that surrounds writers like Kafka and Melville, poets like Dickinson and Poe, and musicians like Nick Drake and Robert Johnson. This consideration has become so essential to their propagation and understanding that the cynic must question whether the very fact of their prior obsolescence is responsible for their continuing significance beyond the type of archival crate-digging common to most eras. What sympathy! What chance! All too often, the veneration of the chronically unvenerated offers its modern promoter the chance to rescue an artist from obscurity, to play groundbreaking critic and heralded archaeologist. To read Walter Benjamin in the context of Eugène Atget's photographs of Paris is to look upon a rare example of one underground hero embracing another, well before either had achieved a semblance of the posthumous recognition they would receive (Benjamin at the hands of the postmodernists and post-structuralists in the second half of the 20th century, and Atget before his official canonization by solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1981). Gushing over Atget, Benjamin states that "he reached the Pole of utmost mastery," comparing him to the piano maestro Busoni, and tracing the genealogy of the avant-garde photography of the 1920s and 1930s squarely back to him (*Little History* 518). It is not difficult to see why the Marxist critical theorist found in Atget a measure of postmortem brotherhood. As a photographer, Atget embodied what appeared to be a radical philosophy of creative work. Refusing to call himself an artist, he preferred to call his photographs "documents pour artistes," taking photographs for use by painters, sculptors, architects, or anyone who wanted to purchase a nontraditional image of Paris from his small shop. In Benjamin's narrative, he acted "with the bitter modesty of a great craftsman who always lived in the shadows," rejecting many of the concepts of artistry that Benjamin saw as harmful, including "genius, eternal value, and mystery" (*Little History* 518; *The Work of Art* 1167).

While both Benjamin and Atget were known in limited circles, this odd intellectual encounter—which brought a German-Jewish intellectual, together with a French tradesman who had stumbled from job to job before settling on photography—had a significant impact on the future reception of each figure's body of work. Drawing on Atget, Benjamin wrote two pieces that remain timely almost a century after their authorship, *The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproduction* and *A Little History of Photography*. These works developed his famous concept of

the aura within their pages, and cemented his reputation as one of the preeminent scholars of the Frankfurt School, and of media studies in general. From Benjamin, Atget received critical acclaim and political importance, as well as fascinated attention from many of those who discover his peculiar photography from Benjamin's writings. But in both of these essential writings on art and photography, Walter Benjamin critically examines neither the background of the photographer that he heroized, nor the breadth and depth of his work. Though he created the type of photographs that signaled to Benjamin a radical turn in the history of art, he also created images that Benjamin classified as counter-revolutionary, portrait photographs that seem imbued with aura, and thus, cut against the aims of technology as an aid for the revolution to come. Further, his incomplete account of the body of Atget's work supports some of the other criticisms leveled at Benjamin, notably by Theodore Adorno, who saw in his essays on art and technology a tendency towards the lionization of the proletariat, the cultivation and promulgation of the same cultic mythologizing that Benjamin attacked, and ultimately, inadequate theorizing. (Feldman 336) This latter issue was damningly described by Adorno as Benjamin's tendency to show an "aesthetic discipline...imposed...by omitting everywhere the conclusive theoretical answers involved." (qtd in Feldman 348)



Figure 1. *Rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Etienne*
Collection of the Museum of Modern Art

Eugene Atget", Photographe de Paris

Eugène Atget, born in Libourne, France in 1857, lived a quiet, yet rambling life, of which, until recent biographical studies, little substantive documentation existed. Accounts have shown that after graduating from high school, he spent a roughly ten-year stint in the merchant marine before he moved to Paris in 1878. There, he took a "cheap room... among the slaughterhouses and railway yards" at the city's edge, and tried his hand at acting, an industry in which he failed to gain traction. Gaining acceptance into France's prestigious acting school, the Conservatoire de

Paris, Atget's studies were interrupted by the compulsory military service of the Third Republic, and when he began to stumble in his classes upon his return, he was dismissed from the school. After spending time as an actor with a ragtag troupe which traveled around France, Atget decided to pursue photography, a practice which biographers have noted may have been a hobby for him long before he took it up professionally. Around 1890, Atget officially joined the profession, which had become a refuge for many of Paris' small-time or marginally talented artists who could no longer compete with portrait photography's low cost and verisimilitude (some sources indicate that Atget had also attempted a career as a painter before opening his photographic studio)



Genevieve, Eugene Atget, 1925
 Museum of Modern Art

(Borcoman 10-16). But unlike many of the photographers who worked in Paris, Atget worked on the streets rather than in slick studios, where portraiture, democratized by the lens, enabled the petit-bourgeois to live out illusions of grandeur and exoticism, to have their photographs taken in elaborate costume within opulent, manufactured settings. Writing in *Little History of Photography*, Benjamin has a great deal of fun addressing these backdrops, which often approximated orientalist or neoclassical themes: "In painting, the pillar has some plausibility, but the way it is used in photography is absurd, since it usually stands on a carpet. But anyone can see that pillars of marble or stone are not erected on a foundation of carpeting" (515). Modifying the familiar biblical parable about building on sand, Benjamin indicts the implausibility of the photographs, as well as the general inauthenticity of the apparatus designed to lend the upwardly mobile a tint of worldliness and sophistication.

Venturing from his workshop in the 5th Arrondissement, not far from the Montparnasse district of intellectual, artistic, and red-light fame, Atget would take an exhaustive number of photographs in and around Paris, largely focusing on under-photographed and non-traditional locations. As Benjamin noted, while lugging around his dated large-format, glass-plate camera, Atget was "almost always passing by the 'great sights and so-called landmarks'" (*Little History* 519). This is largely true: the Eiffel Tower (which would have been brand new when Atget began

shooting) never figures in any of them, and the Moulin Rouge's characteristic windmill appears in only a handful of photographs. Even when Atget decided to document the Arc de Triomphe, he photographed the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel, the lesser-known, half-scale monument erected on the opposite side of the Champs-Élysée from its more famous relative, and focused on its stonework and carvings, not its general architectural presence. In place of Paris' marquee locales, Atget photographed peddlers standing in the middle of old winding streets, disembodied mannequins and elaborate storefronts, leering prostitutes, cemetery gates, old trade signs, and working-class drinking establishments. In Eugène Atget, 1857-1927, James Borcoman describes the photographs as an exhaustive "catalogue" of a "city and a civilization: the old streets, courtyards, and squares, walls plastered with posters, shop exteriors, shop interiors, signs, kiosks, cafes, restaurants, bars, markets, junk shops, street fairs, horse-drawn tramways, carriages and wagons, parks, trees, flowers, fountains and outdoor sculptures, bridges, barges, and the quays of the Seine, churches, confessionals, monuments and rag-pickers' hovels, embassies, mansions, windows, doorways, doorknockers, architectural ornaments, livingrooms, diningrooms, bedrooms, fireplaces, staircases" (24). If this seems to be a massively broad, spiraling collection of subjects, that is because it was. Though there is no official count on how many photographs he produced, the number remaining in archives in France and worldwide exceed 10,000, which is likely only a fraction of Atget's total output. It almost goes without saying, but this productivity was remarkable, even over the span of a lengthy career.

It is easy to write about Atget's photographic practice, but describing his photographs themselves is a harder task. As Benjamin wrote, "free-floating contemplation is no longer appropriate to them. They unsettle the viewer; he feels challenged to find a particular way to approach them" (*Little History* 258). To further Benjamin's perceptions, they feel both in and out of place, bold and humble, contemporary and archival. After viewing them extensively, the one consistent emotion that seems to sear all of these eclectic images of interiors and exteriors, quaint objects and grand pieces of sculpture, is a sense of sincerity, a feeling which is

**// free-floating
contemplation
appropriate to
unsettle the viewer
feels challenged
particular way
to approach
them (*Little History*)**

nonetheless odd, given that so many of them seem barren and unfamiliarly empty. That sense is particularly acute in images such as Rue de la Montaigne Saint-Genève, or Café, Montparnasse Boulevard, in which all traces of explicit humanity are removed, leaving only those latent reminders of the presence of man: the grime of the cobblestones, the detritus strewn about, and the empty wicker chairs arranged in resolute formation. (See figures 1 and 2) Figuring Atget's photographs, I have always thought of two possibilities; either the photographer must have

enlisted all of Paris in a grand game of hide and seek, or some accident must have precipitated a mass evacuation of the city, somehow completed without blood or panic.

Products of an old camera and a dated development process, Atget's photographs are oft marked by vignetting, and occasionally, irregularities and "glitches" appear on the surface of the photographs. Despite that, the large-format images contain a remarkable amount of detail, which sometimes surprises the modern viewer, who tends to associate older photography with the grainy quality of the daguerreotype or tintype. Though the conscious choice of an anachronistic camera and development method could lend itself to accusations of hipsterism and pretentiousness, an extended formal and critical evaluation of these photographs leaves little trace of this, despite Atget's subsequent web of influence. In *Little History of Photography*, Benjamin described Atget's role in prompting the currents of photography that filled "avant-garde periodicals like *Bifur* and *Variete*," images "titled 'Westminster,' 'Lille,' 'Antwerp,' or 'Breslau' but that show only details, here a piece of balustrade, there a treetop

whose bare branches crisscross a gas lamp, or a lamppost with a life buoy bearing the name of the town--this is nothing but a literary refinement of motifs that Atget discovered" (518). While those photographs might seem contrived, conceived out of overtheorizing and arty insularity, it was a common occurrence for observers of Atget's work to note the conspicuous absence of these qualities. One such observer was a young man from San Francisco who would later become a pioneering American landscape photographer. Writing early in his career, years before Ansel Adams became Ansel Adams, he opined that "the charm of Atget lies not in the mastery of the

is no longer
them. They
viewer; he
ed to find a
to approach
story 258).

plates and papers of his time, nor in the quaintness of costume, architecture and humanity as revealed in his pictures, but in his equitable and intimate point of view...The Atget prints are direct and emotionally clean records of a rare and subtle perception, and represent perhaps the earliest expression of true photographic art" (qtd in Russell).

"The Incomparable Significance of Atget"

Although we know that Eugène Atget was a socialist and a subscriber to *La Guerre Sociale*, a leftist and anti-imperialist newspaper, no manifestos, be they political or artistic, survive (Warner). Thus, the interpretation of the content and method of Atget are as ideological as Benjamin, and the other notable figures who knew Atget, like Berenice Abbott or Man Ray, wish to make it. And if the reader takes Benjamin's interpretation at his word, we start to see the rare appeal of Atget the artist for Benjamin the political thinker. Living and writing in an era where aesthetics was being harnessed by the forces of totalitarianism and fascism, Benjamin finds the traditional hallmarks of the artist-- namely those of mysticism, solipsism, and the expansion of the artistic ego-- part of a large and dangerous tradition of "parasitical dependence on ritual" then undergoing a rebirth in the political staging of fascism across Europe (*The Work of Art* 1172). Before jumping into the import placed on Atget by Benjamin, it is worth defining in greater detail the concept that would make Benjamin's name familiar in seminar rooms, academic journals, and political screeds: the aura.

Like many great ideas in critical theory, Benjamin's general concept of the aura can be explained intuitively, and, to a certain extent, holds its relevance as it takes on layer after layer of increased complexity, gets applied to a particular political question, or enters into dialogue with the ideas of another thinker. Benjamin has drawn substantial criticism for the complexity and inconsistency of his theorizing of the aura--Alexander Gelley called it a "notoriously knotty term," while Heinz Puppe preferred "seemingly supererogatory and even gratuitous" -- criticism furthered by the fact that he advanced various different definitions of it across his work. But at the concept's most basic and viscerally understandable application, it is a framework used to elucidate the fact that sculpture, art, architecture, or any other part of visual culture is never experienced in a vacuum (Gelley 97; Puppe 283). Whether a work of visual art is displayed in the "white box" of a contemporary gallery, the dark corner of a modest home, or as the focal point

of a political rally, the aura is the conceptual representation of the atmosphere that surrounds a work and gives it its context, an atmosphere that Benjamin described as, "A strange weave of space and time" (*Little History* 518). For the author, the aura was both materialistic and mythic, describing the cloak of ritual, location, memory, and behavior that envelops the cultural experience of the production and exhibition of a work. While contemplation of the aura can exist as an abstract theoretical framework and a useful device for aiding the critic or skeptic's eye, the genius of the concept is how easily it can be comprehended through the power of first-hand experience. To think about examples of auratic accumulation, it helps to recall the experience of visiting a work that is endowed with a reputation extending across continents and into the mind of laymen, works that exist as first associations to the words "art," "sculpture," and "painting" in the minds of millions of people. To see Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, for example, the historic viewer had to travel to the Papal State, shuffle into the nave under the watchful eye of the Swiss Guards, and tilt their head up at the colossal scene, flanked by devout pilgrims and art enthusiasts. Only there, surrounded by the wafting smells of candles and incense, the incessant chatter of tourists, and buffeted by religious significance and secular appreciation, could the observer experience the Chapel's expansive ceiling. Another well-trodden, yet ultimately helpful example is Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, a painting that -- at least before the coronavirus pandemic--has become so synonymous with group experience that it prompted the following remark from Jason Farago of the New York Times: "The Louvre is being held hostage by the Kim Kardashian of 16th-century Italian portraiture: the handsome but only moderately interesting Lisa Gherardini, better known (after her husband) as La Gioconda, whose renown so eclipses her importance that no one can even remember how she got famous in the first place" ("It's Time to Take Down the Mona Lisa"). Describing the hold that this cultural artifact has on France's iconic institution, not to mention the greater world, Farago provides an excellent summary of those forces that sustain the aura of paintings like the Mona Lisa. Defined by its overwhelming renown, the painting becomes seen only over the shoulders of gawkers, and spoken about only in hushed, deferential tones, creating an intoxicating, self-perpetuating effect. Describing such a scene "in terms of cultural anthropology," Heinz Puppe posited that aura could be understood as "simply the emotional equivalent of a belief in magic, which when applied to the production of images--pictures representing real objects--is a feeling of awe before the capacity of special individuals--divinely gifted, magically empowered--to reproduce reality on a piece of paper, stone, wood, or the like" (284).

For Benjamin, the developments in photographic technology that had originated in the France of Niepce and Daguerre, and quickly found improvements and refinements across the world, had the potential to affect a sea change in the way that art was perceived. The ability to reproduce a sacred painting in record time and unmatched detail, create a negative, and print as many images as one wished, could sever the connection between a physical work and the totality of ritual which had surrounded it. A Flemish altarpiece could be photographed with its wings unfolded, and its entire glory on display as it might be only on high holy days or during feasts. Retreating from the experience of the 15th century peasant, whose exposure to the vivid religious scenes of the concealed panels was tightly scheduled and deployed for maximum effect, the photographer's work could display its apotheosis in perpetuity. The experience of viewing the Sistine Chapel and the Mona Lisa would also be forever altered, now subject to unlimited private or public contemplation, reproduction in books or media, and shrinking, enlarging, and modification. Paris, the eternal City of Lights, might be another prime example. A city so cached in myth and mystery and romanticized in art and literature was a prime target for the imposition of technological reproducibility, which could expose the real conditions of the city, refute the sentimental, postcard view, and shatter the enveloping myth it had cultivated.

As cameras became cheaper and more readily available, the chance grew that every hand would hold a camera, and thus, the world's vast catalogue of art and architecture could be photographed, reproduced, and classified, its aura gradually removed. Yet in Benjamin's eyes, this didn't always end up happening. In what represents a difficult self-muddying of his theory, he observed that in some cases, the anthropological magic of the aura survived the imposition of newfound technology. Benjamin wrote that in early portrait photography, like those by David Octavius Hill or Karl Dauthendy, the aura "retires into an ultimate retrenchment: the human countenance," offering "a last refuge for the cult value of the photograph" (The Work of Art 1173).¹ In addition, Benjamin explained that aura was not always solely attached to visual art and physical objects. The aura also flourished in related concepts adjacent to the physicality of a work, things that could not be touched or seen, but could be felt populating and sustaining them, "creativity, genius, eternal values, and mystery." The best summation of those concepts was probably the elevation of the artistic genius, he who "was expected to produce works of

¹ The Harry Zohn translation of The Work of Art seems to confuse the words "refuge" and "refuse." The original German word "zuflucht," used by Benjamin in this sentence, should translate to refuge, or shelter, as the word "fluchtling" translates to refugee.

high art that bore his unmistakable stamp--original and unique" (Puppe 274). To exemplify the way that these aura-adjacent concepts were historically elucidated, Benjamin uses an apt, if not entirely representative quotation from a German newspaper grappling with the advent of the daguerreotype: "Man has been created in the image of God, and God's image cannot be fixed by any man-made machine. Only the divine artist, elevated by heavenly inspiration, may dare to reproduce the godlike countenance of a man in a moment of the most solemn dedication, commanded by his genius, and without any help from some machine" (qtd in Puppe 274). In 1930s Germany, not to mention the salons of Paris in the 1880s and 1890s, one would be hard-pressed to hear of sainted inspiration, or of the importance of depicting the human form in a way appropriately gratifying to its divine maker. Regardless, a third of the way into the 20th century, Benjamin believed in the relevance of the concept. The aura was alive and well, and it had, due to its nature, traversed between the boundaries of the artistic and the political, becoming incorporated into the personality cults that characterized Europe's fascist regimes.

How had art become such a potent and dangerous tool of fascism? How had it become more than counter-revolutionary, an accessory to genocide and tyranny of the worst sort? In essence, Benjamin believed that it had in fact been art and its conventions which had enabled the rise of fascism. Extrapolating from Benjamin, art had devoured itself and predicated the scenes of its own enslavement under fascism: the burnings, confiscations, and exhibitions of "degenerate art." By sustaining the archetype of the flawless, singular, and unrestrained genius, art had made possible the political and personal characterizations that came to epitomize the state cults forming around Mussolini and Hitler. Though each nation differed dramatically in its cultivation of an explicitly fascist school of art, their leaders drew on auratic concepts every day. Writing in *Walter Benjamin and Photography*, Heinz Puppe astutely traced the way that the personality cults of painters and politicians alike functioned: "Hero Worship was rampant in the arts as well as in politics, and the 'creative genius' was accorded the highest honors the state and society could bestow...[He] was expected to produce works of high art that bore his unmistakable stamp--original and unique. Practical questions of a technical nature were considered gauche since they distracted inevitably from the stature of the artist as an original genius. And the original genius as an effective and functioning concept was...tied to the cult of the individual, to the idea of personal enterprise, and to notions of individual merit" (274). To take Puppe's comparison of the political and artistic realms literally, one can easily trace the fascistic

analogue to the artistic tradition. The political genius—he who could articulate a compelling vision of a Germany betrayed, yet a Germany that could still be redeemed—would be handed the keys to the administrative state. For this kind of gifted artist, technical matters like the destruction of the independent judiciary, the rollback of civil and criminal protections, and the dubious fire at the Reichstag might be dismissed as mere distractions, so long as the genius was able to deliver his eventual masterpiece: The Thousand Year Reich. Particulars aside, the politician, like the artist, had a vision, and that vision was to be credited and elevated over such lower things. For Benjamin, it was these inherently dangerous concepts, plucked from art and reappropriated, that enabled Mussolini's Blackshirts, the Nuremberg rallies, Kristallnacht, and the Hitler Youth. Under the workings of fascism, he theorized that the aura once attached to a statute, painting, or an icon was now being refashioned into a weaponized aesthetics, which promoted cultic values—among them the worship of the Fuhrer or Il Duce, violence, racial purity, or nationalism. This was reflected in the artistic culture of Nazi Germany, with its idealized romantic style, principled opposition to realism and materialistic art, and its reliance on the swastika. Sewn into clothing, incorporated into art, and draped in public spaces, the swastika was itself a symbol of historical cabalism, its name derived from Sanskrit, and carrying profound religious and cult value within the Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions.²

This was the artistic and political context in which Benjamin began working on *Little History of Photography*, the first published piece in which he introduced the concept of the aura. His native Europe was beset by the fascist menace, critical materialism was being rejected, and many of its proponents were being repressed, imprisoned, or even killed. Though the landscape seemed bleak, all was not lost. As Benjamin wrote, the era of technological reproduction, led by the invention and continued improvement of photography and film, retained the potential to free works of art from the “negative theology” of cult and ritual value, an effect which would snowball, introducing a new critical framework that would deal decisive blows to regimes built on shaky foundations of legend, cult, and myth (*The Work of Art* 1172). For Benjamin, whose antifascist convictions were only surpassed by his Marxist ones, technological reproduction was not only

2. Italy's futurist movement was in some ways more exciting and artistically innovative. Writing on Italian futurist art in the *New Yorker*, Peter Schejldal defined its mission as sifting “a melange of radical ideas into an aestheticized politics of upheaval for upheaval's sake, with a strutting emphasis on heroic virility.” (“Party Lines”) The movement's poet-prophet, Filippo Marinetti, explained the shockingly raw message of the artists working for Italian fascism: “We intend to glorify war—the only hygiene of the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gestures of anarchists, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and contempt for woman.” (qtd in Schjeldhal)

the key to the repudiation of oppressive politics, it was crucial to the promulgation of the mindset that would enable the spread of Marxism. After technology had tamed art, it would render it flaccid and ineffectual for exploitation by reactionary forces. And this technological reproduction would go even further, becoming an active danger to the foundations of fascism, and a standard-bearer for a revolutionary dialectic. As he concluded *The Work of Art*, "Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing Art" (1186).

It is in this context that Eugène Atget serves as Benjamin's quiet partisan, harboring no sympathy for the aura or the dangerous conventions of artistry and aesthetics that fascism would build on after his death. Atget's photographs, with their straightforward honesty, are entered in opposition to fascism's aestheticization of art and cultivation of mystery, his archival mode of photography essential in furthering the historical dialectic by placing the conditions of the past on display without glorifying them or shielding them in aura. Describing his photographs of empty streets and ghostly, unoccupied buildings, Benjamin recycles a famous characterization of Atget's work, "it has quite justly been said that he photographed them like scenes of crimes. The scene of the crime, too is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence" (*A Little History* 1173). Evidence, it is implied, that will feature in a prospective historical reckoning in which capitalists and fascists are brought to task. For Benjamin, these vacant streets represented one of the most consequential actions ever taken within the realm of photography: "Empty is the Porte d'Arceuil by the fortifications, empty are the triumphal steps, empty are the courtyards, empty, as it should be, is the Place du Tertre." Creating a recognizable alienation of humanity and the spaces people occupy, Atget's photographs give "free play to the politically educated eye, under whose gaze all intimacies are sacrificed to the illumination of detail." For Benjamin, this is not merely a difficult act, but a fundamentally iconoclastic, ascetic, and heroic one. "To do without people is for photography the most impossible of renunciations," but one that is more necessary than ever (*Little History* 519). However, Atget is not a mere counterweight to the artistic forces of fascism, he is a photographic sapper, infiltrating art under the cover of the craftsman, and laying waste to concepts of aura, mysticism, and cult value. In no uncertain terms, Atget is lauded by Benjamin because he single-handedly "initiates the emancipation of object from aura, which is the most signal achievement of the latest school of photography." That emancipation is visualized as a process in which Atget's photographs: "suck the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship," and thus, his photographic practice becomes the ideal partner in Walter

Benjamin's critical theorizing--to the point of strange coincidence (*Little History* 518). In a 1920 letter to Paul L  on, the director of Paris' Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Atget wrote: "For more than 20 years I have been working alone and of my own initiative in all the old streets of Old Paris to make a collection of 18 x 24cm photographic negatives...I can say that I possess all of Old Paris" (qtd in Bardis 61-62). Compare this with Benjamin's urgent directive to harness the power of mechanical reproduction: "Every day the need to possess the object in close-up in the form of a picture, or rather a copy, becomes more imperative...The peeling away of the object's shell, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception...where even the singular, the unique, is divested of its uniqueness--by means of its reproduction" (*Little History* 519). Given that Benjamin would not have been aware of personal correspondence sent by Atget only 11 years prior, can there be two figures that appear more sympathetic to one another?

Beyond operating towards the destruction of the auratic, Benjamin praises Atget for his humility and his tendency to eschew fame, despite the impact of his work among a small, but influential segment of enthusiasts (Maurice Utrillo and Edgar Degas are believed to have painted scenes based on Atget photographs, while a number of notable artists, including Georges Braque and Henri Matisse collected them) (Sullivan 49-50). In Benjamin's eyes, Atget was "poor and unknown, selling his pictures for a trifle to photographic enthusiasts scarcely less eccentric than himself" (*Little History* 518). There is one anecdote in particular that figures in much of the literature on Atget and might have been familiar (and compelling) to Benjamin. In 1926, the American photographer Man Ray asked the aging Atget for permission to publish one of his photographs in his photomagazine, *La R  volution Surr  aliste*. He agreed, and *Pendant l'  clipse*, which shows a crowd gathering at the Place de la Bastille as they peer at a 1912 solar eclipse, appeared on the cover of the 7th issue of the magazine, under the credit line "Photos Man Ray" (Matthews 42). Atget had apparently given his permission under the condition that his name not be used. According to Ray, Atget instructed: "Don't put my name on it. These are just documents that I make" ("Atget's Art"). For Benjamin, the unselfish attitude that enveloped Atget made him not only a pioneering and underappreciated artist, but a worker and a humble craftsman of the sort that a political revolution would require in large numbers. Hanging a shingle that read "Documents pour artistes" was a sign that marked Atget as one who saw himself as part of a larger process, who rejects personal glory for the production of something greater than himself. As the creator of images used by artists as visual aids, and works that would find their

way into the possession of archivists, historians, and writers documenting the transformation of Paris after Baron Hausmann's reconstruction had taken place, Atget was a small cog operating in a machine of the utmost importance. But reading *The Work of Art* and *Little History of Photography*, there is a feeling that Eugène Atget is a remarkably convenient figure for Walter Benjamin. His call for the destruction of the cult of the artist in the face of fascism was not necessarily a view embraced by visionary or aesthetically innovative artists, regardless of whether they happened to share his leftist politics. Although the artists of the Dada and Surrealist movements (which Benjamin lauded, and likened to an "instrument of ballistics" ruthlessly destroying the aura) shunned commercial success and many espoused Marxism, they tended not to reject personal fame, nor the eccentricity and flamboyance that epitomized the character of the avant-garde artist (*The Work of Art* 1182). Atget's popular perception as one who resolutely refused to participate in the cult of artistry, and his apparent rejection of fame may have resulted in a problematic instance of confirmation bias on the part of Benjamin. Not finding an acceptable hero directly within Surrealism or Dada, Benjamin appears to have latched onto Atget, a figure who, in total, appears not to be as sympathetic to his project or theorizing as he imagined him to be.

Mistaken Evaluations, Inadvertent Hero Worship, and "Inadequate Theorizing,"

In the light of new historical treatments of Atget, and critiques of Benjamin's writings by his contemporary, Theodor Adorno, Benjamin's arguments in *Little History of Photography* and *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproduction* deserve increased scrutiny. These reevaluations reveal that there is much to be desired in both Benjamin's approximation of Atget, and in the way that he harnessed the latter's life and practice for his writing and theorizing. The first major objection questions the way that Benjamin characterized and utilized Atget's body of work. Within this angle of critique, the largest incongruity resides in the fact that, contrary to Benjamin's lauding of "cleared out," empty photographs, Atget was remarkably interested in people. In *A Little History of Photography*, which Benjamin originally published as a sort of book review, he notes that his exposure to Atget's peculiar photographs originated from a volume entitled *Atget: Photographe de Paris*, an "exceptionally beautiful" edition sponsored by Camille Recht and published in small numbers in New York, Paris, and Leipzig (518). It is difficult to say how much of Atget's photography Benjamin had seen other than what was contained in the book,

which represented a miniscule fraction of his oeuvre selected from an archive that Berenice Abbott had prepared. As an incredibly prolific photographer, the vast majority of his photographs were not preserved due to the circumstances of their sale. (Atget himself considered them to be tools, and these prints were not necessarily designed for long-term contemplation or at-home display.) Regardless, if Benjamin based his argument off this edition, which it seems like he did, he appears to have performed a remarkable amount of cherry-picking.

Of the 96 plates reproduced in *Photographe de Paris*, almost 20% show a semblance of the human figure. Even eliminating a number of deceptive photographs that purport to show people, but instead portray the strange, authoritative presences of mannequins and dressforms that Atget seemed to enjoy shooting (and the surrealists, particularly Man Ray, so appreciated), there are still over a dozen images of people— crowd shots and portraits alike. Compared to the number of shots that show empty streets, public message boards, sculpture gardens, and dark, intimate images of bedrooms, the handful of portrait photographs are outnumbered. Yet their limited quantity has little bearing to their effect on the viewer, nor the importance that they have in understanding Atget and his subsequent critical appraisal. Apparently, Benjamin's evaluation of this volume formed the radical role that he would attribute to Atget in smashing up conventions, destroying the tyranny and the excess that the cult of the artist enabled, and creating images that would have a usefulness to a socially radical reader, one steeped in the same mode of revolutionary criticism that Benjamin brought to the table. As Karen Feldman explained Benjamin's outlook, "Art and specifically film are not promises or place- holders; they rather offer an actual means of rendering audiences and spectators more progressive, of making the audience not just a mass but instead a revolutionary force" (339). In these old Parisian photographs, Benjamin found a political ally that he could rescue from the archives and rehabilitate in service of his ideas. Essentially, he found reason for optimism in these shots, marked by blurs, uneven lighting, and sepia tints. While that could explain his reasoning, it cannot explain his fairly ridiculous assertion that Atget's images were "almost all...empty." It is worth noting that Benjamin was working with dramatically less access to Atget's photographic archive than is available today, where both the layman and the academic have the benefit of thousands of organized photographs, digitized in exceptional detail. But Recht's Atget volume--the very same cited by Benjamin--contains a number of notable portraits of humanity, powerful photographs of people in their environs which include a captivating full-page print of a lampshade peddler

and an ebullient scene which juxtaposes a wizened old organ grinder with a little girl, her arms outstretched in jubilation. (See figures 3,4) Even more damning, these images seem to undermine Benjamin's lauding of Atget as a supremely politically useful photographer.

As mentioned above, in his writings on mechanical reproduction of artwork, Benjamin sounded the horn about the promise that photography and film had in destroying cult value and forcefully separating "the work of art from its parasitic dependence on ritual (*The Work of Art* p.6). He argued that photography was a formidable match for the power of cult value and the aura, as the negative, the very technology that made photography a useful and notable invention rendered the concept of the authentic and the original old-fashioned, superstitious, and simply outdated. Art was no longer one of one, and whoever controlled the negative could turn out identical copies as long as the negative survived, the first copy indistinguishable from the last. At the same time, Benjamin maintained that the one place where the aura stubbornly resided was the portrait photograph. In both *Mechanical Reproduction* and *A Little History of Photography*, Benjamin deployed highly eloquent passages describing these portraits and the elusive way that they retained their auratic qualities. In *A Little History*, he stated: "the most precise technology can give its products a magical value, such as a painted picture can never again," and in *Mechanical Reproduction*, he asserted "the cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time, the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty" (510; 1173). For the aforementioned Organ Grinder and the Lampshade Merchant, their photographic presence, documented days, months, or years before their subjects disappeared from existence, do not seem like archival documents. They are more than cold, unfeeling "standard evidence of historical occurrences" (*A Little History* 1173) In these photographs, overlooked by Benjamin, his explanations of the auratic qualities of earlier portraits begin to make sense in a visceral, emotional way.

"Through that 'most precise quality,'" Benjamin wrote, we gain a "magical value, such as a painted picture can never again have for us. No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has... seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it." (*Little History* 510) In that

passage, Benjamin furthers the argument against his own invocation of Atget. To look at these photographs is to understand why the critic John Russell claimed that “Like Jean-Francois Millet, Atget made his peasants stand up like royalty” (“Atget”). It is to understand that his portraits give his subjects a dignity and an independence, and to be enchanted by the presence and singularity of the person captured within-- exactly what Benjamin thought technical reproduction would and should supplant. Eugène Atget, revolutionary photographer, was a merchant, not unlike those he pictured in his photographs, rag-pickers that sold textile scraps, courtesans that sold their bodies, peddlers who hawked soap, ceramics, and ice cream. But unlike those who sold something concrete, he sold fleeting captures, auratic moments seemingly immune to death, destruction, transformation, and revolution.

In an alternative, biographical reading of Benjamin's source material, his appraisal of Atget comes across as myopic and confused, trafficking in the exploitation of the visual arts for political purposes, and guilty of many of the same sins that he attributed to the use and abuse of the aura. At the very least, he failed to paint a complete picture of Atget's body of work, and at the most damning, this mischaracterization hits back at the very core of Benjamin's arguments. Ultimately, had Benjamin's work been limited to popular appraisals, and had he remained more of a critic than a cultural theorist, these confusions might not matter enough to rebut or attempt to explicate. However, Walter Benjamin's writings on art were not without consequence, either to the author himself, or to a later group of academics and thinkers who rediscovered his work after his suicide in Catalonia, prompted by fears of deportation into Nazi-occupied France. The very facts of his life, and particularly those of his death, underscore the potent political message that his works on art, photography, and the aura carried. For this reason, further explanation on how Benjamin misinterpreted the greater body of Atget's work is needed.

Over the course of a long relationship, Theodor Adorno--a fellow member of the deeply influential Frankfurt School who would find particular acclaim for his writings about the “culture industry” --enjoyed a correspondence with Walter Benjamin that lasted for hundreds of letters, postcards, and telegrams. They shared drafts and manuscripts, gave suggestions on edits and revisions, and offered each other sharp critiques. One of these letters from Adorno responded to a draft of *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* that had been sent to him by Benjamin. In the midst of a technically complex and deeply internecine quarrel over the duty of intellectuals, Adorno offered a charge against Benjamin; that he “credit[ed] the proletariat...

directly with an achievement which, according to Lenin, it can only accomplish through the theory introduced by intellectuals as dialectical subjects” (Adorno and Benjamin 129). While Adorno wasn’t directly responding to Benjamin’s treatment of Atget, he raised a critique that also seemed to apply to the writings of photography contained in *A Little History*. In that work, Benjamin built up an image of Atget, the proletariat photographer who labored in poverty, not knowing the import that his photography carried. But was Eugene Atget who Benjamin said he was? The image that Benjamin so carefully crafts is of an old man quietly doing the work of the revolution in the midst of Paris, creating a new practice of photography that promises great things for the future of Marxism. But essential to his invocation in this essay is that Atget remains a penniless, unknown creature who labors in darkness and the absence of fame. As it would turn out, recent biographical information reveals that nearly all that Benjamin wrote about him in *Little History* was untrue. Though his business did not make him a millionaire, he was not the grimy wretch that Benjamin constructed him to be. By 1900, the only concrete date Benjamin references in his writings on Atget, he had a loyal, expansive clientele that included artists, sculptors, stoneworkers, architects, historians, and interior designers, and had made several large sales of hundreds of photographs to institutions that included Paris’ *Bibliothèque historique*, the *Bibliothèque nationale*, the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, and the *Musée de Sculpture*: hardly “photographic enthusiasts scarcely less eccentric than himself.” In 1899, these sales apparently financed his move to a comfortable apartment at the edge of Montparnasse. (Borcoman 16, 21) As for the reputation of the quiet, unassuming man who had famously told Man Ray that there was no reason to attribute his name to his “documents,” there is little evidence of this figure either. Records show Atget was a popular lecturer who gave scholarly talks to students at universities across Paris, from smaller community learning institutions, to the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes Sociales*, one of the city’s most prestigious institutions. Erudite and well-read, he lectured on popular authors such as Moliere, Victor Hugo, Dumas, and philosophers like Friedrich Schelling (Borcoman 24-25). In addition, the famous Man Ray-Atget exchange that Benjamin had probably heard about originated after Man Ray offered to teach Atget to develop negatives using his advanced process. Declining, Atget nevertheless allowed Man Ray to reproduce his photograph using the new process and put it on the cover of *La Revolution Surrealiste*. The request that his name not be used, Atget’s biographer suggests, “may have been the decision of a man, demanding in his standards, who refused to allow the quality of his work to be compromised”

(Borcoman 29).³ Whether his portrait emerged out of ignorance, negligent cherry-picking, or a willful desire to reform Atget to suit his writings, it is clear that Benjamin indulged in the mythical, creating a hero out of him, and building a shrine to his revolutionary potentiality in two of his most famous writings. Analyzing the portrait of Atget that appears in Benjamin's writing, one cannot help to think that it exemplifies the sort of celebrity cult-making impugned so passionately within Benjamin's writings. To invoke one of Adorno's critiques, it seems evident that Benjamin might not have had to create the theoretical marionette that he made out of Atget had he fine-tuned his notoriously difficult, largely impenetrable theory of the aura.

Interestingly, while *A Little History of Photography* was the first published piece in which Benjamin discussed the aura, he had already explored the idea in earlier, unpublished work. In what he called his "Experiments," the author took a variety of drugs, apparently inspired by Baudelaire's writings, and made copious observations. His first written discussion of the aura resulted from Benjamin's consumption of a large amount of hashish, and in it, Benjamin's usage of the term see-saws from paranoid to consequential. Describing the feeling of a friend reaching out and touching him, Benjamin states that he "sensed the contact long before it actually reached me. I felt it as a highly repugnant violation of my aura." Elsewhere, Benjamin stated something much more relevant for this explanation: "First, genuine aura appears in all things, not just in certain kinds of things, as people imagine" (*On Hashish* 19, 27). In these writings, Benjamin appeared to define the aura much more expansively, stating that a person, not just a work of art, possessed it, and that it could be "violated."

It is tempting to view these sentences as throwaway thoughts and stoned musings. After all, Benjamin had devoted innumerable pages in *A Little History* and *The Work of Art* to slippery explanations of why certain photographs contained aura, and why some didn't, and Atget's denial of refuge to aura was the lynchpin of the promise of technological reproduction. Yet, Miriam Bratu Hansen has posited that these statements actually reveal Benjamin's fascination with a broader, "more esoteric" definition of the aura that had been circulating in popular discourses around occultism. In this reading, the deployment of the concept in a narrower form in his well-known works was a purposeful deviation from his original thoughts, but one that was essential to his intellectual method. "To corral the meaning of aura into the privileged sphere of aesthetic tradition--and thus to historicize it as a phenomenon in decline--was the only way the term

³ Borcoman also states that counter to Benjamin assertions, Atget's photographs had appeared in a number of publications, and that selling the reproduction rights to his photographs constituted a decent part of his income.

could be introduced into Marxist debates at all, in an intellectual and political gamble that would legitimize it as a philosophical category" (Hansen 336-338). "An intellectual and political gamble" it was, as the translation of his ideas into an acceptable mode of discourse, as brilliant and enlightening as they could be, were also deeply confused and irregular.

In the same letter in which he accused Benjamin of insufficient scholarly development, Adorno offered his belief that Benjamin, out of academic irresponsibility, had mistakenly assigned the label of "counterrevolutionary" to any artwork that didn't actively work towards the destruction of the aura (Adorno and Benjamin 128). Alex Ross explained this rift as the manifestation of the favor that Adorno held towards the traditional, auratic modes of art that Benjamin saw as "spoils...blemished by the suffering of nameless millions" ("The Naysayers"). However, Adorno's critique is not the result of sentimental attachment, but an astute and almost fatherly reaction to some of the gaps that Benjamin left uncovered. Had Benjamin anticipated Adorno's response, or reflected on this advice and taken it to heart, he may have realized that Atget was the ultimate proof of Adorno's critique, possessing the ability to create dramatic, progressive works of technological reproduction, while retaining the ability to create hauntingly beautiful, auratic portraits of the people of Paris. Handicapped by his desire to shoehorn the concept of the aura into a productive, scholarly discussion, and pressured by the aestheticization of politics in Europe that directly threatened his life, Benjamin's rigid depiction of Eugene Atget's art deeply imperiled his portrait of the man he admired, and the discussion in which he centered. Unfortunately, in scholarly environs, Atget remains a prisoner of the box into which Benjamin put him, and, as I have observed, the relevance and resonance of Benjamin's thought is affected by the kind of scholarly inconsistencies apparent in his approximation of Atget. Yet in today's world of virtual reality and 3-D printing--brand new forms of technological reproduction-- it is inevitable that we will again call Benjamin and the best parts of his aura out of the grave to make sense of it. Let us be responsible, diligent, and sensitive: without a reckoning about who the true Atget was and the way that Benjamin considered him, we will fail to make heads or tails of either man, or the consequences of their work.

Appendix



Figure 2. Cafe, Boulevard Montparnasse, 6th and 14th Arrondissement, Eugene Atget, 1925
Collection of the National Gallery of Canada



Figure 3. Marchand abat-jour, Eugene Atget, 1899-1900
Collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Art



Figure 4. Joueur d'orgue, Paris, Eugene Atget 1898-1899
Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Works Cited

1. Adorno, Theodor W., and Walter Benjamin. *The Complete Correspondence 1928 – 1940*. Edited by Henri Lonitz. Translated by Nicholas Walker, Harvard University Press, 1999.
2. "Atget's Art". Review of *The Use of History*, by Molly Nesbit. *The Wilson Quarterly*, vol. 10, 1986, pp. 33–34.
3. Bardis, Antonia. "Imaging the City: Modernity, Capitalism, and the Making of Modern Athens." University of Derby, 2011.
4. Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproduction." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch et al., W.W. Norton & Company, 2018.
5. ---. "Little History of Photography." *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, by Walter Benjamin et al., vol. 2, Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 506–531.
6. ---. *On Hashish*. Edited by Howard Eiland, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.
7. Borcoman, James. *Eugène Atget, 1857–1927*. National Gallery of Canada, 1984.
8. Dupêcher, Natalie. "Eugène Atget: MoMA." *The Museum of Modern Art, The Museum of Modern Art*, 2017, www.moma.org/artists/229.
9. Farago, Jason. "It's Time to Take Down the Mona Lisa." *The New York Times*, 6 Nov. 2019.
10. Feldman, Karen S. "Not Dialectical Enough: On Benjamin, Adorno, and Autonomous Critique." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2011, pp. 336–362., doi:10.5325/philrhet.44.4.0336.
11. Gelley, Alexander. "Benjamin on Atget: Empty Streets and the Fading of Aura." *Benjamin's Passages*, 2014, pp. 87–101., doi:10.5422/fordham/9780823262564.003.0004.
12. Hansen, Miriam Bratu. "Benjamin's Aura." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2008, pp. 336–375., doi:<https://doi.org/10.1086/529060>.
13. Matthews, J. H. "Modes of Documentation: Photography in 'La Revolution Surrealiste.'" *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1985, pp. 38–48., doi:10.2307/3194440.
14. Puppe, Heinz W. "Walter Benjamin on Photography ." *Colloquia Germanica*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1979, pp. 273–291., doi:<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23982301>.
15. Ross, Alex. "The Naysayers." *The New Yorker*, 8 Sept. 2014, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/09/15/naysayers.

16. Russell, John. "Atget." *The New York Times Magazine*, 13 Sept. 1981, pp. 55–58.
17. Schjeldahl, Peter. "Party Lines." *The New Yorker*, 24 Feb. 2014, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/03/03/party-lines-3.
18. Sullivan, George. *Berenice Abbott, Photographer: An Independent Vision*. Clarion Book, 2006.
19. Thomas, Francis-Noël. "Paris at Street Level ." *New England Review* , vol. 30, no. 3, 2009, pp. 152–158., doi:<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25656062>.
20. Warner, Marina. "The Paris of Phantoms." *The New York Times*, 11 Apr. 1993.

“Upside-down as in a camera obscura”:

The Possibility of an Internal Space of
Alterity in Marxist Class Consciousness

Leah Casey

I begin this paper with the idea of inversion: of consciousness, as Marx puts it, which is never anything other than the product of the materialist perspective of “conscious existence” and “actual life processes.” (*The German Ideology* 656). That is, the idea of human consciousness not as the base upon which the world’s productive forces are built, but as the superstructure built upon productive, economic, material forces—forces that produce consciousness itself. Marx’s theory does not descend from heaven to earth, but ascends from earth to heaven, with consciousness as the effect of material life-processes (*The German Ideology* 656). Thus, “men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*”—with the circumstances placed firmly on the earth’s base, and men’s consciousness as that which is created on the ascent to heaven. Marx’s thinking, here, emphasizes verticality—the ascent; the base; the superstructure; the upside-down as in the inverted image of the camera obscura. Yet, in this emphasis on vertical inversion of previously held notions of base and superstructure (consciousness not as base, as was widely conceived, but as superstructure) there is the sense, to my mind, that the production of consciousness and consciousness itself neatly align: one stacked on top of the other, an ascending production that assures us that the base straightforwardly produces the superstructure in the manner of uniform building blocks reaching further and further upwards.

My question, then, reading Marx, is a relatively straightforward one: does Marx preclude the lateral slippage which would, if only for a moment, allow consciousness to momentarily escape and step outside the bounds of that which produces it? Could the superstructure, to put the same thing differently, not only be dependent upon the vertical thrust of the base, but horizontally (mis)aligned—creating an excess that is outside of, and thus other to, power’s production of consciousness? In this essay, then, I set out to answer the question of whether a consciousness not straightforwardly linked to the production of class consciousness can exist in Marxist thought. To answer this question, I ask two others, around which I structure this essay; first, I ask if class consciousness is reconcilable with Hegel’s (and Marx’s own) dialectical thought. Second, I ask if Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s conception of “the event” can disrupt Marx’s straightforward notion of a class consciousness with, instead, the notion of an innovative, immanent break which upsets the existing order’s straightforward production of consciousness.

To begin with Marx’s conception of a class consciousness: “The ideas of the ruling class,” Marx begins, “are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force

of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force" (*The German Ideology* 656). Opposed to the ruling class and its ruling ideas, there are the revolutionary ideas which require, as precondition, the "existence of a revolutionary class" (*The German Ideology* 657). To set up the binary Marx establishes: we have, on the one hand, the ruling class--the producer of dominant ideas couched in the "semblance" that these ideas "[have] a power distinct" from the power of the ruling class (*The German Ideology* 657). On the other, we have the revolutionary class: those who "lack the means of mental production" and are thus "subject to it"--that is, the mental production of the ruling class (though there must be, I think, some element of mental production at work in the revolutionary class by virtue of the revolutionary class's formation [*The German Ideology* 657]). So, to now return to my first question with this in mind, how can what appears to be a static notion of base and superstructure, ruling and revolutionary class, fit into the dialectical thought which Marx employs--if, indeed, it can at all? For in contrast to the seemingly concrete categories of "ruling" and "revolutionary" which Marx establishes is Marx's *own assertion* that "the concrete is concrete because it is a combination of many determinations, i.e. a unity of diverse elements. In our thought it therefore appears as a process of synthesis, as a result, and not a starting point." (*Grundrisse* 650) How can this "combination of many determinations," this "unity of diverse elements," be reconciled with the static whole of class consciousness Marx details?

Let's look again. What Marx is emphasizing in "Grundrisse" is, as I understand it, that population is no static base on which to build the superstructure of economic, social, and material relationships. Rather, using the dialectical method, Marx inverts the notion of population as base, instead emphasizing that "society"--and in turn its material processes--"must constantly be kept in mind as the premise from which we start." Population, and, in turn, consciousness, builds up from there. So, with this in mind, it initially seems that class consciousness can be reconciled with the internal logic of Marx's dialectical method: The class consciousness is built *on the class itself*, and all the economic processes which determine the class as population. This consciousness is not the "error" that "Hegel fell into" when "considering the real as the result of self-coordinating, self-absorbed, and spontaneously operating thought"; here, thought (and class consciousness) is merely the byproduct of class itself. The dialectic has been satisfied, it seems, through the inversion of consciousness and material forces Marx initiates. And, as Marx imagines an end of dialectical thought wherein the workers overthrow the bourgeoisie, resulting in a shared consciousness, it seems as though the two dialectical

categories Marx envisions are the consciousnesses of the workers and the consciousness of the bourgeoisie, as two coherent, and distinct unities. These unities, then, will eventually be dialectally synthesized in their final unity, the *telos* that will “unmake the distortion [of false] consciousness, bending consciousness back into the image it misses” (Blanton 726). But there does not seem to be room for individual consciousness, or dialectical movement, *within* the unities themselves; that is, within the workers’ consciousness or within the bourgeoisie consciousness. Instead, there is only the unmaking of distortions at the end of the Marxian line. What do we have in the interim? Do we wait for the mythic event that, operating at the macrocosmic dialectical level of the revolution of the classes themselves, will resolve itself once we reach the fated goal of history?

Here I am inclined to disagree with Marx’s reliance upon the “external” dialectical movement (and eventually, synthesis) of proletarian and bourgeois consciousnesses, rather than focusing on the internal dialectical movement *within* a class itself. For I think Marx makes the category of class consciousness too monolithic, too static and inert. “The class which has the means of material production at its disposal,” he argues, “has control at the same time over the means of material production, so that thereby, *generally speaking*, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it” (my emphasis; *Grundrisse* 656). This is an odd phrase. For how can Marx *speak generally* about what is, according to the dialectical method he promotes, a whole composed of a “combination of many determinations,” a “unity of diverse elements?” How can he speak, in general, about a concrete unity which must be made of many determinations and diverse elements? How can consciousness have a steady base on which to uniformly rest, when every concrete is made up of many individual pieces? Yet this phrase also seems to provide Marx with a “get out of jail free card,” as it were. The phrase “generally speaking” both invokes (through implying that there may, indeed, be those who don’t fit the general pattern) and elides (though that very recourse to the general, rather than individual), those who might not fit neatly within a particular situation. What are we to make of this sense of the general nature of class consciousness?

Perhaps looking at another passage can help us. “The ruling ideas,” Marx continues...

...are nothing more than the ideal expressions of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one,

therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age; thus their ideas are the ruling class of the epoch (*Grundrisse* 656).

I do not think Marx is dialectical enough in this statement. The ruling class, those who control the means of production, think; they produce and regulate the age's ideas; and they are, ultimately, construed as the dominating, static, and inexorable base from which there is no escape. There is no outside thought, here. We have, instead, the linear, vertical ascent to heaven with domination at its (immutable) base. How, in this scenario, is there even the possibility of a revolutionary class? How can any force remain outside, or at least other to, the dominant production of the ruling class? And most importantly, how can any unity, such as class consciousness, remain static when using the dialectical method? Would not those supposedly static categories, too, have to incorporate that which it is not into its own structure?

Marx's conception of class consciousness seems too inert and does not appear to be reconcilable with the "combination of many determinations" and the "unity of diverse elements" which characterize the dialectical "whole." Marx's idea of class consciousness precludes what Hegel describes as "speculative thought," a dynamic thought which could upset the unity of class consciousness and inescapable ascent to heaven which, according to Marx, produces and regulates thought only according to the domination of the ruling class (*Dialectics* 647). Hegel, for one, describes the "inner self movement" inherent to a "form...of consciousness" which, in "realizing itself at the same time abolishes and transcends itself, has for each result its own negation – and so passes into a higher form" (*Dialectics* 647). This "inner self movement" seems antithetical to Marx's stable idea of a ruling consciousness. For if the consciousness of the ruling class is regulated according to the dialectical principles of *thesis*, *antithesis*, *synthesis*--that is, a form of consciousness (thesis) which contains its own negation (antithesis) and thus, through synthesis, passes into a higher dialectical form--then the ruling class consciousness must, paradoxically, both contain that which it is not and be indebted to that which it is not: synthesis

with the proletarian (non)consciousness and/or the revolutionary consciousness.¹

According to Hegel, through negating its other, the dialectical form “therefore contains it [the other],” and moves into the form of “the unity of itself and its opposite” (*Dialectics* 647). And it is here, “in the grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative, that speculative thought consists” (*Dialectics* 647). I wonder, then, if speculative thought offers a way to think outside the narrow bounds of the dominant class’s production of consciousness—to think of the individual *within* the class, rather than merely the lumpen category as a whole. I wonder if the positive inclusion of the other through its very negation shakes the supposedly stable foundation of any uncomplicated notion of a unitary and productive (and non-dialectical) class consciousness. “The opposite determination also belongs to the subject matter,” Hegel avers—so does not this notion implicate the proletarian (non)consciousness in the ruling class consciousness, and vice versa? And (Or?) the revolutionary class consciousness in the ruling class consciousness? I suggest that Hegel’s dialectical method makes any so-called class consciousness indebted to, and indeed include within itself, that which it is not, thus shaking the straightforward unity, and general nature, of Marx’s class-consciousness.

If so—if class consciousness negates and synthesizes that which it is not into its own multiplicity of unity—we have a far different conception of class consciousness and thought than that which Marx puts forward. The paradigm of *thesis*, *antithesis*, and *synthesis* indicates, for me, more than an upward thrust from base to superstructure. It indicates an almost lateral movement engendered by incorporating the other into an internal unity which then can no longer exist as stable, monadic base. Inside its very structure there is a dualism, a sense of the other in self and self in other. The dialectic reveals, as Hegel puts it, that “what is first immediate now appears as mediated, related to an other”—and thus, I think, it can never be unproblematically seen as ascending to heaven (*Dialectics* 648). Its structure contains a horizontal implication of the “inner self-movement” that grasps opposites in their unity; which does more than simply invert base

1. To momentarily note an inconsistency in Marx’s work which I cannot reconcile: the presence of a revolutionary consciousness presupposing the presence of a revolutionary class seems to be a counterforce to the bourgeoisie, ruling consciousness (presupposing the ruling class). But how does this relate to the (non)consciousness which exists as a result of the ruling class’s production of consciousness, and foreclosure of other thought production? That is, how does the revolutionary consciousness emerge from a class which cannot think, cannot produce, and is only subject to the ruling class’s ideas? How does nonconsciousness give way to revolutionary consciousness? Marx does not provide satisfying answers to these questions. While the notion of ideology, as developed by later thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci, does provide a clue as to how the ruling thoughts are disseminated, my question lies in how the *counterforce*—the revolutionary consciousness—*comes into* being. For, by simple virtue of the fact that the emergence of a revolutionary class is not foreclosed, it seems that there must be a way of existing without, or within, dominant and dominating ruling class consciousness. It is in the realm of this (unelucidated) possibility that my questions take shape.

and superstructure and continue on its merry way.

The notion of inversion brings us back to Marx's notion of the *camera obscura*, in which "men and their circumstances appear upside-down." Marx uses this example to illustrate the inversion of men and their circumstances: to reiterate, men are not the base and circumstances the superstructure, but vice versa; the camera obscura both mediates and inverts the "reflection" of an external image (*Dialectics* 647). Yet, what Marx doesn't mention about the camera obscura is that it also reverses the image: left to right and right to left in the camera's eye.² There is an element of lateral movement at work in the camera obscura that is not simply inversion: there is the horizontal play of the elements it pictures, a play which, if not vaguely dialectical, then at least seems to indicate a movement that is more than unproblematically vertical, reaching up from base to superstructure. What Marx does not (consciously) recognize in his use of the example of the camera obscura (or, at least, what he does not choose to explain), is the lateral movement always already at work in the dialectical play of thesis and antithesis which is more than mere inversion. This reversal--left to right and right to left--seems to echo the "inner self movement" Hegel describes; an inner movement that does not step outside the bounds of Marx's class consciousness, but remains dynamic while within it. In the idea of the camera obscura, it does, indeed, seem as if there is no outside thought. Yet there still seems to be an internal space for dynamic, speculative, lateral thought (left to right and right to left) *within* the vertical ascent to heaven.

So now let's return to my original question: does Marx preclude the lateral slippage which would allow consciousness to momentarily escape and step outside the bounds of that which produces it? Could the superstructure not only be dependent upon the vertical thrust of the base, but horizontally (mis)aligned and thus other to power's production of consciousness? I think, at this point, we must both answer "no" to the above questions and continue to refine our inquiry.

For what seems to be at stake is not so much a "stepping outside"--I think that Marx's thought

2. See Figures 1 and 2. Cited in Rod Bantjes, "'Vertical Perspective Does Not Exist': The Scandal of Converging Verticals and the Final Crisis of *Perspectiva Artificialis*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75, no. 2 (April 2014): 331 and 334, respectively.

// there is the horizontal play of the elements, a play which, if not vaguely dialectical, then at least seems to indicate a movement more than unproblematically vertical, reaching up from base to superstructure.

ultimately precludes anything external to the hierarchical relations he describes (base and superstructure, ruling and proletarian, etc.). While his notion of “generally speaking” does, indeed, leave room for individual agency within class structures, I do not feel as though Marx develops this line of thought significantly in his work. What is at stake, here, is an internal space of lateral movement engendered through reversal *immanent in* the dialectical relationship Marx describes. In the use of the camera obscura example, Marx complicates the idea of straightforward, or even merely inverted, reflection. Instead, the notion of a lateral space in which the image is reversed, left to right and right to left, creates an internal space of alterity within a supposedly stable class

**horizontal play
in pictures,
not vaguely
at least seems
movement that is
problematically
growing up from base
re.**

consciousness. So perhaps it is not a question of “stepping outside” or even the “misalignment” of base and superstructure which creates a space for thought *external to* the class consciousness. Perhaps it is a question of the internal, lateral, and immanent movement within the purportedly concrete construction of class which opens a space for speculative thought not without, but within, Marxist class consciousness.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s conception of “the event” can, I think, help us here. Social control, for Hardt and Negri (and Michel Foucault), is not merely the production of consciousness, but the production of the body itself: capital and the corporeal are inexorably linked (*Empire* 27). This biopolitical approach to capitalist production introduces a new perspective of accumulation in which there can be “*no external standpoint...that can be posed outside this field* permeated by money; nothing escapes money. Production and

reproduction are dressed in monetary clothing. In fact, on the global stage, every biopolitical figure appears dressed in monetary garb” (my emphasis; *Empire* 32). In the capitalist (and biopolitical) creation not only of consciousness, but the body itself, there is no space to stand outside production; nothing external to be pitted against capitalism’s all-encompassing producing power. There can be no external slippage in this conception; no consciousness which escapes the bounds of that which produces it; no misalignment of base and superstructure. Marx, Hardt and Negri all foreclose this method of escape. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that there can be no consciousness not linked to the production of class consciousness. Just

because there can be no consciousness *outside* the production of thought, of bodies, of always already implicated life, does not mean that there cannot be a space of alterity in Marxist thought. And here, we will have to draw on the notion of an immanent break, a space of alterity not without, but within.³

The "event," according to Hardt and Negri, is that which "ruptures the continuity of history *and the existing order*, but it should be understood not only negatively, as rupture, but also as innovation, which emerges, so to speak, from the inside."⁴ The event is that which seizes and shatters you, that which affirms a sense of emerging alterity while still being within the social

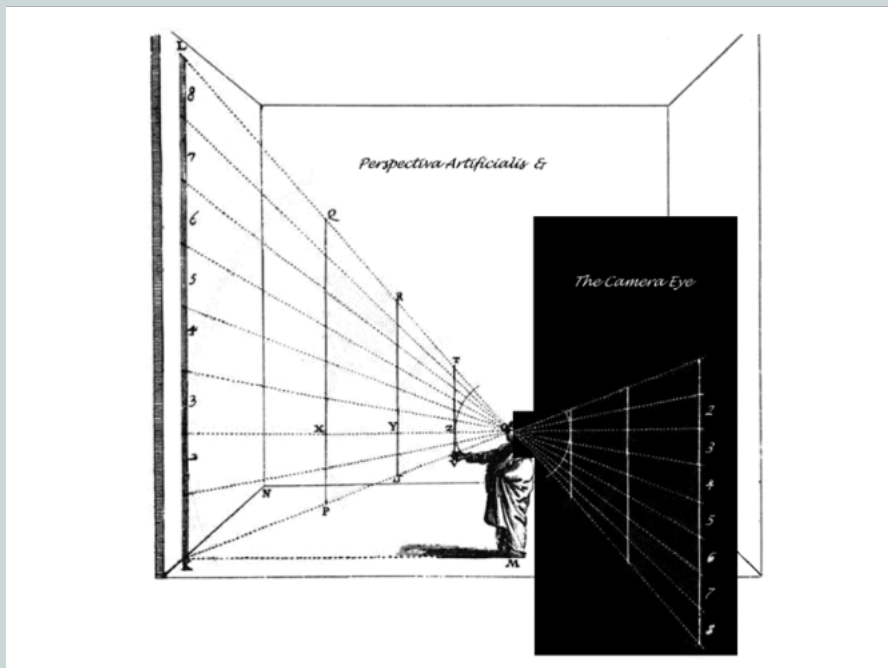


Figure 1: The Camera Eye. Modification of a figure from Abraham Bosse, *Traité Des Pratiques Geometrales et Perspectives* (Paris: chez l'Auteur, 1665). Cited in Bantjes, 331.

constructs which constrain you. The event allows you to maintain faith to, and be absorbed in, a cause--be that political or personal--and to hold true to it.⁵ Thus, the event seems to be akin to the speculative, internal self-movement of the dialectical whole, which can never merely be the static, upwards-reaching structure of which Marx conceives. The

event, I think, provides a way for us to better conceptualize the immanent self-movement which retains a lateral and dialectical space for speculative, individual thought *within* Marx's vertical consciousness and the existing order of the class structure. And maybe, the event will help us to conceptualize the ways in which class, as I see it, is far from the sole determiner of thought and consciousness. For one can be in a particular economic class, I believe, yet still retain a

3. I take the term "immanent break" from Alain Badiou's *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2012).

4. "Biopolitics as Event," in *Biopolitics: A Reader*, ed. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 240.

5. This paragraph is generally indebted to Badiou's version of the event, which draws on examples such as the Russian Revolution, falling in love, scientific discovery or artistic line of inquiry that breaks with tradition. All that which, in other words, "break[s] with the status quo, a break sparked by an event that eludes classification in the situation," which still being contained within that very situation (xiv).

consciousness other to that of the class as a whole. It is possible to be *in*, but not *of*, one's class.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe interrogate this same possibility; that is, of a form of consciousness--what they describe as "antagonisms"--which is not strictly class based. "Once the conception of the working class as a 'universal class' is rejected," they argue, "it becomes possible to recognize the plurality of the antagonisms which take place in the field of what is arbitrarily grouped under the label of 'workers' struggles'" (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* 167). Though I agree that Marx's description of a stable, universal class structure is outmoded (and doesn't fit within his own dialectical method), I don't think we can reject it altogether. In fact, I think it's possible to "recognize the plurality of antagonisms" while still working in (but not *of*!) Marx's conception of a class system. For class, while far from being the sole determiner of consciousness, is still part of the way in which we view ourselves, our peers, our friends, our relationships and neighbors. Yes, there are infinite other ways of classifying identity--gender, sexuality, race, religion, regional identity, etc.--yet I still think that we cannot entirely reject Marx's model of economic determinism. I believe there can be a space of alterity, a lateral space, left to right and right to left, within Marx's own dialectical inversion, which retains the possibility for other identificatory antagonisms--and the speculative thought which accompanies alternate constructions of identity--to exist *within* Marx's thought. The terms of the event, too, seem to capture all the fidelities and allegiances one maintains which, while immersed in a class system, are not necessarily indebted to that system. The political cause, the academic interest, the romantic relationship--the many things which seize and shatter you--are in class structures, but I would argue (and hope!), they are not *of*, and thus uniformly controlled by, that class structure.

But what would the event mean in Marx's own terms? Though I have thus far drawn on external sources, such as Badiou, Laclau and Mouffe, Marx, too, in his "Theses on Feuerbach" offers the possibility of being "in" but not "of"--a possibility which engenders the hope of lateral movement within revolutionary ideologies. In Thesis III, specifically, Marx observes that "the materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men...The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice" (*Theses on Feuerbach* 13). "Circumstances are changed by men": this sentiment allows for the possibility of individual actors within the class system Marx outlines. Not an unrestrained and idealistic individualism, to be clear, but an affirmative intervention within societal structures

which are neither natural nor fixed. Marx's mention of revolutionary practice, too, opens the possibility for a change that is not dependent on larger "class" fluxes. Human activity itself offers a more reflexive model--a feedback loop, as it were--whereby one can affect "self-changing" and thus revolution on a larger scale.

Similarly, in Marx's "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," he writes that "A class must be formed which has radical chains, a class *in* civil society which is not a class *of* civil society, a class which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society which has a universal character because its sufferings are universal, and which does not claim a particular redress..." (my emphasis; *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* 52). The "in/of" locution, here, indicates that while a class can be in society, it need not be of society. Can the same be said, then, for individuals in relation to their respective classes? I think yes. In the notion of an active, affirmative revolutionary class which is not merely the product of those in power, there is the simultaneous possibility of a universalization of lateral change and revolutionary movement (as in the feedback loop) which would stretch to individual actors. For finally (and pertinently), in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx notes that "in the United States of America, where...classes already exist, but have not yet acquired permanent character, [they] are in constant flux and reflux, constantly changing their elements and yielding them up to one another where the modern means of production, instead of coinciding with a stagnant population" (*Eighteenth Brumaire* 31). The emphasis on class movement, here, rather than classes which are fixed and static, open the possibility that individuals, too, can take advantage of this "constant flux and reflux," rather than being mired in stagnancy.

So I ultimately think that while you are *in* a class, you need not be *of* a class: in the sense of solely determined by that class. The lateral movement invoked by the idea of the camera obscura retains the possibility of internal dialectical movement, speculative thought, and "antagonisms" not solely linked to class--all *within* Marx's class structure itself. Not to mention, of course, the revolutionary potential Marx invokes in his "Theses on Feuerbach," *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, and *Eighteenth Brumaire*. So perhaps the question with which we should end is more general: Does the inclusion of an internal space of alterity within the upward movement and economic determinism of class consciousness open a new way of seeing the individual, and individual agency, within structures of power? Does it create the possibility of an immanent resistance lingering in, but not of, the ruling class's production of consciousness? Does it, at

the end of the day, destabilize monadic categories and categorizations, and instead allow for internal slippage in more than just Marxism? I hope these questions, which occur in the internal space of alterity, offer a more hopeful and productive--though not in Marx's sense of the word--hermeneutic method.

Appendix

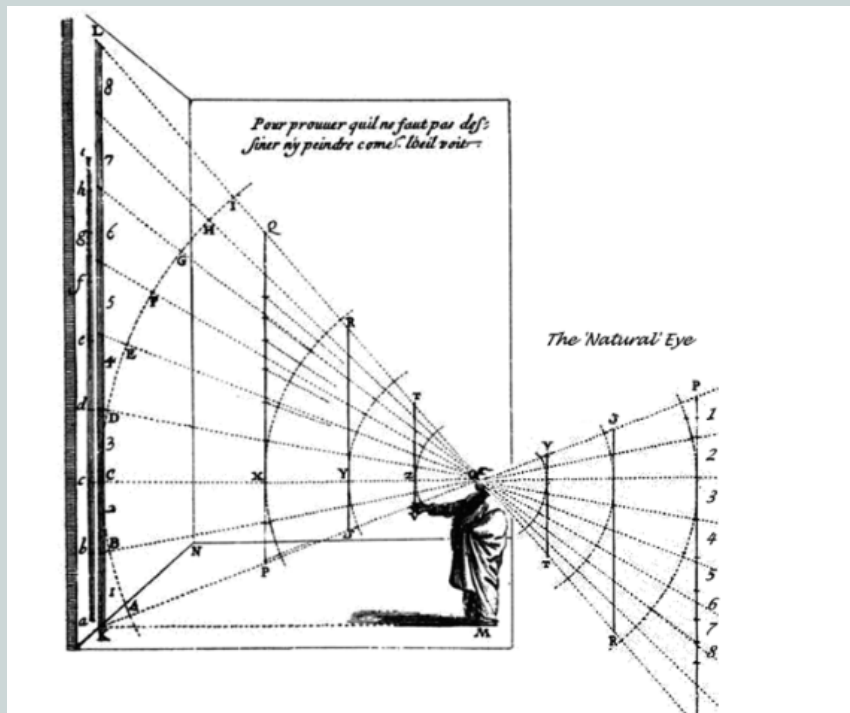


Figure 2: The "Natural Eye," modifications of a figure from Abraham Bosse, *Traite Des Pratiques Geometrales et Perspectives* (Paris: chez l'Auteur, 1665). Cited in Bantjes, 334.

Works Cited

1. Badiou, Alain. *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. London: Verso, 2012.
2. Bantjes, Rod. "'Vertical Perspective Does Not Exist': The Scandal of Converging Verticals and the Final Crisis of *Perspectiva Artificialis*." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75, no. 2 (April 2014): 307-338.
3. Blanton, C. D. "Judgment and Social Being: Notes on Teleological Positing." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 119:4 (October 2020): 726.
4. Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
5. ---. "Biopolitics as Event." In *Biopolitics: A Reader*, edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, 237-244. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.
6. Hegel, G.W.F. "Dialectics." In *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 647-649. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004.
7. Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso, 1985.
8. Marx, Karl. *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Edited by Joseph O'Malley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
9. ---. *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1937): 31.
10. ---. "The German Ideology." In *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 653-658. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004.
11. ---. "Grundrisse." In *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 650-652. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004.
12. ---. "Theses on Feuerbach." In *Marx/Engels Selected Works, Volume One*, translated by W. Lough. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969: 13-15.

**Urban Landscapes, Nature, and
Sexuality:**
The Beatniks and Environmental
Aesthetics
Kendall Milender

Whoever described the Beat Movement as an urban phenomenon never read Allen Ginsberg's first few stanzas of "Sunflower Sutra":

I walked on the banks of the tincan banana dock and sat down
under the huge shade of a Southern Pacific locomotive to look
at the sunset over the box house hills and cry.

Jack Kerouac sat beside me on a busted rusty iron pole,
companion, we thought the same thoughts of the soul, bleak
and blue and sad-eyed, surrounded by the gnarled steel roots of
trees and machinery

The oily water on the river mirrored the red sky, sun sank on top
of final Frisco peaks, no fish in that stream, no hermit in those
mounts, just ourselves rheumy-eyed and hung-over like old
bums on the riverbank, tired and wily (1-10).

Ginsberg and his Beat contemporaries are remembered as figures in an urban landscape. In 1959, writer Paul O'Neil of *Life* magazine, remarked that these literary Bohemians, choosing to inhabit the seamier fringes of New York and San Francisco, "yearn for the roach-guarded mores of the skid road, the flophouse, the hobo jungle and the slum, primarily to escape regimentation," (Jessmer, 2-3).

But in his opening lines of "Sunflower Sutra," Ginsberg conveys a different yearning. A blue and rheumy-eyed poet bemoans a lost America, in which the knotted roots of machinery claim a surer sense of belonging to the soil than do those of trees. As he and Keuroac look out across the river, Ginsberg complains that, in the absence of hermit and fish, it is "just ourselves." It is the common lamentation of the poet: the harsh consequences that result when man is removed from nature. But his poem delivers a profound sense of hope — An indication that Ginsberg and Kerouac need only find their way over those final Frisco peaks, beyond those box house hills, and grasp that petaled scepter, to find their resolution.

These stanzas suggest that we have remembered an entire generation of poets falsely. Though surely many of the foundational works of the Beat Movement are replete with urban imagery (Kerouac's *The Town and the City*, Ferlinghetti's *A Coney Island of the Mind*, Burroughs

Junkie, to name a few), more often than not, these works were intended to degrade the technocracy and amoralism of city life, rather than celebrate it. As John Tytell writes in *Naked Angels*, "The Beat movement was a crystallization of a sweeping discontent with American virtues of progress and power. What began with an exploration of the bowels and entrails of the city... evolved into an expression of the visionary sensibility" (Paton, 201). With the Beat poets' rejection of consumerism, sexual frigidity, and an overall mid-century malaise, so too came a rejection of urbanism, and exceedingly, an inclination toward awareness of the natural world. Most notably, the poetic efforts of Gary Snyder and Lew Welch gave way to the emergence of a new eco-philosophy, advocating for a renewed intimacy with nature, both through the reintegration of man into the natural world, and the resignation of man from the human-centered world. Therefore, the hope for man's reconciliation with nature — even more than horn-rimmed glasses and poetry circles on Fillmore Street — pulsed the heart of a literary movement, and so too, emboldened the ecological consciousness of the generation that followed.

In 1993, Gary Snyder published a collection of his works entitled *No Nature*, in which he prefaced the selected poems with a discussion of intimacy. Intimacy, Snyder argues, means "to be truly native of something." Unfortunately for the contemporary American, though, "we do not easily know nature, or even know ourselves... the greatest respect we can pay to nature is not to trap it, but to acknowledge that it eludes us" (Phillips, 96). In other words, although true intimacy between man and nature may be an impossibility, it is the task of our lives to try. Frequently, Snyder uses nudity in his work as a rather blatant means toward such intimacy. In "By Frazier Creek Falls," Snyder exclaims;

The living flowing land

Is all there is, forever

We are it

It sings through us

We could live on this Earth

Without clothes or tools! (41)

as if to say that in the absence of clothing, one may achieve a physical — even primitive — closeness with nature. Importantly, however, it is not the removal of clothing, alone, that allows for such intimacy. Rather, the stripping away of clothing represents a rejection of the Western societal norms that enforce their use. Thus, nudity becomes not only a means of reconnecting with the natural world, but so too, dissociating from a frigid, Western one.

In that same vein, Snyder's "The Bath" celebrates the nakedness of himself, his wife, and his two sons. The poem opens with an exploration of the human body in its earliest stages of development, as Snyder washes his youngest son, Kai. The first stanza ends with a question, presumably asked by Kai. He asks, "is this our body?" (20) indicating a sexual ignorance and a detachment from our own physical understanding. In the more erotically charged stanzas of the poem, Snyder describes his bathing wife, outlining "the space between the thighs I reach through," and the "double-mirror world of wombs in wombs" (34-39). Even these instances of intense eroticism, though, err more on the side of the sacred than the sexual. Snyder uses nudity not to titillate, but rather as a means of celebrating the reproductive, gendered, and familial implications of the human body. "This is our body," he resolves in the final stanza. "We sigh and slide ourselves down from the bench... step outside, black night and all the stars/ Laughing on the Great Earth/ Come out from the bath" (77-91). With his use of the collective *our*, he implicates all of humanity in this moment of intense intimacy with nature, as if to say that humanity may achieve even more than a physical closeness to nature; we may become fixtures in its landscape.

Beyond his endorsement of the human form as a natural wonder, Snyder often suffuses the world, itself, with intense sexual energy. Part of Snyder's description of his wife in "The Bath" involves the image of her "winding valley spine" (33) — a metaphor which describes the curvature of the female body as informed by the shape of the land. In "Beneath My Hand and Eye the Distant Hills, Your Body," however, Snyder inverts the relationship, instead using features of the feminine body to illustrate the landscape. He looks out over the "snow-dappled Uintah mountains," whilst he explores the body of his lover — "hand curves over, following the line... follow by hand and eye / the swimming limits of your body" (7-14). It becomes nearly impossible to distinguish between the tactile and the visual; the human experience and the natural. In simultaneously conveying intimacy with a lover and intimacy with nature, Snyder suggests that sexual energy is exchanged between all organic things. In this way, his poetry reintroduces man to the grace of his own

natural form, and advocates for the reintegration of that form back into nature.

Snyder works to achieve this half-palpable, half-ethereal atmosphere that is often associated with environmental writing. He is both a voyeur of this landscape and a fixture in it. He may marvel at the black night and all its stars, but simultaneously collapse the world and himself into a metaphysical oneness. It is this very simultaneity in ambient poetics that Morton distrusts. (As a brief aside, Joni Mitchell is guilty of existing within this simultaneity, herself; of straddling the medial existence that is both within and without. We must consider: Can we really be the stuff of stars and earth, ourselves, yet still be so far removed from nature that our return to it demands such effort and urgency?)

In describing the six most salient elements of ambient poetics, as they work to evoke environment (succinctly, ecomimesis), Timothy Morton describes the principle of the re-mark in his seminal work, *Ecology without Nature*. "Aesthetic..." Morton writes, "...and furthermore, metaphysical distinctions, involve discriminations between inside and outside... what we are dealing with is the idea of medium, split into two aspects — foreground and background." Using the principles of Gestalt psychology, Morton argues that there exists a rigid distinction between figure and ground, such that the two entail each other. In the face and candlestick illusion, for example, it is impossible to see both as ground, or both as figure, simultaneously. Put another way, we must make a choice. We can see things one way or the other. Snyder may exist as an observer or a fixture, the background or the foreground, but he can't exist as an amalgam of the two. In no way is Morton's argument attempting to reinforce the idea that "inside" and "outside" really exist. If anything, ambience negates the notion that these terms are binary. What Morton does suggest is that ambience, and its suggestion of a place that is both inside and outside, will "[suffer] from its wish to have it both ways."

Clearly, the purpose of much of Snyder's poetry is to reintroduce humanity to its own corporal physicality. His mission to understand the human body as an element of natural beauty, though, while ambitious, becomes imbued with gender politics. In his book *Earth House Hold* (a cheeky play on words on the etymology of "ecology"), Snyder marvels at the winter landscape:

What happens all winter; the wind driving snow; clouds—
wind, and mountains—repeating
this is what always happens here,

and the photograph of a young female torso hung in the lookout window, in the foreground. Natural against natural, beauty.

The female body, then, becomes something ornamental. As foreground to the winterscape, Snyder seems to place a degree of separation between the female body and the natural world he seeks refuge in. In situating the beauty of the female form against the beauty of the nature scene, his language suggests that women may facilitate man's appreciation and intimacy with nature, but they themselves are partially excluded.

Moreover, this rendering of atmosphere performs a medial function. Snyder positions himself on one side of the window, and the natural landscape on the other. He makes clear the distinction between the foreground and background, the here and there, thus drawing our attention to the dimension and medium in which this communication is taking place. This metaphysical distinction, and the layering of natural against natural, beauty drives the poem. Therefore, as Morton contends, contact becomes content. Once again, though, the most salient element of ambient poetics in this stanza seems to be the re-mark. "With Aeolian events, we have a paradoxical situation in which background and foreground have collapsed in one sense," Morton writes, "but persist in another sense." Where "The Bath" is concerned with the metaphysical collapsing of these entities, *Earth House Hold* is overwhelmingly preoccupied with their persistence.

In the aforementioned "Beneath My Hand and Eye the Distant Hills, Your Body," Snyder similarly feminizes the landscape – valleys that curve like hips and groin, mountains dappled and pockmarked like breasts – by unabashedly allowing the scene to take on the appearance of a woman. However, as Snyder's hand follows on her body, and with eyes lascivious, licks and watches over (49) his lover, the female form becomes little more than a means of sexual exploration and fulfillment for her male counterpart – She is devoid of agency; a touchstone for man's understanding of himself as a sexual figure, and as a figure of his natural landscape. Similarly, in "The Bath," Snyder writes of,

The gates of Awe
That open back a turning double-mirror world of
wombs in wombs, in rings

that start in music (37-40)

Snyder's description of his bathing wife's anatomy becomes something akin to the description of a psychedelic hall of mirrors. A double mirror implies a reflection of a reflection; a seeming elusiveness of Snyder's identity as it is "gradually dematerialized into the natural world" (Lavazzi, 1). In that way, his wife's sexuality serves the purpose of reflecting back sexual introspection to her partner. The central role of the female anatomy, it would seem, is to serve as a foil for male sexual vitality. Moreover, if we are to think of wombs as vessels — arbiters of life — the world of never-ending wombs in wombs that Snyder marvels at is one capable of the ultimate act of closeness with nature — bringing new life into it. But stripped somewhat of sexual agency, and reduced to a looking glass for her husband, one can't help but wonder if Snyder allows true intimacy between women and nature or envisions them merely as conduits for the intimacy between men and the natural world.

Interestingly though, in contrast to "The Bath," Snyder's *Earth House Hold* involves a speaker who is neither a participant of the foreground or the background (nor does he attempt to exist as an amalgam of both). Rather, the female torso is the foreground, and the natural landscape is the background. This time, man is just the voyeur, woman is the fixture. While in "The Bath," Snyder celebrates the female form for its reproductive capabilities, in *Earth House Hold*, he reduces it to something ornamental. In situating the female form against the natural world he seeks refuge in, Snyder reinforces the idea that he, the foreground (the female torso), and the background (nature), are operating in different planes. In that way, Snyder's view of nature — which is indicative of the wider view of his Beatnik contemporaries — is one that is partial to holism rather than collectivism.

To that end, Morton contends, "It is better for environmentalism to think in terms of collectivism rather than holism. A collective does not imply an organic whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Indeed, ecology without nature rules out holism." Holism considers a person to be a part of nature to the extent that they are a relational junction within what is called the total field.

While holism strives toward totality, Morton argues that it fails to do so. The concept of the total field perpetuates the idea of an environment existing as something different from its relational junctions. Once again, we are made hyper aware of the background as it is made

distinct from the foreground. Snyder differentiates between the relational junctions of men and women within the total field. In doing so, he creates a world that not only places human beings over here, and nature over there, but so too creates an ontological distinction between how men and women are to exist in that world. This runs contrary to the widely held belief that Beatnik poets worked to subvert gender tropes and heteronormativity in literature. From Morton's ecological perspective, their work reinforces these assumptions.

While the gendered, ecocentric imagery in Snyder's work seems ignorant to any distinction between man and nature, Lew Welch's work is entirely informed by that distinction. Welch, having worked as an advertising copywriter in Chicago, quickly became disenchanted with corporate urbanism and immersed himself in poetry and San Francisco's rising counterculture. Upon the release of *Ring of Bone*, Welch reflected, "Enlightenment... is a process whereby a person gradually resigns from the world that is man, and thereby becomes a member of the world that is not man" (Phillips, 86).

This distinction is made clear in Welch's "Chicago Poem," in which he describes Chicago as a place so "ugly sullen and big... in country like this there/Can be no God..." (6-10). Conversely, the speaker recalls an experience on a quiet lake, away from the city, which comforts him enough to acknowledge that "All things considered, it's a gentle and undemanding planet, even here" (32-33), and that the trouble is not with the planet, itself, but what humans choose to construct on top of it. Upon the speaker's return to the city, the final stanza reads:

You can't fix it. You can't make it go away.
 I don't know what you're going to do about it,
 But I know what I'm going to do about it. I'm just
 Going to walk away from it. Maybe
 A small part of it will die if I'm not around

Feeding it anymore (52-57).

Read one way, the final few lines of the poem spell dejection and defeat. Read another, they indicate a radical act of civil disobedience. Not only does a retreat to the wilderness allow for the rekindling of the relationship between humanity and nature, but so too does it work to

undermine the forces that challenged that relationship in the first place. For Welch — unlike Snyder—it isn't enough to just slip out of the steam bath into the black night and all the stars. Welch's work suggests that a reclaiming of intimacy with the natural world is predicated, first, on one's ability to "recognize the ferocity" (28) inherent to life in the city, and then, on a conscious resignation from that Godless, urban America. That said, there is a similar acknowledgement, in the poetry of both Snyder and Welch, that an energy exists between and amongst all things. In his meditative long poem, "Wobbly Rock," Welch describes an encounter had with a boulder on Muir Beach, California. Divided into six sections, it is in the fourth that Welch begins to explore the predominating theme of humanity's troubled relation to the natural world. He describes a fair-weather day at the California shoreline, repeating the phrase "gathered and broke" to describe the movement of the beachgoers. Comparing them to a flock of birds, the speaker, situated on a faraway rock, offers a wide-angle perspective of the scene that is at once detached but also decidedly intimate. He watches them with close attentiveness — the tug of the fisherman's line, the manner in which the young girl's jeans are rolled up to mid thigh — but he becomes isolated in his pity for them. Not long after that idyllic day, the beachgoers return to the city, dismayed by a trivial change in weather. The speaker laments,

Jeans are washed
Shells all lost or broken
Driftwood sits in shadow boxes on a trachouse wall

These phrases, curt and accusatory, suggest that what is domestic is perverse. The driftwood sitting atop a trachouse wall, collecting dust, seems like a feigned attempt to naturalize the home; an unsatisfactory compromise to live somewhere in between the world that is man and the world that is not man. In the speaker's view, the beachgoers have flirted with an existence in nature, only to turn it away for the routine and comforts of home. "Like swallows you were, gathering," he remembers, "Like people I wish for..." (56-57). Welch's use of simile in these final lines speaks to the temporality and incompleteness of the beachgoers' connection with their surroundings. Only briefly were they like the swallows, flocking and gathering at the shore break. So too are they only like the people the speaker hopes for — those capable and willing of an absolute reconciliation with nature, absent of washed jeans and seashell keepsakes.

In the poem's final section, the speaker begrudgingly accepts his fellow man's shortcomings in attuning himself to the natural world, and instead, turns inward. Walking in meditation, the speaker describes losing "all separation in step with the/Eucalyptus as the trail walked back beneath me" (59). One feels the boundaries between human life and plant life blurring together into a unified whole. "Wind water / Wave rock / Sea sand / (there is no separation)," the speaker continues (60). Welch hardly makes an effort to construct these images into phrases. Rather, they are to be imagined as elements littering the landscape, dependent on one another to form a coherent whole. Welch is blatant about the cohesion of natural life — there is no separation. In the final stanza, Welch implicates the speaker in this codependency, conveying a spiritual balance between the speaker and the sea:

Sea breaking within me balanced as the
 Sea that floods these rocks. Rock
 Returning to the sea, easily, as
 Sea once rose from it. It
 Is a sea rock
 (easily)
 I am
 Rocked by the Sea (124-131).

Neither the play on words, nor the antithetical structure of the last line, go so far as to suggest an interchangeability between man and nature (as Snyder often does), but rather an interdependence between the two. Thus, the resounding difference between the two poets is Welch's acknowledgement that we do, in fact, straddle the world that is man and the world that is not man. Moreover, "most men spend all their time in the world of man... where their feet only touch pavement" (Phillips 106). However, upon taking up residence in an abandoned Civilian Conservation Corps cabin in Forks of Salmon, California, Welch's work from this period suggests an alternative to a pavement-bound fate. Espousing the merits of asceticism and a total withdrawal from society, Welch writes in "He Thanks His Woodpile," a poem in *The Way Back* series, that "all the others... who walked away from it, finally, kicked the habit, finally, of Self, of man-hooked Man... (which is not, at last, estrangement)" (*Ring of Bone*, 84). Syntactically, ending

this poem with estrangement gives power to that word — if the rejection of man-hooked Man does not demand estrangement, we are to believe it demands something similar. Placing this line in parentheses similarly lends emphasis — as if Welch is defending his methods of reconciling with nature as radical, but necessary. This stanza recognizes a detachment of man from nature similar to that of Snyder's is this our body motif. In this case, Welch sees a resignation from the human-centered world less as an estrangement from the rest of humanity, but rather, as a way of reconciling with humanity's estrangement from nature. While both poets urge a rekindling of intimacy between humanity and nature, Welch necessitates the abandonment of one world, in favor of embracing the other, to achieve that closeness.

The poet Robinson Jeffers once wrote:

But for my children, I would have them keep their distance

From the thickening center; corruption

Never has been compulsory, when the cities lie at the

Monster's feet there are left the mountains (Shrine, Perishing Republic, 14-17).

Written in 1925, this poem precedes the Beats' famous Six Gallery reading by 30 years. Still, it might be one of the best summations of what moved that literary generation — the frustration and the disillusionment; the yearning and the hope. That these young poets, so discontented with the saccharine promises of forward progress and the polypropylene hollowness of the American Dream, had the wherewithal to articulate what had been lost is a matter of great import. For in their writing, Jeffers, Welch, Snyder, and the rest of the Beatniks, remind us that we always have the ability to opt out. Corruption has never been compulsory, and when we decide we want to regain the intimacy with nature that has been forgotten — when we decide we will not be complicit in the forces that tempt us away from that world that is not man — we can rest assured that there will always be a garden to get back to; there will always be the mountains left.

Works Cited

1. Ginsberg, Allen. "Sunflower Sutra by Allen Ginsberg." Poetry Foundation, Poetry Foundation, 1955, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49304/sunflower-sutra.
2. Jeffers, Poem by Robinson. "Shine, Perishing Republic." PoemHunter.com, 13 Jan. 2003, www.poemhunter.com/poem/shine-perishing-republic/.
3. Jessmer, Anna Lou. "Containing the Beat: An Analysis of the Press Coverage of the Beat Generation During the 1950s." Marshall Digital Scholar, 2012, mds.marshall.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1425&context=etd.
4. Morton, Timothy. *Ecology without Nature Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Harvard University Press, 2009.
5. Paton, Fiona. "Cain's Book and the Mark of Exile: Alexander Trocchi as Transnational Beat." SpringerLink, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 1 Jan. 1970, link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137014498_13.
6. Phillips, Rodney L. "Forest Beatniks" and "Urban Thoreaus": Beat Literature and Nature. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1996.
7. Snyder, Gary. "By Frazier Creek Falls." *The Writer's Almanac with Garrison Keillor*, 29 Nov. 2017, www.writersalmanac.org/index.html?p=7312.html.
8. ---. *No Nature*. Pantheon Books, 1992.
9. ---. "The Bath by Gary Snyder." Poetry Foundation, Poetry Foundation, 1974, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47753/the-bath-56d2286f7a7ad.
10. Snyder, Poem by Gary. "Beneath My Hand And Eye The DisTant Hills, Your Body." PoemHunter.com, 27 July 2015, www.poemhunter.com/poem/beneath-my-hand-and-eye-the-dis-tant-hills-your-body/.
11. Welch, Lew, and Donald Allen. *Ring of Bone: Collected Poems of Lew Welch*. City Lights/Grey Fox, 2012.
12. Welch, Lew. "Chicago Poem by Lew Welch." Poetry Foundation, Poetry Foundation, 2012, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/55776/chicago-poem.
13. ---. "Wobbly Rock by Lew Welch." Poetry Foundation, Poetry Foundation, 2012, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/55778/wobbly-rock.

"A Mask" versus *Paradise Lost*:

Milton's Construction of Distinct Spaces
for Female Temptation

Alexandra Limb

John Milton's views on gender have long existed as the highly controversial subject of scholarly criticism. Historically, he is recognized as a prominent figure of 16th century England, a period driven by the misogynistic belief that a woman's identity was to be reduced to her sexual chastity. The loss of such purity "...constituted the loss of her credit, making her abhorred and despised, and her very name a reproach among all men" (Dabhoiwala 207). How closely Milton's literary works actually adhere to this overarching social order has been disputed, revealing the difficulty in coming to a singular, staunch conclusion on his attitudes towards women. Some scholars believe that his views are largely progressive for his time, even bordering on feminist, while others have diminished him as a blatant misogynist (Martin 4). In one of Milton's earliest works, "A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle," the subject of women's reputation and sexual temptation appears in the Lady's successful ability to resist Comus's sexual overtures and maintain a chaste, and therefore virtuous, state. *Paradise Lost* returns to a similar theme but with a contrasting outcome when Satan successfully convinces Eve to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. While numerous Milton scholars have individually analyzed the temptation scenes of these two texts, the unmistakable similarities in narrative framework present an opportunity to put the works in conversation with each other. Specifically, Milton ultimately decides to reward the Lady as virtuous but punishes Eve as deserving of "distrust and all dispraise" (*Paradise Lost* 11.166). There are certainly moments where the Lady is less than perfect in her ability to completely resist the temptation of her perpetrator, so why does Milton grant the Lady praise and leave Eve to suffer? Jeanie Grant Moore's *The Two Faces of Eve: Temptation Scenes in "Comus" and "Paradise Lost"* proposes that the difference is not due to Eve's lack of good character, but rather, the paradoxical lack of knowledge of good and evil that would have prevented her fall (2). Moore claims that both female figures are virtuous and neither innately possesses better character than the other from the beginning, however, it is without the tools of reason and moral judgement that the innocent Eve cannot successfully overcome deception (9). She supports this belief by presenting Satan's recognition of Eve's innocence prior to her fall, noting, "Satan is so awed by her 'graceful Innocence' that he is at first 'of emnitie disarmed'" (qtd. in Moore 6).

However, it is undeniable that there are numerous scenes in *Paradise Lost* where Adam directly warns Eve not to eat the fruit out of obedience to God. And even later in the narrative, Eve herself directly speaks on the importance of relying on reason. Taking these moments

into consideration, I propose an alternate reading from Moore in which the distinct outcomes faced by the Lady and Eve are unrelated to differences in moral understanding. Instead, their opposing fates can be attributed to the distinctions in internal and external spaces of temptation constructed by Milton. While the Lady and Eve both succumb to external temptation, they depart from one another in their ability to employ an existing moral judgement to resist the inner temptation of the imagination. Ultimately, these contrasting narrative outcomes have implications in revealing Milton's nuanced view of feminine virtue as an internal test. It is an inner form of purity that can only truly be achieved after successfully resisting male temptation of the mind, regardless of physical violation of the body.

Moore's piece persuasively highlights the similarities in various elements of the temptation scenes in "A Mask" and *Paradise Lost*, namely the pastoral setting, similar choice of verbiage in describing the two female figures as "hapless," and the lack of male protection in the presence of the perpetrator (6-7). However, she misses the parallels in moral understanding for these two women, an existing knowledge of what was accepted as right from wrong. The Lady's embodiment of moral judgement is doubly articulated by both external characters and herself. It is through the two elder brothers that the moral advantage generally associated with female chastity is introduced. Milton uses the brothers' remarks as a demonstration to the audience that the Lady is fully understanding of a chaste morality. Most importantly, she is recognized as possessing an unwavering ability to exercise chastity both in past and present. While the younger brother is fearful that the Lady will not be well-protected in the forest on her own, the elder brother dismisses these worries by asserting that her well-established knowledge of chastity as the moral choice will prevent any physical harm from coming her way. The elder brother remarks, "'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity: // She that has that, is clad in compleat steel," ("A Mask" lines 420-421). Subsequently, when trapped by Comus, the Lady herself says, "Twill not, false traitor, // Twill not restore the truth and honesty // That thou hast banish't from thy tongue with lies," ("A Mask" lines 691-693). Here, the Lady exposes Comus' deception and his dishonesty in luring her into his castle. This slew of harsh verbal attacks effectively eradicates the "mask" Comus had previously put on as someone with good-intentions, particularly when she identifies him as a "false traitor." The Lady's recognition of Comus's character as immoral and deceptive builds on the existing knowledge established by the elder brothers of good versus evil.

Moore argues that "the Lady has an advantage that Eve does not possess: the knowledge

of the difference between good and evil," (7). Because Eve lacks moral judgement, she ultimately ends up "surprised by deceit," preventing her from successfully seeing through Satan's false guise (Moore 7). I counterargue that Eve and the Lady both possess the same level of reasoning and it is not the underlying cause of Milton's decision to grant one success and the other failure. Just as the Lady's reasoning is confirmed by external characters and herself, Eve's reasoning is similarly laid out. In Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*, Adam directly says to Eve:

So various, not to taste that onely Tree
Of knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life,
So neer grows Death to Life, what ere Death is,
Som dreadful thing no doubt; for well thou knowst
God hath pronounc't it death to taste that Tree,
The only sign of our obedience left (*Paradise Lost* 4.423-4.428)

Eve learns early on from Adam that God has established that it is wrong to eat from the Tree of Knowledge and will bring death to those who disobey this command. Given that she fervently praises Adam as her "guide and head" (*Paradise Lost* 4.442-443), she cherishes these instructions as morally correct. She directly confirms, "what thou hast said is just and right" (*Paradise Lost* 4.443). Additionally, in book 9, moments before Eve's deception by Satan, she is once again reminded by Adam to avoid seeking temptation. As Stella Revard validly suggests in *Eve and the Doctrine of Responsibility in Paradise Lost*, "He [Adam] has made clear to Eve what her responsibilities are and where inherent dangers lie...he is not guilty of negligence" (73). After her introduction to Satan, Eve herself articulates to her tempter that she possesses moral judgment:

But of this Tree we may not taste nor touch;
God so commanded, and left that Command
Sole Daughter of his voice; the rest, we live
Law to our selves, our Reason is our Law (*Paradise Lost* 9.651-654).

Here, Eve does possess an existing sense of what God considers right versus wrong. She articulates herself that eating the fruit would be an act of disobedience towards the commands of God. Moreover, time after time she heard these exact instructions from Adam, her source of guidance. She even overtly proclaims her reason and judgement as her "law," something that

cannot be disputed, seconds before she ends up succumbing to temptation. Thus, her failure to recognize Satan as an evil figure does not seem to be excused by a lack of knowledge of good versus evil as Moore suggests. She knew that any act of eating the fruit was evil, so even if Satan was deceptive in appearance and did not visually appear evil, the act alone should have been easily recognizable as sinful.

While in both temptation scenes the Lady and Eve possessed a strong understanding of right versus wrong in their individual circumstances, the main difference between the two narratives is the space in which the tempter prevails. While Comus successfully deceives the Lady into entering a situation where he physically defiles her body, he is unable to tempt her mind. In contrast, Satan is able to invade Eve's mind and entice her into eating the forbidden fruit in her dream, which mirrors Satan's physical temptation of Eve's body to taste the forbidden fruit in book ix. This critical difference in the structure of the temptation scenes (one internal and the other external) suggests a possible reason Milton's characterization of the Lady as virtuous and Eve as shameful, despite both being outwardly tainted by their tempter. From Milton's perspective, it appears that the internal space of the mind must remain pure and protected against temptation, while the external space of the body carries less importance and implication for its impurity.

In *Paradise Lost*, the principal feature of the narrative framework is the pre-temptation scene that occurs through Eve's dream that directly foreshadows the events to come. Here, Eve's dream is understood as the thoughts and events that unfold in her mind, an internal space that no other characters can enter. When Eve reveals to Adam what occurred in her dream, the audience is brought directly into this independent inward space that transcends the outward space shared with Adam. Disguised as an angel with "dewie locks", Satan convinces her to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, urging, "Taste this, and be henceforth among the Gods // Thy self a Goddess, not to Earth confind," (*Paradise Lost* 5.56, 5.77-78). However, Eve does not show any signs of restraint and easily succumbs to temptation. She admits, "the pleasant savourie smell // So quick'nd appetite, that I, methought, // Could not but taste" (PL 5.84-86). Despite knowing that it was immoral to eat the forbidden fruit based on God's commands, she chose to trust the deceitful Angel anyways. The fact that this exact situation is paralleled in book ix when Eve physically eats the fruit offered by Satan in serpent form suggests the importance Milton places on maintaining mental fortitude and strength against temptation. Her inability to fend Satan off in

her dream renders her easily susceptible to his outward attempts at temptation later on. It is not that eating the fruit in Eve's dream removes her understanding of moral judgement, for she still verbally affirms right from wrong. However, it does give her a degree of doubt when she physically faces Satan. Since she ate the fruit in her dream and did not suffer death, it opens the door for a similar outcome in reality. However, looking at the text on its own cannot confirm for sure that had she resisted internal temptation, her external circumstances would have been different. By looking at Eve in direct contrast to the Lady in Milton's "A Mask," we can establish Milton's belief that the real reason Eve is punished by God for eating the fruit is because she was unable to internally resist temptation, rather than what ultimately happened physically. It is the implications of the dream that end up being more valuable than the actual temptation scene itself.

In Milton's "A Mask," the Lady is characterized as an exemplar of internal preservation of her chastity and therefore, resistance to sexual temptation. Comus is successful in physically tempting the Lady by posing as a Shepherd and offering to lead her through the woods to find her elder brothers. Seeing this as harmless, she winds up in the entrapment of Comus where she is ultimately stripped of her physical purity when he rapes her. However, despite her falling for his trickery and deceit, Milton still chooses to reward her and positions her as the ideal, virtuous female figure. The explanation for this outcome can be boiled down to something the Lady says herself: "Fool do not boast // Thou canst not touch the freedom of my minde" (Milton, "A Mask" lines 663-664). While Comus succeeds in harming her physically, his attempts cannot undermine her authority over her own mind. It is through her verbal convictions that one can recognize and visualize her internal resistance to temptation. In William Schullenberger's essay, "Into the Woods: The Lady's Soliloquy in Comus" he writes, "Contemplatively identifying with those violated and silenced selves, she awakens her own inviolable voice, and discovers in that voice a power to protect herself and to announce her presence to a listening world" (41). Her voice not only provides Comus the knowledge that he is powerless within her mind, it also serves as an active mechanism to protect against his continued internal overtures. The Lady remarks,

I had not thought to have unlockt my lips
In this unhallow'd air, but that this Jugler
Would think to charm my judgement, as mine eyes,
Obtruding false rules pranckt in reasons garb. ("A Mask" lines 556-559)

It is her ability to consistently resist the temptation of her mind that ultimately brings external help to free her from her perpetrator. The physical assault is clearly less relevant to Milton as he later allows her to be purified by the acts of Sabrina the Nymph. In Beth Bradburn's piece, *Bodily Metaphor and Moral Agency in A Masque: A Cognitive Approach*, she believes that there is uncertainty associated with the Lady's untouched internal state, insisting that Lady does not verbally confirm her "uninterrupted mental freedom" after being saved by Sabrina from Comus's threats (2). However, I would point out that the Lady does establish her freedom of mind while alone in Comus's presence. This assertion of her internal purity in light of the tempter's overtures is most significant. When Sabrina comes to save her from Comus, even if the Lady does not reiterate her internal purity, the audience recognizes that Sabrina will establish purity regardless. In the end, she is chaste, pure, and virtuous, which is the most important aspect of this narrative. Broadening the fact that Milton places less significance on physical violations by tempters in how he chooses to reward female characters, Eve could be understood to be ultimately punished as a result of her inability to maintain mental resistance.

As a result of the difference in outcomes, we can also understand how Milton chooses to portray the ideal virtuous woman. While Moore believes that the two scenarios "begin from a similar point of innocence" (Moore 6), I would argue that the virtue is earned as a result of successfully weathering tests of temptation. In *Areopagitica*, Milton writes, "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd." Therefore, one's virtue must be tested by challenging circumstances and ultimately confirmed via success or failure in resisting an internal temptation of the mind. Thus, portraying Eve and the Lady both as similarly virtuous female figures from the start would disregard Milton's notion of virtue as being tested and subsequently claimed. Milton does not favor a "fugitive virtue" in which one can possess morality without it ever being threatened. Overall, this could suggest that the true female virtue comes from resisting temptation and sin internally.

If the Lady gets to enjoy success and virtue, where does this leave the sinful Eve? Eve's failure to pass Milton's test of female virtue sets up her subsequent punishment for succumbing to temptation. But what still remains puzzling is Milton's recognition of her as the "Mother of all Mankind" (*Paradise Lost* 11.159). Why is she deserving of this position, given that she failed to obey God's commands? More obviously, Milton makes this choice to adhere to the words of the Bible, which states, "And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living"

(Genesis 3:20). The seed must come from Eve if it is to "bruise our foe" and "all restore" (Paradise Lost 11.155, 12.623). Therefore, Eve is the necessary means of producing the "promis'd seed" (Paradise Lost 12.623) that will provide redemption after this transgression. In this way, Eve's fall is not black and white: there is certainly a good that comes from it. Moreover, considering the distinct contexts of Eve as the first woman and the Lady as a postlapsarian descendant, perhaps the Lady's later success requires Eve's earlier failure. Eve's inability to resist internal temptation is what could give the Lady the ability to subsequently do so, and in that way, possesses an underlying instructive merit. By constructing the Lady's success as following Eve's failure, Milton departs from the Christian image during his time that extended the "negative view of Eve to all who were considered corrupt simply because they were her descendants" (Moore 1). While there is certainly blame that is put on Eve for failing to resist within the internal space of temptation, by presenting the Lady's contrasting success, Milton does not generalize all women as corrupt. In fact, he offers a more nuanced consideration of female virtue that positions them with greater agency, as they have autonomy over the internal space of their mind, regardless of the threats to their physical self.

Perhaps as a result of comparative analysis between two of Milton's literary works that richly surround the subject of gender, we can synthesize a more balanced understanding of Milton's views towards women, avoiding the extreme polarization purported by existing scholarship. Of course, his position of male judgement and voice of authority on the topic of female virtue certainly echoes the patriarchal attitudes of the historical period. He also still upholds the bond between a woman's virtue and her sexual nature, as opposed to her other qualities. However, he strays from societal expectations in other ways, mainly in who is given agency. Milton envisions a total reshaping of what constitutes female virtue, distinguishing it from merely physical chastity and realigning it with an internal attitude completely under the control of women, which still remains an impressive movement away from the traditions of his time.

Works Cited

1. Bradburn, Beth. "Bodily Metaphor and Moral Agency in 'A Masque': A Cognitive Approach." *Milton Studies*, vol. 43, 2004, pp. 19-34. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/26395875. Accessed May 2020.
2. Dabhoiwala, Faramerz. "The Construction of Honour, Reputation and Status in Late
3. Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England." *Transactions of the Royal Historical*
4. *Society*, vol. 6, 1996, pp. 201-213., doi:10.2307/3679236.
5. Martin, Catherine Gimelli. *Milton and Gender*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.
6. Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Thomas H. Luxon, ed. The John Milton Reading Room, http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/pl/book_9/text.shtml. May, 2020.
7. --. "A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634." Thomas H. Luxon, ed. The John Milton Reading Room, http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/comus/text.shtml. April 2020.
8. Moore, Jeanie Grant. "The Two Faces of Eve: Temptation Scenes in *Comus* and *Paradise Lost*." *Milton Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2002, pp. 1-19., doi:10.1111/1094-348x.00026.
9. Revard, Stella P. "Eve and the Doctrine of Responsibility in *Paradise Lost*." *PMLA*, vol. 88, no. 1, 1973, pp. 69-78. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/461327. Accessed May 2020
10. Shullenberger, William. "Into the Woods: The Lady's Soliloquy in 'Comus.'" *Milton Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2001, pp. 33-43. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/24465427. Accessed May 2020.

M E M E N T O

memento-journal.org