FIGURES AND THINGS: CHARLES DEMUTH, 1908 – 1935

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Abstract

Between 1923 and 1929, Charles Demuth (1883 – 1935), an early-20th century American painter perhaps best remembered today for his Machine-Age precisionist landscapes, executed a series of ten non-mimetic portraits of artists and writers active in and around the American avant-garde. All ten portraits in the series transgress the traditional conventions of their genre, eschewing the body proper to depict their subjects instead by way of objects, words, and graphic inscription, and often by reference to—or “in the guise of,” so to speak—his or her signature work or style. Bracketed between ca. 1908, the year that marks the onset of Demuth’s mature production, and 1935, the year he succumbed to diabetes at the age of fifty-two, this study uses the “poster” portrait series as a lens to distill a set of conceptual engagements and formal problems across Demuth’s complex and varied practice. While most scholars have treated the artist’s delicate floral still lifes and intimately-scaled watercolor figure studies in isolation from the precisionist landscapes for which he is best remembered today, I argue that the portraits crystallize an underappreciated thread running across Demuth’s practice—his persistent interrogation of the determinants—and limits—of pictorial meaning, genre chiefly among them. While Figures and Things trains its primary focus on Demuth, it also casts a wider view. Using the poster portrait series as a fulcrum to open onto a wider rereading of Demuth’s oeuvre, I position Demuth in turn to pry open the mythos of unity and rupture central to the art-historical narrative of American Modernism more broadly—a narrative, and by extension a revision, which exceeds any one individual actor. Arguing neither for Demuth’s exceptionalism nor against his marginality, I treat his singularity as a lens that brings into focus a richer and more complex account of the formal questions and historical pressures that shaped picture making in the early decades of the last century.
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Figure 152. *Chimney and Water Tower*, 1931
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This study makes an argument for the intensely relational and dialogic nature of Charles Demuth’s artistic practice, and thus it is unsurprising that it has resulted from a deeply relational and dialogic process all its own. As in Demuth’s case, the final product bears the influence of and its strongest convictions unfold from the conversation, engagement, and commitment of many interlocutors. A list of the most important of these is to follow, but I offer my thanks first to four women in particular who have had a hand (and heart) in shaping this dissertation in ways that sit closest to the core: to Sole Anatrone, for longer and more closely than I can remember; to Anna Katz, whose incisive criticism and devastating wit I’ve had the benefit of since our first Art History class at Berkeley as freshman through our years together at Princeton and beyond; to Frances Jacobus-Parker, for her singular capacity to walk that line between inside and outside; and to Tessa Paneth-Pollock—to you and especially “to you”—for her enthusiasm and presence and readiness to wade into the guff and muck, and especially for her faith. To the short list must be added one more, Chinn Wang, without whose steadiness and infectious enthusiasm for all the good things in life other than writing sustained this endeavor from first to last.

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I. I Saw The Figure Five in Gold

Among the rain / and lights / I saw the figure 5 / in gold / on a red / firetruck / moving /
tense / unheeded / to gong clangs / siren howls / and wheels rambling / through the dark
city.

—William Carlos Williams, “The Great Figure” (1921)

Between 1926 and 1928, Charles Demuth (1883 – 1935), an American modernist painter
best known today for his machine age paintings of the American industrial landscape, executed a
large-scale oil portrait of the poet William Carlos Williams [Figures 1 and 2]. He called it The
Figure Five in Gold, a reference to Williams’s 1921 poem, “The Great Figure,” a spare, staccato
text whose broken lines and blunt diction are meant to capture the visceral experience of a No. 5
fire truck’s keening passage down 9th Avenue in New York City. Demuth’s title is tongue-in-
cheek: “The Great Figure,” here literalized in the form of a numeral five telescoped in receding
triplicate, sits in as surrogate for the figure of the poet himself: The Figure Five is a portrait, then.
But rather than transmute corporeal subject into figural representation, as per the usual operations
of the genre, this portrait takes for its task the translation of poetry into painting. The substitution is
incisive: severing identity from physiognomy, it ruptures the portrait’s privileged tie to a bodily
referent in the phenomenal world.

Demuth produced a series of ten such “poster” portraits between 1923 and 1929, taking
for his subjects a range of artists active in and around the American avant-garde in that decade
[Figures 3 – 11]. All ten portraits in the series transgress the traditional conventions of their
genre, eschewing the body proper to depict their subjects instead by way of objects, words, and
graphic inscription, and often by reference to—or “in the guise of,” so to speak—his or her signature work or style. In addition to painting biomorphic abstractions, Charles Duncan for example, the subject of Demuth’s third portrait, made his living painting billboards, and Demuth’s depiction of the artist as a wall of signs is informed by both aspects of his visual production [Figures 3 and 12].

Bracketed between ca. 1914, the year that marks the onset of Demuth’s mature production, and 1935, the year he succumbed to diabetes at the age of fifty-two, this study uses the “poster” portrait series as a lens to distill a set of conceptual engagements and formal problems across Demuth’s complex and varied practice. While most scholars have treated the artist’s delicate floral still lifes and intimately-scaled watercolor figure studies in isolation from the precisionist landscapes for which he is best remembered today, I argue that the portraits crystallize an underappreciated thread running across Demuth’s practice—his persistent interrogation of the determinants—and limits—of pictorial meaning, genre chiefly among them.

I take a methodological cue here from Joseph Leo Koerner, whose study of Albrecht Dürer’s self-portraits provided a model for how a local inquiry into Demuth’s “other” portraits could open onto a wider rereading of his practice. Following Koerner’s guide in this respect, I propose that Demuth’s painting is at once self-referential and at the same time transcends aesthetic inquiry to negotiate broader questions of meaning and intersubjective relation. If, as Koerner suggests, Dürer’s self-portraits presage the notion that “art and artist are co-substantial, that the value and meaning of an image derives from its being by someone,” Demuth posits a set of diametric claims: posing subjectivity as relational and pictorial meaning as deeply intertextual, his work locates both at the complex intersection of multiple layers of representation.
Far and away the best known painting in the portrait series, *The Figure Five* is perhaps Demuth’s most celebrated work bar none, its standing as a veritable icon of American Modernism consecrated as recently as March of 2013 when it entered mass circulation on the face of a U.S. postage stamp, one among twelve modern American “masterpieces” selected to honor the centennial of the Armory Show. Though *The Figure Five* never sold during Demuth’s lifetime, since its bequest to the Met in 1949, it has been the subject of extensive scholarly attention and widespread popular acclaim. Yet this painting’s status as a portrait, and its place alongside the sustained group of like pictures Demuth painted over the course of the 1920s, has gone relatively under-theorized.

While Demuth mobilized some form of citation across the portrait series, in no other instance did he riff so directly (or punnily) off his source material as his one-to-one substitution of “The Great Figure” in place of the figuration of Williams’s body. The relationship between *The Figure Five* and its source text is often described in terms of equivalency, with Demuth’s precise painterly aesthetic lauded as a seamless correlate to Williams’s unaffected prose. Yet compare *The Figure Five* to *Rue du singe qui pêche* (1921), a painting Demuth made in and of Paris seven years prior [Figure 13]. The stylistic continuity between the two works complicates any characterization of the later painting as a simple translation of Williams’s prose.

As this comparison makes clear, the citational mode of the portraits, several of which “depict” artists and writers whose style hewed closely to Demuth’s own, makes it difficult to determine what properly belongs to the subject, and as a result, who exactly we are to understand that subject to be. Demuth described this elision of the difference between self and other in a letter to Alfred Stieglitz, just around the time he was back at work on *The Figure Five.*

*[The work] has been going, but going very strangely this summer. They—the paintings—have a strange, inner strange look about them, they look sometimes*
like I think my own things do or should and then again when I look at them they seem to look very different and strange with a strange strangeness. Really, I can’t tell you, — you’ll see them unless they look too strange some morning and I do away with them, — only remembering the summer of ’28 without any work to help me remember some terrible days.”

The “strange strangeness” to which Demuth refers here suggests that rather than deploy mimesis to differentiate and individualize his subjects (primary among the usual objectives of traditional portraiture), the portraits might be said to model the process of individuation-through-assimilation by which the self is first constituted in relation. Demuth’s recourse to mimicry in place of mimesis, that is, might be said to supplant the depiction of identity with something akin to the process of identification in the technical psychoanalytic sense, defined by Laplanche and Pontalis as “the psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides.”

To insist on the continuity between Rue du singe qui pêche and The Figure Five is not to imply that the formal innovations for which Williams and Demuth came respectively to be known—Imagist poetry and Precisionist painting, both widely venerated as pioneering, quintessentially American modernist forms—were not mutually informed. Yet the emphasis placed by later scholars on this point of equivalence between The Figure Five and “The Great Figure” tends to overlook the degree to which painting and poem proceed from fundamentally, even structurally different premises.

Stripped of the ornaments of metaphor and allegory, “The Great Figure” claims to proffer a direct line to the fullness and immediacy of individual perception—Williams’s visual, aural, haptic experience of his body in the world (light and sirens and a red fire engine barreling past in
the dark and the rain). “Once on a hot July day coming back exhausted from the Post Graduate Clinic,” Williams recounted of the poem’s origin in his autobiography decades later,

I dropped in as I sometimes did at Marsden’s [Hartley’s] studio on Fifteenth Street for a talk, a little drink maybe and to see what he was doing. As I approached his number I heard a great clatter of bells and the roar of a fire engine passing the end of the street down Ninth Avenue. I turned just in time to see a gold figure 5 on a red background flash by. The impression was so sudden and forceful that I took a piece of paper out my pocket and wrote a short poem about it.12

The Figure Five—and the following holds not only for the other portraits in the series, but across Demuth’s practice more broadly—challenges precisely the claims of essential nature and self-determination that underlie Williams’s account. There is no “bedrock” (of self, body, world, nature, experience) locatable in or behind Demuth’s pictures.13 Whereas Williams claims the adequacy—and indeed transparency—of language to lived experience, Demuth removes not only Williams’s body but also his own sensate experience from the origin of representation, and substitutes in place of both a text—an intrinsically mediated referent already once-removed from the phenomenal world.14

Put another way, Demuth is focused on questions of representation as opposed to perception.15 His painting, this study argues, doesn’t probe the relationship between seeing and knowing (what is seen and how it is represented), so much as interrogate the distance between knowing and telling (what is known and how it is communicated), and most crucially, the role of the picture therein. The demonstrative clarity of the comparison between The Figure Five and “The Great Figure” on this point lies in the fact that portrait and poem diverge along precisely this axis. If “The Great Figure” has its origin in and presumes to offer the viewer transparent access to the somatic experience of its author, The Figure Five, by contrast, is a painting about the translation of experience into language, which is opaque, symbolic and—central to claims of this study—never belongs to a singular subjectivity.
The meaning of Demuth’s painting, that is to say, doesn’t emerge from or point back to any originary encounter between body and world, but from a set of other, more layered relationships—between word and image, self and other, as a product of the interplay between styles (Demuth’s own and his subjects, as well as deeper art-historical referents). As I demonstrate across analyses of each of the four canonical genres in which he painted (portraiture, literary illustration, landscape, and still life), Demuth posited the contingency of picture and person alike, each forged by (and subject to) a fundamentally a-sensory epistemology.

II. Incased in Glass

The remove of Demuth’s paintings from the realms of the bodily and the material was identified early on by critics. “His craftsmanship is so perfect that it is not always quite alive,” wrote Paul Strand in 1922, echoing the sentiments of Guy Pène du Bois who had critiqued Demuth’s “timidity” in response to “the sensuous luxuriance of nature” four years prior. “His temper is so meticulously refined,” du Bois noted in 1918, that “its estheticism verges on aridity. It wants health above everything, but given health would it also have this tremendous sensitiveness?” In this same vein, Willard Hunting Wright concluded his rather cool review of Demuth’s contributions to The Society of Independent Artists’ First Annual Exhibition in the spring of 1917 with “the hope” that “this painter,” although clearly “already beginning to grapple with the deeper problems of aesthetics,” will “in the near future devote his entire time to organizing his sensations.”

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On a more laudatory note, writing for *The New York Sun* in 1926, Henry McBride, who over nearly two decades authored the most sustained and consistent readings of Demuth’s painting, described him as an artist, who,

with the aid of science, doubtless wraps himself in some sort of transparent cloak and shields himself from the contrary winds. He is like these deep sea experts who sink beneath the waves incased in glass, to come back when the supply of oxygen has been exhausted with reports of wonders. Not a ripple from the upper airs is allowed to disturb the intensity of his study. If a storm rages, he will hear about it from Marin afterwards. But this scientifically induced calm is by no means stagnation. There is life to be observed from the spot where he has taken up his station and, since science secures you from fogs, he gets it right.

Drawing out the contrast with the “lusty” watercolors of John Marin, McBride proceeds to challenge the presumption that the two painters’ relative modernism can be established or distinguished on such grounds.

But can Demuth be modern, you ask, if Marin is? Why not? The oddest fallacy amid all those that persist is that there must be a formula for modern art. Both men connect with the times, although they connect differently. The submerged, inner life of Marin revolts at science and fights it. But the science that kills Marin keeps Demuth alive. Demuth chants the Hymn Intellectual, as Walt Whitman would say.¹⁷

The “you” to whom McBride poses his rhetorical “Why not?” stands in for his fellow critics, who often staked a claim for the values they deemed “modern” via the comparison between Demuth and Marin.

Strand, for example, offered on the whole a positive assessment of the watercolors Demuth exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum in 1922. Yet he concludes with a glowing paean to those shown by Marin in the same exhibition, the success of which he defines against the (implicitly gendered) “delicacy” not only of watercolor (the medium in which both painters primarily worked), but in direct contrast to Demuth’s practice thereof. Marin’s “few vivid etchings of New York” in particular, Strand claimed, “assert” a “direct reaction to the immediate
environment”—“face and penetrate it, rather than run away. Much more than in the work of Demuth,” he continues,

does this profound approach to life in America make itself clear in the painting of John Marin. Older and more mature, he is more free of contemporary French influences and of a certain too delicate niceness which yet characterizes the work of the younger man. No less sensitive to the inherent qualities of the medium, and with a more robustly daring color sense… Marin has added to what has been so much a medium of singing violins and wood winds, the fanfare of brasses and drums, the sharpness of flutes and the deeper tonalities of the lower strings.

Regarding the “too delicate niceness” of Demuth’s paintings, Wright was even more explicit. “The unfortunate thing about Demuth’s art is that it reveals in the artist a contentment with his tricks and mannerisms and a lack of striving for more solid and masculine attributes.” Indeed, functioning as barely-veiled euphemism for his sexuality (Demuth was gay), such references—to the “precious,” “almost feminine refinement,” “daintiness of touch,” “queer elegance,” “sensitiveness,” “fastidious” “well-bred … urbanity,” and “perversity” of Demuth’s painting, to offer just a few examples—abounded in contemporary criticism.20

As the reviews by McBride, Strand and others attest, critics certainly drew a comparison between Demuth and Marin, and did so in deeply sexualized and gendered terms. Drawing on this body of contemporary criticism, historians have in turn given considerable attention to the relational dynamics between Demuth, Marin and Alfred Stieglitz, the photographer, publisher, gallerist, and crucial architect of American Modernism. Common across such accounts is the claim that Stieglitz’s lukewarm support of Demuth resulted from the gallerist’s reticence to equally represent two watercolorists, a supposed either/or from which the ostensibly more “virile” Marin emerged the consistent winner.

As perhaps the dominant concern of the most sustained literature on Demuth’s practice, his liminality relative to the cadre of artists Stieglitz championed in the 1920s (Marin primary
among them) has been attributed more often than not to his sexuality, which didn’t accord, so the logic goes, with Stieglitz-circle conceptions of gender/masculinity and its relationship to painting. But I suggest in what follows that Stieglitz’s equivocal support of Demuth’s work stemmed rather from the distance his painting marked from the nexus of authorship and embodiment, essentialist subjectivity and expressionism that would come to define the aesthetic discourse of American Modernism as it developed in and around Stieglitz’s galleries in this decade.

The portraits in particular, as I demonstrate in Chapter 1, do not so much illustrate Stieglitz-circle picture theory as speak back to it, at once crystallizing and offering a meta-reflection on the key values around which that discourse cohered. Where critics such as Paul Rosenfeld and Waldo Frank posited an adequacy, immediacy, and transparency between the essence of the artist-subject and their body and their (often abstract) pictures, Demuth’s (not-abstract) portraits literalize that collapse by picturing his subjects as their paintings. More specifically, in collapsing his artist-subjects with their artworks, Demuth critically performs (rather than merely rehearse or advertise) Stieglitz-circle picture theory, and in doing so pressures the core conception of both picture and subject that lie at its center.

III. Reconceiving the Antechamber

The earliest works in the portrait series made their debut in the show “Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans” held at the Anderson Galleries in New York in March of 1925. Displayed in the antechamber to the main space of the exhibition, the first five portraits—most likely O’Keeffe, Dove, Duncan, Hartley, and Marin—greeted visitors upon their arrival, functioning, as Wanda Corn and others have suggested, as a kind of advertisement for the artists
represented within the gallery’s interior. This marginal positioning is the origin of the descriptor “poster,” as coined by Demuth himself.

Officially, “Seven Americans” was organized to mark the twenty-year anniversary of the opening of 291. In practice, however, it publicly signaled a shift in Stieglitz’s focus, and in the deployment of his capital (both financial and cultural), from the championing of European Modernism to the programmatic cultivation of his own homegrown strain. The very title of the exhibition encoded this newly focused intent: the promotion of “159 Paintings, Photographs & Things Recent & Never before Publicly Shown” by seven specific American artists: “Arthur G. Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Charles Demuth, Paul Strand, Georgia O’Keeffe, Alfred Stieglitz.”

The Intimate Gallery, which Stieglitz opened the following winter, advanced the mission inaugurated by “Seven Americans.” Stieglitz even carried over its specific phrasing in the ad copy for the new space, but with one “particular” change. “The Intimate Gallery,” read the statement distributed on all official communications, “will be used more particularly for the intimate study of Seven Americans: John Marin, Georgia O’Keeffe, Arthur G. Dove, Marsden Hartley, Paul Strand, Alfred Stieglitz, and Number Seven (Six + X).” The secure place Demuth had occupied in the first exhibition’s line-up, in other words, had now been explicitly relegated to the variable position of “Number Seven.” While Demuth would go on to fill this role more often than not over the next five years (until his health began to deteriorate in earnest), his liminality relative to the core stable of artists Stieglitz promoted in the 1920s is starkly illustrated in the contrast between “Seven Americans” and “Six + X.”

Scholars have made much of the portraits’ literal marginality in “Seven Americans,” and by extension Demuth’s own within the constellation of this so-called “second Stieglitz circle.”
Most of the extant literature rests on three primary claims: first, that the portraits, alongside those produced by other members of the Stieglitz circle (both abstract and figurative, painterly and photographic) reflect an attempt to define and maintain a coherent group identity, and in Demuth’s case specifically, solidify his tenuous inclusion in that group; second, that by “advertising” their subjects, the portraits ventriloquize Stieglitz-circle critics’ claims for an indigenous school of American modernism; and finally, that if Demuth can be understood to have operated at all independently of this framework, it was in his adoption of the idiom of commercial advertising, which, in line with Stieglitz in purpose if not subject or style, served the greater endeavor of promoting that movement. Wanda Corn captures the central through-line of such narratives: “to a degree barely understood to date,” she would write in 1999, “Demuth’s homosexuality, along with his illness as a diabetic, determined the relationships he would have with other artists and critics as well as the way he would paint.” The portraits, Corn concludes, “were his personal contribution to a campaign for a new American art; but they were also entreaties to Stieglitz and his circle for love.”

This tendency toward what we might call “psychobiographic” interpretation can be traced to the first comprehensive monograph on Demuth, a thousand-page tome by Emily Farnham, initially written as a dissertation in 1959. Modeling her methodology on Freud’s essay on Leonardo, Farnham argued that the distinctive qualities of Demuth’s painting, namely its “effete” mannerism and enigmatic “dilettantism,” resulted from the sublimation of his “sexual perversion.” If already nascent in the primary criticism, Farnham’s focus on Demuth’s sexuality generated the terms that have continued to preoccupy scholars in the decades since: variations on the claim that the style, subject matter, and abstruse meaning of Demuth’s
paintings, and particularly his portraits, result from a “working through” of repressed sexual desire remains a consistent motif in the literature.\textsuperscript{33}

As I demonstrate in what follows, the inclination to read through Demuth’s pictures in search of some essential subject beneath has obscured the ways in which his painting seeks to transcend the particularity of individual experience, not only in the dialogue it initiates with a wide breadth of other images and aesthetic traditions, but also in the artist’s active interrogation of genre as a determining condition of pictorial meaning. In this sense, such scholarly efforts run counter to the conception of picturing, the model of subjectivity, and their interrelation posited in and by Demuth’s body of work. For as we shall see, Demuth neither conceived of the picture as transparent to the self nor located that self at (or as) the origin of representation.

Running parallel to, and as Corn’s interpretation attests, often going hand-in-hand with such psychobiographic treatments, Demuth’s painting has been almost uniformly viewed through the critical matrix of Stieglitz circle picture theory. The result is that his entire oeuvre, from the “poster” portraits to the “billboard aesthetics” of his later landscapes, has long been subsumed under the search for a native modern pictorial vernacular. Yet Demuth’s preoccupations with the nature and structure of pictorial signification—and with the reciprocity between the act of picturing and the forging of subjectivity—distinguish his practice from the central precepts espoused by Stieglitz circle picture theory.

No responsible discussion of this body of work can ignore its connection to Stieglitz. The portraits were shown under his auspices and took as their subject, at least in the beginning, the very artists that comprised his inner circle. But this study challenges the presumption that this work—or any other body of Demuth’s painting—can be read as simply iterating Stieglitz’s
agenda. Demuth’s first written mention of the portrait series, which appears in a letter to Stieglitz dated January of 1924, offers a case in point.

I am having a lot of fun—as much as I can have, at present, with the ‘posters.’ G’Keeffee’s [sic] is well on the way, — Dove’s and Marcel’s are started. I will send you G’Keeffee’s when it is finished. The work on them seems endless. Am reading a book in which I find this advice: ‘for the lips of the saints use Sienna and White; use Sienna first (for the mouths).’ ‘The Book of the Art of Cinino Cennini [sic].’ Also, ‘with prayers to the Virgin, and on the panel of chestnut wood coated with plaster and glue, paint the altar pieces.’

This passage has been called on to verify a reading of the portraits as acts of veneration to a new pantheon of modern American “saints.” Demuth’s rhetoric here certainly dovetails with the spiritually transcendent and indeed religiously-minded brand of modernism that Stieglitz has come to epitomize, as Stieglitz himself would no doubt have recognized. Yet this fact has masked other valences of meaning that underlie Demuth’s reference to “the saints.”

As first demonstrated by John Pope-Hennessey and subsequently elaborated by a wide range of Early Modern scholars, the genre of portraiture as we know it today came into its own in symbiosis with Renaissance conceptions of the individual humanist subject and of the individuated easel picture, or tableau. Yet the genre’s inception can be located much earlier. As Stephan Perkinson and others have argued, the conventions of modern portraiture can alternately be traced all the way back to Veronica’s veil, that miraculous (and, we should note, indexical) registry of Jesus’s perfect likeness on the cloth used to wipe his sweating brow. This primal origin story gave rise to the tradition of religious icons—“likenesses of the saints”—the power of which was understood to inhere in their physical genesis from the bodily presence of their subjects. The material connection between sign and referent foundational to this genre of religious image has carried over into the reception of modern secular portraiture, informing how
we engage such objects, and accounting, at least in part, for the power they hold over us as viewers.

Rather than a simple iteration of Stieglitz-ian religiosity, in other words, I read Demuth’s invocation of Cennini as but one mark of his intently discursive practice. As this brief detour into portraiture’s genealogy suggests, his reference not only evidences what I will go to characterize in Chapter 1 as Demuth’s “methodological” interest in portraiture’s auratic power, but also offers a crucial framework to understand the tension between presence and absence from which the meaning of these pictures unfolds.

While I too begin with the portraits’ display in the antechamber to “Seven Americans,” then, I argue in what follows that their literal marginality in that inaugural exhibition offers a concrete, and indeed cannily specific metaphor for how we might reconceive of their meaning in terms specific to the content, exhibition, and reception of the work itself rather than their author’s identity or status. My reading of Demuth’s portraits, and indeed my approach to his practice across genres, thus grants the artist more agency in his differentiation from Stieglitz and his program. In what follows, I reframe Demuth’s outlier status by demonstrating that he wasn’t (or wasn’t only) excluded but that he used his artwork to take or make or mark a distance from this discourse—to pry apart its terms—and that he did so actively. Rather than use “The Stieglitz Circle” as merely a foil, then, and so re-inscribe the monolithic narrative that has come to define art-historical accounts of prewar American Modernism more broadly, by parsing the ways in which Demuth responded to and distinguished his work from that discourse, my account restores the active, contingent processes by which its values first came into being.37
In this sense, while *Figures and Things* trains its primary focus on Demuth, it also casts a wider view. Using the poster portrait series as a fulcrum to open onto a wider rereading of Demuth’s oeuvre, I position Demuth in turn to pry open the mythos of unity and rupture central to the art-historical narrative of American Modernism more broadly—a narrative, and by extension a revision, which exceeds any one individual actor. If the physical space the portraits occupied within but also (partially) outside this seminal exhibition offers a frame for reconceiving the meaning and significance of this work (and the bearing of Demuth’s relationship to Stieglitz thereon), that is, Demuth’s liminal position also productively complicates the story of a coherent and unified movement that we have inherited largely intact directly from Stieglitz himself.

**IV. Chapter Summaries**

Chapter 1 attends to the poster portraits in depth, focusing on the 1923 picture of Marsden Hartley. Demuth’s recourse to symbolic tokens in lieu of physiognomic likeness has been taken as evidence that he sought to penetrate the surface of his subjects to disclose their essential selves. Yet the symbols he employed do not open readily onto clear or fixed meanings. Rather than attempt to decode and thus make legible these hermetic pictures, this chapter considers what else might be at stake in Demuth’s exclusion of the body.

My second chapter addresses Demuth’s approach to the representation of the body. I focus here on the series of literary pictures he painted between 1915 and 1919, which attend to a range of mostly nineteenth-century works of fiction by authors such as Émile Zola, Henry James, and Frank Wedekind. Transcending binaries of abstract and material, text and image, Demuth approaches the body as itself a signifier—a figure, at once vivid and material yet emptied of both
the specificity of individual(ized) identity and the sensuous immediacy of illusionistic embodiment.

On the surface, the bodies of work I address in my first two chapters thus appear to be inverses of one another—the former substituting words for bodies, the latter bodies for words—but I trace much deeper lines of continuity between them. Where I argue in Chapter 1 that the ontological link between picture and person definitive to portraiture offers a structure within which Demuth works to test the limits of legibility, I suggest in Chapter 2 that the relationship inherent to the practice of illustration provides a similar tether between image and referent, in this case a text. Emphasizing the manifest disjunctures between the illustrations and the narratives that inspired them, Demuth likewise locates the meaning of these pictures above all in relation—not only that of word to image, but also between the bodies depicted.

Chapter 3 examines Demuth’s landscapes, the work on which his place in the canon of American modernist painters came ultimately (posthumously) to rest. At once mining and departing from the genre’s typical preoccupations with materiality and perception, Demuth, I argue, approaches the landscape (his environment and largely architectural surrounds) as already a kind of picture. Focusing primarily on the efflorescence of the genre in Demuth’s practice in the years around 1920, I examine this body of work in relation to the history and traditions of landscape painting as the genre, the contemporary discourse around Cubism, and especially the influence of Cézanne thereon, and against the nativist position staked out by the critics most closely associated with Stieglitz and his galleries in this decade.

Finally, a brief epilogue centers on the single late illustration Demuth based on Robert McAlmon’s “A Distinguished Air” (1930). This discussion opens in turn onto an analysis of the erotic genre pictures Demuth painted in the late teens and early thirties, the least widely-
exhibited and perhaps most overdetermined watercolors he produced. I conclude by reconsidering the privileged status Demuth scholars have accorded his biography, and in particular his sexuality, and suggest an alternate approach to how we might frame their significance vis-à-vis the breadth of Demuth’s practice.
Chapter 1. Token Subjects

I. Signs

*Poster Portrait: Duncan* (1924 – 25) [Figure 3]. C. Duncan in boldface black lettering, like the signature at the close of a letter (Sincerely, C. Duncan) except that the first initial C followed by the period is located above as opposed to before the Duncan, somewhat disrupting the signatory allusion. An oval, placed just left of center-foreground, contains a lackluster bloom (peony? old-fashioned rose?) floating in the negative space of a matte black ground. Positioned to its immediate left and right sit the silhouettes of two almost but not quite identical sprigs of vine, perhaps ivy. Two more periods dot the ground below a central band that traverses the breadth of the picture. Aligned just above and below the central oval, these marks perform a decorative rather than grammatical function, cueing the viewer’s attention not only to read the composition as text (its content) but also to appreciate the arrangement as image (its form). Viewed as a trio, the three periods are ever so slightly misaligned on the vertical axis, with off-putting effect. Together these three components (periods, sprigs, oval) evoke a logo or crest.

This motif is circumscribed by a pair of nested frames. First, a thick, even black rectangle surrounds the composition on three sides, its lower border cut off by the literal demarcation of the picture’s bottom edge. Moving outward, a much thinner line signifies the perimeter of what appears to be a sheet of paper on which the central constellation of forms has been written/painted. Colored in a shade of salmon-rose that hovers somewhere between pallid and lurid in relation to the orangey-red of the painting’s primary ground, this sheet reads as a poster or bill (as in the admonition “post no bills”). The shallow space of the picture thus evokes the flat surface of a painted wall papered with three (or more, just out of sight?) such bills, zoomed in and awkwardly cropped to focus on one particular sign.
The narrow band that cuts across the image is unhindered by the internal framing and expands gradually in diameter from left to right. Capped at either end by sky-blue cuffs, the band contains within the boundaries of its own defining borders a kind of attenuated rainbow or color spectrum. Evoking nineteenth-century rack paintings by the likes of John F. Peto, it appears as if an oblong rectangular swath has been unevenly excised from a color wheel and pasted across the representation of a wall. Yet complicating the picture’s trompe l’oeil effect, the blank white stretches between the colors also read as primed ground, suggesting the band exists before or underneath not only the bills but also the very wall on which they are posted. The band thus distills a tension between our sense of color in nature (as in a rainbow) and color as form—one among various materials that comprise a painting. The band at first appears to serve as an emphatic underlining of the name Duncan, but closer inspection reveals that the bottom edges of the letters reverberate below it, as if the band literally slices through the material rendering of the word. At the same time, however, these echoes produce an unsettling sense of duplication, as though two versions of the same text were imperfectly superimposed, so that the lower portion of the first remains visible. Yet this slippage is not uniform across the word. Some letters, for example, the two Ns and the A, seem too big—stretched out, like the spectrum of colors inside the band—while the upper and lower components of the letters in other cases, such as that of the C and U, don’t quite line up and so appear doubled. Compounding this doubling effect, the C in Duncan is proportionally too small in relation to its adjacent lettering. This discontinuity draws the eye to the C, and from there to its counterpart above, the first initial C followed by the period, so that the two broken circles separate out from their semantic order to create a visual rhyme across the surface of the picture. More troubling still is the way in which the letters above the
band progress on a slightly elevated diagonal, while their echoes below run parallel to the picture’s bottom edge, like two sheets of wallpaper inexpertly hung.

Contributing to this sense of dislocation, the central pink rectangle is not only off-center in the composition (too far to the left, producing the sense of awkward cropping) but off-kilter too, its top misaligned with the upper frame of the picture. What we seem to be presented with, then, is something like the following: it is as if a rectangle—a sheet of paper, say, with “Duncan” written across it—has been cut in half, hinged on one side, with its top half opened an inch so to create a narrow, pie-wedge-shaped void—think of the profile view of a square clamshell (if there were such a thing) opened a crack—and that void then papered over with the cut-out color wheel/spectrum.

Relying on such imaginary comparisons underscores the difficulty of integrating the way this image is put together. As the picture persists in upsetting our expectations, its various disjunctures manifest a sense of disorientation (what appears to be a straight line in fact isn’t, what we expect to be centered turns out to be off-kilter, etc.), and only gradually, upon a second or third more careful look, can we gather together the means by which that sense is generated.

If it is difficult to apprehend this picture formally, the task of realizing its meaning is complicated exponentially by the simple fact of its genre, which the title informs us is that of portraiture. Understanding how and why such a recalcitrant picture was made—recalcitrant not only in its formal terms but, insofar as portraits go, this one readily communicates little to nothing about its subject—is the central concern in what follows.

II. So-called Pictures
Demuth painted a series of ten such “poster” portraits over the following decade, taking for his subjects a range of figures active in and around the American avant-garde including, in addition to Duncan and Williams, the major painters associated with Alfred Stieglitz’s galleries in this decade (Georgia O’Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, and John Marin), the vaudevillian Bert Savoy, and writers Wallace Stevens, Eugene O’Neill, and Gertrude Stein [Figures 2-10]. The works’ difficulty was noted from the start. “Being Demuths they are necessarily beautiful in their sure and delicate craftsmanship,” remarked Helen Appleton Read in her review of “Seven Americans” for The Brooklyn Daily Eagle. Yet he seems to “offer portraits…in a code for which we have not the key.” Glen Mullin of The Nation was likewise confused by yet sympathetic to the series: “Charles Demuth’s poster portraits were excellent. Even though one as an outsider did not get the full force of the cosmic symbols, he could at least admire the craft employed.”

Demuth bemoaned the works’ lukewarm reception in a letter to Stieglitz a few months after “Seven Americans” had closed.

I want to finish the posters. Almost everyone has told me what a great mistake I made showing them without explaining that they were made for my own amusement! I’ll do three, or more, more [sic] and show them all next winter. I’ll make them look at them until they see that they are, so called, pictures. I wish I could afford to work without ever showing it. I think they don’t ever deserve to see our work; most of them, anyway. I wish we could all ‘strike.’

Demuth’s statement that the portraits were done “for his own amusement” is undercut by his insistence on doing more (and more) and showing them again. True to his word, Demuth went on to add four additional pictures to the series over the next four years, none of which sold.

And indeed, as the series progressed, the portraits became increasingly hermetic and more brazenly so. “You know, maybe you don’t,” Demuth wrote to Agnes Boulton O’Neill (wife of Eugene) the following July,
that I’ve painted several things which I called “Posters,” for several American painters. I showed them last winter. Well, my dear, I’ve now done Eugene and it has his name quite plainly on it, — I thought I would like to know if he cared if I showed it... The thing itself is very “up in the air” and outside his name will probably be thought by most to have nothing to do with Eugene. It was really, at one time, a thing I started as a poster for “The Moon of the Caribbees.” At least it will have that much connection. I can claim that if—if the New York art public say that I just painted Eugene O’Neill across an old canvas and called it a “portrait.” I want to do one of Wallace Stevens and then I think American “letters” will be finished. I did one of W.C. Williams.41

Much about the portrait of O’Neill changed between the summer of 1926 and the date Demuth sent a final version to Stieglitz some three years later, most notably Demuth’s wholesale excision of his subject’s name [Figure 10]. Not only does “O’Neill” no longer appear “quite plainly on it,” but by the time of the portrait’s first exhibition at The Intimate Gallery in April of 1929, Demuth had purged O’Neill’s name from its title as well, which was now listed as Longhi on Broadway, a rather esoteric reference to the eighteenth-century Italian painter, Pietro Longhi.42 Demuth replaced the identifying name of his subject, moreover, with the form of an almost corporeal mask. This object serves as a kind of substitute face, made all the more anthropomorphic by the illusion of a glint in its “eye,” which Demuth effects via a carefully-placed speck of white paint.43

In this, Longhi is characteristic of the later portraits as a group. While an inscription of the subject’s name (in the absence of that subject’s figurative representation) supplies a nominal link between picture and person in the first six portraits, the final three works in the series—Longhi, Calla Lilies and Love, Love, Love (Demuth’s portraits of O’Neill, Savoy, and Stein respectively)—skirt any direct reference (iconic, nominal, or titular) to their sitter whatsoever [cf. Figures 2-8 vs. 9-11].44 This has led to some debate in the years since as to whether these later works ought to be considered portraits at all.45 What interests me, rather, is the degree to which Demuth opens up the question to begin with.
Composed nearly two years after the project’s inception, Demuth’s letter to Agnes O’Neill is revealing of his enduring commitment to the series and to its difficulty (that which makes the work difficult) in particular, despite whatever ambivalence continued to dog its execution. Not only does the letter evince the status of these later portraits as such, it also indicates a sustained interest on Demuth’s part in the mechanisms that impart that status to begin with—an interest, that is, in the question of what makes a portrait a portrait, and, more specifically, in what connects picture to person in the absence of likeness.

Read through the lens of the Stieglitz circle’s critical apparatus, Demuth’s turn to symbolic tokens in lieu of physiognomic likeness has been taken as evidence that he sought to penetrate the surface of his portrait subjects to reveal their essential selves. Edward A. Aiken’s thinking on this point is representative. “A great portrait,” he writes in an essay on *The Figure Five*, “should reveal to the viewer what an artist believes to be a fundamental quality or essential truth about the subject; mere likeness reveals only that which is readily apparent.”46 Anne Collins Goodyear also stakes out this position:

Early-twentieth-century developments in physics, mathematics, and psychology suggested that much of “reality” was hidden beneath the surface and prompted artists such as Marius de Zayas, Francis Picabia, and Charles Demuth to abandon verisimilitude in favor of abstraction. Each of these artists experimented with the technologically informed language of modernism, turning, respectively, to mathematical equations, machines, and billboards to create revealing depictions of their subjects. Although the abstract portrayals of early-twentieth modernists represented a dramatic departure from tradition, these artists did not question the essential integrity of identity or their capacity to represent it.47

Goodyear touches only very briefly on prewar abstract and symbolic portraiture (this is not the main focus of her essay) but I quote this passage at length because her concluding sentence so cannily articulates my argument in reverse formulation. The assertion of this chapter—and
indeed, a primary argument across the study as a whole—is to the contrary, that Demuth’s portraits do in fact question, quite deeply and complexly, both the integrity of identity and the capacity to represent it.

Close readings of the kind with which this chapter began—with the portraits’ status as “pictures,” to borrow Demuth’s own phrasing—is conspicuously lacking in the literature on this body of work. Much of the extant scholarship has been driven instead by a concern to decode Demuth’s idiosyncratic repertoire of object-symbols. Centered on the portrait subjects and heavily reliant upon the archive, this iconographic detective work has been integral to our understanding of the series. Yet such methodologies tend to overlook the degree to which the tokens Demuth employed do not open readily onto clear or fixed meanings.

The predominance of iconography in the Demuth literature is matched by an intimately-related “psychobiographic” approach, likewise grounded in archival research, but fixated, rather, on what these pictures might have to hide/ reveal about Demuth himself. Converging around a notion of access—to pictorial meaning, and by extension the depicted/ depicting subject—these tendencies dominate the scholarship on the series, mirroring one another’s assumptions about picture and personhood alike.

Characteristic of the literature on the genre of portraiture more generally (and, I should add, that on Demuth more generally), Harry Berger has “baptized” this mode of interpretation the “physiognomic” for the way in which it deploys a combination of methodologies “in the service of a venerable and familiar project: reading the face as an index of the mind.” Founded on the belief “that character may be inferred from image,” the physiognomic approach evidences (and so, reinforces) this belief by “treating the image as an index of the archive.”

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Recourse to the archive is not entirely out of step with the material under consideration. While the portraits bank on their medium’s material integrity and temporal immediacy, Demuth’s use of symbolic tokens—the red bow, for example, in Dove, or the ivy sprigs in Duncan—prompts the viewer to locate meaning beyond their refractory surfaces [Figures 6 and 3]. But if Demuth seems to proffer a certain epistemological engagement and thus to invite such archival “reading in,” the portraits never quite deliver on the suggestion of that promise, instead opening onto diverse and often contradictory meanings.

Departing from these characteristic trends, I take the portraits’ illegibility as a constitutive facet of the work—a quality that demands our due attention rather than something to be overcome. Put another way, the portraits have been understood to pose a problem of interpretation, with the result that scholars have worked hard to understand what their obtuse jumble of object-symbols mean. I begin instead with the more basic problem of how Demuth establishes (and elides) reference. In doing so, I shift attention from a local, iconographic focus on content—what exactly the portraits have to convey about their subjects (or, for that matter, their author)—to the means by which they signify and the modes of reception and interpretation they elicit. If much work has been done to insist that portraiture, no less than religious, allegorical, or history painting, is a storytelling genre, Catherine Soussloff’s point, quoted in my epigraph above, applies here. Soussloff’s diagnosis of a crippled history speaks to an issue different in kind than the assumption that portraiture grants transparent access to its sitter, pointing rather to the limited—and limiting—questions posed to portraits as objects of art-historical inquiry. These are the concerns that I argue lie at the heart of Demuth’s portrait practice.
In severing the mimetic link between his portraits and their so-called “sitters,” Demuth presses, more specifically, the following set of questions: How does (can?) the artwork signify in the absence of likeness? By what means—and to what ends—does the picture serve as a transitive conduit of meaning between artist, subject, and viewer? What enables and what limits such reciprocity, and by what engine (and whose agency) is it driven? Or, alternately, to whom and by what criteria should we ascribe authorship? To the viewer of portraiture in particular, these works ask: is our foreknowledge of the subject, whether personal or archival, a prerequisite of the picture’s very capacity to mean? To the degree that portraiture signifies only in relation to its purported sitter, the answer is yes. However, Demuth complicates this “yes” in that such knowledge does not guarantee or underwrite that capacity or otherwise supply their meaning, for these pictures both eclipse and exceed their referents.

As these questions indicate, our understanding of the meaning and significance of Demuth’s portraits necessitates more than merely noting their polysemy or breaking their “code.” It requires addressing the ways in which their meanings unfold from the association between image and subject, which is exactly not to say that it can be located in (or reduced to) any one individual. Rather than approach Demuth’s hermetic tokens as clues to an essential subject, I argue that by disembodying his subjects, Demuth interrogates portraiture’s structural logic—what Wendy Steiner has termed the semiotics of the genre—to challenge the integrity and autonomy of picture and person alike. If, as I demonstrate below, portraiture “makes intimate” the relationship between sign and referent, picture and person, it is by absenting the body that Demuth brings such relationality to the fore. Locally, my chapter title speaks to Demuth’s use of symbolic tokens to figure his subjects, but it is in this regard that I conceive of the portraits as tokens in a wider sense. For like the “token sign,” to borrow George Baker’s definition, the
series “directs attention back onto the system within which it circulates, the structural conditions of its own production.”

IV. The Promises of Portraiture

It cannot surprise us that, unlike the landscape, the still life, and the nude—pictorial genres that have all but vanished since the moment of their cubist deconstruction—the portrait has been resurrected again and again. It was to become, in fact, the site where the myth of a natural motivation of the sign, and of the mimetic model of representation, would be most avidly re-affirmed within every generation of twentieth-century modernity.


In Baker’s terms, then: What are the conditions of portraiture and what do they produce? Among the pictorial genres, portraiture is uniquely defined by its reference to a specific individual, in which capacity, we might say, it is the categorical opposite of the simulacrum. What makes a portrait a portrait, in other words, is the “existential presence” of the subject to which it refers (whether he or she may be alive or dead, to have actually “sat” or only imagined to have done so). The reality of this subject is what we might call portraiture’s ontological condition—that which both defines any given picture as such and distinguishes the genre, axiomatically, from all other categories of pictorial representation. As such it holds true across the spectrum of art history: All portraiture, mimetic, abstract, symbolic or otherwise—irrespective, that is to say, of any given portrait’s content (figures, objects, landscape), style (impressionist, realist, expressionist etc.), or semiotic modality (symbolic, iconic, indexical)—derives its legibility, meaning, and power over us as viewers from this privileged tie between picture and person.
This ontological binding—the condition of being from which Demuth’s and indeed all non-mimetic portraits both commence and depart—opens onto what we might call the “promises” of portraiture, which are twofold: a humanist model of subjectivity with origins in the Renaissance (from where modern portraiture derives) and a pendant model of the picture grounded in the proffer of transparency to the embodied presence of its “existential” sitter. The meaning of traditional portraiture, in short, is thought to inhere in the interiority of its subject, as (indexically) signified through that subject’s body, to which the picture presumes to grant our unmediated access in turn.  

I borrow the concept of “existential presence” from Rosalind Krauss, who points to the defining status of such in the case of the shifter, and that of pronouns in particular:

Insofar as their meaning depends on the existential presence of a given speaker, the pronouns (as is true of the other shifters) announce themselves as belonging to a different type of sign: the kind that is termed the index. As distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify.

In this respect, the genre of portraiture shares something with the medium of photography. As Krauss details, the photograph’s “separation from true icons is felt through the absoluteness of [its] physical genesis,” which “seems to short-circuit or disallow those processes of schematization or symbolic intervention that operate within the graphic representations of most paintings.” Likewise, as spectators and scholars of portraiture, we tend to treat iconicity not only as proof of an underlying real-world referent but as indicating the presence of the portrait subject at the origin of representation. Conjuring their “referents over time and space,” portraits thus work what Steiner describes as kind of “indexical magic” on their viewers, a quality all the more magical for their not being indexically tied to their subjects to begin with.
the way in which traditional mimetic portraits, one might say, masquerade icon for index—is the genre’s most rhetorically powerful operation.64

The valuation of a direct tie between artist, subject, and representation threads through the etymology of *conterfeit*, the Dutch word for portrait. Peter Parshall has carefully traced the usage of this term, a vernacular variant of the Latin *contrafactum*, over the course of the sixteenth century, arguing that it came to designate, much more broadly than portraiture, a whole category of picture understood to transmit factual information.65 Emerging separately from if alongside the discourse around mimesis, this conception of the image as a conveyer of information (as opposed to a show of invention) was built upon a notion of authenticity epitomized by and defined in terms of the portrait. “Literal, sensory, and empirical,” the order of truth signified by the term counterfeit, Parshall contends, was “the truth of portraiture rather than the truth of historia.”66

Surveying the use of counterfeit and its cognates to refer to images ranging from broadsheet illustrations of physical abnormalities to botanical guides to landscapes, Parshall demonstrates that the term carried over from its origin in portraiture valences of legitimacy and authority, derived—whether implicitly or explicitly—from “the testimony of direct witness.”67 Although applied to a diverse array of pictures, counterfeit suggested the “integrity of form stamped from the very contours of another,” imparting to other genres of image “the sense of immediacy in a portrait taken in the living presence of its subject.”68 Parshall’s focus is not expressly on early modern theories of portraiture, yet his essay cogently illustrates the assumption of and value ascribed to the direct, immediate, spatial, and temporal connection understood to bind portrait, sitter, and maker.
This presumption of co-presence has come to be treated in the culture around portraiture as a kind of contact between sitter and painting, whereby the artist’s mimetic transcription of the (physical body, exterior) of his or her subject is understood to guarantee the viewer’s access to that body, and by extension, to that subject’s essence/interiority. To take seriously the opacity of Demuth’s portraits—to acknowledge their difficulty as structurally integral to the work—is to challenge this set of assumptions. Or rather it is to insist that Demuth himself challenges them.  

V. Dispersal

I have argued that what makes a portrait a portrait, most basically and categorically, is the existential presence of the subject to which it refers. Although verisimilitude is often brought to bear as evidence of that connection, in effect it merely reinforces what is in fact a foundational premise of the genre. Unlike the index, then, iconicity offers no guarantee of the artist and sitter’s co-presence at the origin of representation. Rather, it simply makes the correspondence of picture to person internal to the image and thus self-evident to the viewer.

In absenting the body, Demuth severs that bridge. Or doesn’t sever it exactly—this would be impossible as it is definitional condition—so much as mask it, which points up the conventionality of the connection to begin with and, as a result, opens up a kind of gulf between sign and referent. In order to be legible—not in order to be a portrait, but in order to be legible as such—non-mimetic portraits must establish that connection by some other means. Demuth mobilizes three primary strategies in this regard, often in combination, each of which we have encountered in some form already. These include: emblematic attributes and symbolic tokens, language (and proper names in particular), and citation (how Demuth mimics, copies, translates,
or otherwise substitutes an interpretation of his subjects’ work or style in place of their face and body).

_The Figure Five_ is exemplary in this last respect, though Demuth’s borrowings tended toward the less explicit, and, as is evident even in the case of _The Figure Five_, almost always fold, self-referentially, back in on themselves. Consider, for example, the references Demuth makes to Marsden Hartley, which are both amalgamative (Hartley invokes several sources simultaneously) and palimpsestic (those references fold in on one another, a result in part of Hartley’s own tendency toward citation) [Figure 2]. He seems to have lifted the potted plant at center, for example, nearly verbatim from Hartley’s _Still Life with Eel_ (1917), while the juxtaposition of still life against landscape, as mediated by the architectural frame of the window, belies its debt to _A Bermuda Window_ (also of 1917) [Figures 17 and 18]. To make matters more complicated, the landscape onto which Hartley’s window opens conjures that of Mont Sainte-Victoire, its jagged horizon line dividing that distinctive, triply-graduated peak from the “quite blue” “white cloud”-spotted sky. Rendered roughly yet recognizable as such, this view moreover recalls not only Cézanne’s obsessive re-working of that motif twenty years before, but also Hartley’s own sustained and what would prove to be life-long engagement with Cézanne, particularly vis-à-vis Mont Sainte-Victoire [Figures 19-23 and 24-27]. The implicit reference to Cézanne-as-a-reference-to-Hartley is further impacted by the fact that Demuth and Hartley traveled together to Bermuda through the winter and early spring of 1917, a time when they were both “working through” Cézanne, often literally side-by-side [Figures 28 and 29].

Such citational layering is at work in other portraits in the series as well. _Love, Love, Love_ for example, Demuth’s portrait of Gertrude Stein, encodes an analogously palimpsestic relation between Stein and Picasso [Figure 11]. Like the _Figure Five_ vis-à-vis Williams’s prose,
Demuth here mimics his subject’s iterative, alliterative style and in so doing directly invokes Stein’s own “word portraits” of Matisse and Picasso, first published by Stieglitz in *Camera Work* in 1912. And as in the case of *Hartley*, the citation tracks in both directions. In picturing Stein as a mask, Demuth also evokes Picasso’s 1906 *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, the first work in which Picasso incorporated the form of an Iberian mask [Figure 30]. *Love, Love, Love* thus interweaves a non-linear reciprocity of exchange between Stein and Picasso similar to that which *Hartley* establishes between Hartley and Cézanne—and, in both instances, with Demuth himself.

*Love, Love, Love* is structured by a broken diagonal, not quite centered, which divides its ground into two roughly triangular spheres of color, matte black on one side, and a texturized crimson-russet on the other. A cane-like rod emerges midway up the composition, proceeding along a straight horizontal trajectory from left to right. The allusion to a cane, it is fair to assume, is not incidental. Demuth fancied himself, and fashioned himself quite self-consciously, as something of a dandy in the fin-de-siècle Oscar Wilde sense, replete with capes, colored cummerbunds, and a ubiquitous cane. In fact, he relied upon the support to compensate for a hip abnormality caused by a childhood illness (or injury, there is some disagreement on this point) that left him with a lifelong limp, but it came to serve as something of his signature attribute. He was repeatedly photographed with it, and indeed there is another example of non-mimetic portraiture painted the same year (1928)—a picture ostensibly of Stieglitz but in actuality closer to a group portrait by Florine Stettheimer—in which a cane stands in as proxy for Demuth’s absent body [Figures 31 and 32].

Attached to the end of this rod is the deeply contoured form of a white mask, which sits at the center of the composition staring blankly outward, the voids of its eyeholes reflecting the respective black and red of the ground over which they appear suspended. The only object in the
picture, this mask is reminiscent of its counterparts in *Longhi on Broadway*, but its central position in and placement against an empty, flat plane, like the expansive white ground in *O'Keeffe*, call attention to the absence of Stein’s body [See Figures 4 and 11].

If *Love, Love, Love* accentuates the same vacant quality as *O'Keeffe*, it is perhaps with *Duncan* that this last portrait in the series shares the most. As in *Duncan*, certain discontinuities become apparent here after extended study. The volumetric cane, which enters the composition from left-center, for example, does not intersect with but rather seems to simply hit a dead end when it reaches the mask. The diagonal line of its form, moreover, does not cut the canvas precisely in half but misses the corners by at least an inch at bottom-left and by more than five inches at top-right, so that the two parts fail to match up. Reminiscent of how the central band in *Duncan* appears to at once enact and paper over a break in the very armature of that picture’s illusion, the mask in *Love, Love, Love* sits right at the point of the ground-plane’s misalignment, seeming neither to quite motivate nor fully “mask” the disjuncture, but drawing our attention to it nonetheless.

In the bottom left quadrant of *Love, Love, Love*, Demuth has painted the first three numerical digits in sequence—1, 2, 3—in a bright, contrasting yellow against the murky black ground. These numerals echo the three partial iterations of the word love at right (“ove,” “love,” “l”). In contrast, however, to the successive progression of numbers, each of which maintains the integrity of its individual form, the way in which the "l" at center-foreground completes the “ove” at top-right suggests a cycle that loops off the canvas in potentially endless repetition, a formal pun that dovetails with the non-linear network of influence the picture conjures between Stein and Picasso, as well as with the repetitive and cycling patterns in Stein’s writing.

All to say, if the fluid boundaries between Demuth’s practice and that of his subject is at
issue in *The Figure Five*, they are perhaps even more so in his portrait of Stein, whose word portraits, of all the practices of non-mimetic portraiture that effloresced in this period, perhaps share the most in both style and substance with Demuth’s own. Indeed, one could argue that in the very same gesture that Demuth calls up Stein’s portraits in this final work in the series, he pays “homage” to his own. The representation of Stein as a mask, for example, references his earlier use of the mask as a central motif in the portrait of O’Neill (1926-8), who himself used the mask as both costume and prop in his plays. All of which diffuses the picture’s meaning outward in a complex chain of relations and substitutions: Stein’s body is replaced by her style, as exemplified in her word portrait of Picasso, which itself points to Picasso’s representation of Stein’s body, who ultimately eschewed mimetic likeness in favor of the mask after a reported eighty to ninety sittings.

Yet where Picasso integrates the form of the Iberian mask with that of Stein’s physiognomy, the mask in *Love, Love, Love* is itself unsettlingly anthropomorphized, and in this sense could be said to represent the closest Demuth ever came in the portrait series to painting a “face.” At the same time, however, in contrast to the mask in *Longhi*, this object manifests an uncomfortable tension between the quality of weighty, volumetric presence it manifests and the blank void of its “eye sockets” [cf. Figures 10 and 11].

If the mask in *Longhi* is less bifurcated in this respect, the painting on the whole could be described as structured by this very tension. Demuth “depicts” O’Neill as a green glass bottle, from the opening of which emerge a few sprigs of ivy that wind their way with an uncanny sense of intention, toward the upper left corner of the composition. A thickly-contoured red mask hangs around the bottle’s neck, its minty-green string, curled at the end, mimicking the spiraling tendrils of vine. Another mask, this one painted in blue and displayed in profile—a position that
highlights its empty, shell-like quality—leans against the bottle. The bottle takes on
dimensionality vis-à-vis both this second mask, which edges around its cylindrical base at right,
and a spoon, which Demuth has arranged along a diagonal trajectory to its left, appearing to
recede into depth. The space the bottle occupies, however, doesn’t quite adhere to a perspectival
logic: angled slightly toward us, the bottle presents a relatively head-on view despite the fact that
the journals on which it is positioned are tipped forward to such a degree that we can clearly read
the lettering on their covers.

Beside the spoon, positioned slightly below the bottle and manifesting a corporeal
presence all its own, sits a single tangible-seeming peach, its substance primarily a function of
Demuth’s careful modeling through color gradation, from bright yellow triangular swaths at
center-left, to the deeper oranges, reds, and mauves which darken toward its perimeter. Against
the journals’ matte finish, and the bottle’s glassy surface, the peach comes across as a veritable
piece of succulent fruit-in-the-hand, and this apparent fullness brings the emptiness of the bottle
into relief. Indeed, each element in the composition—the two masks, curling ivy, spoon and
peach—heightens our sense of the volumetric, semi-transparent cylinder at center. *Longhi’s*
proffer of absence in lieu of presence—not only is there no liquid in the bottle, but no indication
that even the stems of ivy fill its void—is redoubled by the proportional dominance, as in
*O’Keeffe*, of the painting’s blank white ground.

Though Demuth’s references in *Longhi* are not quite so complexly layered as those that
define *Hartley* and *Love, Love, Love*, this portrait also alludes to multiple subjects in excess of
O’Neill. As other scholars have established, the cryptic “Elsie” could refer to any number of
people, or perhaps to the 1923 Broadway musical “Elsie.” The letters “(?)theil,” it has been
suggested, likely signal the avant-garde composer, George Antheil, best known for his score to
Ballet Mécanique. The carefully placed spoon and peach, a kind of still life within the still life, might signal Demuth’s own still life practice. Most compelling is Robin Jaffee Frank’s proposal that the journals could themselves represent collaborations between the various artists, theorists, and critics whose words and thoughts are collectively evoked beneath the surface of their covers.80

The journals’ titles are mostly indecipherable, with the exception of the centrally placed “-IF,” the only word in the picture not cut off by or superimposed upon another. If the slash indicates that this word, too, is only partial, it perhaps further indicates that it is the semantic function of the word “if”—as a signifier of contingency (“if this then that,” or “only if”) that accounts for its pride of place in this picture. (We might recall here, too, Demuth’s letter to Agnes O’Neill, in which he hangs his anxiety about Longhi’s anticipated reception on the repetition of this word, separated by a dash: “At least it will have that much connection. I can claim that if—if the New York art public say that I just painted Eugene O’Neill across an old canvas and called it a “portrait.”).

As the examples of Longhi, Love, Love, Love and Hartley suggest, unlike mimesis which serves to differentiate and individualize the portrait subject, Demuth’s citational mode of reference isn’t quite particularizing. The centrifugal enfolding of the portraits’ citational mode is matched, moreover, by a centripetal opening outward, as exemplified by Demuth’s other signal operation in the series—his use of the proper name (in the absence of a proper body) to forge a connection to his subject. As the primary pictorial components—for the names themselves assume a material, pictorial identity all their own—these nominal signs likewise begin to untether from their referents.
In *Duncan*, this manifests in how the three periods and two “C’s” produce a patterning effect across the picture’s surface. A similar play occurs in *O'Keeffe* [Figure 4]. Demuth composes the letters of O’Keeffe’s name in a cruciform pattern, in which arrangement they spell out various words, such as “Fee” (twice) and “Go,” in addition to his subject’s name. Demuth’s play with the letters O-K-E-E-F-F-E here points up something about the arbitrary excess of written language as such—here in there being three E’s and two F’s. The radiating composition, moreover, signals the formal similarity between the two letters, the short band at the bottom of the E marking the singular point of distinction between the two and thus the only element standing in the way of the repetition of five identical letters in her name.

Demuth’s deployment of names is not strictly pictorial, but also punny, allusive, associative, linguistic. He depicts Hartley, for example, as a plant with heart-shaped leaves, while the positioning of “Dove,” spelled out in white block lettering in the empty blue of the sky above the horizon line, collapses the difference (or rather lack thereof) between Dove the name and Dove the bird [Figure 5 and 6]. This allusion to the points of similarity and distinction between text, image, and spoken word is operative in *O'Keeffe* as well: here, Demuth gives us O’Keeffe’s name in substitute for her body, and plays that name (as form) in turn against the form of the pears, which, translated back into spoken language—these have been identified as “Kieffer” pears—folds back into a play on her name. Like citation, then, Demuth’s recourse to allusion in place of illusion results in a subject whose presence is deflected and dispersed in a chain of associations, relations, absence, and difference.

The way that proper names operate in the portraits runs counter, in this sense, to what Rosalind Krauss describes as our “common sense” understanding of their function.

A proper name, we could say, is a token without a type. Not transferable and not reusable, it applies only to me. And I am its complete significance. The proper
name completes, exhausts itself in an act of reference. Aside from labeling the object that is its bearer, it has no further meaning, and thus no “sense” such as other words have. Those words, like the common nouns horse or house have definitions: a set of predicates by which we grasp the concept that can be said to be their sense, or meaning. A proper name has no such definition—only an individual who bears the name and to whom it refers.83

Demuth’s orientation of Dove’s name in particular challenges this conception of the proper name, and the theory of language that undergirds it. “Dove” does not “exhaust itself in the act of reference,” for the way Demuth deploys the name compositionally points up the diacritical nature of its meaning. Demuth’s focus—and so too my own—lies in probing how this “common sense” understanding of portraiture (a la the proper name) conditions both aesthetic interpretation and conceptions of subjectivity.

The specificity of Demuth’s interests in this regard clarifies in comparison to Robert Rauschenberg’s This is a Portrait of Iris Clert if I Say So (1961) [Figure 36]. This much later portrait, which Rauschenberg produced upon invitation to contribute to the exhibition “Les 41 présentent Iris Clert” [41 Portraits of Iris Clert] organized in celebration of Clert’s new Paris gallery space, consists of the single sentence of its title written out and submitted in the form of a telegram signed by the artist.

In producing a non-mimetic portrait, Rauschenberg, like Demuth, must rely on mechanisms other than likeness to posit the work in relation to its subject. Rauschenberg forges this link through the performative utterance—in short, by simply declaring it so. In this sense, Rauschenberg could be said to substitute his own existential presence for that of his subject. Making that declaration structural to the work (and thus perceivable by the viewer), Rauschenberg reduces portraiture in the process to nothing but the act of reference, and in doing so, programmatically abrogates the auratic status and traditional function of the genre.84
Krauss’s “Notes on the Index” is once again useful here. Describing a series of artworks by Bill Beckley, David Askevold, and Dennis Oppenheim, she explains how the meaning of each “involves the filling of the ‘empty’ indexical sign with a particular presence. The implication [being] that there is no convention for meaning independent of or apart from that presence.”\(^{85}\) This last is what I take to have been Rauschenberg’s point. By filling the absence left by the body (Clert’s) with himself (his own declaration) he reveals the portrait to have been already empty to begin with—to be nothing but convention—and so too, then, the promises that attend it.\(^{86}\)

In disembodying his subjects, Demuth likewise denaturalizes the genre’s inherent claim to the transparency of picture to person. Yet the poster portraits make no such explicit declaration. Rather than rely (solely) on the Dada-esque declarative utterance, Demuth insists on and so makes visible the relations between artist, subject, and work and, as a result, instantiates what I have described as a kind of gap or space between them.

Demuth’s deployment of the proper name provides, once again, a concrete illustration of the way in which he plays in the space of that gap. While the internal inscription of the portrait subject’s name ought, like a title, to anchor and orient the viewer, these names in fact serve an alternate, even opposite end: multiply allusive, they amplify rather than repress the projective power of the image.\(^{87}\) Consider, to offer one final example, the diffusion of partial names in *The Figure Five*—Bill, Carlo, W.C.W—all abstractions, and each integrated into the composition in such a way as to evoke multiple referents: Carlos, spelled out in yellow dots and missing its concluding “s” becomes a lighted marquee; at top left, Bill, cutoff midway by the frame’s upper terminus, brings to mind a hanging street sign, as if caught in passing at the edges of peripheral vision; Williams initials cannily double Demuth’s own.
Both Rauschenberg and Demuth, then, produce portraits that defy the promises that attend the genre’s ontology, modeling subject and picture (in the latter instance, no longer describable as such) “as a concept of instantiation and iteration, as a continuous process rather than a status, as a performative rather than a representable object condition.” Yet where Iris Clert could be said, in Krauss’s terms, to “exhaust itself” in the act of reference, the poster portraits exhaust their viewer, engendering a perpetual struggle to pin down a referent and so to determine their meaning. The names refer out to a subject to whom the viewer does not have access or previous knowledge, while the tokens tease, titillate, invite deep reading in, but do not give forth. The poster portraits, in this sense, are neither destructive nor programmatic for, unlike Rauschenberg, Demuth works within the structure of the genre rather than dismantling it from outside. Moreover, Demuth—and this is the crucial distinction—does not locate himself, or any singular self at the origin of representation. Rather, as my discussion of Hartley will demonstrate, these works posit the portrait subject as both internally riven and multiple, and always in relation to other subjects.

VI. Hartley

“TO ANNIHILATE MYSELF IN THE SUBJECT/ – to become ONE/ with it” – this was the purpose of the sweet old man / consumed with humility and sincerity, who wandered away / from the scene of our infantile assertions and of our / egotistic despairs / “I shall die, PAINTING” – and he died, / PAINTING.

— Marsden Hartley, “The Mountain and the Reconstruction” (1928) 89

Thus far this chapter has established how, for reasons that are structural to the genre portraiture offers a pendant model of subject and picture grounded in the dual claims of transparency and presence. Against the framework of the secondary literature, I have argued that Demuth’s exclusion of the body is one among several indicators of his interest in portraiture qua
portraiture, and that through the interrogation of that convention, Demuth not only reneges on these promises but posits an alternate model of the subject and of the picture, and of the relation between subject and picture in its stead.

The portraits forge this model by way of two key operations: by banishing the (represented) body, and by collapsing (through citation) artist and artwork. The central question that I understand Demuth to explore by way of these operations is that of the relationship among artist, artwork and motif, and in particular, the reciprocity between the act of picturing and the forging of subjectivity. The remainder of this chapter uses Hartley to parse this model in more detail, focusing on what’s at stake not only in Demuth’s exclusion of the body but in his substituting for that body the architectonic structure of the window [Figure 5]. My discussion of Hartley gets more specific about Demuth’s interrogation of portraiture, then, but it also shifts attention to Demuth’s engagement with the aesthetic discourse that was emerging contemporaneously in and around Stieglitz and his galleries.

Composed on paper of loose watercolor washes over graphite under drawing, Hartley is small. At 10 x 8 inches give or take (just shy the dimensions, that is, of a standard sheet of paper) the sheet in question likely derived from Demuth’s sketchbook. Though undated, I would hazard he painted it third or fourth in the sequence, sometime after O’Keeffe and Dove, and just prior to or following shortly on the heels of Duncan. Among the richest and most complex iterations of the portrait series, Hartley is not much more than a sketch really, a mock-up by the looks of it, though Demuth would never execute a final version. If Hartley has a preliminary look and feel, its seemingly preparatory state—what we might call its rhetoric of unfinish—in fact does the work of signification.
Properly speaking, *Hartley* might be described as any one of several genres, except perhaps a portrait in the traditional sense. In lieu of his subject’s body, Demuth represents Hartley as a view squared off by a window, cropped in close to frame a simply rendered mountain scenery. A wide sill mediates the transition between shallow interior—a slip of wall and window frame, a brush of diaphanous curtain at right—from the landscape beyond. Inside, propped up against the window’s internal frame, rests a cane, its handle intersected by the bottom edge of the page so that all we see is its knobby tip on which the initials “C. D.” have been inscribed. Across the threshold of the sill, the picture circumscribes three spatial, and indeed generic, registers: interior, still life, and landscape. Demuth has scrawled Hartley’s name in large-format capital lettering along a vertical banner at left, which functions as a fourth compositional layer, this one outside the illusionistic economy of the picture.

The portrait is layered in terms of facture as well: crowded with hand-written annotations and graphic under-drawing, all overlaid by uneven coats of transparent watercolor wash. The “quite Blue” sky and “White Clouds,” for example, have been labeled as such, while another note, written in the same fluid hand and circled for emphasis, describes the face of the mountain as “Snow winter.” On the windowsill sits an arrangement of still life objects, a potted anthurium with a large heart-shaped blossom, a camellia boutonniere attached to a cruciform base, and a single jeweled ring. Sketched in pencil, the curtain, camellia, and ring are each identified by name, while the anthurium, like the “quite blue” sky beyond, is colored twice-over, first by pigment and second by language: literally colored in with watercolor wash and figuratively labeled—its petals “all red,” its meandering spadix simply, “yellow.”

Yet just as the picture appears to lay bare the painterly apparatus, it shifts our view toward multiplicity. For, as we have already encountered, Demuth redoubles the picture’s formal
layering with layers of citation, amalgamating several visions and origins (Hartley’s, Demuth’s, Cézanne’s, our own), even as it maintains their separateness, and all the while insists on those subjects’ own internal multiplicity. In picturing Hartley as a “Hartley,” moreover, Demuth unfixes who and what occupies the positions of author, subject, and viewer, ultimately making this network of interrelation—between Hartley and his own paintings, Demuth and his own paintings, Demuth and Hartley, Hartley and his body and the world—over into the subject itself.

I borrow my epigraph to this section from a poem by Hartley about Cézanne (the sweet old man in question), published in the catalogue to his March 1928 show at The Arts Club of Chicago. Five years, then, after Demuth painted Hartley, this exhibition surveyed the fruits of Hartley’s preceding two-year pilgrimage to Aix-en-Provence, where he studied and painted at the foot of Mont Sainte-Victoire and, one can imagine, tried his best to become ONE with the subject.91

The purchase of Cézanne was not new for Hartley in 1928. Cézanne’s bearing is evident on the paintings that came out of Bermuda in 1917, as well as those both Demuth and Hartley would go on to produce in the coming years. Demuth’s first engagement with Cézanne can likewise be traced back further. The influence of Cézanne’s early, psychologically-wrought oils, for example, is clear in the suite of watercolors based on Emile Zola’s Nana, which occupied his attention over the duration of 1915 and into the following year [Figures 38-41].92 Yet 1917 marks the beginning of Demuth’s sustained experimentation with an applied cubist aesthetic, resulting in a body of work wherein we can locate the origins of the high precisionist style that would typify his most celebrated paintings of the later 1920s.93

I single out the passage from Hartley’s poem because it touches on how Hartley conceived of the relationship between the (artist-)subject and his subject (motif), a collapse of
terms (subject and subject) which Hartley, of course, makes much of. Hartley’s poem implies that it was at least in part his interest in the nature of that relationship, in the particular elision between its key terms—artist and motif—that drew him to Cézanne in the first place. This is precisely the question posed by Demuth in Hartley: in what set of relationships (between which terms) might we locate the origin of representation?

The relationship that interests Hartley, his “ode” suggests, is that between person (artist) and motif (world), in the encounter between which the self—the artist-subject—is annihilated. Cézanne’s most famous (if likely apocryphal) ambition to “redo Poussin after nature” indicates, however, a different objective: neither to annihilate himself in his motif, nor vice versa (to figure the landscape in his own image), but to redo nature after Poussin—a desire, in other words, to take the subjective self out of the equation altogether; or at least relegate the self to that which merely mediates the distance between world and picture, which is what Cézanne’s constructive stroke (in contrast to the Impressionist dab) additively plots.94

What preoccupied Cézanne, in other words, was a slightly shifted pair of relational terms—that between picture (pure form) and motif (world). Certainly, as the wide and often conflicting literature on Cézanne illustrates, we might bring to bear any one of several other statements attributed to Cézanne to make exactly the opposite argument for his intentions.95 Yet together, what the artist’s many seemingly contradictory claims on this score attest is the extraordinary tension he sought to sustain in his painting between subject and object, self and motif. Of course, this is the key thing about Cézanne, the reason he became and remains to this day such a powerful figure for so many artists of such varied aesthetic persuasions that came after.
Positioning himself in this genealogy, Hartley’s “confesses” his allegiance to the old master. But to stress self-annihilation is to misread Cézanne on precisely these (objective/subjective) grounds. For all Hartley’s insistence on eradicating the self, that is, the rhetoric of the poem—the implied heroics of Cézanne as compared to the “infantile assertions” and “egoistic despairs” of the contemporary painter, even, perhaps especially, the proclamation to “die PAINTING”—implicitly celebrates the romantic-heroic artist-subject over everything else, not least the world. This is the sense in which Hartley “misreads” Cézanne, for to stress self-annihilation does not maintain a balance between objectivity and subjectivity so much as collapse these terms into ONE. As I address below, this collapse is among the core tenets of Stieglitz-circle picture theory.

If Hartley (the artist) is all about the self (a self in the world, but not in binary opposition to that world, all one), then, and Cézanne is all about the tension between the self and the world (tending, if anything, to privilege the latter), Demuth, who pictures his subject (Hartley) as his (originally Cézanne’s) motif, drops the motif as a generative term out of the equation all together. The portraits locate meaning—and the self—not in the encounter between subject and world as does Hartley, nor canvas and motif following Cézanne, that is, but rather in the intertextual space Demuth defines between picture and person.

VII. Frames

In picturing his subject as his painting, Demuth literalizes the position, most clearly staked out by Arthur Dove, that “all painting is best understood as self-portraiture.” In this Hartley would seem to hew more closely than Hartley himself (and certainly closer than Cézanne) to what we might call the expressionist model underlying Stieglitz-circle picture
theory, an ethos that locates the origin of representation in the authorial subject, its belief in the unmediated expression of that self by way of the picture, and the access to that self which the picture thus grants to the viewer. Ventriloquizing an imagined Kandinsky, Yve-Alain Bois summarizes this position as follows: “What I paint are the deepest folds of my very own soul, accessible to myself alone, if at all, of which I nevertheless claim to offer you a truthful portrait. Take it or leave it.”

It is not incidental that Dove (and later Bois) turns to the metaphor of (self-) portraiture to characterize this ethos, for the expressive relationship between interior and exterior, depth and surface, mind and body is both the foundation and animus of that genre. Hartley engages this convention of portraiture most directly through its motif. In subbing window for body, Demuth makes over the genre’s structural divide between interior and exterior into a matter of spatial (and architectonic) relationship—a literal juxtaposition between inside and outside as opposed to and in place of the face/ body/ figure’s ability to index the personality/ interiority/ essence of the subject. To figure Hartley as a window, in short, is to make that binary over into an issue of space (and so, of genre).

In her discussion of the “perverse opacity” of Rodin’s sculptures, Krauss makes clear that this dynamic is undergirded by—and indeed undergirds—a whole model of subjectivity, and of the relationship between subjects. This model is grounded in two competing claims: a notion of the essentially private and discrete nature of the individual (interiority), and a belief in the universality of experience, which is what enables the legibility of our private interior selves to one another by way of facial expression and external, bodily gesture. “Understanding Rodin’s sculptures,” writes Krauss “requires that we inhabit not a place but a ‘condition,’ the significance of which
can be gauged by the force of its challenge to the normal picture one has of the self and
the way the self relates to other selves. For we normally think of the self as a subjectivity
with special access to its own conscious states, an access simply denied to others outside
it. Because each individual registers sensory impressions upon his or her own
mechanisms of touch or sight, what I see or hear or feel is available to me with a special
kind of immediacy that is unavailable to anyone else…

This picture of the self as enjoying a privileged and direct relationship to
the contents of its own consciousness is a picture of the self as basically private
and discrete. It is a picture which conjures up a whole set of meanings derived
from a range of private experiences to which each of us has subjective access,
meanings that exist prior to our communication with each other in the present.
They are, one might say, the very foundation on which such communication must
be built, the background from which it must arise. It is only because I have this
experience prior to my contact with another person that I can know what he
means in his various acts, his various gestures, his various reports.

As applied to aesthetics, “it would seem,” Krauss continues, that the artwork “can only
become coherent and intelligible if it addresses itself to the same underlying conditions of
experience.”

Traced back to their respective origins in the Renaissance and Romanticism, portraiture
and expressionism share and were each constitutive in producing what we might call this
normative (or humanist) model of subjectivity. The legibility of the picture under both
paradigms—or rather, the legibility of the self, to an other, by way of the picture—is deeply
bound up in this conception of the subject. In the case of expressionism, of which Stieglitz-
circle picture theory is a variant, adherence to the normative model of the subject opens onto a
model of the picture as a corrective to the privacy of experience. This paradigm posits, in other
words, not only that we have private experiences accessible only to us, that are “inside” us, but
that the picture makes that interior, private experience external—brings it to the surface in
legible form. If portraiture privileges its referent in this regard, expressionism locates this subject
in the position of the artist/author. Regardless of subject matter (motif), the meaning of
expressionist painting is thought to issue from the artist’s self, which the resulting picture expresses/registers indexically via painterly gesture.¹⁰²

Consider, for example, this little gem of a passage from a letter Stieglitz wrote to Rebecca Strand (Paul's wife) in July of 1922, just around the time Demuth was conceiving the portrait series: “I’ll try portraits of eggs, and see whether I can differentiate between a rotten egg and a fresh one—so that as you look at the pictures you’ll get the psychology of that particular (or not particular) egg.—That will be a test of my powers.”¹⁰³ It’s not fully clear whether Stieglitz is joking here or not. I’m inclined to think so (there are no extant “portraits” of eggs by Stieglitz) but we could leave it to say that if he is joking, he seems to be making fun of himself. Regardless, the notion that one could look at a picture of a surface—the exterior of two identical eggs—and be able to distinguish their interiors, signals the expressionist ethos undergirding Stieglitz-circle picture theory, which posits a core of embodied experience, legibly expressed by way of the surface of the picture.¹⁰⁴

The collapse of artist and artwork, and the linking in turn of artistic identity to bodily being, lies at the center of Stieglitz-circle picture theory. Seven Americans laid out as much expressly: “The exhibition is an integral part of my life,” wrote Stieglitz in his catalogue essay, “The pictures are an integral part of their makers. That I know.”¹⁰⁵ Or, as he put it succinctly in a 1921 letter to Rosenfeld, “all O’Keeffes are O’Keeffes. And she is always Georgia.”¹⁰⁶ It is this collapse that Demuth performs in picturing his subjects as their artworks.

Applied equally (if differently) to all the members of the Stieglitz circle, these core values were codified in the discursive apparatus Stieglitz built up around O’Keeffe, and especially by way of his Composite Portrait.¹⁰⁷ Subtitled a “Demonstration of Portraiture,” the work consists of several hundred pictures he took of O’Keeffe over the span of several
decades. Particularly germane to the present discussion are a selection of photographs mostly
dating to early in the portrait’s conception (1917-18) in which Stieglitz posed O’Keeffe in front
of and/or interacting with her own paintings [Figures 42-47]. “These are not gestures of making,
or even possession,” writes Anne Wagner of Figures 44 and 45. “Instead I would claim that the
relationship between drawing and person posits a notion of parallelism or reiteration: by this
means the artist and her body are identified as one and the same.” As such, these particular
images function as “something like a visual fulfillment of Stieglitz’s reading of O’Keeffe’s
work.”

These images open onto a strange correlate within Stieglitz circle discourse to the
collapse of picture and person: he bodilyness—that which is affirmed, declared, even
demonstrated in these particular iterations of the Composite Portrait—comes to be seen as a
quality inherent to the pictures themselves [see especially, Figures 45-47]. Wagner turns to the
pendant pair of images from Stieglitz’s Composite Portrait to illustrate the point, which zoom in,
respectively, on O’Keeffe’s hands probing her own picture and her own breast [Figures 44 and
46]. Of the latter, she writes: “Her hands rest there, or sometimes squeeze and press them in
gestures that seem oddly like a proof or demonstration of the fleshly reality of the body on
display. The actions look less like onanism than simple self-possession, a testing and affirmation
of the bodily state.” My claim is that taken together these pictures might also be understood to
function as testing ground and affirmation of the painting’s bodily state. Demuth subverts this
operation. Rather than equate work with person, he literally collapses artist and artwork. What is
lost in the process is precisely the material body, as though in disembODYing his (painter-)
subject, Demuth disembODies the picture (the object) too, which becomes the privileged term.
VIII. Self-Portraiture in the Space of Alterity

The subject does not disappear; rather, its excessively determined unity is put in question, what arouses interest and inquiry is its disappearance ...or rather, its dispersal, which does not annihilate it but offers us, out of it, no more than a plurality of positions.

— Maurice Blanchot, “Michel Foucault As I Imagine Him” (1987)

But of course Hartley doesn’t absent the body altogether. While the portrait may not figure its ostensible, eponymous subject, it conjures another, that of Demuth himself. Yet if Hartley suggests Demuth’s presence, it does so by way of his literal absence, a tension which hinges on the fulcrum of the cane. A double signature of sorts, the cane evokes Demuth twice over in two different modalities, authorial and bodily, which it links through its double invocation of the “hand.” Inscribed with the initials “C. D.,” the attribute signals Demuth’s authorship of the portrait—it identifies Hartley (figuratively speaking) as “by his hand,” and does so, not incidentally, on the very spot—the knob of its handle—where Demuth’s (absent) hand would grasp. At the same time, and reinforcing this link between authorship and bodily being, the cane invokes Demuth’s physical presence inside the depicted interior, and so by extension on the “inside” of his own picture. As a token attribute left behind, it invites us to imagine the artist himself standing at the window, taking down in fluid motions exactly what he sees; or perhaps, having just momentarily stepped away. So much can be inferred from the prop of its handle, an effect enhanced by the graphic quality of line and the hastily jotted notes-to-self. Together, these aspects imbue the scene with a sense of immediacy—of access—at once to the subject and to the process of making, both laid bare.

Hartley’s motif would seem to further underscore the picture’s proffer of presence and access. At least since Alberti, the window has served as a metaphor for perspectival painting’s illusory transparence onto the empirical real, as though we look through its frame as through a
clear pane of glass. Yet if Alberti calls on the window to speak to a fundamental continuity between painting and world, in doing so he necessarily disavows the contingency of illusionism upon one-point perspective—its orientation, that is, around a singular, centered subject.

Demuth’s deployment of the window-as-frame foregrounds this inherent tension between illusionism and objectivity. Indeed, Hartley could be said to refuse the very premise of the Albertian paradigm altogether. For all the picture’s rhetoric of transparency, that is, there is no phenomenal world on offer here. What we see through Hartley’s frame is emphatically not the world but rather a view, and a deeply palimpsestic one at that: a view (Demuth’s) of a view (Hartley’s) of a view (Cézanne’s).

In the absence of its literal representation, Demuth establishes the body, moreover, as a kind of architectural space—an interior from which we look out—and the picture, by extension, as the perspective that opens out from that bodily position. In this respect, Hartley shares something with The Windshield (On the Road to Villacoublay), a little oil-on-canvas landscape painted by Matisse six years prior [Figure 48]. Matisse likewise mobilizes the window to produce what we might call a “dis/embodied” perspective onto a landscape depicted beyond, resulting in the suggestion of a bodily presence, yet one predicated on that body’s representational absence.113

As the painting’s title suggests, Matisse places the viewer in the driver’s seat of a car, from which vantage we look out through its emphatically square-framed frontal pane onto a country road lined with trees. Painted in the same thick strokes of gestural black that circumscribe the internal frame of the windshield, the two lines signifying the road’s recession into depth converge into a dramatic vanishing point at their intersection with the horizon in the distance. Like Demuth, Matisse has abruptly cropped the composition to zero in on this confined
interior space, so that everything depicted therein appears within arm’s reach. This is partly an effect of Windshield’s lack of a foreground, which extends the pictures’ illusionistic space into the real space we occupy as viewers. Positioned flush up against the picture plane at center, wedged in the narrow space between steering wheel and (we are to imagine) Matisse’s own body, can be seen the upper edge of the very canvas on which we gaze and on which, the painting suggests, the painter is himself presently at work.¹¹⁴

In this sense, though Matisse does not figure his own likeness, Windshield can be understood to partake in a particular tradition of self-portraiture, that in which the artist pictures himself in the very act of picturing himself [see, for example, Figures 50-54]. T.J. Clark has theorized the epistemological questions and formal conventions that have defined this trope since the Renaissance, tracing its codification to a 1794 self-portrait by Jacques-Louis David [Figure 50]. Seated at his easel in a nebulous setting, David looks out at the viewer as though into a mirror, as if caught in a moment of both literal and figurative self-reflection. Among this subgenre’s “most basic forms of make-believe,” Clark tells us, “is that the entity we are being shown is caught in between representation—in between acts of putting paint on canvas, at the moment of pure sight itself.”¹¹⁵

Consider in this light, to offer an example more temporally and stylistically proximate to Windshield and Hartley, Picasso’s self-portrait of 1917 [Figure 54]. Depicting his own fully-articulated head against a roughly-sketched out body, Picasso, like Demuth, inscribes a sense of access to the originary moment of representation into the very armature of form. With brow furrowed and coolly appraising stare, the tip of his pencil poised to just graze the tilt of a drawing pad, Picasso seems to proffer the very instant before his gaze is broken and he looks back down again at the lines that have just been drawn.
Clark characterizes the defining “look of self-portraiture”—a look that Picasso, like David before him, has characteristically turned upon the viewer—as driven by the objective not only to capture an adequate self-likeness but as a means toward “possessing a self, or coming to consciousness of oneself as one.” Clark maintains, “is not just another picture of someone who happens to be you; it does not occupy the space of alterity at all, or it can be called back from that space; it will be One, not Other; the likeness will be made at (or of) the very moment the self sees the self, d’un seul jet.”

Though Matisse does not depict any correlative act of self-scrutiny, Windshield makes an analogous claim to self-possession and integrity. Rather than present a likeness of himself gazing directly upon the viewer, Matisse situates us in the position of the painter gazing out at the landscape. In so doing, however, he likewise places the viewer at the moment “of pure sight itself”—here in between the space of the eyes and the surface of the canvas. Matisse thus equates the act of painting—of putting paint to canvas or paper—with the act of perceiving, and invites the viewer to occupy this same position, as though we step into his shoes or look through his eyes or occupy his body.

In both Windshield and Hartley, then, the evocation of the painter’s presence blurs the distinction between the genres of landscape and (self-) portraiture. Yet the tokens Demuth and Matisse use to signal their authorial presence—cane and canvas—are different in kind, and their difference opens onto a more fundamental distinction between the two works. In framing such a layered perspective rather than figuring a singular body, Demuth unfixes the picture’s subject, opening the position at the window to a plurality of others. By contrast, Windshield’s mise-en-abyme—the suggestion that we are looking the very same canvas Matisse pictures himself painting—functions to reinforce the internal coherency of the picture, just as the painting as a
whole reinforces the integrity of the authorial body and links that body to an experience of being-in-the-world.

These differences between Windshield and Hartley clarify in relation to Landscape, St. Tropez (1904), a little drawing in which Matisse partially figures the body (his own) only implied in the later Windshield [Figure 55]. Yve-Alain Bois, from whom I borrow this pairing, sees an explicit opposition therein.118 Whereas Windshield functions as a vedute in the traditional Albertian sense, “the illusory transparence of the picture plane being ensured by” the painter’s emphatic “adherence to the rules of linear perspective,” Landscape dispenses with the mediating device of the window altogether.119 In this respect, the earlier drawing hews closer to an Impressionist mode of representation, which locates its origin in the artist’s perception of the natural world. “What does Matisse do in the extraordinary Paysage de Saint-Tropez” asks Bois rhetorically, “if not verify whether it is really possible to be an Impressionist, ‘to be nothing but an eye—but what an eye!’ as Cézanne used to say of Monet, and thus to paint exactly what he sees.”120

If Windshield marks a more definitive distance than Landscape from the practice of painting en plein air, both Matisse landscapes depart from their Impressionist forebears in offering what Bois, drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty, characterizes as a kind of absolute or “solipsistic” seeing, “outside of which there is nothing and which closes itself over” the viewing subject.121 Like perspectival painting, that is, solipsistic vision “puts the spectator in the position of the painter’s eye,” but reverses its outward, worldly orientation “by closing the world in on itself.”122 To explicate this particular vantage, Bois introduces an 1881 illustration by the Austrian physicist and philosopher, Ernst Mach, in which Mach pictures the world as though literally emanating from his own eye [Figure 56]. A canny and precise caricature of the attempt
to paint “exactly what one sees,” Mach foregrounds the tension inherent to the metaphors of the window between objectivity and one-point perspective.

Presenting a landscape likewise literally enframed by the body, Landscape, St Tropez offers a vision of the world wholly determined by the subject who sees it. In this sense, both the Matisse landscapes—this is what the former makes visible in the latter—posit not only the centrality of seeing/ experiencing to the act of painting but privileges the viewing/ painting body over that motif. Where Landscape more literally locates the origin of representation at the intersection of body and world, Windshield makes the perhaps more subtle and powerful assertion of author as origin, which is what Mach’s illustration exaggerates.¹²³

What is most useful about Windshield as a counterpoint to Hartley, then—what I am using the progression from Windshield through Landscape, St. Tropez through the Mach illustration to demonstrate—is how Matisse makes this question of positing the self—as bodily, singular, whole, authorial and originary—a matter of literal positioning. Locating authority in an integral body, and situating that body in the world, Matisse suggests that to be authorial is to be originary (the origin of representation, the producer of meaning). (If Landscape’s inclusion of the artists’ own figured body in a position of both mastery and repose over the scenery makes that painting more didactic in this regard, note that Windshield positions that viewer literally in the driver’s seat). Fundamentally different from the endeavor to paint as though “nothing but an eye” (to say nothing of self-annihilation), this is what differentiates these pictures from Hartley: not only that Matisse securely yokes authorship to embodiment, but that, despite the absence of his literal self-representation, the artist’s bodily, authorial, subjective presence therein is never really in question.
Demuth too, of course, ties authorship to bodily presence—we see as much in the “hand/hand” play of the initials on the cane. Yet Hartley never quite delivers on the promise of that bodily subject. Or if it does—the cane conjures Demuth’s hand after all, if not Hartley’s—Demuth also opens up that subject position (of authorship, at the window) to multiple occupants, viewpoints, vantages, bodies—not only his own, but also that of Hartley and Cézanne, in addition to the viewer herself. In this sense, Hartley might best be described by Clark’s terms but in reverse formulation—as something akin to a self-portrait that exists wholly in the space of alterity. Hartley, in other words, isn’t solipsistic but indeed vehemently the opposite, opening centripetally outward away from its ostensible subject and rendering that position—of artist, author, and portrait subject alike—fundamentally unfixed.

Demuth effects this unfixing both symbolically and formally. As his own signature attribute, the cane asserts the picture’s attribution, symbolizing the artist himself and evoking, where genre would dictate our expectation of Hartley, not just Demuth’s authority but the presence of his body, and his fallible body at that.

If foremost an iconographic effect (issuing from the cane), Demuth reinforces this opening outward at the level of composition. It results in part, for example, from Hartley’s lack of a ground space into which we can projectively imagine ourselves to stand before the window. While Demuth places the viewer right up against the sill, moreover, the space we might (potentially) occupy isn’t shallow so much as flat. Because the picture doesn’t recede into depth, that is, the depicted interior doesn’t appear continuous with the physical space we occupy but rather pressed flush up against it, producing a kind of uncanny doubling between represented space and real. In other words, the flat graphicness of its view, together with the picture’s double inscription—by the internal frame of the window, and the literal, external frame of the picture—
works against a procession into depth (and by extension the real). For these reasons and more—because it eschews representation of the body proper; because of its citational structure; because Demuth excises not only the body but also the foreground—*Hartley* doesn't invite the viewer to project herself *into* the picture, so much as open outward onto real space.

This effect is enhanced by the way in which the internal frame of the window so neatly echoes the external frame of the picture, a repetition which implicitly equates—and so doubles—the thresholds of painting and sill. Instead of inviting the viewer to project herself into an empty space, then, it’s almost as if *Hartley* projects that emptiness back outward onto the viewer, rendering the space in which we literally stand likewise empty.

What are we to make, in this light, of the fact that the object Demuth chooses to stand in as proxy for the subject is a token that points to that body’s compromised status? Perhaps this is too easy a pun, but it can’t be incidental that the cane is at once a literal “holder” of Demuth’s body and, in the context of the scene depicted, a placeholder for his absent figure. That the cane is the site at which *Hartley* opens itself—not only to difference and multiplicity but to the world—the real space occupied by the viewer—indicates that in selecting this bodily prosthetic, Demuth draws an implicit analogy between (compromised) body and (compromised) tableau.

The alignment of body and tableau, of course, has a long history within modernism. But if Demuth aligns the two, as I am suggesting, he does so to opposite ends—to point to the vulnerability of the body’s integrity to the outside and beyond itself, and therefore the picture’s. Whereas *Windshield’s* mise-en-abyme reinforces the autonomy of the picture and makes the space of the body-as-window occupiable by the viewer, that is, the doubling in *Hartley*—between pictured frame and real, between the depicted window and the literal, squared
demarcation of the support—ruptures the integrity of body and tableau both, opening onto the contingency of the picture and rendering our position at the window fundamentally vacant.

The authorial body Matisse conjures, by contrast, is securely his own, with the result that Windshield functions almost like a shifter. In the same way that the pronoun “I” signifies (contains or presumes) only one person at a time, the absence of Matisse’s figured body opens up that position of authority to be assumed by the viewer as well. The picture reinforces the singularity and integrity of that position, moreover, with the vehemence of its one-point perspective, which gives rise to the “solipsistic” structure of vision Matisse re-presents.

Hartley doesn’t afford the viewer this same opportunity. We can’t quite occupy the space “behind the eyes,” as in Windshield, in other words, because the painting’s citational mode posits more than one set of eyes from which this picture emanates. Nor can we slip into Demuth’s skin, as we might if Hartley’s foreground contained his (or better, Hartley’s own) feet, as in the case of Landscape, St. Tropez. Rather than establishing any kind of a co-extensiveness between Demuth and the viewing subject, then, the analogy Hartley draws between the absent figure standing before the window and our position before the picture—produces a position, both inside the picture and out, which is at once intently fixed (Demuth, Hartley, Cézanne) yet in that multiple-fixity, profoundly empty.

The absence of the body from Demuth’s portrait resonates, in this sense, with that of still life according to Norman Bryson.

Removal of the human body is the founding move of still life, but this foundation would be precarious if all that were needed to destroy it were the body’s physical return: the disappearance of the human subject might represent only a provisional state of affairs if the body is just around the corner, and likely to re-enter the field of vision at any moment. Human presence is not only expelled physically: still life also expels the values which human presence imposes on the world.125
While I disagree in certain respects with Bryson’s broad characterization of still life as a genre, what’s ultimately at stake in the body’s absence from Demuth’s portraiture, I want to suggest in conclusion, resonates with Bryson’s deeper point here. For all Hartley’s evocation of temporality, the absence of Demuth’s body (to say nothing of Hartley’s) isn’t merely narratival, for, like still life in Bryson’s account, these pictures “negate the whole process of constructing and asserting human beings as the primary focus of depiction” to begin with.

Demuth’s non-mimetic portraits, that is, don’t banish the body so much as they challenge the entire “scale of values” aligned with the figure. Or, put another way, as in the case of still life, these pictures challenge the very “centrality, value and prestige” of the integral humanist subject. Likewise “unimpressed by the categories of achievement, grandeur or the unique,” the subject Demuth “proposes and assumes,” if not quite “anonymous and creatural,” is no longer predicated on “access to distinction.”

Through the picture’s various absences and absentings, Demuth shifts away from portraiture’s foundational promise, via the mimetic representation of its subject’s physiognomy of the presence of and the viewer’s access to a singular, holistic, identifiable individual, and instead creates an opening that can be occupied by a plurality of others. If there is indeed a sense in Hartley that a singular body lurks “just around the corner”—this is in part what makes the painting such an interesting case study—it is Demuth’s body, not Hartley’s. But if Demuth is himself present in these works, overtly and confusingly so, that confusion between self and other, subject and object, is precisely the upshot of his eschewal of the body—which is to say of likeness, which is a quality of specificity, which particularizes. The model of the subject Demuth posits in these portraits, and the relationship they figure between self and other, is always most deeply, by contrast, one of reflections, joinings, mediations, interpolation.
IX. Inside/Outside

No picture of consciousness and understanding could give language more power; for it is precisely at the moment that a statement declares itself to have emanated from an “inside” that it makes its most coercive claim on us and our like minds. All the more strongly—and here Rousseau is taken to be exemplary above all—in that the inside here pointed to is language, its figures, effects, and powers of doing things. Rousseau is that moment when language comes into its dangerous own exactly by declaring itself pure transparency to a space within: this is the moment of linguistic activity we still inhabit, and for which Rousseau is the uncomfortable figure.

—T. J. Clark, “Gross David with the Swoln Cheek” (1994)\textsuperscript{128}

I have argued that portraiture and expressionism (of which Stieglitz-circle picture theory is a variant) have both played an active historical role in the discursive construction of our normative conception of subjectivity, which is structured around the dichotomy between inside and outside. These are the primary contexts in relation to which Demuth defines his model of the subject and picture: where the window motif spatializes the binary logic foundational to portraiture, in picturing its artist-subject as his own painting (in this instance, of a window) \textit{Hartley} literalizes expressionism’s originary collapse between picture and person.\textsuperscript{129} What Demuth suggests by way of these operations, challenges the premises foundational to both paradigms: the expressive (and so connective) promise at the core of Stieglitz-circle picture theory (and of all expressionist discourses, from Romanticism through Abstract Expressionism), and the signifying capacity of the body crucial to portraiture’s most fundamental promises of transparency, presence, and essence.

Krauss’ analysis of Rodin lends insight here. The illegibility of Rodin’s figurative sculpture, she argues, results from the artist’s refusal to correlate inside and outside—or in her words, his “failure” to relate “the outward appearance of the body to its inner structure.”\textsuperscript{130} Against the causality inherent to the surface/depth model, Rodin establishes the bodily/sculptural
surface as *itself* the “locus of meaning.” No longer functioning as a “boundary between what we think of as internal and private and what we acknowledge as external and public,” Rodin’s surface instead “expresses equally the results of internal and external forces.”

Like Rodin’s surface, the motif of the window breaks down the binary on which the normative model of the subject depends. By situating the viewer in the interior (in the position of the artist-subject looking out) Hartley suggests that the picture (that encapsulated by the frame) emanates *from* inside, and yet, in the very same gesture, that there is no stable inside to begin with—Hartley’s “inside” is not fully distinguishable from Demuth’s, which is not fully distinguishable from our own. Moreover, as the picture defines it, that which emanates from this interior—as indicated by the Cézanne-esque landscape beyond its frame—is, to use Clark’s phrasing (in this section’s epigraph) “already a form of representation.”

The window likewise blurs the binary opposition between interior and exterior at the level of structure: neither exclusively bringing the inside to the outside (expression) nor the outside to the inside (perception), it cuts both ways. The window thus undermines the expressionist notion of the *self* built into and reinforced—indeed, I have argued, promised—by portraiture, which we tend to think of as a one-way-street (inside made outside).

At stake in these performative gestures is a different answer to the questions of where meaning derives, which is not from the essence or interior of the subject (or the world outside the subject, or the collapse of or encounter between the two, as manifested in the picture) but rather by way of alterity (the relation between self and others) and textuality (the relation between all these different layers of representation).

As we have seen over and again, Demuth pressures both portraiture’s referentiality—its ability to point to/ individualize a specific subject (a pressure Demuth turned up as the series
progressed), and its signification—what the portrait has to say (the meaning it makes) about that subject. In prying apart the collapse of artist and artwork in these ways, Demuth undercuts traditional mimetic portraiture’s most fundamental promises of essence, presence, and equivalence, pressuring each term in its (dis)connection from the other. In this sense, absenting the body allowed him to test out what we might call the elasticity—and ultimately the limits—of portraiture’s ontological condition.

Indeed, one might say that, in excluding the body, Demuth problematizes reference precisely to privilege questions of signification. None of which is to suggest the portraits are self-referential in the medium-specific sense codified by Clement Greenberg. For Demuth exploits the strength of portraiture’s referentiality in service to an endeavor that exceeds the “self” in every sense: that of the picture, of the author, and of the portrait subject. If these works fold back on themselves, if they are concerned above all with the grounds and determinants of pictorial meaning, it is this problem of reference—to an outside beyond themselves, to an other—that lie at the center of Demuth’s portrait practice.

Finally, if the absence of bodily form is the defining condition of the poster portraits, nevertheless that absence does not make of these pictures abstractions. That is, while the portraits are non-mimetic, they are not non-objective. In their recourse to token objects as surrogates for the body, they remain connected to the mechanics of illusion and so to the world of real things. Yet inasmuch as Demuth objectifies his sitters he also, in the very same gesture, symbolizes them. As the example of Dove’s name demonstrates, the symbolic function of these tokens redoubles the diffusion and dispersal of the picture’s reference (and meaning) exponentially outward, and so away from their ostensible subjects.
Chapter 2. Textual Bodies

I. Depicting Prose

Late in the summer of 1918, Demuth began a series of six watercolor illustrations based on the script for a play [Figures 57-62]. His timing coincided with the death of its author, German playwright Benjamin “Frank” Wedekind (1864 – 1918), whose turn-of-the-century “Lulu Tragedies” had been published in English translation to widespread interest a few years prior. Likely introduced to the material by Marsden Hartley in Berlin circa 1913, Demuth had been familiar with Wedekind’s texts since at least the autumn of the following year, when they first circulated among the American avant-garde in the New York-based little modernist journal, *The Glebe*. Indeed, *The Glebe* published the first English translation of “Pandora’s Box,” the second installment of Wedekind’s two-part narrative, in a volume which included Demuth’s own first (and only) experiment in the genre, a short play titled “The Azure Adder” which never saw production. The illustrations Demuth produced over the course of 1918 roughly correspond to six scenes from their source text and, borrowing from the conventions of caricature, incorporate dialogue therefrom in the form of cartoon speech balloons, which emanate from the mouths of the figures depicted.

The Wedekind images take their place among a broader body of literary pictures Demuth painted in these years, which attend to a range of primarily nineteenth-century works of fiction. Between 1915 and 1919, Demuth produced, in addition to the Wedekind series, eleven watercolors based on Émile Zola’s “Nana” (1880) [Figures 64-74]; one each for Henry James’s “The Real Thing” (1892), Honoré de Balzac’s “Girl with the Golden Eyes” (1832), Walter Pater’s “Imaginary Portraits” (1887), and Edgar Allan Poe’s “Masque of the Red Death” (1842) [Figures 75-78]; five and three, respectively, for James’s “The Turn of the Screw” (1898) and...
“The Beast in the Jungle” (1903) [Figures 79-83, 84-86]; and finally, the late great one-off, *A Distinguished Air* (1931), a riff on Robert McAlmon’s 1924 short story of the same title, the only contemporary text Demuth included in the series [Figure 87]. While a majority of the illustrations interweave word and image, for the most part they incorporate language from their source texts in the more secure and straightforward mode of captioning, with quotations typically placed in the margins, frame, or a register otherwise separate from the pictures’ illusion [see, for example, Figures 14, 24, and 29]. Demuth’s use of the speech bubble device, however, is unique to the Wedekind pictures, which visualize equally body and text.136

Characteristic in this regard, as well as in its intimacy of scale and saturated jewel-tones, *No, no O God*, the second illustration in the Wedekind series, titled after the dialogue embedded therein, is indicative of the concerns that dominate Demuth’s depiction of the figure [Figure 58]. Here he does a kind of beautiful violence unto the body of Lulu, Wedekind’s eponymous heroine, whom he has arranged as a disjunctive, disarticulation of parts flush up against the flat of the picture plane. Washes fill in the entire 8 by 13-inch support, contributing to the watercolor’s claustrophobic feel and, in concert with its hard-edged pencil under-drawing, creating a sense of patterning across the surface of the paper. The unity of the image’s overall composition thus takes precedence over the integrity of the figures, the coherence of the space, and the legibility of the narrative.

**II. Textual Bodies**

This chapter examines Demuth’s representation of the body and his treatment of the body itself as a means of representation. I take the Wedekind suite for my primary case study, which I consider, in conclusion, in relation to Demuth’s roughly contemporaneous depictions of
vaudeville and the circus. Rather than address each set of illustrations (or all of Demuth’s
depictions of the figure, for that matter), I craft my argument around the intersection of the
Wedekind and vaudeville pictures because these series best exemplify Demuth’s deployment of
what I term the “textual body,” a conception which originates in my thinking about the
illustrations but applies, across his practice of figuration.

Whereas Chapter 1 considered the stakes of Demuth’s elision of the body in “picturing”
his portrait subjects, this second chapter examines his turn to the body as a conduit of narrative.
The poster portraits and the illustrations could thus be described as inverses of one another—the
former substituting words for bodies, the latter bodies for words—but I see much deeper lines of
continuity between them. As the literary pictures attest, the figures that appear in Demuth’s
work are for the most part fictional or otherwise “textual” bodies—bodies that never existed, so
to speak, “in the flesh” Transcending binaries of word and image, abstraction and corporeality,
Demuth approaches the body itself as a signifier—a figure, vivid and material, yet emptied of
both the specificity of individual identity and the sensuous immediacy of illusionistic
embodiment.

No, no is once again representative in this respect: while the material presence of
Wedekind’s quoted dialogue signals this picture’s textual foundation, Demuth withholds any
manner of contextual framing which might serve to orient the viewer in Wedekind’s world and
thereby dimensionalize— or “flesh out”—this depicted body into a fully realized character in our
minds. The pattern of Lulu’s disarticulated form thus appears—and remains for the viewers of
Demuth’s picture, few of whom it can be presumed will bring to their viewing an intimate or
even proximate knowledge of Wedekind’s narrative—not only flat, but empty. It is in this
respect that Lulu typifies Demuth’s approach to the figure more broadly: Evacuated of both
narrative content (character, plot) and the substance of experience (real identity, material referentiality), Demuth’s literary bodies neither synthesize the pregnant moment of Neoclassical history painting nor embody the sensuous fullness that has been aligned with the figure from Realism through Impressionism, Expressionism, Stieglitz circle picture theory and beyond.

It is not some literal (or for that matter, ideal) body against which Demuth defines his performative figure, then, but in contrast to a different discursive conception of the body—as sensate, as material, as essential, as real; as located within or as the locatable center of any particular (individualized) subjectivity. Illustrating the script of play—a text intended to be animated by actual bodies—brings this aspect to the fore, but it is characteristic across Demuth’s approach to the figure.

III. The Real Thing

If the Wedekind pictures crystallize Demuth’s approach to the figure, his preoccupation with the body as a means of representation—as well as his interest in interrogating the relation between word and image—is already evident in his earliest-known illustration, a small ink wash on paper titled The Real Thing after the short story by Henry James from which it derives [Figure 75]. Painted in 1908 while Demuth was still a student at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, The Real Thing predate his more substantial foray into the genre by a good seven years. An early work, then, and hardly more than a study at that, this little picture nonetheless manifests the key thematics that would characterize Demuth’s representation of the body in the years to come.

The Real Thing depicts three figures in varying states of articulation on the page. I emphasize “the page” because they seem very much to exist on the flat rather than to embody dimensional form in perspectival space. This quality is redoubled by Demuth’s inclusion of the
title of his source text written just below, “The Real Thing,” each word separately underlined for emphasis. A female nude with a crudely cross-hatched face, her body outlined in rough gestural strokes more redolent of charcoal or pastel than watercolor, comprises nearly a third of the picture. Were we to impose on the composition a sense of uniform space, then this figure could be described as reclining, with her buttocks on the ground and her back propped against a support at left, offset a few inches from the border of the page.

Behind and to the nude’s left, a black wash surrounds the contour of her body, providing the only spatial cue in the picture. These marks demarcate two distinct areas: a concentrated background against which her modelled form emerges in comparative relief and, where striated by the white of the paper peeking through at far left, evoking the draped fabric of a curtain. With no direct referent in James’s story, this allusion—to a stage curtain perhaps, or that in a painter’s studio—anticipates Demuth’s fixation in the later illustrations on the trope of the theater. The nude’s arms, extended backward to hold the weight of her body, are truncated by these vertical strokes in such a way as to indicate that she is positioned in space, however shallow and nebulous. Facing her to the right, against the plain white ground of the support, float the sketched busts of the two additional figures, who appear proportionally too small to exist in the same perspectival economy. If somewhat insecurely gendered, these visages, by comparison, with their respectively bulbous nose and hollowed cheeks, have the quality of character studies.

There is something of a mise-en-abyme at play in the picture’s very premise, for The Real Thing is an “illustration” of a short story about illustration. The unnamed protagonist of James’s 1892 text is an aspiring portrait painter who makes his living working “in black and white” (as the saying goes) as an illustrator. A refined couple, the Monarchs, arrive at the painter’s studio seeking work as models. The couple confess to having never modeled before but entreat him
to hire them based on this very fact: their lack of experience is mitigated, they insist, by their being, in their own words, “the real thing,” and thus perfect models for genteel characters.

Pressing their cause, the husband insists that his wife in particular is especially suited to become an image of herself: “We thought that if you ever have to do people like us, we might be something like it. She, particularly—for a lady in a book, you know.”

The artist intuits that the couple has made their way in the world “on the capital of their looks” alone (“there was something about them that represented credit,” he reflects a few pages on), which raises the specter of what it means to be “the real thing” in this instance. Weighing their potential to serve as models rather than portrait subjects, as he had eagerly presumed upon first answering their knock, the narrator finds himself appraising his visitors “like animals” or “useful blacks,” a comparison whose violent logic reduces the Monarchs, and by extension the model writ large, to the status of chattel, whether human or animal. From the outset, then, James defines the body of the model as merely a means—evacuated of individual subjectivity and agency—to an end.

The protagonist agrees that Mrs. Monarch is like a lady in a book, but as such a cliché of sorts—already, in herself, “like a bad illustration.” However, despite such reservations—for “all their perfections I didn’t easily believe in them,” he tells us—the painter takes them on. His ostensible motivation is charity, but underneath the veneer of the good deed he conspiratorially confesses to the reader that his decision to hire the couple is born of “an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation. I liked things that appeared; then one was sure. Whether they were or not was a subordinate and almost always a profitless question.”

Here, then, James evokes the simulacral: Mrs. Monarch, who presents herself as “the real
thing”—the referent (a genteel lady)—is too much like the real thing, (though possessing neither wealth nor title, she is not), to make a good model for an illustration of the real thing—because, in short, she is already a kind of token sign. What makes the Monarchs “real,” in other words, is their ability to perform their class. Yet “these advantages,” admits the portraitist, “struck me as preponderantly social; such for instance as would help to make a drawing room look well. However, a drawing-room was always, or ought to be, a picture.”

We can impute from the evocative if implicit pun James draws here between “drawing” and “drawing room,” the suggestion of class itself as already a means of representation.

Things don’t end well for the Monarchs. Ultimately, the painter determines that the qualities that make them ideal portrait subjects—the fact that they are clearly a “type” (the protagonist conveys to the reader upon their first introduction that he has “immediately seen them” and “seized their type”)—make the couple singularly unsuited to serve as models, whose particular talent is to assume the guise of any number of types. In the denouement, the painter, at risk of losing a lucrative illustration commission due to the Monarchs’ subpar performance, must fall back on his usual models, his servants, the cockney Miss Churm and Oronte, an itinerant Italian laborer (these characters serve as the closest analogues to the pair of smaller figures Demuth depicts). By the story’s end, their positions have fully reversed: too guilty to fire the Monarchs, who continue to arrive daily at his studio despite the fact that Oronte and Mrs. Churm have definitively taken over their positions, the painter continues to pay the couple and, with nothing else to occupy their time, they take on the unattended tasks left by the otherwise-engaged “help.”

As these intricacies of plot indicate, James’s narrative circles dizzyingly around conceptions of the real and appearance, placing visual representation as the ground upon which
their collapse and reversal play out. As would come to typify Demuth’s more sustained practice of illustration in the decade to come, none of this story is conveyed by the picture. Demuth’s inclusion of the title, however, like that of his portrait subjects’ names, forges the connection between picture and text and, moreover, draws the figures into a kind of textual space in which, following James, he poses the “real” against the “represented.”

In Demuth’s illustration, the phrase “the real thing” reads as a reference to the nude model; the onlookers see the naked body of a woman in the flesh as opposed to as a representation. The logic of Demuth’s illustration relies on the special status of the body. If, rather than a nude woman, the two figures were looking intently at a bowl of fruit, the adjacent text would not make sense. “The real thing” works as an annotation because it references, via a kind of wink that makes us complicit, the nexus of desire, prohibition, intimacy and vulnerability that the body conjures up. The fact that this scene is rendered itself as a representation creates another layer of meaning—unlike the figures in the image, we as viewers do not have access to the “real” body. Adding to these circular layers of logic is the fact of course that Demuth is illustrating a scene from a story about illustration.

IV. The Space Between (or, Mind the Gap)

Though often reduced to the supplementary status typically accorded the genre of illustration, Demuth’s literary pictures were neither commissioned nor subsequently published with their source texts, a fact which prompted some critics and later scholars to surmise that they were done for little more than his own “private” amusement. Yet there is little evidence to suggest this was Demuth’s intention. Indeed, what scant documentation we have pertaining to their early exhibition and critical reception (laudatory on most fronts, if rarely sustained) all
suggest the contrary: that these were serious, ambitious works, intended from the start for the gallery wall and, by extension, the public eye. Most were snapped up by private collectors in the early 1920s; the majority, including the Wedekind and most of the Zola series, by Alfred Barnes, while a critical mass eventually found their way into the permanent collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.  

Several questions emerge from these facts: Why produce such free-floating illustrations? How do (can?) such works signify separately—literally, physically apart—from their sources? What do such pictures presuppose about their viewers, about the very nature of aesthetic contemplation itself? Is a familiarity with their textual referents a precondition of their legibility—their very capacity to mean? Of the Wedekind illustrations in particular we might ask: why illustrate the script of a play, a genre of writing inherently designed to be animated—one might say illustrated—by real bodies?

Such an endeavor, of course, wasn’t unheard of in the annals of art history, having been canonized at least as far back as the eighteenth-century French academy. Indeed, one of the most celebrated paintings in the modern western canon—Jacques Louis David’s *Oath of the Horatii* (1784)—was based on a play [Figure 88]. But where *The Oath* has come to epitomize the “pregnant moment”—what the nineteenth-century philosopher, Gotthold Lessing, would later theorize as the special purview of narrative’s visual representation—taken together, Demuth’s six illustrations, by contrast, don’t even target Wedekind’s major plot points. Rather than achieve any kind of equivalence or distillation, then, Demuth’s uneven treatment of the play effects a figurative distance that compounds the pictures’ literal estrangement from their source material.
Yet, while various indicators suggest that Demuth worked from Wedekind’s published script as opposed to a live performance, he includes a visual reference to the space of the theater: each image is framed by a red curtain—a red thread, as it were—that provides a formal line of continuity across the series, supplying a connection between the pictures, that comes to replace the relation they would have had to one another (and to the play) had they been bound in a published volume. This framing device, moreover, turns each illustration into a stage-like space, drawing our attention to its mediating role between reader/viewer and text.

What little scholarship has been written on Demuth’s illustrational practice has by and large approached the disjuncture between image and source text as immaterial. Belying a certain (modernist) nervousness about the genre’s “literariness,” the older literature (that with more direct ties to the primary criticism) lauds that separation on the grounds of the illustrations’ autonomy or “artistic merit.” More generally, as typical of the Demuth literature on the whole, scholars have tended to analyze this work through a psychobiographic lens. Where the former disavows the work’s inherent relationality, this latter approach, as in the case of the portraits, is predisposed to collapse the illustrations back onto their referents, either by treating the images as though transparent to their (likewise deemed transparent) texts and/or, by treating the nexus of image and text as though an optic unto Demuth himself.

One question that has typically preoccupied scholars of this work, for example, is what motivated Demuth’s selection of narrative. The most often-identified theme is the linking of sex and death, with Zola’s “Nana” and Wedekind’s “Lulu Tragedies” pointed to as exemplary: the stories of courtesans and the men and women caught in their crosshairs, all (or mostly all) of whom variously meet their demises over the course of each text. Scholars have been almost
unanimous in attributing a causal (and hence moralistic) relation between the two tropes and deduce that Demuth’s own sexual shame led him to draw the same correlation. The illustrations thus, time and again, have occasioned meandering, sometimes deeply specious “symbolic” readings of how Demuth’s choice of these particular texts serve as coded communiqués about his own most private feelings and experience. In the cases of the James, Pater, and Poe series in particular, the tendency has been to point to a figure with whom Demuth “identifies.” A regular culprit is Marcher, the central figure in James’s “The Beast in the Jungle,” who is unable to consummate his romantic attachment to the short story’s female protagonist due to some unspecified internal “beast” with whom he wrestles. Marcher’s dialogue is then mobilized as if having issued from Demuth’s own mouth, while the pictures are brought (if at all) to bear in reverse order, to evidence such claims.

Chapter 1 elaborated in depth why such approaches present particular problems for understanding Demuth’s portraits. Presuming the transparency of the picture to the artist’s inner world is likewise incompatible with the models the illustrations establish in relating picture to subject. Indeed, the problems inherent in such methodologies compound in the case of the illustrations, as interpretation (of text) is layered atop interpretation (of image) atop interpretation (of Demuth’s motives, conscious or unconscious)—as though any one of these “objects” can be reduced to a single meaning. By contrast, I attribute Demuth’s proclivity toward narratives structured around themes of carnality and fatality not to his personal experience—indeed Demuth doesn’t treat these as facets of any individual biography or psychology—but to his interest in something closer to fundamental drives in the Freudian sense, those forces that move us through the world—titillate, engage, and connect us—and for these reasons, drive narrative.
The Eight o’clock series, a set of images roughly contemporaneous with the illustrations, demonstrate Demuth’s preoccupation with sex in particular as an engine of narrative [Figures 89-91]. Together these pictures depict the lead-up to and aftermath of a sexual drama between four men. We are given Eight O’clock, Evening (in anticipation) and Eight O’clock, Morning (the fall out), but crucially, never shown the culminating event. There’s a slightly shifting cast of characters between the two scenes—four men in the evening, and only three the following day, and those three don’t quite correspond to their nighttime counterparts. Yet despite these inconsistencies, what we are clearly meant to understand is that it is sex—the meeting of the swords, as it were (to return to the comparison with David’s Oath)—that has transpired in the lapse between pictures, and for which at least one participant, come morning, demands remuneration.

The Eight O’clock series points, moreover, to Demuth’s interest in what we might describe as gaps or disjunction—in the space between—as opposed to the perfection of that one fell swoop of the pregnant moment that unifies and encapsulates meaning. And it locates that interest formally—as a quality, that is to say, which not only inheres in the pictures themselves but is fundamental to their very premise as a narrative (here of before and after).

Certainly, these pictures convey meanings at the level of content in addition to that of form or narrative structure. The sex that has been omitted occurs between men, and clearly Demuth would have had reasons in 1917, beyond an interest in the means by which images convey narrative tension, to absent such encounters from visual representation. There are obvious indications of shame here as well, largely signified through gesture. For starters, the pictures make clear that the sex was contractual, as indicated by the smug demeanor of the central figure in Eight O’clock Morning and particularly his outstretched hand, which Demuth
has positioned at the very midpoint of the composition and oddly contorted to face outward, an
anomaly in anatomical form that both draws and implicates the eye of the viewer. And the
response that fact elicits is clearly one of contrition—note the emaciated, deflated bearing of the
figure folded flatly in on himself at left, who literally hangs his head. But can we really read this
as Demuth’s own shame? If so, it is right there for all to see, all the more so in light of the
absence of the actual act, which, if omitted, has hardly been veiled.

Though technically neither literary nor part of the vaudeville series, as I define the main
focus of this chapter above, I nonetheless take a cue from *The Eight O’clock* series in
approaching the material under consideration in what follows. For rather than elide the
separation between text and image, Demuth undertook the project of illustration—specifically, of
producing illustrations never intended for publication—because he aimed to interrogate the
mechanisms by which pictures tell stories differently and in concert with language. It follows
that the literal disconnect between Demuth’s illustrations and the literature that inspired them not
only dematerializes their relationship but denaturalizes it as well, instantiating textual narrative
and visual picture as distinct (if interrelated) producers of meaning, opening up a kind of
conceptual space in which Demuth explores the divisions and dialectics between them.

Put another way: just as the poster portraits challenge their genre’s promise of
transparency to their real-world referents, these pictures locate their meaning above all in
relation. Likewise, self-reflexive in this sense, the illustrations are less concerned with imparting
the narratives from which they derive than in the procedures of pictorial narrative as such, which
is to say, in the space *between* word and image. And, of course, it is the figure, as codified by the
hierarchy of genre, that first and foremost comes to occupy that space.
One of the overarching claims of this study is that Demuth was a painter who was particularly attuned to the conventions of genre. I have argued in Chapter 1 that the ontological link between picture and person definitive of portraiture offered a structure within which Demuth worked to test the conditions and limits of legibility. I suggest, in what follows, that the relationship between narrative and image inherent to the practice of illustration provides a similar tether between the picture and an outside referent, in this case a text.

This relational structure and predetermined content is at least in part what drove Demuth’s practice of illustration over nine texts and more than two decades, and came to shape his approach to the figure across genres more broadly. Like the portraits, moreover, Demuth’s literary figures often fail to legibly distill their textual subjects. While the extant literature has typically attributed to these works the secondary status of “illustrations” and treated them accordingly, Demuth’s primary investment in the genre lay neither in conveying his chosen narratives, nor in the body as a material, physical entity, but rather as a means to explore how meaning emerges in the space between word and image, and in the role the figure plays therein.

The continuity between the portraits and these so-called “illustrations” extends to how and where Demuth locates the origin of representation in each body of work. As exemplary of the broader series to which they belong, the Wedekind pictures, like Hartley, amalgamate several visions and origins. And as the analysis to come will flesh out, they similarly propose that meaning does not emerge from any personal or phenomenal experience in the world, but rather at the intersection of multiple, palimpsestic layers of authorship.

V. Origins and The Agency of Narrative
Indeed, Wedekind’s plays have a complexly layered origin all their own. All in all, he spent more than thirteen years writing and revising what are now known as “The Lulu Tragedies” after their heroine, a classic femme fatale, whose rise and decline lends the narrative its basic structuring arc. Over a combined seven acts, Wedekind’s drama surveys Lulu’s biography, from her lowly origins as a scrappy, orphaned flower vender, to her ascendency in the Berlin Theater, through a series of ill-fated lovers and marriages, to her eventual downfall into poverty and prostitution, and finally her death, in the plays’ concluding scene, at the hands of Jack the Ripper.

Wedekind began work on the manuscript in 1892 as a single text titled “Pandora’s Box,” but early in the writing-process, due to its expanding length and a copyright problem pertaining to the characterization of Jack, he split the text in two. The first segment was published in its original German in 1895 as “Earth Spirit: A Tragedy in Four Acts,” with the second following nine years later under the title “Pandora’s Box: A Tragedy in Three Acts” (1902). The plays function in relation to one another, however, like two-part installments of a single narrative: after a brief gap in chronology, the second picks up where the first leaves off, with roughly the same cast of characters.

The script of “Earth Spirit” opens with the following epigraph, which appears in quotation marks but without attribution, suggesting the address issues from the “earth spirit” herself:

I was created out of the ranker stuff
By Nature, and to the earth by Lust am drawn.
Unto the spirit of evil, not of good,
The earth belongs. What deities send to us
From heaven are only universal goods;
Their light gives gladness, but makes no man rich;
And in their state possession not obtains.
Therefore, the stone of price, all-treasured gold,
Must from the powers of falsehood be enticed,
The evil race that dwells beneath the day.
Not without sacrifice their favor is gained, And no man liveth who from serving them Hath extricated Undefiled his soul.¹⁵⁸

This utterance aligns Lulu’s character with materiality and the pleasures of the body, with darkness, evil, luxury, and—interestingly—with wealth, and the gold standard in particular—money from the earth, that is, which it implicitly distinguishes from the “falsity” of capital. These themes underlie the action that unfolds over the course of the play and are dramatized in the prologue that follows. More specifically, recalling the transactional relation at the heart James’s “The Real Thing,” the trope of the body’s circulation in an economy of value (variously conceived) and exchange likewise threads across Demuth’s illustrations.

Wedekind organizes his plot around Lulu’s string of suitors, each of whom meets his or her demise in the conclusion of each consecutive act, often with the help of, and only to be replaced by, her next paramour/victim. Each love interest is presented as penetrating or appealing to—and as a result (this is the important part) revealing to us—some realer, deeper, more essential, authentic Lulu. At first the audience’s knowledge of her character develops primarily through these romantic ties, with each lover offered as Lulu’s true, and subsequently truer loves. Yet, as the acts progress, Lulu’s character comes into focus and dimension via the revelation of more primal father figures from her past.

The plays’ “onion-layer” plot structure of successive revelation would seem to invoke a depth model of the subject, yet Wedekind undercuts that very model in one and the same gesture, as each of Lulu’s suitors and fathers rechristen her in turn. The name “Lulu,” we learn at the start, was bestowed by Dr. Schön, Lulu’s initial benefactor, adoptive father (of sorts), and ultimately reluctant consort, who arranges her first marriage to the wealthy Dr. Goll. While Goll
calls her “Nellie,” Lulu’s second husband, Schwarz, an aspiring portrait painter (who, we might note, bears a close resemblance to the protagonist of “The Real Thing”) designates her “Eve.” Finally, Schigolach, Lulu’s biological father, a beggar and con artist who arrives in Act III to challenge the persona of self-made success with which she has wooed Schwarz, calls her “Mignon.” Thus, the deeper into the narrative we advance, the clearer it becomes that there is no real, core Lulu—that this figure is merely a projection of the desires and fears of her lovers/ husbands/ fathers/ brother, roles that are often combined.

As is common in analyses of the femme fatale archetype, critics and scholars disagree over Lulu’s symbolic significance: whether she is best understood as (a) the threatening embodiment of a destructive, primal female sexuality in the mode of a Pandora or Eve (figures Wedekind evokes when he has a character refer to Lulu in the opening prologue as a “serpent,” and in titling the second play “Pandora’s Box”); or (b) an emancipatory and empowering figure who transgresses sexual and gender norms.¹⁵⁹ Yet the role of Lulu, and the play’s narrative structure more generally, muddy such binary interpretations. Indeed, the ambiguity of agency is a primary theme of the play. Neither definitively an agent of her own power (in control herself) nor merely a conduit of greater forces (subject to the scheming of others), Lulu’s fate, and that of the coterie of her supporting cast, seems often to shift passively. Wedekind tends to impel the plot forward, for example, through a series of re-actions rather than actions, with the result that events tend only to make sense retrospectively. What is important in this respect vis-à-vis Demuth’s illustrations is not that the narrative is incoherent but that Wedekind’s plotting doesn’t adhere to a strictly linear progression. Rather than move from foreshadowing to denouement, that is, the reader/audience must follow a jumble of non-consecutive events and interactions as
they occur in real time, only to have the motivation and/or context for the action spelled out, often didactically, at the conclusion of a given scene or act.

Such qualities have earned Wedekind’s plays the label of absurdism, yet he modelled the character of Lulu on the protagonist of Zola’s realist novel, “Nana” (1880). “Nana” itself was first published in serial format and eventually as the ninth volume in Zola’s epic twenty-novel “Les Rougon-Macquart” series. This fact would not have escaped Demuth, of course, for “Nana” was another narrative that held his attention in this period. Beginning in 1915, and over the duration of the following year, Demuth painted no fewer than eleven watercolors based on Zola’s novel, the most illustrations of any in the series [Figures 63-74]. The Nana pictures differ in significant ways stylistically and, of course, pre-date the Wedekind suite by three years; but whether Zola keyed Demuth’s attention to Wedekind or the other way around, it must have been, at least in part, the very fact of their imbrication that drew Demuth to the material in the first place.

Like his later rendition of Hartley as Hartley’s rendition of Cézanne (1923-24), then, Demuth’s Lulu illustrations might be described as translations, in the latter instance, of author, genre, and medium (from Zola’s novel, through Wedekind’s play, to Demuth’s pictures), with the source material in each case—Cézanne’s Mont-Saint Victoires and Zola’s “Nana”—itself complexly worked over. Wedekind’s text is of a piece, in this sense, with Demuth’s work more broadly, insofar as the artist’s most crucial and interesting paintings self-consciously thematize questions of origin and authorship.

Demuth brings such issues, which remain largely implicit in Wedekind’s plotting, to the fore in the first illustration of the series [Figure 57]. The Animal Tamer Presents Lulu offers a scene culled from the prologue to “Earth Spirit.” Here we encounter the personification of the
picture’s title, a chorus-like figure who appears in the play only this once (there is no narrative continuity between the prologue and the action that follows). Adhering to Wedekind’s precise description in the stage directions, Demuth depicts the animal tamer in vermillion coat and white cravat, his “long, black curls” flowing out behind him as though caught in a current of air. In his left hand, he holds a revolver, in his right, an object Wedekind deems a dog whip yet in Demuth’s rendition, readers will note, bears a striking resemblance to a cane.

Breaking the fourth wall to address his audience directly, the animal tamer opens the play by inviting us into his “menagery” [sic] to observe the spectacle of “man and brute” battle one another “in narrow cages.” To this contest of human versus animal he adds another—that between his mode of entertainment and that proffered by more traditional theater. The animal tamer explains that his act has fallen on hard times, as “highly valued” members of the public have begun flocking instead to the opera or playhouse to watch Ibsen. The situation has become so dire, he reports, that his “boarders,” by whom he implies man and beast alike, have begun to devour one another; a circumstance he contrasts with that of the dramatic actor, who doesn’t have to worry about the “meat upon his ribs.” Such “house-animals,” as the tamer refers to professionally-trained actors, merely play at emotion, reveling in an easy cry or “despairing of the world,” while his show presents “the real beast, the beautiful wild beast.”

Listing off his various charges and their attributes, he boasts of how they tremble at the sound of his revolver, and then suddenly without warning, shoots into the audience, as though to suggest he counts the viewers themselves among the beasts in his menagerie. Without pausing to acknowledge this action, the animal tamer proceeds to lift the flap of his tent and call back into its depths, “hi, Charlie—bring our serpent just this way.” And out of the darkness emerges the stagehand (said “Charlie”) who carries Lulu to the stage and sets her down before the audience.
This is the moment Demuth has chosen to depict in *The Animal Tamer*. Following Wedekind, Lulu’s doll-like appearance suggestively evokes a body waiting to be animated—by an actor, playwright, or even by the artist himself. Outfitted in the distinctively-ruffled black-and-white costume of the stock commedia dell’arte character, Pierrot, Lulu is placed on a small riser and cordoned off behind a red-velvet rope. With her feet turned out, head tilted just so, and her arms arranged daintily in front of her, she gazes into the distance with an unfocussed stare and uncannily absent expression.

Both picture and text thus present Lulu as blank and immobile. Wedekind’s precise phrasing is important in this respect: Lulu, the epigraph begins, “was created.” Combined with her physical passivity (her vacant demeanor, the fact that she has to be carried out), the passive construction raises the question of who drives the narrative action—who is in control, who is the author. If this “pretty beast”—these are the animal tamer’s words again—“was created to incite to sin/ to lure, seduce, poison—yea, murder, in/ A manner no man knows,” what we know so far (and what this first image in Demuth’s series announces), is that the agent of this anticipated malefaction is not (or not necessarily) Lulu herself.\(^\text{164}\)

Reinforcing the binaries established in the opening epigraph between the earthly and celestial, animality and affectation, the corporeal and the symbolic, the animal tamer turns back to Lulu after this foreshadowing and implores her to be “unaffected, and not pieced/ Out with distorted, artificial folly,” to “speak naturally and not unnaturally/ For the first principle in every art/ Since earliest times, was True and Plain, not Smart!”\(^\text{165}\)

What are we to make of these directions? Certainly, the animal tamer poses such qualities in counter-distinction to the artifice of the theater-house players he describes above. Yet paradoxically, his direction reminds Lulu, and by proxy the audience, that this, too, is a
performance—a mere prologue to the theatrical drama about to take place, a drama in which the animal tamer never in fact reappears, and in which Lulu is merely a character. Reminiscent of the mise-en-abyme at the heart of James’s “The Real Thing,” and the simulacral emptiness for which the character of Mrs. Monarch stands in particular, the Lulu the animal tamer presents to his audience is less an actor (as in the agent of one’s own, self-determined actions) than the mere vessel for a role (and one slated to perform the role of an *actress* no less).

At the close of the scene, the animal tamer turns back to the stagehand and utters the following command: “hop, Charlie, march! Carry her to her place.” The reader will have noted that the stagehand is named “Charlie.” A coincidence, yet clearly Demuth himself (Charles Demuth, we should recall) makes some meaning here, for this is the dialogue he inscribes in the balloon that emanates from the animal tamer’s mouth. And if we zoom in and take a closer look, what is visible at the base of the opening to the tent flap, at the intersection of the two strong diagonals that structure the spatial coordinates of the composition, staring out directly at us, is “Charlie.”

Yet if Demuth shrewdly aligns himself with the figure of the stagehand, we should recall too that the animal tamer holds an object resembling a cane, an overdetermined attribute that, as we have already encountered, recurs as a token of Demuth’s own (absent) body across several paintings [Figures 5, 34, 86]. Rather than announce himself as the origin (or engine) of the ensuing narrative, Demuth takes up the position of framing figure. And he does so twice-over, aligning himself on the one hand with the role of the animal tamer, who lifts the curtain at the outset, and on the other, with the stagehand—he who merely bears out the body and then retreats back to observe the events—indeed, to observe *us* observing the events—about to unfold. With this layered self-portrait that has been doubly inscribed into the fabric of its illusion, the
opening picture in the Wedekind series thus poses the question: from where do meaning and narrative agency derive? Demuth suggests, in answer, that such motivation issues neither from the experience of an individual body/actor in the world nor, more pointedly, from any singular author or subject.

VI. Subject/ Object

In bringing such issues of authorship and agency to the fore, The Animal Tamer lays the groundwork for No, no O God [Figure 58]. In this second illustration of the series, Demuth jumps from the prologue of “Earth Spirit” all the way to the end of Act III, a decisive juncture at which power shifts from Dr. Schön, Lulu’s benefactor and first paramour, to Lulu herself. The key takeaway from his picture, which plays out in different respects in the illustrations that follow, is that the phrase Demuth quotes in Lulu’s speech bubble, and particularly his use of quotation, prompts the question of who, exactly, is speaking; this, in turn, opens back onto the question of who (or what) holds the power to drive the narrative action—Demuth, Wedekind, or the characters themselves (in any event, as the epigraph foreshadows, not God).

As in the case of The Animal Tamer, these questions are intrinsic to Wedekind’s text at the levels of both structure and plotting. Understanding the intricate play between subject and object that Demuth effects within the space of Lulu’s quoted dialogue thus requires a more specific contextualization of the scene depicted in No, no within Wedekind’s narrative.

By the conclusion of this act we have learned the backstory that Schön took the adolescent Lulu under his wing after catching her in the act of picking his pocket. He set Lulu up with a governess, provided her a living stipend and, in return for these kindnesses (Wedekind implies though never quite states outright), Lulu and Schön began a drawn-out sexual affair.
Though their relationship is clearly complicated, Lulu loves Schön and operated, we are given to understand, under the assumption that they would marry upon the death of his wife. Yet before Frau Schön’s long-anticipated passing, Schön orchestrates Lulu’s match to the rich, old, lecherous Dr. Goll. Relevant here to the latter illustrations in the series, is the fact that from the start, Schön’s son, Alva—a brother figure to Lulu (the two having grown up together)—supported her claim to his father’s affections, even as he himself remained deeply taken with Lulu, and ultimately supplants Schön to become her penultimate lover in the act following that depicted in No, no.

After the prologue, Act I opens in the space of a studio belonging to a painter called Schwarz, where Schön has recently arrived to discuss a partially-completed portrait of his newly-acquired fiancée, a wealthy young heiress named Adelheid. Schön’s attention, however, is quickly caught by another painting hanging on the wall—a portrait of Lulu in a titillating, diaphanous Pierrot costume. Feigning ignorance of her identity, Schön inquires after the picture, which has been commissioned, Schwarz informs him, by her new husband Dr. Goll. Alluding to Lulu’s previous career on the stage, Schwarz implies that she was Goll’s mistress prior to the marriage, and proceeds to describe the underlying erotic charge that fuels their modeling sessions. The impression we receive of Lulu via this dialogue is something akin, then, not only to a sexual predator (Schwarz describes her as wielding a Salome-like power over her audience) but also as a kind of class predator as well, clawing her way up the social ladder, husband-rung by husband-rung, into respectable bourgeois status. (This is the version of Lulu that most closely resembles the particulars of Zola’s “Nana.”)

Their conversation is interrupted by a knock at the door, which is answered to reveal the arrival of Goll and Lulu herself, who has appeared for just such a modeling appointment. Lulu
and Schön bluff casual acquaintance (the sham of which only becomes clear to the audience as the play progresses), and this is when she learns of his recent engagement. After Lulu has emerged from behind a screen outfitted in her revealing Pierrot guise, Schön and Goll settle in to observe the portrait’s painting, with Goll witheringly directing Schwarz’s every brushstroke, at one point instructing him to “treat her as a piece of still life.” The two men, however, are soon called away by Alva, who turns up at Schwarz’s studio to lure them (with the promise of even more scantily-clad dancers) to the final rehearsal for the production he is directing at a nearby theater.

Upon their departure, we learn that Lulu has already embarked on an affair with the portraitist. Their infidelity is uncovered in short-order by Goll, who, immediately after Lulu articulates her fear of the affair’s discovery, drunkenly returns to the studio already in a jealous rage—a rage, that is, which anticipates the actual revelation—and then, in the scuffle that unfolds, dies suddenly from an accidental fall. We learn at the start of Act II that Schön has subsequently arranged Lulu’s marriage to the painter Schwarz, a romantic type who himself dies in quick succession (by his own hand) after Lulu’s shadowed past is revealed to him during an unexpected visit from Schigolach, her long-lost biological father. Financially flush, having received a healthy inheritance from Goll, Lulu is happy in her newfound independence after Schwarz’s death and returns to a successful career on the Berlin stage.

This synopsis brings us roughly to the scene in the end of Act II that Demuth depicts in No, no which—as once again becomes clear to the audience only in hindsight—is the apex of Lulu’s narrative trajectory. Everything has been proceeding fortunately for the newly-single Lulu, who is roundly adored by her public. However, late one night after a performance, Schön arrives at her dressing room to announce his impending nuptials to the young heiress Adelheid.
Indicating that fear of the revelation of his inappropriate liaison with Lulu is all that has stood in the way of his wedding to this point (his fear of the affair’s discovery, that is, not the relationship itself) he informs Lulu that they must henceforth sever all ties.

The dynamic established between the two characters has primed the reader/audience to anticipate a dance of delicate persuasion to ensue, in which the costumed Lulu appeals to Schön’s bodily desire in order to entreat him back into the fold. Instead, suddenly and seemingly out of the blue (without any verbal or physical response on Lulu’s part to Schön’s demand, that is) Schön wordlessly surrenders his cause, and Lulu begins to dictate to him a letter—a message from Schön to his fiancé—breaking off the engagement. Schön’s signature, which he compliantly renders at the close of the act, amounts to his ceding all agency in the matter, an act which he decries in the scene’s final lines as his own “execution.” And sure enough, by the start of the next act he is married to Lulu, and by the end of “Earth Spirit” he is dead.

This is the exchange Demuth culls from Wedekind’s text as the basis for No, no. He pictures Lulu, her back to the viewer, perched upon a table top at center. Schön sits to the left with one ear cocked in her direction, pen poised in-hand between ink-pot and paper. Lulu’s legs, which culminate in mannerist, un-articulated toes, jut out from her body at a gravity and anatomy-defying forty-five-degree angle, the penciled contour of her delicate underclothes just visible beneath the transparent peachy-cream wash that colors in her dress.

Positioned to angle outward toward us, the surface of the table has been pitched forward, like a Cézanne still life, to display an assortment of objects. Schön’s top hat rests beside Lulu’s discarded yet oddly animate gloves, and next to these, a bouquet, a gift no doubt from some adoring fan, the suggestive head-on view, tight circular arrangement, and white-paper packaging of which recall the flowers in Manet’s Olympia (1863) [Figure 92]. Although there is no archival
record of Demuth’s making explicit reference to Manet’s transgressive reclining nude, it is safe to assume that he would have known the painting, whose red-headed model, Victorine Meurent, like the character of Lulu (and Nana before her), infamously skirted the lines between courtesan, performer, and bourgeois society. That *Olympia*, and particularly Cézanne’s 1870 “modernization” thereof, occupied Demuth’s consciousness during the period he was at work on the illustrations is evidenced by the clear resonance between Manet’s painting and the penultimate picture of the “Nana” series, in which Demuth, departing from Cézanne’s rendition to hew more closely to Manet’s original, also features the notorious bouquet [Figures 73 and 94]. And, of course, it is not incidental that Manet himself “illustrated” Zola’s protagonist, the same year Zola published “L’Assommoir,” a precursor to “Nana,” in which the title character of the later book is first introduced (though again, as far as we know, Demuth never indicated as much) [Figure 76].

Demuth depicts Lulu instructing Schön, ventriloquizing the words he is to write, and, in doing so, Schön is made to not only actualize what is already true—that he is bound to Lulu and therefore cannot commit himself to Adelheid—but also to take responsibility for that action. Much like Dr. Goll’s discovery of Lulu’s infidelity and subsequent death in Act I, the dialogue between Lulu and Schön in this scene exemplifies how Wedekind propels his narrative by prose rather than plot. Here, the writing itself (Lulu’s and in the letter-to-be) describes a given reality and, in the very same gesture, enacts that reality through the performative utterance.

The inevitability of Schön’s resulting demise isn’t self-evident from the preceding drama yet it comes to pass in the fourth and final act of “Earth Spirit.” In the scene following that which Demuth represents in *No, no*, Dr. Schön arrives at Lulu’s residence deep in the throes of “persecution mania,” brandishing a revolver and accusing her of murder. If Lulu is arguably
responsible for the death of her first two husbands—Dr. Goll from an accidental blow to the head upon discovering her affair with Schwarz, and Schwarz by suicide upon the revelation of Lulu’s lies and prior infidelities—at this juncture in the narrative, she has technically never committed the act (at least not intentionally, nor by her own hand). Yet Wedekind’s first play concludes at the close of Act III with Lulu shooting Schön in self-defense, thereby fulfilling Schön’s augury (“my execution”) in Act II.

Demuth fixes on the shift in power between Schön and Lulu largely through a play on words that occurs in the space of their quoted speech. In Wedekind’s text, the letter Lulu dictates concludes with the phrase “Forget me,” followed by the (implied) signature, “Dr. Ludwig Schön.” In the script, Schön responds to Lulu’s instruction by “groaning” (this is in the stage directions) “O God!” to which Lulu responds: “No, no O God. Dr. Ludwig Schön.” A play on words, then. Dr. Schön groans his invocation of god in response to Lulu’s demand that he break off the engagement. To make a point, however, Lulu stubbornly misinterprets his “O God” as the words he means to write, insisting instead that the missive conclude not with “O God,” but rather with his name, “Dr. Ludwig Schön.” She insists, in other words, that Schön—not god, and not, for that matter, Lulu herself—bears responsibility for the letter’s contents (the act of breaking off the engagement).

These words thus encode several subjects at once: Lulu is dictating—speaking words meant to be conveyed through written language—in the voice or from the position of Dr. Schön, words that are in fact authored by Wedekind, and yet have been inscribed into the image by Demuth’s hand. Moreover, just as these words originate simultaneously from several different sources Lulu, Schön, Wedekind, Demuth), they are likewise at once directed at numerous
receivers—from Lulu to Schön, from Schön to Adelheid, from Wedekind to actor, from actor to audience, from Wedekind to reader (Demuth), and from Demuth to viewer.

The punctuation marks Demuth selectively places around Lulu’s spoken dialogue redouble the confusion that arises from her ventriloquy regarding who is speaking to whom, and what, exactly, is being communicated. Based on the context of the exchange, the dialogue Demuth cites ought to read as follows:

Schön (Groaning): O God!
Lulu (Half startled): No, no “Oh God.” Dr. Ludwig Schön (With emphasis)

Demuth, with the crucial exception of the stage directions but otherwise following Wedekind’s text to the letter, writes:

Schön: O God!
Lulu: No, no O God! “Dr. Ludwig Schön”

Grammatically speaking, that is, the quotation marks are incorrectly placed. Wedekind deploys the quotations to signify Lulu’s repeating Schön’s own phrasing (O God!) back to him and, parroting his voice (to Adelheid), amend those words with the correction, “Dr. Ludwig Schön.” However, placed around __Dr. Ludwig Schön__ instead of __O God__ they cease to point back to any of these actors. A granular detail certainly, but Demuth’s choice not only to quote this particular exchange, but to re-emphasize that quotation in the picture’s title, supports our attention to it in turn.

Blurring distinctions between the animate and inanimate, fullness and flatness, sentience and objectivity, Demuth redoubles this ambiguity of agency in his rendering of Lulu’s bodily—or indeed, markedly flat, disjunctive, un-body-like—figure. Note, for example, how the deflated arc of her finger, which pointedly gestures in emphasis toward the letter that sits on the drawing table before Schön, echoes not only the form of the empty gloves that curve over the table’s
edge, but also the parabolic sweep of the speech bubble containing her enigmatically-phrased direction. Moreover, rather than issue forth along a firm trajectory in keeping with the force of Lulu’s command, these languid forms (finger and balloon) emanate from the flattened, disjointed pattern of her body like liquid, or gas passively escaping containment.

Moreover, the vagary of Lulu’s words and gesture, in combination with the absence of Wedekind’s stage directions (“groaning,” “startled,” “with emphasis”) and the lack of any contextual indicators, renders illegible the plot point Demuth depicts in No, no. Due to the simultaneous spatiality of the image (in contrast to the linear temporality of language), both exclamations are present to the viewer at once with nothing to indicate the sequence in which we are to read them. Thus, without the order inherently imposed by language (whether read or spoken), Demuth’s depiction of the repetition of the phrase “O God” between the two figures lends the picture a sense of narrative urgency, as though both Lulu and Schön respond to some external event or threat (No, No! O God! O God!). Demuth, in other words, flattens out the difference between their two utterances—a crucial difference, one that marks a distinction of will and power in Wedekind’s script—and thus renders them essentially equivalent, much in the same way the picture as a whole equally visualizes bodies and text. A result of the change in medium (word to image), this collapse is a function, more specifically, of Demuth’s fidelity to Wedekind’s original wording and punctuation, the meaning of which doesn’t survive the translation into visual representation.

VII. Temporal Collapse

Demuth organizes the next image in the series, The Lunch Scene, around a complex dynamic of hiding, looking and witnessing [Figure 59]. The illustration presents an interior
domestic space peopled by at least seven figures, with the profile of a shadowy eighth lingering under the staircase at right. A loosely-handled, heavily made-up Lulu, her body gone soft and fleshy, with drooping eyes and breasts bulging out of a low-slung evening gown, is seated with Alva, the object of her current affections, at a table in the center-foreground. They are attended by the waiter Ferdinand, whose left eyeocket appears oddly vacant, as though Demuth forgot to fill in the articulation of his pupil. From beneath the draped cloth of their table, the disembodied bust of the young Hugenberg, a new character who Wedekind introduces in this scene without any back-story or significant role in the action to follow, emerges with a dead-eyed grimace focused directly upon the viewer.

Several additional bodies are hidden around the room: Rodrigo, the acrobat who will unseat Alva by extorting a desperate Lulu’s pledge to marry in the opening act of “Pandora’s Box,” lingers behind a curtain at left, almost as though waiting in the wings. To his right, nearly obscured by a folding screen, hides Countess Geschwitz, Lulu’s final lover in the tragedies’ culmination; while the ghostly figure of Schigolach lurks in profile under the stairs at far right. Hovering above the fray, the nearly skeletal countenance of Dr. Schön extends over the balcony, the form of his dialogue—“my own son!”—spilling over the railing in a ponderous loop colored in by a blotchy rust-toned wash, as if to approximate the emptied contents of his stomach.

Indeed, a speech balloon emits from the mouth of every subject depicted, each one filled in with dialogue in Demuth’s cramped cursive hand. Irregular in size and shape, these oddly-angled oblong forms have a kind of planar materiality about them. Unlike their speakers, they appear to jockey for both position and attention, lending the picture a haphazard, cacophonous feel.

This quality is compounded by Demuth’s collapse of narrative temporalities, for he culls the dialogue in The Lunch Scene from several distinct points in the act. Countess Geschwitz, for
example, hides behind the screen on page 54, yet speaks the lines “you can’t think how glad I’ll be to see you” directly to Lulu two pages prior, while Dr. Schön doesn’t arrive until seven pages after that. Meanwhile, for reasons Wedekind never fully explains in the play, Hugenberg, the young chap under the table, utters the exact words he’s pictured as speaking—“I shall be expelled from school”—twice, first on page 54, and then again, ten pages later, where they serve as the final spoken words in the act.

Demuth could be said, in this sense, to literalize what Lessing argues is the unique capacity of visual narrative by spatializing the plays’ temporal unfolding. But he does so to the paradoxical, counter effect of disjuncture and confusion. Rather than synthesize the plot through a composition of unified gestures into a singular, immediately comprehensible meaning, Demuth’s mash-up of disparate snippets of dialogue results in the collapse of both spatial and narrative legibility. Despite the preponderance of speech, for example, the dialogue depicted isn’t *dialogic*—no one is actually talking to anyone else. Thus, if Wedekind himself bucks the linearity of written narrative to effect a certain absurdist discord, Demuth capitalizes on the spatiality and simultaneity of the image to heighten that effect.

**VIII. An Intimacy Performed**

There are a number of continuities between *The Lunch Scene* and *Lulu and Alva Schön*, which follows fourth in the series [Figure 60]. Here, for example, we see the same red curtain, ottoman, and fireplace screen. Yet the space feels markedly different—significantly smaller and more intimate. Washes fill in the entire composition, contributing to this sense of closeness and creating a jigsaw-like patterning across the surface of the paper support. A large armchair encapsulates Lulu, who sits on Alva’s lap at center. Gumby and indeterminate, like irregularly
cut-out shapes delimited by contour and filled in by a watery uneven wash, these figures typify Demuth’s “textual body.” In contrast to the depiction of Lulu’s angled, jutting limbs in No, no, here both she and Alva embody an inchoate, almost liquid state, a quality that echoes (even as it is an effect of) the picture’s watercolor medium.

Their attenuated, bordering-on-grotesque bodies appear, that is, to have no structural underpinning. Lulu in particular is twisted and turned in ways that suggest she has no armature of bone and muscle to support or motivate her movements, and hence, pace Krauss’s characterization of Rodin’s figures discussed in Chapter 1, no interiority from which her gestures believably appear to have emanated.172 The orientation of both bodies seems to issue, rather, from pure relation—that between the figures; as characters, to Wedekind’s text; and above all, as signaled by the outward bearing of the embrace, their relation to an audience—to us.

Lacking in both material substance and psychological depth, Lulu and Alva are “character studies” by definition only. Theirs, in short, is an intimacy on display: performed. If the two figures share some physical communion—their bodies are deformed to entwine with one another, after all—in the awkward contortion of their embrace they are positioned to face the viewer, as would be consistent with a live performance or stage directions. In this way Demuth disallows his viewer to get swept up in or take for granted the connections between the characters provided by Wedekind’s text. Instead he takes narrative apart at the seams, positioning both himself (the artist) and Wedekind (the playwright) as puppet-masters, manipulating bodies into mannered gestures rather than responses galvanized by feeling, intention or plot.

To get a better grasp on this effect, we might contrast Demuth’s treatment of bodies in Lulu and Alva with the way the figure more traditionally serves to distill narrative in text-based
history painting. Consider the difference, to return to the example of David’s *Oath*, between *Lulu and Alva* and the gestures of the Horatii, which appear to originate from a sense of deep internal conviction and intention. If the “pregnant moment” embodied by these brothers, whose public allegiance seems to issue through the tense musculature of their very calves, indicates their integration into a larger moral-historical ethic, the empty, fluid forms of Lulu and Alva appear evacuated of internal animation and narrative motivation, both.

Before moving on to the final two images in the Wedekind series, I want to briefly focus on the fascinating clip of dialogue that emerges from Lulu’s mouth, which provides perhaps the most concrete example of a gap or disjuncture that Demuth manifests between his image and Wedekind’s text. The words Lulu utters—“Is not that the divan?”—are followed by two elongated hyphens. However, as is evident in a selection from the original English translation, those two blank lines are not in fact blank in Wedekind’s text, but instead hold the place of the missing phrase: “on which your father bled to death?”

Demuth’s use of line here is key. Those familiar with the play know that Lulu’s words—which is to say, Lulu’s lines—are missing. Yet even without that foreknowledge, the picture provides a visible residue of their omission, pointing back to the words of their author, now to be filled-in by the reader/viewer/actor. Moreover, the content of the missing sentence (“on which your father bled to death”) packs huge narrative punch. Demuth thus not only absents death but materializes that absence, and that materialization becomes a kind of hinge around which the scene’s narrative tension (and punch and pleasure) coalesces.

As the lines in Lulu’s dialogue balloon demonstrate, Demuth’s illustrations do not articulate a division between text and illustration so much as they internalize—and indeed, visualize—their conjunction. In this sense, they could be said to exemplify W. J. T. Mitchell’s
contention that the relation between word and image is more dialectical than dichotomous: “The
word/image difference,” writes Mitchell, “is not merely the name of a boundary between
disciplines or media or kinds of art: it is a borderline that is internal to both language and visual
representation, a space or gap that opens up even within the microstructure of the linguistic sign
and that could be shown to emerge as well in the microstructure of the graphic mark.”173

IX. The Body as a Unit of Exchange

Second-to-last in the series, The Ladies Will Pardon My Mouth’s Being Full, depicts three
bodies in a row, here again positioned to face the viewer. From left to right, the countess
Geschwitz, Rodrigo, and Lulu stand with their hands linked together to form a chain across the
midline of the picture [Figure 61]. Their dialogue, which bobs to the left of each talking head,
locates the viewer in (though predictably by this point, does not legibly convey) the tail-end of
the second, penultimate act of “Pandora’s Box.” The scene is a chaotic and complex one, which
Wedekind organizes around the literal and symbolic transaction of both actual (which is to say,
representational) currency, as well as the body itself made over into an abstract unit of exchange.

A brief summary of the events that led up to this point in the text: “Earth Spirit” ends
with the death of Dr. Schön at Lulu’s hand, an event the reader will recall was augured in the
scene Demuth depicts in No, no, O God, and so unfolds with a characteristic vagueness of
agency, as a self-fulfilling prophecy on the part of Schön. In the mayhem that culminates in his
death, which The Lunch Scene prefigures, Schön, in a hysterical rage, tries to force Lulu to
commit suicide (for unexplained reasons, he can’t/ won’t/ doesn’t simply kill her himself). A
struggle ensues and he is shot—apparently by Lulu, and if so, arguably in self-defense, although
Wedekind never explicitly indicates as much in the script.
Act I of “Pandora’s Box” (the second play) opens in the midst of a plot to free Lulu from a German jail, where (we must extrapolate) she has been imprisoned for the murder of Schön. The scheme is a zany and outlandish one, which Wedekind metes out piecemeal to the audience through the dialogue that transpires between Rodrigo, a nefarious strongman, the Countess Geschwitz, who out of unreciprocated devotion to Lulu is bankrolling the operation, and Alva, Lulu’s current love interest. Suffice it to say that the scheme involves evil nuns and Lulu and Geschwitz’s infection with the cholera virus. Most importantly for our purposes, it entails using Geschwitz as a body double for Lulu. By the end of the first act of “Pandora’s Box” (the scene Demuth depicts in Lulu & Alva) the reunited pair are alone and about to get intimate in the drawing room where Schön died (hence Lulu’s line, “is not that the divan …”).

By the beginning of Act II, which commences after some unspecified lapse in time, we find our band of jail-breakers dressed to the nines in a lavish rococo interior. Lulu and Alva are now married. The occasion is a gambling-themed birthday party for one “Countess Adelaide d’Oubra,” which we learn is the pseudonym under which Lulu has been living since her escape from prison. And here we arrive at a second doubling: Lulu has taken on a variation of the first name of her former, would-be replacement—Schön’s jilted fiancé, the young heiress, Adelheid.

Wedekind introduces several new characters in the stage directions as guests at the party, including one Marquis Casti-Piani, a white slave trader, a journalist called Heilmann, and a banker, Puntschu. Present in addition to the men are several ladies: a matron, Magelone, with her twelve-year-old daughter, Kadidia, and two unaccompanied fräulein, Bianetta and Ludmilla Steinherz, who—each more richly decorated than the last—call to mind James’s decorative drawing room. Puntschu the banker is the dramatic focus of the scene, and fills its opening passages brokering deals among those present for shares in the “Jungfrau” (note the German
contraction) cable car company. These shares are, in turn, quickly turned over as collateral in the gambling game (as well as other negotiations), and their rise and fall, win and loss, make and break several fortunes, Lulu’s among them, over the course of the act.

Textually speaking, Demuth’s quoted dialogue locates us at the apogee of these negotiations: the exchange of bodies for money, in exchange for other bodies leveraged for different forms of currency, running the gambit from precious stones to “Jungfrau” stocks to the actual young fräulein, Kadidia. Once again, however, Demuth makes no effort to convey this narrative context. Instead, the forward-facing array of bodies brings to mind actors taking a final bow, an association reinforced by the group’s collectively campy attire, which suggests costuming; in particular, the bearing of the acrobat, Rodrigo, at center, who crosses one leg in front of the other, with a slight bend to his back knee. I would venture that Demuth’s allusion to a curtain call is clear enough that we can assume it to have been intentional but there is no textual referent—no scene in the play—on which to hang such a reading. As in the case of The Lunch Scene, moreover, Demuth has culled the depicted dialogue from distinct textual junctures, and perhaps even more dramatically in this instance, there is no interchange or reciprocity between the depicted figures, a fact redoubled by their frontal arrangement in a line facing toward us.

By the culmination of the act, Lulu finds herself under the duress of Casti-Piani, who threatens to turn her over to the police unless she agrees to his ransom. Upon learning the market’s crash has left her penniless, she can only manage the exchange, he informs her, with the proceeds procured by selling herself into the harem of one “Oikonomopulos in Cairo.” Although Lulu, through yet another complex scheme (once again involving the assumption of various identities, promises of betrothal, etc.) ultimately escapes that fate, the young Kadidia
isn’t as fortunate. After her mother also loses her fortune in Jungfrau stock, Kadidia is forced to become a performer “in the Varieté,” a thinly-veiled allusion to prostitution, and one that cannily evokes Lulu’s own origins, as if to suggest—just before Lulu’s trajectory bottoms out and she is forced back into the profession she eludes the harem to escape—a looping cyclical return to the narrative’s beginning.

**X. Sex & Death, Full Circle**

The sixth and last picture of the series, *The Death of Countess Geschwitz*, depicts the final scene and indeed the concluding lines of Wedekind’s “Lulu Tragedies” [Figure 62].

Demuth gives us a room in disarray, its furniture overturned and clothing strewn about. Countess Geschwitz lies prostrate at center-foreground in the midst of her final death throes. Perhaps more than in any of the previous illustrations, the space is clearly a stage set, as indicated by the presence of the red curtain, which once again frames the scene, though here on three sides and depicted in perspective.

By the end of “Pandora’s Box,” Lulu has escaped Rodrigo (with whom she negotiated her escape from Casti-Piani), but her station in life has fallen: over the arc of the play she has run the gambit from street urchin to high-end performer, to wealthy widow, to renewed success on the stage, and finally, plunged back into destitution, she supports Alva, Geschwitz, and Schigolach by prostituting herself. Her last client is Jack the Ripper, who murders both Lulu and the Countess in this concluding scene.

Here Lulu is signified only by way of her icon. Her portrait in the guise of Pierrot, painted by her first husband, Schwarz, in the opening scene, hangs above the mantel. Jack is likewise physically absent, though his presence is marked by the index—a trail of bloody
footprints, which lead from left, down center, to back right, stopping before a door or screen from behind which emits his line: “I am a damned lucky chap!”

Almost animate, these footprints—a marker of the body’s absent presence—are firmly delineated by sharp contour lines, giving them the quality of autonomous material objects, like paper cut-outs. Moreover, they are the exact color of and a similar shape to the pair of hands (we are to assume also Jack’s) which peek out from behind the screen at back right. Indexing not only Jack, then, but also Lulu whose blood provides the “paint,” these marks function like the blank underlines in *Lulu and Alva*: Demuth omits something crucial to the text, yet provides a visible, material record of its absence. The absence that they mark, of course, is that of the body. And, in true Demuth fashion, they refuse to tether themselves to a singular subject. The footprints become, in this sense, a “figure” for both Lulu and Jack at once, and through them Demuth suggests that the body itself can be arbitrary.

This chapter’s claim, and its work to bear out by way of a few close readings, is that Demuth was less interested in conveying his chosen narratives (what we typically think of as the purpose of illustration) than in the body as a conduit of narrative as such. Meeting that objective, as we have seen, came first and indeed often at the expense of “illustrating” (let alone encapsulating or distilling) the literature itself. Demuth’s concern in these pictures, in other words, lay neither in the meaning of these texts nor in the body as a material, physical entity in the world, but rather in how meaning is produced and in the role the body plays therein. His literary pictures function, in this sense, more like images of models—think Seurat’s *Poseuses* (to say nothing of Demuth’s own *Real Thing*)—than bodies engaged in the throes of narrative [Figure 95].
What is absent more broadly, then, from Demuth’s sixth and final Wedekind illustration, is the signifying body. In conclusion, the series thus takes us full circle, from Lulu the tragic-heroine-femme-fatale, who figures (at least in the eyes of her ill-fated admirers) as earthly, carnal desire in all the pleasure, debasement, and chaos it wreaks, to Jack, who stands in for and closes off the narrative with death. The significance here, to reiterate my point about Demuth’s selection of texts that privilege themes of sex and death at the start, is not that Demuth (or Wedekind) posit a causal relationship between the two but that such narratives provided him the opportunity to mobilize the body in extremis—the body, we might say, at its respectively most and least bodily.¹⁷⁶

As these examples demonstrate, the most important question posed by Demuth’s illustrations is not what they capture of their sources, but the gaps and discontinuities they register—the way they seem to meditate on rather than mediate the relation between—word and image. And this is my claim in its most basic formulation: Demuth’s illustrations are most fundamentally about—what they illustrate—are the divisions and dialectics between word and image. Knowing the source texts is important insofar as it allows us to apprehend the pictures’ relational structure. Yet such foreknowledge does not guarantee or underwrite their legibility or otherwise supply their meaning, for the illustrations, like the portraits, at once elide and exceed their referents.

XI. Free Play, The Textual Body in Vaudeville

Contemporaneous with the illustrations, Demuth produced a series of watercolors depicting acrobats, dancers, and vaudevillians which explore what we might characterize as gesture for gesture’s sake—the body concerned above all with performing its own formal
capacity for movement and expression. Much of the beauty of these pictures proceeds from how Demuth renders these endlessly manipulable bodies as empty, flat, and often in relation to one another. Almost all have a mannerist, even grotesque quality about them, while many, for example Two Trapeze Performers in Red, position two attenuated figures that could be considered “in extremis,” here, stretching and straining [Figure 96]. In Two Figures Bowing, to offer one further example, bodies insert into one other like pieces in a machine, but incredibly without touching [Figure 97]. These and other works bear down on the tension between two disjunctive figures, presenting the body itself as infinitely adaptive [Figures 98-103].

The division between word and image has long been framed as a dichotomy between, on the one hand, the plenitude and materiality of the picture, which has conventionally—discursively and generically—been aligned with the spatiality and unity of the body and, on the other hand, the temporality and abstraction of language. Demuth’s textual bodies transgress this binary. To return to the counterpoint of the Neoclassical body of Davidian history painting one last time, we might consider the difference between Demuth’s figures and the tension T.J. Clark identifies in The Intervention of the Sabine Women (1754) [Figure 104]. “What is most special,” about David’s painting, writes Clark, “is the way the discursiveness coexists with such an all-or-nothing sense of the real. The great bodies lumber into narrative and symbolic position, finally, but as it were in spite of the weight of their illusionistic armor. It is this double-sidedness of David’s pictorial imagination—the effort to signify so often at odds with the passion for embodiment—that is the clue to this work’s inimitable pathos.”

Light and lithe and flexible, weighted-down neither literally nor figuratively, Demuth’s figures are anything but pathetic. Where in Clark’s estimation David’s Sabines inhabit the double space of both/and—their discursive role in irresolvable conflict with their material, illusionistic
embodiment, their lumbering brute *realness*—Demuth’s literary figures, like his gumby circus performers, could be said, inversely, to sidestep this tension altogether. If their narrative function is in question (and it is), this is because they are, if not quite nothing but symbol, something closer perhaps to nothing but *relation*.

Clark in another context has defined modernism as “an approach to modernity,” in just these terms. “Modernism,” he writes,

was interested in the images and occasions of modern life but also, more deeply, in modernity’s means of representation—the deep structure of symbolic production and reproduction within it. Somewhere at the heart of that symbolic order lay two great dreams, or two great offers. The first proposed that the world was becoming modern because it was turning into a space inhabited by free individual subjects, each dwelling in sensuous immediacy…. The second, in practice, was hard to separate from its twin. The world, it said, is more and more a realm of technical rationality, made available and comprehensible to individual subjects by being made mechanized and standardized. The world as on its way to absolute material lucidity. In the end it will become (and if you look hard, it is already becoming) a world of relations rather than entities, exchanges rather than objects, symbol management rather than bodies engaged in physical labor or gross struggle with the realm of necessity.  

As the vaudeville pictures suggest, Demuth’s practice likewise belies an interest in the “images and occasions” of modern life. But he has something to say too, and much more fundamentally, about the body as a means of representation. Above all, this is what the literary illustrations and vaudeville pictures share: both are embedded in the world of relations and exchanges rather than entities and objects. And both are concerned with bodies as instruments of symbolic production and reproduction (as actors, performers, and literary characters). These works figure the body, that is, as (just another) means of representation, a (potentially) empty signifier. Demuth posits this model of the body in opposition to another, older, painterly conception—as sensate, as material, even as abject or mechanized. And to another (even older) conception of the picture, too—as illustrative, anecdotal, documentary, as some kind of record of “everyday” modern life.
Demuth’s painting doesn’t quite conform, then, to either of the two dreams Clark lays out in these passages. His portraits, as Chapter 1 argues, suggest subjectivity as deeply inter-penetrated, -textual, -subjective, multiply constructed—anything, in short, but freely individuated. Neither, as this chapter has demonstrated, do his figures revel in experiential immediacy. And, as I will revisit in this study’s conclusion, while Demuth explored appetites “head on” (excuse the pun), his late still lifes, like the erotics—works that take for their subject the objects of bodily desire and/or the body as an object of desire—are neither fleshly nor immediate but somehow removed, empty, distant, flat. In the erotics, this has to do with the disjuncture or juxtaposition between form and content, the way watercolor, in its very delicacy and transparency, mitigates, mediates—stands between—the vulgarity of their content. In images, such as *Sailors on a Beach* and *Two Sailors Urinating*, the bodies seem empty because of the theatricality of their encounter. It’s as though the bodies in Demuth’s pictures relate for our eyes, but they don’t seem to have interiorities and so they don’t relate in or to “the realm of necessity,” nor are they relating to each other sensually; they are just relating to each other within our eye, like a kind of sexual Precisionism/ Pointillism.

In many ways Demuth’s paintings hew more closely to the second dream of modernity Clark outlines in these passages, which is itself comprised, as I see it, of two incommensurate parts: the world understood as a realm of technical rationality—mechanized, standardized, and for these reasons “on its way to absolute material lucidity.” This is the textbook take on Precisionism, of course. Yet it is a perspective with which (as I turn attention to in Chapter 3) even Demuth’s most-canonical Machine-age landscapes don’t quite fit, and that doesn’t itself quite gel with the second aspect of this second dream—this world of “exchanges rather than
objects, symbol management rather than bodies engaged in...the gross struggle with the realm of necessity”—the dream, I have argued, in which we find his figures palpably at home.

XII. Postscript: In No Satisfying Measure

I conclude this chapter by resting for a moment on A Prince of Court Painters (1918), the single illustration Demuth based on Walter Pater’s 1887 “Imaginary Portrait” of Antoine Watteau [Figure 77]. Pater’s essay is a fictional account of Watteau’s biography, as told through a series of diary entries by a young female narrator hopelessly consumed with love for the painter.

Demuth depicts Watteau alone in his studio holding aloft a daintily ruffled blue slipper upon which his attention is fixed. On the ground, beneath a chair piled high with a woman’s empty outfit, rests the other heel. In the bottom right-hand corner Demuth has penned the closing lines of Pater’s essay: “He was always a seeker after something in the world that is there in no satisfying measure, or not at all.”

The reader will not be surprised that A Prince of Court Painters has been interpreted as a thinly veiled self-portrait. Its themes of sexual fetishism (the shoe) are allied with Demuth’s queer identity, the air of isolation and loneliness cast over the image by its caption, read as further indicative of his “invalid” status. As I have insisted, such psycho-biographical readings tend to occlude consideration of the confluences Demuth effects in this picture, which once again call Hartley’s layered structure to mind.

Here Demuth’s ostensible subject is Antoine Watteau, but we are given Watteau as filtered through Pater’s fictional narrative, and again through Demuth’s brush. Indeed, Watteau is strangely absent even in Pater’s “Imaginary Portrait,” given to us only through the eyes (and
desire) of an unnamed narrator. Each journal entry details, from the perspective of this unrequited lover, Watteau’s comings and goings, and news of his doings from afar. Demuth’s invocation is, then, of a historical subject who is a figment not even of his own, but of another’s imagination. And here are, as well, allusions to self-representation: once again the cane makes an appearance, cast haphazardly across the studio floor. Yet setting aside the presumption that Pater’s text is merely a foil for the sublimation of Demuth’s own desires and conflicts, we can see how this work, like so many in Demuth’s oeuvre, challenges any such notion of essential nature or self-expression, unconscious or otherwise. Rather, as characteristic of his work across several genres, Demuth here poses subjectivity as relational, pictorial meaning as inherently intertextual, and locates both at the complex intersection of multiple vantages.

Lulu of course is an emblem for all of this. Returning, then, in closing, to the question I suggest is posed by Wedekind’s play at the start: who created Lulu, who controls her, who or what is really pulling the strings? Addressing the crowd directly, the animal tamer implicates his audience—and Demuth’s viewer in turn—implying that it is our basest material desires for sex and blood and money and power, each of which Lulu embodies at various junctures in the play, that move us through the world, that propel narrative, that animate her body. Yet Demuth himself never quite answers this question but rather troubles its very premise, pointing instead to layers of narration and performance in place of any singular origin.
Chapter 3. Picturing Landscape

I. Arrangements

Late in the spring of 1920, Demuth’s health began to mysteriously deteriorate. In July, bone-tired and struggling to keep on weight despite an incessant craving for sweets, he returned to his family home in Lancaster, PA from Cape Cod where he had planned to spend the summer months painting. These symptoms persisted throughout the following year. “I’m not up to doing very much about anything,” he wrote to Stieglitz in January of 1921. “Will see you I hope sometime soon when things are more or less,—more or less,—god knows what.” Six months later, having yet to receive a definitive diagnosis, Demuth was antsy and eager for a change of scene, writing in June of 1921 to his friend Scofield Thayer, editor of The Dial, that his “enforced residence in the old home town” was making him “a bit weak minded” and that “with luck,” he would leave for Europe on the third of August.

Offering his mother, Augusta, the rather equivocal assurance that he “suppose[d] things would go alright,” Demuth embarked on the S. S. Paquebot two months later, arriving in London on the twelfth of August, and from there travelled to Paris. By early September he had happily reunited with old friends, including Man Ray, Marsden Hartley, Marcel Duchamp, and Leo and Gertrude Stein, as well with Léonce Rosenberg, director of the Galerie de L’Effort Moderne, who purchased two watercolors, and with whom Demuth discussed the possibility of mounting an exhibition of his recent work. Paris, he wrote to Alfred Barnes “has never seemed so beautiful, — it is different in some ways than before the war, — but I don’t remember it as fine as it is now ... I have a large room with a wonderful view of Paris,—it’s not very cheap but the
view is worth almost anything asked, I would work from the material seen from the window for years.”

From Demuth’s description to Barnes, written on the stock pink paper provided by the Hotel Lutetia on the Rue Raspail, we might infer that the paintings he produced in these months pictured expansive views down Haussmann’s grand boulevards, or vistas of the Parisian skyline. Yet the single work Demuth is believed to have executed in Paris—*Rue du singe qui pêche*—situates its viewer quite differently [Figure 13]. Lacking a real-world referent (there is no actual Rue du singe qui pêche in Paris) Demuth’s title is likely a play on Rue du Chat-qui-Pêche, a street considered to be among the narrowest in the city. And indeed, here we find ourselves claustrophobically ensconced in a kind of no-space—more flat than shallow—between the oddly-slanted overlapping architectural facades that line the city street.

As readers may recall, *Rue du singe qui pêche* has already made an appearance in the early pages of this study, introduced in passing in my introduction. There I argue that it serves as an important third term for understanding the relational dynamics between Demuth’s *The Figure Five in Gold* and “The Great Figure ,” the poem by William Carlos Williams from which the latter picture departs [Figure 2]. If less abstractly emblematic than *The Figure Five, Rue du singe qui pêche* likewise privileges the form of written language, though here that form—the city’s commercial signage—appears as a feature more firmly embedded in the lived environment.

Embedded is perhaps too fixed a description, for the wording of the signage has become wholly unmoored from any architectural ground, appearing to dance off the surfaces of its respective awnings like so many Parisian waiters calling out the daily special to ambling passers-by. Like the angling oblong speech bubbles in *The Lunch Scene*, these forms compete for the attention (and capital) of an imagined flâneur, and by extension, the viewing subject.
In this respect, *Rue du singe qui pêche* could be said to reverse the terms that Demuth, following Williams, would later establish in *The Figure Five*. Whereas William’s poem is premised on the multiply-sensory experience of a great flashing numeral five moving fast on the side of a firetruck, siren blaring, as it rushes past the stationary viewer, in *Rue du singe qui pêche*, the (presumably) stationary signage of commercial advertising—a symbol of modernity for so many early-twentieth artists—has itself become mobile and unfixed, arching out along the trajectory of the ray lines established by Demuth’s signature planar faceting to crowd the city street.

In both its architectural subject matter and “applied” cubo-purist-futurist style—note the picture’s overlaid faceting, tight facture, and ruler-drawn lines—*Rue du singe qui pêche* is characteristic of the 1920s landscapes on which Demuth’s reputation, and ultimately his place in the canon of American modernist painters, would come posthumously to rest. This chapter centers on the landscapes Demuth painted in this period, the most canonically “precisionist” and widely-celebrated work he produced. Focusing on the efflorescence of the genre in his practice in the years roughly between 1917 and 1923, I examine this body of work in dialogue with the history and traditions of landscape painting as a genre, the nativist aesthetics that propelled Stieglitz circle picture theory in this decade, and the contemporary discourse around Cubism and in particular the bearing of Cézanne thereon. At once mining and departing from the genre’s typical preoccupations with materiality and perception, Demuth, I argue, approaches the landscape as motif as itself *already* a kind of picture.¹⁸⁶

Demuth first exhibited his landscapes as an autonomous group at The Daniel Gallery under the rather awkward title “Arrangements of the American Landscape Forms” in December of 1920. His sixth solo show at The Daniel Gallery since 1914, the exhibition included *After Sir*
Christopher Wren, *End of the Parade (Coatesville, PA)* and *Machinery*, as well as three other unknown paintings titled *Waiting, The Merry-Go-Round*, and lastly, my personal favorite among all of Demuth’s titles, *Chimneys Ventilators or Whatever* [Figures 105-107].

In approaching this material, I take two cues from the title of its initial exhibition. First, I refer to the paintings under consideration as “landscapes,” and to a degree this chapter will theorize them as such, but as *Rue du singe qui pêche* indicates, “cityscapes” or “architectural paintings” would perhaps be more accurate descriptors. With a few exceptions, after his early student period Demuth rarely took the natural world for his motif. As A. E. Gallatin noted in 1927, this is true of his contemporaneous still lifes as well. “These fruits and vegetables are very cool,” wrote Gallatin in the first scholarly book on Demuth’s paintings. “The juiciness of a peach by Renoir or the passion which Cézanne put into an apple are not to be found here. This is not voluptuous fruit: it comes from a country whose *vin du pays* is iced water.”

If not exactly domestic in subject matter, Demuth never quite pictures his fruit, vegetable, and flower motifs as living, growing things in (or of) the world [Figures 108-116].

Second, I take as axiomatic that Demuth’s interest in the landscape as a motif—as encoded in the precise wording of this work’s first exhibition, and particularly the emphasis placed on the terms “arrangements” and “forms” therein—lay above all in the potential the subject matter offered Demuth to pursue formal questions and concerns. What makes the almost sentence-long title “Arrangements of the American Landscape Forms” so awkward is the mash-up of its plural and singular components—the misfit, that is, between “Arrangements” and “Forms” on the one hand, and “the American” on the other, with “Landscape” a kind of middle term that doesn’t quite properly belong to either camp. The title seems to suggest an origin in
concession—as though the Frankenstein-like hybridity of its final form points back to an agreed-upon compromise between “Arrangements of Forms” and “The American Landscape.”

II. From the Provinces to Paris, 1921

I feel ‘In’ America—even though its insides are empty.
—Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz (October 1921)

My argument about Demuth’s landscapes—that he approaches his motif (environment, surrounds) as itself already a kind of picture—departs markedly from how this body of work has typically been understood. Demuth’s most canonical late-twenties paintings—works such as Welcome to Our City, My Egypt, And the Home of the Brave—have generally been characterized as deeply rooted in the identity and specificity of place—i.e. Lancaster, PA, and by extension, some essential(ized) notion of “America”—and in this regard, taken to epitomize and indeed to pioneer a particularly “precisionist” strain of the nativism at the core of American modernist discourse in the decade following World War I [Figures 117-119].

This strain of interpretation has its roots in the primary criticism, and particularly the claims staked out by the critics most closely associated with Stieglitz’s galleries in this period (primary among them, “An American Place”). Stieglitz set the terms by which the landscapes have been received to this day, perhaps marking this, more than any other body of Demuth’s work. The result is that answers to the questions of what this painting is about and where it fits in our narrative of twentieth-century American art, boil down, in short, to “America” (and sometimes, the more localized Lancaster, PA). The evidence for what I’ll deem the “America” reading is culled from Demuth’s letters from this period—and especially those he wrote to Stieglitz from Paris between August and November of 1921, which are rife with references to
America and the development of an indigenous modern pictorial style. In these often-quoted letters, Demuth suggests that his interests were in exact alignment with Stieglitz’s agenda.\textsuperscript{192}

A particularly ingratiating example can be found in the rhetoric Demuth deploys in his first dispatch to Stieglitz upon arriving in Paris. “I wonder if it will ever happen in the land of the free?—or is it happening? I never knew Europe was so wonderful, and never knew really—not so surely—that New York, if not the country, has something not found here. It makes me feel almost like running back and doing something about it,—but what does that come to?”\textsuperscript{193}

In quoting this passage and others like it, scholars rarely take into account the fact that Demuth wrote such statements to Stieglitz himself and, moreover, that he was actively engaged in an effort to convince Stieglitz to represent him. Gently planting the seed for what we can imagine to have been his desired response to the question “but what does that come to?,” Demuth concludes his August 1921 letter with a complaint about Charles Daniel, his long-time New York Gallerist. “I can’t cope with it any longer. He had a good chance too. Again the American idea. I have taken most of my things away,—all the good ones ... Poor Stieglitz, some more outside trouble being again poured over you.”\textsuperscript{194}

The extent to which Demuth’s recruitment campaign was a matter of concerted strategy is laid bare in a passage from Demuth’s 1921 letter to Thayer in which he announces his intention to travel abroad. Having conveyed his plans, Demuth turned next to an order of business, namely Thayer’s purchase of After Sir Christopher Wren\textsuperscript{192} (1920), a landscape in watercolor, gouache and graphite on cardboard depicting The Center Methodist Episcopal Church in Provincetown, Massachusetts (today home to the Provincetown Heritage Museum) [Figure 105]. Executed the previous summer before circumstances forced his return home and
subsequently shown in “Arrangements of the American Landscape Forms,” *After Sir Christopher Wren* was as of June 1921 still in the possession of the Daniel Gallery.

Though Demuth doesn’t specify in his letter to Thayer their agreed-upon price, we can extrapolate from his characteristically florid wording therein that he endeavored to sell *After Sir Christopher Wren* to Thayer for well-below market value. “There are two reasons … why I accept which I do, you see, gladly, your offer. First you seem to protest a bit over much about my wish in this matter, and, secondly, I hope this act of mine will be the first step in an, anyway, intended row with Mr. Daniel.” Demuth’s insistence on a price lower than that set by Daniel, and his explicit indication in particular that in doing so he meant to initiate a break with the gallery—suggests the intentionality with which he went about courting Stieglitz in the late teens and early twenties.

While my analysis takes into account Demuth’s statements to Stieglitz and others, I reject the presumption of transparency between word and work. My reading of Demuth’s landscapes—the premise from which they begin, the formal qualities that define them, and the underlying stakes and questions onto which they open—departs markedly from this Stieglitzian account. As this chapter demonstrates, Demuth’s landscapes are neither “regionalist” in orientation—about the particularity, essence, or qualities of a specific place—nor nativist in the broader sense of being about “America.” Rather Demuth approaches his motif—his environment and surrounds (again, rarely the natural landscape as such)—as itself *already* a kind of picture.

**III. Landscape Forms**

Demuth’s landscapes traverse the trajectory of his career and can be divided roughly into four chronologically-bounded categories: those that comprise his early student experimentation
(1890s to circa 1914); proto-precisionist or applied cubist works depicting Provincetown and Bermuda (1915-1918); the efflorescence of “mature” precisionist paintings of Provincetown, Paris, and Lancaster (1919-1923), and the series of seven late or “high” precisionist landscapes that take Lancaster for their sole subject (1927-1931). The greatest concentration of landscapes bookend the decade of the 1920s, and were painted during periods in which Demuth was largely confined to his family home at 118 E. King St., where he took up residence in the aftermath of his first major diabetic outbreak in Paris in 1921. In fact, with the exception of the Bermuda pictures and the two works that came out of his 1921 trip to Europe, including Paquebot Paris in addition to Rue du singe qui pêche, Demuth painted the vast majority of these landscapes from the confines of his “provincial” birth place, often taking for a subject what was visible through his studio window or over the wall of his mother’s garden [Figure 119].

Demuth began painting landscapes as a child. His earliest extant work in this genre is a small watercolor and pencil from 1896, made at the age 13. These early, student landscapes, which extend through circa 1915, are largely derivative in style and don’t bear much continuity with the work for which Demuth later became known [Figures 123-129]. More specifically, most of these early landscapes, which were all executed in watercolor and have a characteristically loose facture, belie the influences of his training at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts under William Merritt Chase and Thomas Anshutz, figures respectively associated with the traditions of American Impressionism and Realism. Chase’s influence on these early works is perhaps more evident in regard to both style and content, which on the whole could be characterized as [pastoral or picturesque], but they also have something of an Ashcan sensibility, less in subject matter (the grittiness of the city, so-called “real” life) but in the looseness of their handling (all are done in watercolor on paper). A few of these early works were painted while
Demuth lived in Europe, where he was based (mainly in Paris) from December 1912 through the spring of 1914, during which time he met Hartley and saw works by Matisse, Cézanne and Picasso in the collection of Gertrude and Leo Stein.

What I am calling the “mid,” proto-precisionist period begins with the paintings Demuth produced in Provincetown, MA over the summer of 1916 and reaches its apex in the early months of 1917 with the pictures that came out of his time in Bermuda with Hartley, which I introduced in Chapter 1 [Figures 129-143]. In Provincetown, Demuth shared an apartment with Edward Fisk and spent his days with Hartley and Eugene and Agnes O’Neill, among others; his time in Bermuda, where he met up with Hartley in February of 1917, brought him into close contact with one of Cubism’s leadingponents. Albert Gleizes, with whom Demuth was acquainted through Walter Arensberg, was also in residence on the island in these months.200 Gleizes and Jean Metzinger had published an English translation of their book Du Cubisme just four years prior in 1913, a primary vehicle through which American artists first digested cubism.201

Most of Demuth’s Provincetown and Bermuda landscapes were snapped up, along with the majority of the literary pictures, by Albert Barnes in the late teens and early twenties.202 For this reason, as well that of their delicate medium—like the earliest landscapes, the mid-period works are all executed in watercolor on paper—these pictures have been less widely exhibited than Demuth’s later, more celebrated Lancaster landscapes, although they were well received, both during Demuth’s lifetime and since.203

Scholars generally agree that it is in these pictures—the watercolors Demuth produced in Provincetown in the summer of 1916 and Bermuda over the winter and early spring of 1917—
that we can locate the origin of his precisionism, a crystalline, “applied” cubist style, heavily filtered through the lens of Cézanne’s late watercolors.204

Unlike Demuth’s first forays into the genre, these landscapes tend to integrate architectural and natural forms. Characteristic of this period is Bermuda Landscape (1917), owned today by the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC [Figure 131]. Here Demuth breaks up his surfaces into not quite geometric, semi-transparent, overlaid planes, in which the organic forms of greenery intermingle with the crisp edges of the built environment. Works such as Tree Trunks exemplify the dryer, texturized look and feel of these mid-period watercolors, a result of the blotting technique Demuth began to mobilize in these years [Figure 146].205 The curved lines, more muted tones, and all-over jigsaw-like composition of this 1916 watercolor also points forward to the style that would come to typify Demuth’s vaudeville imagery and literary illustrations (the Lulu series in particular, the surfaces of which are likewise divided up by definite, arcing contours into an interlocking pattern.

Largely lacking in horizon lines, the most distinctive feature of the Bermuda landscapes—and one among several indicators of Cézanne’s influence—is Demuth’s tendency to cluster form at the center of his compositions, while leaving the paper bare at the edges. Demuth would continue this practice in the pictures he painted over the summer of 1918, which found him back in Provincetown. See, for example, Rooftops, Provincetown (1918) [Figure 141].

The years between roughly 1919 and 1923—and especially in the more concentrated period over 1920–1921—saw an efflorescence in Demuth’s landscape practice. He painted a cluster of architectural pictures in this period and it is in these works that we can locate the full-fledged emergence of the hard-edged style that would come to typify his painting across genres until his death in 1935. That style, already evident in the poster portrait series (which he begins
in 1923) departs in significant ways from both the illustrations and mid-period Bermuda pictures. The shift is attended (perhaps driven) by changes in medium, scale, and orientation—from watercolor on paper to tempera on board (and sometimes, though less frequently, oil on canvas), and from the intimate, sketchbook-sized, and typically horizontally-formatted illustrations to the verticality and larger dimensions of easel painting proper.  

While some of the 1919-1923 landscapes share the faceted, cut-gemstone quality of the earlier Bermuda landscapes, they generally appear more planar. Take the lovely little 1919 boating picture Demuth calls (Sailboats) The Love Letter [Figure 147]. In comparison to the dimensionality of the Hirshhorn’s Bermuda Landscape, the central motif of which appears as if formed around the dictates of its own inward gravitational pull, the origami-like faceting in Sailboats operates in a much more shallow register, almost like a series of upright folding screens, or the innards of an extended accordion.  

From 1927-1933 Demuth produced his most canonical “precisionist” landscapes of the Pennsylvania industrial landscape and its surrounds [Figures 149-155]. All seven major works were executed in Lancaster, a subject to which Demuth returned in 1927 after a six-year lapse. Of these, only My Egypt sold during Demuth’s lifetime, yet it is this body of work in particular that has fostered the “America” interpretation of his work most especially. In general, they are less abstract (and less playful) than the early 1920s landscapes.  

Many of Demuth’s landscapes manifest an interest evident throughout his practice: they play on the relation between word and image, opening onto questions of legibility and private meaning. Starting around 1919 he began to attach odd, often witty and, in at least one instance, literary titles to these pictures. Many fail to relate in any obvious way to the content depicted, suggesting hidden meanings, as demonstrated by (Sailboats) The Love Letter. Others seem to
playfully point back to Demuth’s craft: *Box of Tricks* (1919), suggests the notion of the painter as a kind of magician, while *Rise of the Prism* (also of 1919), evokes the ascendancy of cubism [Figures 155 and 156]. *In the Key of Blue*, ca. 1919, makes this reference to the mechanisms of visual and verbal representation more explicit. The work takes its title from an 1893 essay by John Addington Symonds which discusses the capacity—and incapacity—of language to convey color [Figure 157].

Perhaps the most extreme example of this trend toward obtuse titling is the nonsensical *Nospmas, M. Egiap Nospmas, M.* of 1921. Recalling the signatory mode of *Duncan* which Demuth would paint just three years later, the “M” followed by a period with which this title begins and ends seems to suggest an anagrammed name [Figure 158]. As Barbara Haskell has suggested, it calls to mind the acrostic and cryptographic interests pursued by Duchamp and Walter Arensberg in these years, though the picture doesn’t offer up any clue for its decoding. Yet just as the symbols in Demuth’s portraits seem to prompt an iconographic and archival approach without ever quite delivering on that invitation, the fragmented words in *Nospmas, M. Egiap Nospmas, M.* seem to hold out the possibility that the picture itself contains some (itself encoded) cipher—as though, if one added up all the picture’s partial fragments in some correct order, the enigma of the title might reveal itself. Perhaps even more resonant with the poster portraits (the red bow, for example, in *Dove*) the addition of “Lovers” to the title of the 1919 boating picture titillates us as viewers with the suggestion of some intimate backstory to which we are not privy.

**IV. Applied Cubism**
The high precisionist style of Demuth’s 1920s land- and cityscapes has often been characterized as typifying an “applied” cubist aesthetic. The style Demuth developed in these landscape paintings can and should be described as “applied” Cubism—although, in contrast with most scholars, I do not use this label as a pejorative. Establishing Demuth’s relationship to cubism—what he took therefrom and applied, as it were—requires getting a working definition on the table. To that end, in the most overarching terms, the watershed we call cubism can be defined as a set of formal experiments in the deconstruction of perspectival space. These experiments—typically identified in the paintings Picasso and Braque produced in Paris between 1907 and 1914—demonstrated, in turn, the degree to which one-point perspective is a “construction” to begin with.

To break this down a little further: Traditional illusionistic painting, we might say, puts its motif through the “translation machine” of perspective and spits out pictures in which the world, if literally flat—reduced to the two-dimensional surface of the support—remains recognizable as such (appearing, for example, to recess into three-dimensional depth). Cubism could be said to break down the mechanisms by which the “translation machine” of perspectival illusion works into its component parts. Whereas one-point perspective is by definition organized around the view of an imagined, singular viewer, cubist painting, or so the common understanding would have it, depicts multiple viewpoints simultaneously.

This “all-at-once-ness” accounts for how Cubist paintings look, which is not like the thing (object, subject, referent) they represent. No longer appearing to recess into depth, the object of cubist painting is depicted “in its surround,” in other words, only in the most literal sense. More than merely break down the semantics of perspective, cubism—and particularly its iteration, in the hands of Picasso, in the medium of collage circa 1912—deconstructs the whole
paradigm and the mode of art-historical interpretation on which perspective as a system of representation is founded in the first place and reproduces in turn.

If cubism proper, which takes the three-dimensional world for its referent, deconstructs the logic of perspectival illusionism, Demuth’s landscapes, I want to suggest, appear to “apply” that logic to a referent that is already two-dimensional to begin with. To extend the metaphor I deploy above, it is as if he passed a picture of the world through some kind of cubist “faceting” machine (or “app” in twenty-first century terms), which breaks up its surface into multiple and competing planes, lending the resulting image a broken (if not quite shattered) appearance.

To be clear, though the question of reference to which I will attend more specifically below, is certainly at play in titles such as After Sir Christopher Wren and Aucassin and Nicolette, I have found no evidence to suggest that Demuth worked from photographs nor, as is variously true of both the portraits and illustrations, that his landscapes build on or reinterpret some previous depiction thereof [Figure 165]. Rather, I propose that the quality that defines Demuth’s representation of his environment and surroundings in this decade, especially in the paintings he produced beginning around 1919 and through circa 1923, is largely formal.

Rosalind Krauss’s seminal argument first laid out in her 1992 essay “The Motivation of the Sign” illuminates what Demuth took—or “applied”—from Cubism. Specifically, Krauss locates in Picasso’s painting, beginning around 1909, a move away from the realms of the bodily and experiential, which she characterizes as a kind of loss.210 In lieu of the haptic, material, carnal reality of bodies and things with which painting has been aligned since the Renaissance, analytic cubism, Krauss argues, offers up an illusionism emptied out of the worldliness of its referent:
Modeling in this sense becomes the empty trappings of an illusionist system more and more divorced from the business of illusionism, a business we could describe as giving us access through the vehicle of sight to reality in all its carnal fullness—to its weight and density, to its richness and texture, to its heat and vaporousness, to the evanescence of its very perfume. By 1911 the asceticism of the intermittencies of Cubist light and shade had almost totally renounced the possibility that the two dimensions of the visual field could ever afford its viewer direct and unmediated access to that other world of tactile completeness, the world that bodies inhabit but vision only registers by means of so many flat and frontal pictures on the retinal plane of the eye.

This quality results—is part and parcel—of the way in which Picasso, in works such as *Houses on a Hill* (*Horta de Ebro*) of 1909 points up the disjunction between the visual and the haptic, a separation, Krauss maintains, implicit in the work of Cézanne [Figure 159]. Note the similarity of the vantage Demuth offers us in The Hirshhorn’s *Bermuda Landscape* of 1917 with Picasso’s *Houses on a Hill*, which dates to just over a decade prior. Pointing in particular to the model provided by Cézanne’s ca. 1895 *Still Life with Plaster Cast*, Krauss locates this division in the disjunctive orientation we are offered unto the scene depicted—as though we at once hover above and stand before Picasso’s landscape. Hewing more closely to Cézanne’s penchant, in the late watercolors especially, for ensconcing his central composition in a frame of bared white ground, Demuth’s *Bermuda Landscape* doesn’t quite revel in this same tension.

By contrast in pictures such as *Lancaster* (*In the Province, No. 2*) of 1920, *Flour Mill* (*Factory*) and *Lancaster* (both of 1921), Demuth’s so-called cubist aesthetic we might say runs away with itself [Figures 160-162]. In certain passages, Demuth’s signature faceting becomes almost fully unmoored from its subject, transforming, like the signage in *Rue du singe qui pêche*, into a kind of motif in and of itself. Note, for example, the emphatically left-leaning thrust of forms that wend the building and sky in *Lancaster* (*In the Province, No. 2*) into a pyramidal composition. Or the way in which these forms, no longer grounded in—and thus having little
or nothing to do with or say about—perspective as a construct, take on a solid, modelled dimensionality all their own in *Lancaster*, painted the following year [Figure 162].

In these respects, Demuth’s landscape paintings operate in counter-distinction to both traditional perspectival illusionism and to Cubism’s deconstruction thereof. On the one hand, they depart from the traditions of illusionistic realism, which starts with the world (of objects and bodies and environments) and uses perspective and modeling to generate a likeness in the form of a picture that resembles that world. On the other hand, their logic is distinct from that of Cubism, which likewise starts with the world (the “real,” the referent) and then breaks down the system by which conventional realism makes the world appear as itself in representation. In contrast to both of these approaches, Demuth does not approach the world as a real phenomenal thing (as something experienced), but rather treats it like a picture, a flat image, a plane of view.

V. Landscape as Picture

The flatness—the lack of experiential depth—that defines Demuth’s landscapes caught the attention of their earliest critics, although not to favorable effect. “The Dove looks very well. The Demuth too,” wrote Stieglitz to O’Keeffe of *Buildings* on the occasion of that painting’s 1932 exhibition in the Whitney’s first biennial. “But it looks dry. So many of the paintings in the show are stale—things done—not experienced” [Figure 152]. Recall, too, the position Strand took in his review of Demuth’s recent work, which included *Rue du singe qui pêche* among other landscapes, shown in the American watercolor exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in the winter of 1922. Demuth’s “craftsmanship,” wrote Strand, is so perfect that it is not always quite alive. For despite much seeking and experiment Demuth has yet to disentangle himself from the sophistication of contemporary French influence. His vaudevillians exist as the impressions of Bermuda and of the factories of Pennsylvania do not. Their geometries are not as
yet instinct with life; the “aesthetic” gets in the way. Whether Demuth will achieve a deeper penetration into his environment yet remains to be seen.  

For both Stieglitz and Strand, Demuth’s landscapes and factories are hampered by a superficiality devoid of life. And, indeed, these works would seem to suggest that their referent isn’t Demuth’s lived, observed environment but rather a picture, already on the flat, which he then proceeds to break apart by “applying” a cubist logic. Yet where Strand reads this pictorial quality as a failure the artist may in time overcome, I argue that it is integral to Demuth’s work in the genre of landscape.

Several of Demuth’s landscapes seem to play overtly on the collapse between the flatness of their subjects and that of their medium. Works such as *Nospmas*, *M. Egiap Nospmas*, *M.* and *Rue du singe qui pêche* exemplify Demuth’s interest in vistas that are already planar, as well as his use of language to heighten that effect. *Rue* offers its viewer a vantage as if walking down a narrow street, except we’re not quite situated on firm ground. The horizontal bands that edge the composition at left and right seem to suggest a window, yet without any spatial or contextual markers such as Demuth provides in *Hartley*, these register as two among many superimposed surfaces.

A triangular swath at right hints at revelation—as though a corner of paper has been folded back (like the flap of an advent calendar, or pulling back a curtain). This frames the picture with intrigue—inviting us to project ourselves within, but the picture offers little in the way of illusionistic depth in return. In lieu of the traditional means of illusionism (modeling, recessional lines, a vanishing point) Demuth produces the sense that we are about to round the narrow corner in *Rue du singe qui pêche* through the interlacing path of partial words, which lead the eye through the composition like a trail of breadcrumbs. As the signage wends its way, from the beckoning “ins” at left to the fragmentary “hote” that hangs unsupported just right of center,
we are cued to imaginatively project ourselves around the bend just as unconsciously as our mind completes the partial word “hotel.”

If there is little sense of depth and dimension in this picture, directionality is certainly at issue, as Demuth privileges competing diagonals over parallel recessional lines. All these partial words—some are firmly rooted but others depart; signs stick out into space, but words appear to hover in midair, with no surface to support them except that of the painting and, particularly, the swathes of facetted light. The way such signage seems to dance off the buildings would seem to suggest an experiential representation of the environment—all this sensory input, being bombarded by words and invitations—yet in contrast to the looser formal language characteristic of Impressionist and Expressionist paintings, which mobilize the fluency and materiality of their medium to simulate lived-experience, Rue hews toward telling over showing. Below the triangular swath, along the trajectory of the slightly bent diagonal at right, appears to be the margin of a piece of lined paper on which can be detected a cursive script, suggesting perhaps a daily menu, caught out of the corner of one’s eye in passing. But peripheral vision registers neither clean, ruler-drawn lines nor this level of detail. In other passages, however, it’s the painting’s lack of detail that doesn’t compute with perceptual experience (note, for example, the grid of windows, or the way in which Demuth denotes the balcony railings at top-center with little “x” marks).

The planarity of Demuth’s landscapes perhaps reaches its apex with Business, an oil painting with graphite on canvas that also dates to 1921. This painting cannily refuses—and indeed thematizes—what Strand refers to as a “deeper penetration” into the environment [Figure 163]. Here, the building we are looking at is in full planar alignment with its rectangular support. Numbers and days of the week marked across the grid of an industrial window appear
almost as a calendar inscribed directly on the surface of the canvas. The façade of the building also registers perspectival depth in the form of the shadows/reflection on its surface—literally a picture of perspectival recession.

VI. Experience and The Genre of Landscape Painting

The specific bone Strand picks with Demuth’s landscapes—that “the ‘aesthetic’ gets in the way” of his, and by extension the viewer’s, full immersion in the environment—falls in line with the foundational values of landscape painting as a genre. In her book, George Inness and the Science of Landscape, Rachael DeLue characterizes what was valued by critics in nineteenth-century American landscape painting thusly:

Accounts of paintings that made their viewers forget they were looking at pictures abounded, and critics frequently described themselves as entering and inhabiting, or desiring to, the landscapes they encountered in galleries, exhibitions, and collector’s homes. Landscapes that were labelled masterly and forceful, enchanting and poetic, were often described as such precisely because they appeared to invite the beholder into their fictional space or, at the very least, to produce the conditions under which viewers forgot that a mere picture was before their eyes and felt they were actually experiencing the things depicted.215

Asher B. Durand, for example, defined the qualities of a successful landscape in (experiential) terms that elicit a response from the viewer in diametric opposition to what I suggest Demuth’s landscapes effect. “A fine picture,” claimed Durand, is that “which at once takes possession of you—draws you into it—you traverse it—breath its atmosphere—feel its sunshine, and you repose in its shade without thinking of its design or execution, effect or color.”216 If in Business, for example, Demuth deploys the diagonally silhouetted forms of the two buildings to winkingly produce the illusion of recessional depth—that depth, as a reflection, is one that we cannot ever, even in our imagination, enter into and traverse.
The evaluation of landscape according to its capacity to communicate—and indeed replicate—experience was not specific to the context of nineteenth-century America, but can be traced to the genre’s conception. Joseph Leo Koerner grounds his study of Friedrich’s Romantic landscape paintings in terms of the emergent German concept of *Erlebniskunst*—“art (Kunst) that comes from, and is an expression of, experience (Erlebnis).”²¹⁷ Friedrich’s radically contentless landscapes, Koerner argues, are a signal origin of this claim—that the very content of a painting could be the unique singular experience of its author.²¹⁸ The artwork in this model serves as a conduit between artist and viewer. A work such as Friedrich’s *From the Dresden Heath*, Koerner argues, thus “places you. Somehow it singles you out to stand before a thicket, just as it singles out each individual branch of that thicket and displays its particularity against the dull sky, as if the singular itself were contingent upon the placement of your eye” [Figure 164].²¹⁹

Demuth’s landscapes depart from this tradition in several respects. To start, they aren’t realist—they don’t have the specificity of detail that characterizes Friedrich’s work and is so important to Koerner’s argument here. But more importantly, they don’t situate their viewer. Often lacking in both foreground and horizon line, many of these works—*Nospmas. M. Egiap Nospmas. M.*, *Flour Mill (Factory)*, and even, though perhaps to a lesser degree, *Rue du singe qui pêche*, are exemplary—picture the architectural facades they take for their subject from the (experientially) impossible vantage of something like midway up the building [Figures 158, 161, and 13]. As I suggest vis-à-vis *Business* above, the emphatic flatness of such works—façade is an important term here—is also significant in this regard; we can’t project ourselves into the scene depicted, and indeed that which is depicted isn’t really describable as a “scene” so much as surface.
I discuss in Chapter 1 how Hartley empties out the viewing position, in part by making it so plural, in contrast to Matisse’s Windshield, which offers up the painter’s position of mastery over the landscape to the viewer to occupy by proxy. If Hartley never quite implies “your” gaze—I have argued that painting pointedly challenges a singular conception of the individuated “you”—it still emphatically presents as a landscape viewed (the window motif, of course, does a lot of work in this respect).

Demuth does something different in the landscapes: rather than the empty/ many/ unfixed subject position offered to the viewer of Hartley, here he situates us in something like a no-place—no firm sense of location from which these landscapes are viewed. In this sense, perhaps above all else, they do not seem to posit an originary viewing/ depicting subject, to whose experience the picture offers the viewer access in turn. This is redoubled by the emphatic flatness of these pictures—just so many architectural facades imposed on one another. Where Hartley maintains a tension (between its proffer of a view, and yet at the same time, refusal to assign that vision to a singular viewer), thus emptying out the position the viewer occupies before the painting, Demuth’s landscapes don’t seem to emanate from any particular, specifiable vantage, and in this sense, have an almost anonymous quality.

V. Layered References & Missed Encounters

If Demuth’s landscapes depart from the conventions codified in both the U.S. and Europe in the nineteenth-century, they resonate with a trope common to nineteenth-century nature writing: accounts in which an experience of the landscape is somehow unrealized. In “Elusive Landscapes and Shifting Grounds,” DeLue offers a series of examples in which writers describe “a difficulty, even a failure” of vision, one that is “obstructed” and “obscured.”220 In his 1835
account of a visit to Niagara Falls, perhaps the quintessential nineteenth-century signifier of sublime American nature, Nathaniel Hawthorn, for example, asks himself “Were my long desires fulfilled?” “Had I seen Niagara?” Not quite, or not satisfactorily anyway; he answers with dismay, “Oh that I had never heard of Niagara till I beheld it!” As DeLue summarizes, Hawthorn realizes “that he had been made as if blind to the falls by previous and countless encounters with representations of Niagara, from poems and travel narratives to paintings and the decorative scenery that adorned dinner plates—the very words and images that had made him so eager to see this most sublime of sights in the first place.”

In “Summer on the Lakes, in 1843” Margaret Fuller likewise recounts to her readers of how, instead of the “lofty emotions” she had expected before the great falls, she found herself “strangely indifferent” to the thing at hand. “When I arrived in sight of them I merely felt ‘ah, yes, here is the fall, just as I have seen it in a picture.’” Happier, she imagines, echoing Hawthorn, “were those first discoverers of Niagara, those who could come upon this view unawares and upon that, whose feelings were entirely their own.” In these (failed) encounters, the status of the landscape as already pictured, already seen, stands in the way of experience.

The accounts presented by Hawthorn and Fuller of an environment mediated by so many representations that came before calls to mind the palimpsestic structure that underlies paintings ranging from Hartley to the Wedekind series. Indeed, if the experience (or lack thereof, as it were) common to both Hawthorne and Fuller’s accounts—characterized by each less as an obstruction of vision (neither’s seeing is literally impaired) than a kind of “missed encounter”—could be said to resonate with Demuth’s painting broadly, it has particular purchase on his landscapes. In its reference to an architectural past, Demuth’s After Sir Christopher Wren, for example suggests an environment mediated by so many representations that came before.
Consider in this light the effect of the reference encoded in the title *Aucassin and Nicolette*, which imbues its inanimate architectural forms with an interiority/subjectivity palpably lacking in Demuth’s figures [cf. Figures 165 and 60]. The title of this 1921 tempera on academy board explicitly references an extant text, in this case an anonymously authored medieval French love story. Yet where we might expect to find two lovers, Demuth instead presents us with the chimney and water tower of the Armstrong manufacturing complex in his hometown of Lancaster, PA.²²³

Demuth returned to this motif at least twice over the following decade. The 1931 oil on canvas *Chimney and Water Tower*—one of the last major works Demuth produced before his health took a precipitous decline in the three years preceding his death in 1935—depicts the same structures but from a shifted perspective and a different angle of view [see Figures 151 and 153]. *Chimney and Water Tower* places the viewer at both a greater distance from and far below the architecture at center. The imposing structures seem to bear down on us ominously from above, the inky-black form of the water tower posed against the impending darkness of the muddy gray sky in the top register of the composition.

By contrast, *Aucassin and Nicolette* places us, or rather fails to place us—and as we have seen, this is characteristic of the landscapes Demuth painted in the first flush of his practice in that genre in the years around 1920—in a kind of nowhere space midway up the façade. The red-bricked building in the lower foreground, for example, which situated placed in front of the two primary structures, has been cut off by the lower demarcation of the frame just before the apex of its roof. Here, the two structures are closer together, and the palette warmer than in the later rendition.
But perhaps the starkest difference between the two paintings lies in their respective titles—one, personal and literary, the other architectural and purely descriptive. The text *Aucassin and Nicolette* had currency in Demuth’s circle. It had been a favorite of William Carlos Williams’ in the early 1920s, and in 1922 Walter Pater’s essay on it was re-published. Applied as a title to Demuth’s 1921 landscape, it lends the intertwined forms of the two structures an anthropomorphic quality, as Barbara Haskell and Betsy Fahlman among others have remarked.

In this respect, my argument that Demuth treats the landscape itself as already a kind of picture extends the claims I’ve developed in Chapters 1 (vis-à-vis the portraits) and 2 (vis-à-vis the illustrations) that, counter to the central through-line of the extant Demuth literature, the meaning of these works can’t be reduced to or even necessarily located in Demuth himself. More than that, Chapters 1 and 2 have established that Demuth’s painting isn’t about any singular experience—not only because the artist himself did not define the subject as such (as singular, individuated) but also to the degree that the motivation for his painting—and thus its meaning—isn’t derived in any direct sense from the phenomenal experience of the body—any body—in the world.

If this quality is something especially evident in Demuth’s landscapes—if it is particularly apropos to these works—it is because it distinguishes Demuth’s practice from the concerns that typically drive or animate that genre—materiality, experience of nature, the specificity, or at least the feel of place (physicality, bodily being, spatiality and so forth). By contrast, Demuth’s landscapes—and indeed, his experimentation with and boundary-pushing across genres—suggest that meaning and subjectivity is a product not of the body’s encounter in or with the world, but some other set of relationships—between self and other, subject and
object, word and image; at the palimpsestic intersection, this is all to say, of multiple and layered forms of representation.
Epilogue. The Aesthetics of Bodily Contemplation

Across the final surface—the touchable bloom, if it were a peach—of any fine painting is written for those who dare to read that which the painter knew, that which he hoped to find out, or that which he—whatever.

— Charles Demuth, “Across A Greco is Written” (1929)

I. Objects of Inattention

More than a decade after Demuth concluded the Wedekind series, and a few years before his death in 1935, he returned to the genre of illustration to produce A Distinguished Air (1930), a single picture based loosely on Robert McAlmon’s titular “Grim Fairy Tale” [Figure 87]. McAlmon’s text, the only contemporary work of fiction Demuth ever took for source material, had been published in a limited edition of 115 six years prior, in 1924. Demuth and McAlmon were personally acquainted through William Carlos Williams, who had co-edited the little magazine Contact with McAlmon in the early part of the decade. A type-written manuscript of “Distinguished Air,” the first story in McAlmon’s volume, held today in the Richard Weyand Papers at Yale, indicates that Demuth was likely privy to the text prior to its formal publication, and the resulting picture is inscribed at lower left to the author.

A Distinguished Air presents aesthetic contemplation as intimately bound up with bodily contemplation, and ties both activities to the practice of representation. Even less literally illustrative than his previous literary illustrations, the picture might more accurately be characterized as an imaginary moment or extrapolation from its source text. Specifically, Demuth transposes McAlmon’s opening scene, originally set in a Weimar-era Berlin “queer cafe,” into the space of a gallery or museum. The composition is structured around a play of gazes. Five subjects form a semicircle around a sculptural object placed atop a pedestal at center, including two couples (female and male at far left and two men at center, their backs turned to
the viewer) as well as the additional singular figure of a red-headed woman somewhat evocative of Lulu decked-out in evening attire at far right.

The object that holds their attention—or indeed fails to—makes a clear allusion to Brancusi’s 1915-1916 sculpture, *Princess X* [Figure 166]. Yet, in its translation from sculpture into painting, polished bronze into watercolor, this object has become dauby and bodily and material—Brancusi’s sculpture-as-(hardly-implicit)-phallus made over into a veritable penis.\(^{227}\) Presumably organized around the narrative premise of aesthetic contemplation, the picture’s tension and interest hinges on the figures’ inattention to this object. Just as Demuth has made over the aesthetic object into a body, that form seems to have lost its privileged status as the object of focus. For the looking that is enacted by these figures is at one another’s “actual” bodies, which transpires under the guise of looking at art. The downcast eyes of the foppish gentleman in a bowler hat—the male member of the (supposedly) heterosexual duo at left—glance toward the lower body of the sailor at center. The sailor, meanwhile, doesn’t return his gaze, but neither does he appear to attend to the alleged object of their collective focus. Rather, he directs his gaze vaguely off to the right, though it is difficult to determine which figure has captured his attention. Because Demuth only provides a three-quarter profile of the sailor’s turned face, it remains unclear whether he looks at his partner—the man at center in coattails—or at the woman in the red evening gown at far right.

What results from these ambiguities is a weave of indeterminate gazes which, if followed, leads the viewer’s own gaze to “circumambulate” the sculpture. The play of all of unreciprocated looks creates a circuitry of missed encounters that lends the picture a kind of dimensionality or ‘in-the-round’ quality, as it materializes in the “air” between its figures. As in the sculptural conceit of *The Three Graces*, which gives the viewer three separate nudes, each
presented at a different angle, Demuth delivers the Brancusi-esque/Princess X/nude-as-phallus as refracted through this not-quite-interconnected network of sight lines. The painting of a female nude on the back wall, which Demuth has lightly sketched in penciled-outline, presides over the scene, bringing the notion of the intertwinement of aesthetic and sexual gazing to bear on the picture. Through a circuit of “inattentive” gazes, Demuth suggests that the erotic operates through display, rather than as a function of sensory experience.  

II. Objects at Attention

What is the ‘personal dimension’ of a painting? What aspects of a painting’s structure are supplied, not by the ‘person’ making it, but by the assumptions and decorum of the wider practice of which the individual picture is a part?

— Anne M. Wagner, “Why Monet Gave Up Figure Painting” (1994)

In the same year that Demuth painted A Distinguished Air he produced a series of pictures that skirt the line between the nude and the pornographic [Figures 167-170]. These include Three Sailors on the Beach, Four Male Figures, Two Sailors Urinating, and Three Sailors Urinating. These works harken back to a genre of picture Demuth made roughly between 1915 and 1917, which depict the sites and subjects of New York’s underground, and often gay culture in this period [Figures 172-179]. The pendant pair of Eight o’clock images, which I bring to bear in Chapter 2 as evidence of Demuth’s interest in pointing to or otherwise registering that which has been absented or veiled, are characteristic. As are the series of contemporaneous Turkish bath scenes, several of which picture groupings of two or three men in circular or semi-circular arrangements, with their bodies facing one another and their backs turned against the viewer.

The distinction between the earlier series of homoerotic pictures and the more explicit,
1930 group is the latter’s self-conscious thematic of display, or what we might describe as a theatrical mode of displaying display. Indeed, the bulging eyes of the sailor at the center of *Three Sailors on the Beach* skirt the line of caricature. As opposed to “nudes” or genre scenes or paintings of bathers in which genitalia appear as though incidentally visible, the 1930 paintings directly depict men showing each other their genitals. While *A Distinguished Air* recalls the veiled treatment of erotic encounters evident in the earlier series, it shares with the more explicitly sexual works a concern with the dynamics of exhibition(ism) and consumption.

Demuth’s erotic paintings were never publically exhibited, and are mostly held to this day in private collections. In both their content and their lack of public display these works most closely conform to the “private” argument so often deployed to account for the illegibility of Demuth’s painting. In the secondary literature, these images have been reduced to records of Demuth’s unconsummated desire. Speculating about what she terms “[t]he conspicuous display of genitalia in these works,” Barbara Haskell proposes that they represent “fantasies rather than chronicles of actual encounters” and served as “an outlet for [Demuth’s] frustrations.” Such readings are, as I have discussed, not restricted to the erotics. Wanda Corn argues that the portraits, which she characterizes as “secret love letters,” communicate by way of a coded language that Demuth purposefully deployed to mediate the “lonely” distance between himself and his cohort, a distance, she speculates, that resulted from his being gay.

By reducing Demuth’s painting to his (private, individual, essential) person, such readings artificially isolate the meaning and significance of the artwork from the cultural fabric and broader contexts (of history, ideology, modernism) to which that work responded and out of which it emerged. In the case of Demuth, the reason—and reasoning—underlying such omissions can be traced directly to the core values of Stieglitz-circle picture theory itself. These
readings are representative of the belief, underlying much of the secondary literature, that Demuth’s retreat from the world of familiar appearance—his recourse to a language of symbol and object in lieu of icon and body—was rooted, as T. J. Clark puts it, “in a recognition of the deep structures of ‘subjective’ apprehension, and therefore the reconstruction of a shared world.” Clark is describing Daniel Henry Kahnweiler’s desire to locate a certain universality of experience in Picasso’s abstraction, but my point here is that the iconographic-cum-psychobiographic approach to Demuth’s paintings is rooted in the same desire. As is characteristic of the “physiognomic” methodology more broadly, to return to the terms established in Chapter 1, this perspective not only views Demuth’s work as rooted in the notion of a shared world but might itself be understood as just such an attempt at reconstruction.

Moreover, to read these works as transparent to Demuth’s own desires obfuscates other readings—the point about display I gesture toward above, the status of the body/figure in representation, the disjuncture between touch and vision, and the disjunction between the vulgarity of these picture’s content and the delicacy of their form. It also occludes an exploration of the interrelation of the queer with the hidden, restricted, and invisible. Pointing to the initials “C. D.” which Demuth has inscribed on the arm of the figure at left in Three Sailors on the Beach, Haskell extrapolates that he “may have fancied having a relationship” with a sailor he met in Provincetown. The sense of absence Haskell intuits in this picture—and indeed, perhaps even loss—is not wholly misplaced, and not unrelated to the caricatural quality of its figures I note above. But I read Demuth’s initials differently. In concert with the theatrical looking on the part of the sailor at center as contrasted against the equally exaggerated blankness in the eyes of his partner at left, the inscription suggests that Demuth registers in this picture the severing of touch from the visual field. Krauss argues that Picasso begins to write on his
canvases in the summer of 1912 because he “has come to the point where what he most wants to represent in his work is the very thing he has no means to depict directly.”\textsuperscript{240} Demuth returned to the practice of figure painting in the summer of 1930 after a ten year lapse.\textsuperscript{241}

In inscribing his initials onto the body of the sailor, Demuth likewise might be said to “tell” rather than “show.” But what is told by—or absented from—Demuth’s pictures isn’t a bodily, phenomenal, material experience, so much as something that was never there to begin with. Which is not to say that Demuth didn’t make or consummate meaningful connections with others, sexual and/or otherwise. Though as we have seen, this is a consistent motif of the scholarly literature. But rather that the absence Demuth’s paintings so consistently register doesn’t point back to the private, interior experience of their author. Like the space opened up by the missing bodies in Demuth’s portraits, or that which he manifests between text and image in his illustrations, that absence comes to be filled—deeply, complexly, circuitously—by relations of all kinds.

III. A Dialogic Subject

There is no experience outside its embodiment in signs. From the outset, then, there cannot even be a question of a radical qualitative difference between interior and exterior…It is not experience that organizes expression, but, to the contrary, expression that organizes experience, that, for the first time, gives it form and determines its direction.

— Mikhail Bakhtin, “The Dialogical Principle” (1940)\textsuperscript{242}

My approach to Demuth’s work has followed a discursive/dialogic mode in the sense deployed by Mikhail Bakhtin. “Meaning is personal,” writes Bakhtin, in a passage which applies with precision to the claims I have staked for Demuth’s painting. “There is always within it a question, an appeal to, and an anticipation of, the answer; there are always two subjects in it (as
Bakhtin’s concept of the dialogic resonates with Demuth’s at once dispersive and deeply connected practice, but also highlights the distinction I have worked to draw between the interpersonal nature of his work and the psychobiographic approaches with which it has been met. As Rosalind Krauss articulates, “[Bakhtin’s] model holds out a way of analyzing the social context’s immanence to the work of art: of seeing how the work, as a discursive event, interpolates the social not through an act of reflection, but through the medium of the intertext.”

The meaning of these works, I have argued, does not derive from any single origin or originary self, but issues rather from the relationship between picture and person. That is, if portraiture could be said to privilege the subject, and expressionism the picture, Demuth’s paintings imbricate the two. His model is in this sense an intersubjective one (all these different reflections and joinings, mediations and mirrorings).

The present study builds from the premise that Demuth was invested—above all—in exploring neither experience nor perception, but means and effects, and those of genre in particular.

To return in closing to *A Distinguished Air*: Beneath the muddy brown wash with which Demuth has treated the central sculpture, we can make out a pencil-drawn visage—an abstracted, geometricized face, which belongs to at least one other Brancusi sculpture—*Mademoiselle Pogany I* (1912) or *II* (1919), or *III* (1931), or perhaps his *Danaïde* (1912) [Figures 180-183]. Signaling that this object stands in not (or not only) for a singular sculptural referent but a collapse of citations, the face inscribed on the form at center reminds us that *Princess X* had itself been intensely worked over by Brancusi before arriving at its final, highly polished, abstracted form [Figures 184-188]. If Demuth’s treatment—note the looser, more modulated handling of pigment, bodily/organic brown wash, and the form’s seemingly slumped posture—translates Brancusi’s archetypal form into a more embodied state, in penciling in the visage of
Mademoiselle Pogany, Demuth ascribes (or reverts) the abstracted Princess “X” with (or back to) the referential specificity of portraiture. Translation (of styles, of media, from poetry to painting) is a key term for Demuth, though he mobilized this interest to produce a body of work that continually tests the conditions (and sometimes surpasses the limits) of the capacity of pictures and language to connect, transmit, and communicate, and in doing so, probes the very possibility of a shared world.

Portraiture proved uniquely fertile ground to pursue the questions that drove Demuth’s painting over the course of the 1920s, sustaining a nearly decade-long practice despite the fact that it resulted in works that, from start to last, neither sold nor were particularly well-received by their critics. Routinely noted, these facts have gone relatively un-probed in the extant studies.

Georges Didi-Huberman argues that before addressing the questions intrinsic to portraiture, we must “ask ourselves certain more directly methodological questions: what exactly do we expect from such an object, what kind of knowledge does it permit, what kind of conflict does it evoke in us…how does it influence our way of looking?” If the “we” with whom Didi-Huberman identifies and to whom he addresses, in short, is the we of art history—we art historians—I see Demuth as having been, himself, so “methodologically” inclined. Like all pictures, the poster portraits structure particular ways of looking, and like many, they evoke conflict in their viewers. Most importantly, by absenting the body, and so foregoing traditional portraiture’s most privileged means of representation, Demuth brings us face to face with the limits of our seeing and knowing, and thereby challenges our preconceptions of what kind of knowledge (and to what kind of subject) the genre of portraiture—and the medium of painting more broadly—grant access. These are the concerns that lie at the heart of Demuth’s practice.
The dominant accounts of prewar American Art have remained remarkably Vasarian: stories of the rise and decline of artists, journals, and galleries, anchored by charismatic personalities and oriented around schematic divisions (Stieglitz vs. Duchamp, America vs. Europe, rear- vs. avant-garde). Yet Demuth challenges such binary oppositions. A self-styled dandy in the 19th-century tradition of the flâneur, he had a proverbial foot on each shore of the Atlantic, and produced a body of work as well as a social practice that straddled divides between the Stieglitz circle and New York Dada, Synthetic Cubism and _Le rappel a l’ordre_.

Certainly, what I have described as “Stieglitz circle picture theory” emerges as a relatively coherent entity in the correspondence, exhibition practice, and criticism produced in and around Stieglitz and his galleries. As scholars such as Corn and Marcia Brennan have crucially mapped, that discourse prized the constellation of essentialist subjectivity, authentic expression, organicism, and nativist identity (spirit, soil, nature, America). Both have argued, and I fundamentally agree that, as applied by Stieglitz and his critics to each of the artists that comprised the “circle,” this narrative was hugely effective in establishing a cohesive identity for the group. Indeed, its success can be gauged by the degree to which it remains largely operative to this day.247

Because we have by and large taken Stieglitz at his own (expressionist, essentialist) word, the history of this avant-garde has been artificially cut off from (and/or used as a foil against) the broader narratives of the prewar avant-garde, European and otherwise. This has done a disservice both to our definition of modernism as well to our understanding of the work produced by the artists who claimed or have been retrospectively ascribed such association, that of Demuth certainly and perhaps especially, as well as others.248 Yet it would be challenging to make my same argument vis-à-vis a figure such as Hartley or Dove. For it is Demuth’s
liminality—his proximity to yet distance from that discourse, and the framing of it that transpires both literally and internally within his portrait series—that makes this artist a particularly generative vehicle for its parsing.\textsuperscript{249}

My claim isn’t that Demuth's performative engagement with Stieglitz-circle picture theory was a conscious, critical deconstruction—which would be hard to prove as Demuth clearly courted Stieglitz’s professional attention, actively soliciting his approval and representation. Rather, the portraits respond to, negotiate the circle’s key values and in doing so challenge the prevalent tendency to collapse discourse and practice in this period. More dialogic than deconstructive, the endeavor was fundamentally constructive in its ends. Through that dialogue, I have argued, Demuth posited an alternate model of the picture, and of the subject, and most crucially, of the relationship between the two. The intervention—and contribution—this study seeks to make is not that this model of the subject and of the picture is unique to Demuth, but that it runs counter to how Demuth has been read at the levels of both approach, or form (psychobiography, iconography) and content (the readings that result from such approaches).

A new generation of scholars, partly in the wake of but also as a corrective to several significant studies of the Stieglitz circle published in the last ten years, has begun to revisit the artistic and literary practices of the early-twentieth century in the U.S., casting new light on long-overlooked networks of interrelationship and influence, notably the transatlantic and trans-pacific, but also within the thick, rooted discourse that defined itself as American Modernism. I see my work as part of this effort to question entrenched categories and established interpretations. Foregoing any essentialist definition of what it means to be “American,” and for that matter “modern,” I trace multiple and contested notions of identity in representation as defined not only in terms of the national and the native, but also the cultural, social, and personal.
In privileging questions of representation over those of national identity and personal experience, I demonstrate that the work produced under the aegis of American Modernism cannot be fully understood apart from its own reflections on the nature of the pictorial and specific questions of intention and interpretation. This study weighs such considerations on Demuth’s part in relation to the social and intellectual contexts from which they emerged, even as it resists using biography as an explanatory rubric as well as the tendency to collapse art theory and material practice in this period. Arguing neither for Demuth’s exceptionalism nor against his marginality, I treat his singularity as a lens that brings into focus a richer and more complex account of the formal questions and historical pressures that shaped picture making in the early decades of the last century.
1 Williams Carlos Williams, “The Great Figure,” in Sour Grapes: A Book of Poems (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1921), 78.

2 In addition to Williams, Demuth’s subjects included the painters Georgia O’Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, John Marin, and Charles Duncan, vaudevillian Bert Savoy, and writers Wallace Stevens, Eugene O’Neill, and Gertrude Stein. Demuth only completed studies for the portraits of Stevens and Hartley, though the latter has been exhibited widely as such and, as a result, taken on the status of a completed work.

3 Duncan, like Demuth himself, operated at the periphery of the Stieglitz circle in the 1920s. As in the case of many of the artists who would later comprise the Pop generation (Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, and Roy Lichtenstein), Duncan got his start in advertising. On his practice as a sign painter, see Susan Chan Egan, “Painting Signs: Demuth’s Portrait of Charles Duncan,” American Art 22, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 90–101.

4 “The 1500 self-portrait,” the full passage in Koerner’s introduction reads “is a statement less about Dürer’s person than it is about his art. It proclaims that art and artist are co-substantial; that the value and meaning of an image derives by its being by someone; that the artist paints, as Dürer himself writes, to ‘make himself seen in his works;’ and that every signed picture is in some sense a self-portrait.” The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), xviii.

5 “Masterpieces” is the descriptor used in the USPS press release announcing the series’ issuance. United States Postal Service, “Postal News,” March 7, 2013. The series includes the following works in addition to The Figure Five: Stuart Davis, House and Street (1931); Aaron Douglas, The Prodigal Son (1927); Arthur Dove, Fog Horns (1929); Marcel Duchamp, Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2 (1912); Marsden Hartley, Painting, Number 5 (1914-15); John Marin, Sunset, Maine Coast (1919); Gerald Murphy, Razor (1924); Georgia O’Keefe, Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico/Out Back of Marie’s II (1930); Man Ray, Noire et Blanche (1926); Charles Sheeler, American Landscape (1930); and Joseph Stella, Brooklyn Bridge (1919–20).

6 Demuth willed The Figure Five, along with the majority of other portraits in the series (none of which sold during his lifetime) to Georgia O’Keeffe, who bequeathed it to The Metropolitan Museum of Art as part of the Alfred Stieglitz Collection in 1949. That O’Keeffe gave the remainder of the portraits in her possession to Yale University, but interestingly to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library as opposed to the Yale University Art Gallery, reflects their uncertain status as artworks versus archival documents. This fact accounts for the relative obscurity of the portrait series as a whole, and is at least in part the reason that The Figure Five’s status as a portrait (in relation to the other works in the series) has not been rigorously theorized in the extant literature.

7 Bram Dijkstra, for example, describes “The Great Figure” as “a snapshot taken by the poet’s perception” and The Figure Five as Demuth’s “transposition” of the poem “into what might be called [Williams’s own] ‘native’ visual medium.” The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech: Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 173–74. Along the same lines, Wanda Corn emphasizes how “remarkably attentive” Demuth is to the “raw data of Williams’s poem,” while Edward A. Aiken argues that The Figure Five “captured the flux of sensation so vital to ‘The Great Figure’ in a singularly dynamic and stunning form.” See Wanda Corn, The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 204; and Edward A. Aiken, “‘I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold’: Charles Demuth’s Emblematic Portrait of William Carlos Williams,” Art Journal 46 (Fall 1987), 179. See also John Wilmerding, “Poetry in Motion, Expressed in Paint,” Wall Street Journal, December 29, 2012, Life and Style section.

8 Demuth began work on The Figure Five in 1926. The earliest reference to the painting in the archival record can be found in a letter from Demuth to Agnes Boulton O’Neill dated July of 1926 wherein Demuth reports that he has “done” a portrait of Williams. He continued working on the painting intermittently over the next three years. See
Charles Demuth to Agnes Boulton O'Neill, ca. July 1926, Agnes Boulton Collection of Eugene O'Neill, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Library (hereafter YCAL), MSS 122 Box 1, Folder 35. The Figure Five was first shown at The Intimate Gallery in “Charles Demuth: Five Paintings” (April 29–May 18, 1929), an exhibition which also included the portraits of Eugene O’Neill (titled Longhi on Broadway) and Gertrude Stein (commonly known today as Love, Love, Love, but titled in that exhibition Design for a Broadway Poster). The checklist for this show dates The Figure Five to 1927, though 1928 has been inscribed on the verso of the canvas (it is unclear by whom). See “Charles Demuth: Five Paintings,” checklist of paintings for an exhibition at The Intimate Gallery held April 29–May 18, 1929, Intimate Gallery Papers, Rare Books in the Joyce F. Menschel Photography Library, Department of Photographs, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and Barbara Haskell, Charles Demuth (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with H. N. Abrams, 1987), 191n32. Williams weighed in on The Figure Five as late as 1929, writing to Demuth in May of that year about revisions: “I feel in this picture that the completion that was once felt and made the composition as a whole has been lost and that you have tried twenty times to recapture and that every try has left a trace somewhere so that the whole is tortured. It needs some new seep of the imagination through the whole to make it one. It is no longer one but—not even 5. ... O hell, I suppose you’re tired of the picture. Maybe Stieglitz’s suggestions are all that are necessary: to frame the picture better and to make the gold five a smooth metallic figure instead of pocky as it is now.” William Carlos Williams, The Selected Letters, ed. John C. Thirlwall (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957), 97.

9 Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, August 6, 1928, Stieglitz (Alfred) / Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL. The terribleness Demuth describes here is in reference to his health, a result of the diabetes with which he had been diagnosed in 1921, shortly before he commenced work on the portrait series. Demuth’s health steadily declined over the course of the following decade. Although his condition would stabilize for durations, the summer of 1928 found him suffering an acute episode. These would recur at periodic intervals, keeping him largely bound to his childhood home in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, until his death in 1935.

10 Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, “Identification,” in The Language of Psycho-Analysis, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973), 205. My thinking about what Demuth’s citational mode shares with the psychoanalytic concept of identification has its origins in the following passage from Rosalind Krauss’s “Notes on the Index” on Lacan’s mirror stage, in which Krauss describes the opposite (the individual’s relationship to an externalized image of the self): “The mirror stage involves the child’s self-identification through his double: his reflected image. In moving from a global, undifferentiated sense of himself towards a distinct, integrated notion of selfhood—one that could be symbolized through an individuated use of ‘I’ and ‘you’—the child recognizes himself as a separate object (a psychic gestalt) by means of his mirrored image. The self is felt, at this stage, only as an image of the self; and insofar as the child initially recognizes himself as an other, there is inscribed in that experience a primary alienation. Identity (self-identification) is primally fused with identification (a felt connection to someone else).” “Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America Part I,” October 3 (Spring 1977), 70. Demuth’s report of experiencing a “strange strangeness” resonates in particular with what Krauss describes here as an experience of primary alienation.

11 Demuth and Williams were close, nearly life-long interlocutors, and each had an influential hand in the development of the other’s style. Born the same year (1883), the friendship dates to their student days in Philadelphia, where they met in 1905 over a bowl of breakfast prunes at Mrs. Chain’s boarding house for men. Demuth was a student at The Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry at the time, Williams in medical school at The University of Pennsylvania. Of their first meeting. Williams later recalled, “Mrs. Chain’s prunes were the most wonderful. Watery tidbits. It was prunes or applesauce. Her daughter was simple I guess. Did her best to land one of the students, kept it up for twenty years. At that table I met one of my dearest friends. Will you have some bread? Yes. That look. It was enough. Youth is so rich. It needs no stage setting. Out went my heart to that face. There was something soft there, a reticence, a welcome, a loneliness that called to me. And he, he must have seen it in me too. We looked, two young men, and at once the tie was cemented. It was gauged accurately at once and sealed for all time. The other faces are so many prunes.” “The Great American Novel” (1923) in Imagination (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1970), 207. See also William Carlos Williams, The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams (New York: Random House, 1951), 249; and Haskell, Charles Demuth, 35–36. 1921, the year that Demuth painted Rue du singe qui pêche while on an extended trip to France, marked a period of particular closeness in their friendship. In the fall of that year, Williams, by then a practicing doctor in Rutherford, New Jersey, wrote “The Great Figure.” Some months later he would be instrumental, perhaps even life-saving, in facilitating Demuth’s access to a new experimental treatment—insulin therapy—after Demuth suffered
his first diabetic outbreak in Paris. Demuth was among the first patients in the US to receive insulin therapy under the care of Dr. Frederick Allen at The Physiatric Institute, a sanitarium in Morristown, New Jersey. Albert Barnes funded his stay. See Charles Demuth to Albert Barnes, undated, Barnes Foundation, Archives and Special Collections (hereafter BFASC), Folder Demuth, Charles, 1922, 2 of 3, AR.ABC.1922.39; and Richard J. Wattenmaker, American Paintings and Works on Paper in the Barnes Foundation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 262–63. A 1922 portrait of Demuth by Alfred Stieglitz captures the effects of the outpatient regimen he was subjected to upon his release from the Morristown clinic, which consisted of a near-starvation diet that nearly killed him in and of itself [Figure 14]. He was readmitted to the sanitarium in 1923. Although the insulin treatments likely saved his life in the early 1920s, the decade in which he was most prolific, Demuth would never again regain full health after his diabetic attack in Paris in 1921. The relationship between Demuth and Williams is well-traversed terrain. In addition to those essays by Dijkstra, Corn, Aiken, and Wilmerding cited above, see especially James E. Breslin, “William Carlos Williams and Charles Demuth: Cross-Fertilization in the Arts,” Journal of Modern Literature 6, no. 2 (April 1977): 256–58; Dickran Tashjian, William Carlos Williams and the American Scene, 1920–1940 (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978); William Anthony Rozaitis, “Desire Reduced to a Petal’s Span: William Carlos Williams, Charles Demuth, and Floral Representation in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century America,” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1997); and Michael North, “The Sign of Five: Williams’s ‘The Great Figure’ and its Background,” Criticism 30, no. 3 “Modern Poetry and the Visual Arts” (Summer 1988): 325-348.

12 Williams, Autobiography, 172.

13 I borrow this notion of “no bedrock” from Robin Kelsey, who uses it to describe Stieglitz circle picture theory: “Members [of the Stieglitz circle], by and large, promoted an approach to problems of modernity roughly opposite to that toward which contemporary scholars are inclined. T.J. Clark has said that modernism’s two great contradictory wishes were to lead its audience toward a recognition of the social reality of the sign and to turn the sign back to a bedrock of ‘World/Nature/Sensation/Subjectivity which the to and fro of capitalism had all but destroyed.’ At the present moment [2002], many scholars in the humanities work from the premise that social and discursive operations fix and unfix the constraints that produce identity and signification in cultural production. Consequently, historical efforts of modernism towards the acknowledgement of the social reality of the sign tend to meet with ready receptivity, whereas efforts toward the regrounding of the sign in the world tend to meet with disdain. For the most part, the Stieglitz circle noisily advocated the latter. More specifically, correspondence and criticism by members of the Stieglitz circle brims with talk of rootedness, soil, organismic, and essences.” “The Stieglitz Circle Retraced,” Modernism/Modernity 9, no. 1 (January 2002): 178. Kelsey’s essay is a joint review of Marcia Brennan’s Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001) and Celeste Connor’s Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924–1934 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001). Kelsey quotes T.J. Clark, Farewell to An Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism (New Haven: Yale University Press), 9–10.

14 My suggestion is not that the poem is unmediated, of course, but rather that this was Williams’s own objective/fantasy. Michael North offers a compelling critique of such claims made on behalf of Williams and by Williams himself. In reference to the origin story Williams recounts in his Autobiography, North points out, for example, that “the anecdote cannot strictly be true…since the poem places the scene at night (among the lights) and in the rain, not on a hot July day. Williams’s claim of instantaneous transcription is therefore not to be believed and the critical accounts that emphasize the visual immediacy of the poem must be questioned.” “The Sign of Five,” 332.

15 As is typical of most scholarship on The Figure Five, Edward A. Aiken’s myopic focus on the source poem leads him to (over-) emphasize Demuth’s interest in capturing something of perceptual or sensory experience: “The painting makes visual the process of Williams’s poetics: experience an event; lift it out of the commonplace and the flow of life through the act of structuring it; and make of that structure a design, a poem … A close reading of the poem clearly reveals that the subject is not, in the first instance, a screaming fire engine, but rather Williams’s experience of the spectacle of a fire engine bursting into his consciousness and then quickly receding into the night … Demuth has further reduced the poet’s already concentrated report of the experience with the fire truck to a dynamic composition.” “I Saw the Figure Five,” 179–80. Robin Jaffee Frank also maintains that Williams’s interest lies in sensory experience and that “Demuth conveys [that] act of individual perception.” See Frank, “Charles Demuth Poster Portraits: 1923–1929,” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1995), 171. Such claims, however, are
categorically impossible. The Figure Five can’t capture the original individual perception because the source of the painting wasn’t Demuth’s own perceptual experience to begin with.


17 Henry McBride, “Demuth,” The New York Sun, April 4, 1926, reprinted in McBride, The Flow of Art, Essays and Criticism, ed. Daniel Catton Rich (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 218. The term “lusty” is Marin’s own: “I am afraid that in the crazed desire to be modern—to have ideas—to be original—to belong to the tribe intelligentsia—we have gotten away from the paint job which is a lusty thing,” he wrote Stieglitz in 1931, “I almost feel like saying ‘what you have to say don’t amount to much’—but the lusty desire to splash about—submerge oneself in a medium—you might come up to surface with something worthwhile.” John Marin to Alfred Stieglitz, July 20, 1931, quoted in Barbara Rose, Readings in American Art 1900–1975 (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), 61. Demuth himself supposedly expressed a similar sentiment to George Biddle: “John Marin and I drew our inspiration from the same sources. He brought his up in buckets and spilled much along the way. I dipped mine out with a teaspoon but I never spilled a drop.” Demuth quoted in Biddle, An American Artist’s Story (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1939), 216.


19 Wright, “Demuth,” xcvi.


22 There is some confusion in the literature as to which iterations of the series made their debut in “Seven Americans,” and, as will become important for the argument I make in what follows, whether any additional paintings by Demuth were shown inside the Anderson Galleries. Barbara Haskell claims that “in addition to [O’Keeffe, Dove, and Duncan], Demuth included sketches or watercolors (the reviews do not specify) of a still life, a Hartley poster, or both,” 190n14. Sarah Greenough, by contrast, maintains that Hartley wasn’t included. See “Alfred Stieglitz, Facilitator, Financier, and Father, Presents Seven Americans,” in Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries (Washington: National Gallery of Art; Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2000), 516–517n69.

Contemporary reviewers themselves disagreed over exactly which of the portraits they had seen. Several mention a Hartley portrait, and at least one, Forbes Watson, described two (possibly additional) still lifes by Demuth in his review. These we might infer were hung in the main space of the exhibition, though Watson himself doesn’t specify and by “still lifes” he may have been referring to Hartley and Dove [Figures 5 and 6]. See Forbes Watson, “Seven American Artists Sponsored by Stieglitz,” The World, March 15, 1925, Section 3, 5. Another critic, Helen

Demuth never seems to have executed the portrait of Duchamp, a fact which calls into question the reliability of the catalogue on this score. The most plausible explanation for the inclusion of the Duchamp portrait is that the catalogue was printed before Demuth had delivered on the goods. Demuth’s correspondence with Stieglitz in the preceding months suggests that rather than proceeding linearly through his slated line-up, declaring one picture done and proceeding onto the next, he would shift his attention back and forth between works. Complicating issues of dating, titling, and chronology, this practice would prove typical of Demuth’s approach to the series over the next several years. See, for example, Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, April 15, 1925, Stieglitz (Alfred) / Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL.

23 Demuth’s first recorded use of the term “poster” can be traced to the preceding year in a letter to Stieglitz. See Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, January 16, 1924, Stieglitz (Alfred) / Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL. The question of what we should call these pictures—“posters,” following Demuth; “poster portraits,” the description most often used by subsequent scholars, initially ascribed by early reviewers and cemented by Abraham Davidson, the first art historian to write specifically on this series; or “portrait posters,” the term Stieglitz employed when the first four were initially shown at the Anderson Galleries in 1925—has been debated in almost all of the literature on this work. There is also debate over what category of portraiture these pictures fall under more generally (abstract, non-figurative, symbolic, emblematic, non-mimetic, etc.). The most overarching categorization is perhaps “symbolic” portraiture. Wanda Corn prefers the designation “referential,” based on the illegibility of Demuth’s symbols and the way in which they often seem to have multiple referents. Vivien Green Fryd, following Frank, suggests “emblematic portraiture.” Drawing on the work of Karl Josef Höltingen and Michael Bath, Fryd defines the emblem as a combination of text and image that requires deciphering or decoding. In this sense, emblem might be the most technically correct terminology, yet this term somewhat artificially sever the linkage between Demuth’s series and the specific traditions and conventions of portraiture as a genre, which as I argue in Chapter 1, is a crucial context for understanding their meaning. See Abraham A. Davidson, “The Poster Portraits of Charles Demuth,” Auction 3, no. 1 (September 1969), 28–31 and “Demuth’s Poster Portraits,” Artforum 17, no. 3 (November 1978): 54–57; Corn, The Great American Thing, 383; Frank, Charles Demuth Poster Portraits, 1923–1929 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 9; Vivien Green Fryd, “Georgia O’Keeffe’s Radiator Building: Gender, Sexuality, Modernism and Urban Imagery,” Winterthur Portfolio 33, no. 4 (Winter 2000), 289.

24 Operative between 1905 and 1917, 291 was the primary venue through which Stieglitz introduced a reluctant American art public to avant-garde practice in the years surrounding the Armory Show. 291 was the first gallery in the US to hold major exhibitions of the work of Auguste Rodin (January 1908; March–April 1910), Henri Matisse (April 1908; February–March 1910; March 1912), Henri Toulouse-Lautrec (December 1909–January 1910), Paul Cézanne (March 1911), Constantine Brancusi (March 1913), Francis Picabia (March 1913; December 1914–January 1915), and Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque (November 1914–December 1915).


26 On the continuity of purpose between “Seven Americans” and The Intimate Gallery, see Wilson, The Modern Eye, 19.

27 Other artists who often filled the “Number Seven” slot included Gaston Lachaise, Oscar Bluemner, Peggy Bacon, and Francis Picabia. See Greenough, Modern Art and America, 318. Demuth was represented in the following thirteen exhibitions in Stieglitz’s galleries between 1925 and 1939, including, with the exception of 1932, solo shows every spring between 1925 and 1931, and a memorial exhibition in 1939: “Recent Paintings by Charles

On the practice of portraiture as a means of establishing and maintaining group identity within the Stieglitz circle, see Corn, *The Great American Thing*, especially pages 223–237; and Brennan’s third chapter, “The Aesthetics of Intimacy,” in *Painting Gender*, 77–88. Corn argues that the genre “both flowed from and reinforced group solidarity among those who identified themselves as the country’s most progressive artists,” 223; while Brennan maintains that Stieglitz mobilized the genre to assert his “ideology” of intercorporal merger,” 77. As Bridget Alsdorf has established, the Impressionists likewise mobilized (group) portraiture to establish and maintain a group identity. This endeavor, however, came under considerable pressure from the very start: “By the book’s end,” Alsdorf signals in her introduction, “readers will see that their vision of association was predicated on exclusion and an impossible insistence on the boundaries of the individual. This model would go on to define the avant-garde.” *Fellow Men: Fantin-Latour and the Problem of the Group in Nineteenth-Century French Painting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 15. Alsdorf’s description rings true for the Stieglitz circle as well but with the terms reversed. As Brennan suggests, Stieglitz’s vision of association was predicated on the collapse of any such notion of bounded individuality.

Various permutations of these specific arguments show up in almost all the literature on this body of work, including but not limited to: Abraham Davidson’s two essays (1969 and 1978), Haskell, Frank, Brennan, and Fryd as well as in Jonathan Weinberg’s discussion of Demuth’s relationship to Stieglitz in “‘Some Unknown Thing’: The Illustrations of Charles Demuth,” *Arts Magazine* 61 (1986) and *Speaking for Vice* (1993). Charles Brock’s essay in Sarah Greenough’s catalogue is a notable exception. See “Charles Demuth: A Sympathetic Order,” in *Modern Art and America*, 363–380. The literature that stresses the aesthetic discourse of American exceptionalism that Stieglitz championed for our understanding Demuth’s work includes: Davidson, *Early American Modernist Painting*, 1981; Wanda Corn, *In the American Grain: The Billboard Poetics of Charles Demuth* (Poughkeepsie: Vassar College, 1991) and *The Great American Thing*, especially pages 193–238; Betsy Fahlman, *Pennsylvania Modern: Charles Demuth of Lancaster* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1983) and *Chimneys and Towers: Charles Demuth’s Late Paintings of Lancaster* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). These scholars tend to rely largely on Demuth’s own words, culled from his prodigious correspondence with Stieglitz, to shore up the claim for the influence of Stieglitz’s nativist aesthetics on Demuth’s painting. As I discuss in Chapter 3, there is a recursive problem here: such accounts tend to take Demuth’s pronouncements in his letters to Stieglitz (about America and art in general) at their word, without fully taking into consideration the context in which he made such claims. Demuth calculatedly cultivated this professional connection, and thus we can be certain that, at least to some degree, he (like many others) tended to spout Stieglitz’s own language right back at him.

Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 193. Marcia Brennan’s argument is also representative: “Just as Demuth’s undertaking the poster portraits indicates his desire to be included finally in Stieglitz’s circle, the physical placement of these objects in the gallery and the critical reception they garnered attest to his more marginal position.” *Painting Gender*, 188. At least two critics, Helen Appleton Read and Deogh Fulton, commented upon the portraits’ liminal display, the latter describing the series rather witheringly as the “side-show to the circus.” See Deogh Fulton, “Cabbages and Kings,” *International Studio* 81 (May 1925),146; and Read, “New York Exhibitions: Seven Americans,” 231.

Emily Farnham, “Charles Demuth: His Life, Psychology and Works,” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1959). Farnham published an abridged revision of her dissertation as a biography of Demuth in 1971. See *Charles Demuth: Behind a Laughing Mask* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971). Part of Farnham’s research included drafting questionnaires, which she circulated among Demuth’s closest friends and interlocutors, including Williams, Marcel Duchamp, George Biddle and others. Following a series of peremptory questions about Demuth’s materials, influences, and working methods, she asked: “Was Demuth a moody person, or was his smiling personality and wittiness only a mask?” As Jonathan Weinberg, who has written the most sophisticated analysis of the impact of Demuth’s sexuality on receptions of this work, has noted, “only George Biddle took the bait, writing flatly in response” that “Demuth was a homosexual, ‘fin de siècle.’” See Farnham, “Charles Demuth: His Life, Psychology and Works,” 951–58; and Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice*, 47.

34 Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, January 16, 1924, Stieglitz (Alfred) / Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL.


37 This argument builds on the recent diversification of readings of American Modernism on the part of scholars such as Kristina Wilson, who has likewise argued that, “the competing modes of vision found in these exhibitions indicate that the status of American modernism in the 1920s and 1930s was surprisingly unfixed.” Wilson, The Modern Eye, 15.

38 Robin Jaffee Frank also interprets Duncan as a meditation on illusion and reality. But where I emphasize the tension the band maintains between the real and representation (its both/and-ness), she reads it firmly as “an opening in the image, not a pole or ribbon superimposed upon it.” Charles Demuth: Poster Portraits, 1923-29 (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1995), 115n1.

39 Helen Appleton Read, “News and Views on Current Art,” Brooklyn Daily Eagle, March 15, 1925, section 2b; Glen Mullin, “Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans,” The Nation, May 20, 1925, 578; Critic Angela Hagen also spoke to the difficulty of unpacking this work, writing of the latter portraits on the occasion of their exhibition at An American Place in 1931: “We might call them sublimated posters, or we might call them phantasies of precision (if that were not too paradox) …Isolated figures and letters grow, even when rendered with hard sign-painter’s gold, into significance and meaning that certain cults have invested in numbers.” “Around the Galleries: Demuth Watercolors and Oils at ‘An American Place,’” Creative Art 8 (June 1931), 441–442. See also, “Art: Exhibitions of the Week, Seven Americans,” The New York Times, March 15, 1925, Section 8, 11; and Royal Cortissoz, “291, Mr. Alfred Stieglitz and His Services to Art,” New York Herald Tribune, March 15, 1925, Section 4, 12.

40 Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, July 5, 1925, Stieglitz (Alfred)/Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL.
Charles Demuth to Agnes Boulton O’Neill, July 1926, Agnes Boulton Collection of Eugene O’Neill, YCAL. This excerpt is one of the longest extant passages in which Demuth reflects in his own words on the subject of the portraits, and more crucially, among very few examples of such relayed to someone other than Stieglitz.


Frank suggests that the mask in Longhi functions as both a general allusion to theater and as a reference to O’Neill’s use of masks specifically. She quotes one contemporary reviewer who argued that “to achieve his purpose O’Neill uses masks, by which the audience can see the characters as they appear to the world and, when the masks are removed, as they really are...In other places the masks are spoken to as if the papier-mache [sic] moulds were living beings.” “The Play That Is Talked About,” 1926 review of the Klaw Theater Production, quoted in Frank, Charles Demuth, 91.

In this sense, The Figure Five, which includes Williams’s initials but not his full name, marks a transition between the early portraits, which prominently feature names, and the final three, which make no direct reference to their subjects.

I am not particularly concerned about which works properly constitute the series. I include them all. If Demuth’s letter to O’Neill doesn’t quite render the whole debate moot, at minimum it establishes Longhi on Broadway and The Figure Five as part of the series. As for the remaining portraits: Haskell and Kellner argue that Longhi on Broadway, Love, Love, Love, and Calla Lilies should not be considered portraits at all, and Haskell does not even fully count The Figure Five as such. See Haskell, Charles Demuth, 183; and Bruce Kellner, ed., Letters of Charles Demuth, American Artist, 1883-1935 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 81. Yet Henry McBride made the connection between Calla Lilies and Bert Savoy as early as 1926, noting in his review for the New York Sun that the work was “intended by the artist as a tribute to the memory of a strange, erratic figure in the theatrical world who recently passed, as they say, to his reward.” “Charles Demuth’s Cerebral Art,” The New York Sun, April 10, 1926, 6.

There is perhaps the most disagreement over whether Love, Love, Love ought to be considered a portrait, exacerbated in this case by issues surrounding the work’s titling and date. Among the major scholars of this material, Farnham (1959, 1971), Eiseman (1976), and Corn (1999) all date the work to 1928, while Haskell (1989), Frank (1995), and Kellner (2000) date it to 1929. This inconsistency arises from confusion over the original title. As Frank and Kellner point out, contemporary reviews indicate that Love, Love, Love was first shown in the exhibition “Charles Demuth: Five Paintings” at The Intimate Gallery in 1929 but listed in the brochure for that show as Design for a Broadway Poster (Unfinished). See Frank, Charles Demuth, 54; and Kellner, Letters of Charles Demuth, 126. Longhi on Broadway and The Figure Five were also exhibited in this show, which supports not only the claim that Design for a Broadway Poster was indeed Love, Love, Love, but also that all three should be considered part of the poster portrait series. See Charles Demuth: Five Paintings (April 29–May 18) (New York: The Intimate Gallery, Room 303, 1929), AAA. Another indication that 1929 is the more apt date for Love, Love, Love—and of Demuth’s inclusion of this work in the poster portrait series—comes from a letter Demuth wrote to Stieglitz in September of that year in which he refers to it as a “poster”: “Bobby [Locher] took the poster with the white mask—he said it was the only painting which touched Broadway—& New York. I was so touched that I let him have it. It’s still ‘unfinished,’—and he says that he will not allow me to work on it, now that it’s his.” Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, September 26, 1929, Stieglitz (Alfred) / Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL.

In February 1958, after the deaths of Locher (to whom Demuth willed the painting) and Locher’s partner, Richard Weyand, Love, Love, Love was sold at auction by The Parke-Bernet Gallery to Edith Halpert of the Downtown Gallery. The Parke-Bernet auction catalogue titles the painting (listed as lot 33) simply “Poster,” but the description leaves no doubt that the work in question is Love, Love, Love. Haskell, Corn, and Frank all maintain that Halpert was the first to assign the title Love, Love, Love (Homage to Gertrude Stein) when she initially showed the work the following May in the exhibition “Charles Demuth: 30 Paintings.” However, the foldout brochure for that exhibition lists the work as Poster—Love...Love...Love, indicating that “Homage to Gertrude Stein” was added at some unknown later date. See Watercolors and Paintings by Charles Demuth, American: 1883-1935: Part Two (Final) of the Artist’s Own Collection Belonging to the Estate of the Late Richard W. C. Weyand, Lancaster, Pennsylvania (New York: Parke-Bernet Galleries, Inc., 1958). Issues of dating and chronology remain unresolved for Longhi on Broadway as well. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which owns the painting today, dates it to 1928, but Demuth’s letter to O’Neill locates its genesis at least as far back as the summer of 1926, which would be a
few short months after Demuth completed *Marin* (around March of that year). See Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, March 27, 1926, Stieglitz (Alfred) / Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL.

46 Aiken, “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold,” 179. Frank likewise argues that Demuth’s primary intention was to “document and probe the personalities involved in the modernist movement.” Regarding *Duncan*, for example, she writes that “when Duncan’s art and life are reconstructed from various sources, the meaning of Demuth’s portrait of him reveals itself.” Charles Demuth, 88. Such claims are often made less explicitly. For instance, there is a common tendency to approach the series through the lens of Marius De Zayas’s oft-quoted contention vis-à-vis his own practice of non-mimetic caricature that “we cannot represent materially something that is essentially immaterial, unless we do it by the use of symbols.” “Caricature: Absolute and Relative,” *Camera Work* 46 (April 1914), 19. At least one contemporary critic drew the same conclusion. Margaret Breuning saw the portraits as “posters, placards, to notify the public, in symbol certainly, of something very true pertaining to each of the artists he portrays.” “Seven Americans,” *New York Evening Post*, March 14, 1925, section 5, 11.


48 Robin Jaffee Frank has contributed the most in this regard. See her catalogue on the portrait series for The Yale University Art Gallery (1995), as well as her dissertation on which that catalogue was based. “Charles Demuth Poster Portraits: 1923–1929” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1995).

49 Where iconography treats the portraits like windows that open directly onto the inner essence of their subjects, that is, psychobiography assumes the works’ transparency to Demuth’s own deepest desires and conflicts. As Wanda Corn notes, the tendency toward psychobiography can be traced back to the primary criticism: “On one level this vocabulary of elegance, frailty, and fastidiousness described Demuth’s sick body and dandified affectations. His art was an ‘equivalent’ of his body type and dress style. On another, it clearly separated out Demuth from the other artists in the circle, especially Dove and Marin, whose masculinity was never questioned.” *The Great American Thing*, 197. Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and T. J. Clark have all made especially convincing arguments about the issues that pertain to psychobiography as art-historical-methodology in their respective work on Picasso, as has Anne Wagner vis-à-vis Monet. The following sources, among others, have informed my thinking on this topic. See especially, Rosalind Krauss, “In the Name of Picasso,” *October* 16 (Spring 1981): 5–22, and The *Picasso Papers*, 1999; Yve-Alain Bois, “Introduction: Resisting Blackmail,” in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), xi-xxx; and Anne M. Wagner, “Why Monet Gave up Figure Painting,” *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 4 (December 1994): 613–29.

50 Harry Berger, “Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture,” *Representations* 46 (Spring 1994), 87. Berger classifies the physiognomic as a subgenre of “genetic” interpretation, in which category he includes “all historical and archival reconstructions of the motives that condition the production, stylistic influences, theme, and function of a painting.” 17. Such interpretive frameworks, Berger explains, depend on four different kinds of knowledge: (1) Background on the portrait subject, including “social, political, and/or professional status, and on his or her character, personality, and ‘inner being,’ moral quality, and state of mind”; (2) the painter’s characterization of such; (3) “the sitter’s pose and appearance”; and most importantly (4) “on the archival data that provides the information used to confirm or fill out interpretations of ... (or speculation about) the lives, behavior, and practices of sitters and painters,” 88. Frank’s catalogue, in particular, exemplifies how iconography and psychobiography operate on a continuum. To offer one example: regarding camellia boutonnieres on the windowsill in *Hartley*, she writes “perhaps Demuth intended to play on the auditory association between camellia and chameleon, whose changeability would make it—like the anthurium—an apt symbol for any master of artifice, whether artist, actor, or homosexual, by necessity skilled at concealing his sexual preference from an unsympathetic audience,” 35. As I tendency toward biography-as-explanatory onus is particularly prevalent in discussions of *Hartley* because of the way in which Demuth brazenly inserts himself via the token of a cane inscribed with his own initials into the space of this interior, as I discuss in more detail below.

51 “Explicitly the aim of art-historical physiognomy is to draw the character out of the image. Implicitly, however,” Berger goes on to explain, “physiognomic art history seems often to come into conflict with, if not to serve, the aim of converting the image to an allegory of the archive or of the painter.” “Fictions of the Pose,” 89. It is in this sense that “the procedure is identical with that based on the physiognomic formula, only here the face or body is replaced
by the image, the mind or soul by the archive, and the divine or natural or social by the painter,” 88. Benjamin Buchloh echoes Berger’s argument. Portraiture, he argues, takes “the possibilities for physiognomic truth as a natural given, limited, if at all, by the painter’s hand, or, conversely, superbly enacted by the painter’s mimetic skills.” “Residual Resemblance: Three Notes on the End of Portraiture,” in Face Off: The Portrait in Recent Art (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 54.

52 In short, my interest lies, to borrow the words of Jennifer Roberts, in how these pictures “acknowledge [their] own conditions of transitive possibility.” What I take from Roberts, who makes this claim vis-à-vis the literal mobility of pictures, is how she uses Bronislaw Malinowski and Roman Jakobson’s work on the phatic dimensions of language to develop a notion of the transitive that foregrounds the picture itself as a medium or conduit between subjects. As I argue in what follows, this is among the central questions that Demuth pursues across the portrait series and is in part what gives rise to the work’s difficulty. See Jennifer Roberts, Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 7.

53 I adopt the phrasing “makes intimate” from Kaja Silverman: “The theoretical intimacy of the terms ‘signification,’ ‘subject’ and ‘symbolic order,’” Silverman writes, “has long been apparent to readers of Freud and Lacan, but it has perhaps remained less obvious to those semioticians who trace their lineage to Saussure.” The Subject of Semiotics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 3. I take T. J. Clark as a guide in claiming that these two questions—that of how to go about depicting the subject, and that of what’s at stake in the very endeavor of picturing as such—are deeply interconnected inquiries: “A painting does not really picture ‘class’ or ‘Woman’ or ‘spectacle,’ in my view,” Clark writes—doesn’t, in Demuth’s case, picture Marsden Hartley or William Carlos Williams or the category of the artist-subject itself—“unless and until those categories come to alter the painting’s visual economy and put established notions of ‘picturing’ under pressure.” The Painting of Modern Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), xxiv. More specifically, I borrow the vocabulary of “picture” and “person” from Joseph Leo Koerner’s discussion of Albrecht Dürer’s self-portraiture. “What unifies [Dürer’s self-portraits] is that they are all, in their different ways, portraits of the self, inflecting a relation of picture to person during a period in history when these categories are being invented.” The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art, xvii.

54 Baker’s full passage reads: “The token sign directs attention back onto the system within which it circulates, the structural conditions of its own production. It might even be said to refer to nothing else but these structural conditions. However, no longer backed by right but by the Law, by a system of convention, the token will also expose the emptiness of these conventions, of their nature as mere convention.” The Artwork Caught By The Tail (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 124. Baker draws here on Rosalind Krauss’s discussion of tokenism in The Picasso Papers (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 20–21. My claim, to be clear, is not that these pictures are rigorously semiotic in the sense of cubist collage, though as we shall see, they are nonetheless concerned with absence, difference, and relation. On the semiotics of cubist collage, see especially Rosalind Krauss, “The Motivation of the Sign” and Yve-Alain Bois, “The Semiology of Cubism,” both in Picasso and Braque, a Symposium (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Distributed by H. N. Abrams, 1992).

55 Benjamin Buchloh, “Residual Resemblance,” 54.

56 Where portraiture is defined, that is, by the sitter’s underlying presence, the simulacrum is defined by the referent’s fundamental absence. Thus (to pose the contrast another way), whereas portraiture is the site, as Benjamin Buchloh maintains, “where the myth of a natural motivation of the sign, and of the mimetic model of representation” has been “most avidly re-affirmed,” the simulacrum undermines the very foundation of mimetic representation as a construct. The threat posed by the simulacral, writes Michael Camille, results from the way in which “it subverts the cherished dichotomy of model and copy, original and reproduction, image and likeness. For while the mimetic image has been celebrated as an affirmation of the real, the simulacrum has been denigrated as its negation. An image without a model, lacking that crucial dependence upon resemblance or similitude, the simulacrum is a false claimant to being which calls into question the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is represented. The simulacrum also disturbs the order of priority: that the image must be secondary to, or come after, it’s model.” See Buchloh, “Residual Resemblance,” 54; and Michael Camille, “Simulacrum,” in Critical Terms for Art History, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 31. To the degree that Demuth uses the elastic strength of portraiture’s ontological tie between picture and person precisely to interrogate the relationship between model and copy (and, as a result, disperse centripetally outward into just so many
By comparison, a still life, that is, is a “still life” regardless of the existence of the pot of flowers it depicts, just as an imaginative landscape is still a “landscape.” On the relationship between picture and person in portraiture (what I am calling the genre’s ontological condition) see especially Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), especially 7-8, 46; and Wendy Steiner, “The Semiotics of a Genre: Portraiture in Literature and Painting,” *Semiotica* 21 (1977), 111-119. To say that portraiture is defined by its connection to a specific person, however, is not to discount that there is plenty of gray area, for example, portraits whose subjects are no longer known (Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*, Vermeer’s *Girl with the Pearl Earring*) or painter-subject dynamics that blur the distinction between sitter and model (Madame Cézanne, Victorine Meurent). Indeed any number of pictures might be brought in here by way of counter-example, not least Demuth’s own. My point, however, is less one that will allow the art historian to categorize any individual picture as a portrait, but rather that it is precisely the strength of portraiture’s connection to a (real) person that supplies the genre with the elastic strength to withstand and absorb such outliers/challenges from within.

That having been said, the very notion of genre as a categorical designation is by definition a cultural (versus natural) construct, and as such, portraiture, like any other, exists within and derives its meaning (and indeed its very existence) from a specific hierarchical discourse with a particular history—the hierarchy of genre, which took form in the eighteenth century French academy. Whereas I have stressed portraiture’s ontological status, that is, one might alternately define portraiture diacritically (i.e. what makes a portrait a portrait is that it is not a landscape, not a history painting, not a genre scene, not a still life). But this gets tricky in Demuth’s case, which, I am arguing, is precisely the point. For as Demuth himself expressed to Agnes O’Neill, in abandoning verisimilitude, a poster portrait such as *Longhi on Broadway* presses the question: “what is it that makes this picture a portrait as opposed to a still life?” The only answer to that question is the picture’s variously implied reference to a specific subject, a connection Demuth complicates at every turn and almost fully abandons in the final iterations of the series.

The diacritical definition holds, in other words, for the broad category of “portraiture” but not for that genre’s specific iterations (any given portrait). That is, whereas a specific portrait signifies—and is defined as such—vis-à-vis its connection to a real-world referent (a person), there is no singular referent for the category of portraiture broadly, which takes on meaning vis-à-vis “still life,” “history painting” etc. Certainly, any given portrait derives its meaning in relation to other iterations of the genre as well (thus there is a wide body of literature on the tension in traditional portraiture between individuality and typology/idealization). One way to name this distinction is that between ontology and semiotics. The key difference between which (for our purposes) could be described as follows. Semiotics posits meaning as a function or condition of the relation between at least two terms (picture and person, sign and referent etc.)—ikon/ likeness, symbol/ sign, index, arbitrary vs. motivated—all these terms designate and distinguish between different kinds of relation. Ontology, by contrast, is a condition of existence. It names a state of being. Whereas semiosis is grounded in relation, absence and difference, as a positive definitional status, ontology privileges equivalence, presence and sameness.

Underlying the genre’s foundation in the signifying capacity of the body, in other words, is a more fundamental faith in what the body signifies (the essence of the self), which the picture is understood to communicate by analogy. This jump from picture to body is precisely why Berger deems “physiognomic” all methodological approaches that proceed from such premises.

Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, Part I,” 70. Peirce himself defines the index as “anything which focusses the attention,” offering the examples of a knock on the door, and a sundial or clock which “indicates the time of day.” See *The Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), 109. As summarized by Drew Huening for The Chicago School of Media Theory Keywords Glossary, “Peirce outlined three types of index: tracks, symptoms, and designations (Johansen 2002, 32). Tracks often have a physical, cause and effect relationship, but are not simultaneous with their object. Paw prints left by an animal are tracks; the lingering scent of perfume is a track. Symptoms are simultaneous with their object, and distinguishing between symptom and object may be impossible. Fever is a symptom of infection, smoke is a symptom of fire. Lastly, designations point or signify while being distinct from their object: proper names, a pointed finger, and the word ‘this’ are all designations (Peirce, 109). The frequent simultaneity of object and sign may be why (according to Piaget and Bruner), indexical signs are the first signs grasped by infants (Johansen 2002, 32). While symbols cannot be signs without an interpreter, indices cannot be signs without their objects (no interpreter or ‘reader’ necessary).”

61 Krauss, “Notes on the Index,” 75. Krauss draws here on André Bazin, *What is Cinema*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 14. Peter Parshall has also articulated this aspect of portraiture: “A portrait is just a portrait, or so it often seems. By its very nature a portrait makes a tacit claim to being simply what it is, as if one must somehow forego certain of the usual questions one is inclined to ask of any representation.” “Portrait prints and Codes of Identity in the Renaissance: Hendrik Goltzius, Justus Lipsius, and Michel de Montaigne,” *Word & Image* 19, no. 1-2 (2003), 22. Joel Snyder echoes Krauss’s claims about photography. We ascribe to photographs a special kind of objectivity, he argues, “because they are supposed not only to look realistic (although they do not all look realistic) but also to derive from or be caused by the objects they represent. This ‘natural connection’ has been taken as a reinforcement and even as a guarantee of realistic depiction.” To the degree that photography is taken to present an unmediated view of the world, it does “an ‘end run’ around the conventions of representation.” “Picturing Vision,” *Critical Inquiry* 6, no. 3 (Spring 1980), 504–505. I follow Anne Goodyear in arguing for this continuity between portraiture and photography. “The origin myths of western portraiture,” Goodyear writes “are intimately bound up with those of photography. Portraiture, Pliny tells us, was ‘invented’ when Dibutade, daughter of the Corinthian potter Butades, sought to record the likeness of the lover compelled to leave her. The maiden traced his shadow onto a wall, creating an ‘exact’ transcription of his presence, based on the image cast by his shadow.” “The Portrait, the Photograph and the Index,” in *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 211. On the myth of Dibutade and Butades, and for the story of Lysistratus, see Pliny, *The Natural History*, eds. P. Bostock and H. T. Riley (London: G. Bell, 1890), 35.151-153.

62 This is “the fiction of the pose” to which Berger refers in the title of his essay. “The act of portrayal represented by the image,” Berger writes “is a fiction; it needn’t have occurred in that manner; the portrait only pretends to represent the manner in which it was produced.” “Fictions of the Pose,” 90. One could point to a number of artworks in the Western canon, from Velasquez’s *Las Meninas* to Ingres’s *Raphael and the Fornarina*, that depict what Berger calls “the fiction of the pose” [Figures 15 and 16]. Particularly relevant here is Ingres’s *Raphael and the Fornarina*, which depicts Raphael painting a portrait of his favorite portrait subject (la Fornarina), who was widely believed to have been his lover. Representing the culmination of six paintings in which Ingres worked through his Renaissance predecessor, *Raphael and the Fornarina* makes visible the (self-)presence so powerfully implied in Raphael’s original.


64 That likeness is often assumed in instances wherein it is categorically impossible to corroborate—when (in the era predating photography), to give just one example, a portrait’s subject is long dead—indicates that it isn’t a guarantor of any connection to a real person, but is rather, like all modalities of mimetic realism, an *effect*. On the effect of realism (realism as an effect), see Roland Barthes, “L’effet de réel,” *Communications* 11 (1968), 84–89.


69 Stephen Perkinson has succinctly described the effects on reception: “Identifying [Jehan roy de France] as a portrait,” a painting classified by the Louvre as “the earliest example of an independent easel painting in France and the first single portrait in history, “encourages present-day visitors to the Louvre to assume that it offers an unmediated view of its subject’s facial features—that through it they see ‘what John really looked like.’ As a corollary to this, viewers are encouraged to believe that ‘seeing John’ in this way allows us to begin to know
something about him as a person, granting them access to an individual identity presumed to exist independently of its representation in the panel.” The Likeness of the King, 3. On the Louvre’s classification of Jehan roy de France, Perkinson quotes Grete Ring, A Century of French Painting, 1400-1500 (London: Phaidon Press distributed in U.S.A. by Oxford University Press, New York, 1949), 13. Edward Aiken makes a similar point, though he does not always follow through in his own analysis. See, “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold,” 179. The problem with this mode of interpretation, as Harry Berger suggests, which presumes to read out from the picture information about a portrait subject’s essential character or “innermost being,” is that any such endeavor is “based on a chain of presuppositions—first, that such an entity exists; second, that it can be known; third, that it can be revealed; and fourth, that [the viewer] knows it and can recognize it when [the artist] reveals it.” Fictions of the Pose,” 88.

70 It is in this sense, to reiterate, that Demuth’s portraits function like “token signs” per George Baker’s definition quoted above. In establishing the link between picture and person, genre functions like a “linguistic system” in Kaja Silverman’s terms: “Saussure insists … that no natural bond links a given signifier to its signified; their relationship is entirely conventional, and will only obtain within a certain linguistic system.” The Subject of Semiotics, 6. In their eschewal of the body, Demuth’s portraits make visible this function of genre.


72 Bermuda served for Demuth and Hartley in this sense as a site analogous to that L’Estaque served for Picasso and Braque.

73 See Camera Work 39, Special Issue Featuring Gertrude Stein (1912).


75 As Hartley later recounted, “Charles, dressed always in the right degree of good taste, English taste of course, carrying his cane elegantly and for service, not for show, as he had always the need of a cane.” “Farewell Charles,” in The New Caravan, ed. Lewis Mumford (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1936), reprinted in Letters of Charles Demuth, 174. For a discussion of the Renaissance of the persona of the flâneur among American avant-garde circles in the teens and twenties, see Susan Fillin-Yeh, “Dandies, Marginality and Modernism,” 33-44. In reference to O’Keeffe, Duchamp, and Stettheimer, Fillin-Yeh maintains that “each carried over the dandy’s artifice and shifting ambiguities from her person to her art;” 41. This characterization is applicable to Demuth as well.

76 As Frank notes, as have others, “Demuth used a cane as a personal identifying mark in watercolors throughout his career,” including (as I discuss below) his portrait of Gertrude Stein. Frank, Charles Demuth, 113. The object appears, for example, across several of the literary illustrations he painted in the late teens, which are the primary focus of Chapter 2. See, for example, Demuth’s third illustration for Henry James’s “The Beast in the Jungle,” Marcher Receives His Revelation at May Bartram’s Tomb (1919), A Prince of Court Painters (1918), the single he illustrated for Walter Pater’s “Imaginary Portrait of Watteau,” and the opening picture in the six-image series he based on Frank Wedekind’s Lulu Tragedies, The Animal Tamer Presents Lulu (1919) [Figures 86, 1]. I agree with Frank’s claim that the cane functioned for Demuth as an attribute, and indeed argue below that it serves exactly this function in Hartley. Yet, as I address in my discussion of The Animal Tamer in Chapter 2, this object is almost
always a coded and dispersive token, often opening onto a split in or multiplicity of subject(s). For example, it is not clear exactly with which figure Demuth identifies in The Animal Tamer Presents Lulu, that of the animal tamer himself (who holds a cane and whip), or the figure of the stagehand, “Charlie,” who peeks out from behind the curtain at center. Moreover, as I address in relation to Hartley below, if the cane evokes a certain authorial presence, that presence is almost always counter-balanced (and indeed subsumed by) a more fundamental absence.


79 Haskell, Charles Demuth, 187.

80 Frank maintains that “the volumes depicted also contain references to Francis Picabia, George Antheil, Lord Edward Dunsany, Williams, Marin, the American avant-garde as perceived by American and French critics, advertising art, the fourth dimension, and Demuth himself.” Charles Demuth, 215.

81 Frank also notes the play this picture makes between Hartley’s and the heart-shaped anthurium. See Charles Demuth, 29.

82 Frank argues the five-pointed star references O’Keeffe’s own signature. This seems a stretch, but if the case, is another enfolding. See Charles Demuth, 52.

83 Krauss, “In the Name of Picasso,” 8. Krauss makes the point that proper names have been understood to denote versus connote by way of John Searle, “Proper Names and Descriptions,” in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (New York. MacMillan, 1967), vol. 6, 487. Searle, Krauss indicates, is one in a long line of thinkers to have challenged this “common” or “no-sense” view of proper names. She lists among others, Gottlob Frege (1892), Bertrand Russell (1919), and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953).

84 In Buchloh’s words, Rauschenberg “shifts the representation of subjectivity into the register of the performative declaration, reenacting and radicalizing…the Duchampian principle operative in the readymade.” “Residual Resemblance,” 59.

85 Krauss, “Notes on the Index,” 80. The tension between presence and absence that structures Longhi is inherent to the index. Because the index is a material register of its referent, we are accustomed to thinking of it in terms of presence. Yet the classic examples of indexicality—footsteps in the sand, smoke to fire—point to a fundamental absence (of the body, of fire) at the core of the index. One of the key examples Peirce himself used to define the index—that of the bullet hole—speaks to this absence perhaps most directly: “Such, for instance, is a piece of mould with a bullet hole in it as sign of a shot; for without the shot there would have been no hole; but there is a hole there, whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not.” The Philosophical Writings of Peirce, 104. Likewise, whereas in conclusion Krauss stresses the ways in which the meaning of these works “involves the filling of the ‘empty’ indexical sign with a particular presence,” earlier in that essay she characterizes the photogram (that index of all indices) as resulting from “the ghostly trace of departed objects.” “Notes on the Index,” 80, 75 (italics mine).

86 This is the hand Rauschenberg forces, and one he would go on to literalize in a self-portrait-as-thumbprint produced to accompany (one can hardly say “illustrate”) a New Yorker article in which he was profiled a few years later [Figure 36]. But if Rauschenberg can be said to fill up the empty indexical sign with his own presence, the complexity of Iris Clert is that, unlike the shifter (and differently than in the case of the artist’s self-portrait-as-thumbprint), portraiture (supposedly) isn’t “empty” to begin with. This is the tension that Demuth foregrounds.
I borrow the terminology of “anchoring” and the notion of the projective power of the image from Roland Barthes. “All images,” Barthes writes, “are polysemous: they imply, underlying their signifiers, a ‘floating chain’ of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others.” Text limits the unfolding of this chain. By identifying the scene depicted and/or the elements therein, it anchors “all possible (denoted) meanings of the object by recourse to nomenclature,” orienting the viewing subject in choosing “the correct level of perception,” and “permitting one to focus not only one’s gaze but also understanding.” Thus “constituting a kind of vice which holds the connoted meanings from proliferating,” text curtails “the projective power of the image.” By anchoring the image in this way, language functions—or in the case of Demuth’s use thereof, fails to function—“as a means of selective elucidation, focusing the viewer’s reception and understanding of the image.” Its principle function is in this sense. Barthes contends, both repressive and ideological, serving as a means to determine the use of the image’s message. See Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” in Image-Music-Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 39, 40–41; and “Eléments de sémiologie,” Communications 4, no. 1 (1964), 131–32. To the degree that Demuth’s deployment of proper names does not anchor the image in this way, the portraits are not “logocentric” in Silverman’s terms: “The logocentricity of Saussure’s model has also proven to be a general feature of semiotics; it is the common assumption of most semioticians that language constitutes the signifying system par excellence, and that it is only by means of linguistic signs that other signs become meaningful.” The Subject of Semiotics, 5.

I quote Benjamin Buchloh’s description of Iris Clert here, whose reading of Rauschenberg’s portrait informs my own. Buchloh contrasts Rauschenberg’s and his generation against twentieth-century portrait photographers such as Diane Arbus, Richard Avedon, and Irving Penn, all of whom, he argues, “struggle to resurrect” the model of photographic portraiture established by the prewar German portrait photographer August Sander “at all costs.” “By contrast, the artists of the 1960s, Buchloh contends, “struggle to undo the category as definitively as possible.” He proposes Rauschenberg’s Iris Clert to have been the “signal gesture in this historical process.” See Residual Resemblance, 59. For a detailed discussion of Iris Clert see also Amanda Gluibizzi, “Portrait of the Artist(s) as a Portrait of Iris Clert,” Word & Image 30, no. 4 (2014): 455–63. A 2016 exhibition curated by Anne Goodyear at Bowdoin College Museum of Art took Rauschenberg’s portrait of Clert as a starting point to explore the broader practice of non-mimetic portraiture by American artists across the twentieth century. See Anne Goodyear, This Is a Portrait If I Say so: Identity in American Art, 1912 to Today (New Haven: Bowdoin College Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2016), especially pages 1–3, 62–63.


Hartley has been exhibited widely as such, both during Demuth’s lifetime and since, beginning with the first five portraits’ inaugural unveiling in “Seven Americans” (March 1925). As a result, the work has taken on the status of a “finished” work. More recently, Hartley has been called to stand in for the poster portrait series as a whole (“This is a Portrait if I Say So: Identity in American Art,” Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 2016), and for Demuth’s work more broadly in various retrospective re-imaginings of twentieth-century American art (for example, in “Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture,” National Portrait Gallery, 2011).

Hartley moved to Aix-en-Provence in 1926, where he would remain based through early 1928. He traveled to Berlin, Hamburg, and Paris over the winter and spring of 1927 but spent the concentrated period of May through December 1927 in Provence, returning to New York by way of Paris in January of 1928. See the chronology provided in Marsden Hartley, Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser and Ulrich Birkmaier, eds. (Hartford: Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum of Art in Association with Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002), 4–5.

These literary illustrations, and the broader series of which they are a part, are my focus in Chapter 2. Demuth likely first encountered Cézanne’s paintings on a trip to Europe, where he travelled between October of 1907 and March of 1908, staying mainly in Paris with a brief excursion to Berlin. There is no archival record of what Demuth saw on that trip in specificity though I tend to agree with Barbara Haskell that he “surely attended the 1907 Salon d’Automne,” which featured 56 works by Cézanne in memoriam. Haskell maintains that “Demuth’s first awareness of the importance of Cézanne’s watercolors probably came through Hartley, who was transposing their wash effects into his paintings when Demuth met him in 1912 in Paris. The memory of Hartley’s enthusiasm was rekindled by Duchamp’s conviction during these years that Rodin’s drawings ‘may last for twenty years but next to those of Cézanne they are impossible.’ These accolades coming from Demuth’s mentors, would have primed him for the
survey exhibition of Cézanne’s watercolors that the Montross Gallery presented in 1916.” Haskell, Charles Demuth, 125.

93 I consider the Bermuda landscapes at length in Chapter 3, which focuses on Demuth’s landscape practice more broadly. For more on the influence of Cézanne and Demuth’s time in Bermuda, see Haskell, 121–130; Emily Farnham, “Charles Demuth's Bermuda Landscapes,” Art Journal (Winter 1965–66), 133–34; Mark Mitchell, “A New Tradition: Cézanne, Demuth, and the Invention of Modern Watercolor,” in Cézanne and Beyond, 51.

94 What exactly “Poussin” stands for in this equation is a matter of some debate, but for our purposes, I take Poussin to stand in for the endeavor of picturing, most broadly conceived. On the self as that which mediates between the world and form/pure abstraction in Cézanne, see T. J. Clark, “Phenomenality and Materiality in Cézanne,” in Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory, ed. Tom Cohen, et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

95 Even, to offer just one example, another quote about Poussin: “I would like to mix melancholy with the sun,” he supposedly relayed to Joachim Gasquet in the 1890s. “There is a sadness in Provence which no one has expressed, but that Poussin would have personified, leaning on a tomb underneath the poplars of the Alyscamps.” “I would, like Poussin, paint logic into grass and tears into the sky. But you have to know how to let content rest…You have to see your model and sense it exactly, and then if I express myself with distinction and force, I’ll find my Poussin, my own classicism.” The source of this passage, to be clear, is Joachim Gasquet, who is paraphrasing Cézanne. See “The Studio” (1921), in Conversations with Cézanne, ed. Michael Doran (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2001), 151. The layered authorship of Gasquet’s text is surprisingly appropriate to the questions under consideration in this chapter. As the editor Michael Doran has indicated, while “some passages of Gasquet’s text, written over the winter of 1912–1913, “may be genuine reports of independent Cézanne utterances,” in general, “these imaginary conversations are more valuable for their atmosphere than their reporting,” 108. If not straight from the source, then, Gasquet’s Cézanne, first published in 1921 and reissued in 1928, circulated widely in the teens and twenties. Indeed, the epigraph to this section of his text is the (uncited) source of the final lines in Hartley’s poem, “I have sworn to myself that I will die painting.” 147.

96 “This is not meant to be a legend, or a poetic effusion,” Hartley informs his reader in a footnote, “it is intended merely as an association of fates, physical, intellectual, and spiritual, an association of entities in close relation with each other. Its chief reason for being is the quality of confession contained in it.” Hartley, “The Mountain and the Reconstruction,” 74.

97 Demuth’s interest, in other words, lies in the relationship between the self and picture: meaning doesn’t emerge in or from any existential, phenomenological intersection of artist-subject and world (Cézanne and his motif), but rather in the relation between pictures (Cézanne and Poussin). As I argue in Chapter 3, which considers Demuth’s landscapes vis-à-vis the tradition of the picturesque, the artist conceived of the world as itself (already) a kind of “picture.”


99 “This notion of the work of art as a seismograph of the artist’s psyche,” Bois continues, “lies behind all expressionist conceptions of art (it resurfaces from time to time and could be heard, barely altered, during Abstract Expressionism’s heyday).” “Abstraction, 1910-1925: Eight Statements.” October 143 (Winter 2013), 8.


101 This is the subject made existentially present in portraiture. As I have argued, all meaning in portraiture is thought to inhere in the portrait subject, as expressed through the body, to which the picture claims to grant transparent access. Portraiture in this sense privileges its referent above all, so much so that, like realism, and often aided by realism—or “likeness” in portraiture parlance—it masks the work of signification done on the part of both the painter (authorship) and painting (form).
While the paradigms of portraiture and expressionism share a foundation in this model of the subject, then, they diverge around the model of the picture each posits in turn. Whereas portraiture is all about the transparency of the picture to its sitter/referent, expressionism is all about the picture’s expressivity of the artist’s self. Or, put another way: if portraiture can be said to privilege the body’s capacity to indexically signify the essence or interiority of the self, expressionism privileges the picture’s surface as a reflection of the artist’s interiority. This is among the reasons that expressionism is an important origin of abstraction. With roots tracing to Romanticism, a belief in the picture’s expressivity of the self above all (of the self as the origin of representation, regardless of motif) reaches its apex in Abstract Expressionism. As Bois glosses in *Art Since 1900*, “For [Harold] Rosenberg, the stuff of the Abstract Expressionist painter is his uniqueness; his duty is to let us enter the inner sanctum of his feelings; his art is bound to reveal his very own self as the kernel of his originality. But at the same time, Rosenberg claims that the pangs of suffering registered by the artist (a much-dated leitmotiv in his existentialist prose) are universally human and thus universally accessible. In short, the Abstract Expressionist canvas is an affirmation of the ego, a half-romantic, half-petty bourgeois version of the Cartesian ‘Cogito ergo sum,’ which is to say, the seat, as T. J. Clark has argued, of much vulgarity. … Yet this disclaimer is something of a paradox, for in insisting on the individualism of the Abstract Expressionist artists, and on the idiosyncratic nature of their pictorial marks, it does single out what they had in common: longing for what could be called the autographic gesture, the inimitable, signature-like dribble of paint that would translate private feelings and emotions directly onto the material field of the canvas—without the mediation of any figurative content.” *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 348.

As a subset of the broader expressionist paradigm, then, Stieglitz-circle picture theory is likewise invested in the expressivity of the picture and locates the origin of representation in the self. Where it distinguishes itself is in the degree to which it links authorship to embodiment. This discourse, that is, understands the self to inhere in the body (this is why gender takes on such importance) and the body to inhere in the world, and locates meaning in that union (subject, body, world, picture). Waldo Frank, for example, described the “organic nexus between Dove and his world which has endowed him with the substance for his own self-expression.” “The Art of Arthur Dove,” *The New Republic*, January 27, 1926, 269. In Rosenfeld’s words: “the pressure on the brush in his hand carries the weight of the body as a whole, and the life of the body as a whole. He has always a fund of robust and delicate animalism to express. He has dark, pungent, gritty hues in his palette; dark subtle schemes and delicate gradations of earth-browns and dull shadowy greens and dirt-grays and intestinity whites that seem to flow from the body’s fearless complete acceptance of itself.” Paul Rosenfeld, *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1924), 169. Italics mine. Meanwhile, Rosenfeld identified in Marin’s watercolors, “a man’s implicit confidence in his senses: a man’s complete truthfulness to himself.” And a few pages on, Marin “paints from the navel and addresses not the brain but the navel. And only because there is no schism in him between hand and brain has he mastered his medium.” *Port of New York*, 155, 156, 158–59.

See *Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans*, AAA. Rather than approach the self in binary terms (interior/exterior, ideal/material), that is, Stieglitz-circle picture theory sees the body as essential to subjectivity and sees the self as all important to the picture, and thus so too the body. As Anne Wagner argues, “it seems to have been impossible, at this particular moment and site in American letters, to think much differently about artists and the objects they produced. (If, that is, those artists and objects were rated a success). Dove’s painting was Dove, and Marin’s Marin, all the more indelibly the better Dove and Marin were thought to be.” “O’Keeffe’s Femininity,” in *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O’Keeffe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 50. “Moreover,” she goes on to say, “any suspension of the gender categories that came with those identities was unthinkable.” My concern here is less with the heteronormative gender binaries established in the primary criticism (particularly around Dove and O’Keeffe) than I am in the necessarily related ways in which Stieglitz circle critics conceived of the relationship between bodies, pictures, and subjects.

Alfred Stieglitz to Paul Rosenfeld, September 10, 1921, Stieglitz (Alfred)/Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL. This is what I am suggesting Demuth’s portraits, and Hartley in particular, perform. Yet if Demuth’s portraits literalize the collapse between picture and author, the proposal they make about subjectivity by way of that gesture is precisely the opposite, dispersing meaning outward.
107 By “discursive apparatus,” I mean to emphasize that the core Stieglitz circle values get articulated in the O’Keeffe criticism, exhibition practices, Stieglitz’s portrait of her etc.—not in her work. The consistent claim across the O’Keeffe criticism is that her painting grants the viewer access to her body and thus to her feelings, understanding, experience. As Wagner details, the reason that these values (the collapse of artist and artwork, a belief in the picture’s transparency to the body of its maker, the linking of authorship and embodiment) crystallize around O’Keeffe basically boils down to the fact that she a woman and so, pace the gender essentialism of the day (and today), there was an a priori collapse on the part of critics and viewers between her subjectivity and her body, and from there, her paintings. Mary Ann Doane’s formulation of the social function of gender essentialism is particularly illuminating in this regard: “The entire elaboration of femininity as a closeness, a nearness, a presentness-to-itself is not the definition of an essence but the delineation of a place culturally assigned to the woman.” A closeness, a nearness, a presentness-to-itself—Doane could just as well be describing the correlation critics ascribed between O’Keeffe and her pictures. See Doane, quoted in Wagner, “O’Keeffe’s Femininity,” 100. Alexander Brook wrote, for example, of how: “One does not feel the arm’s length that is usual between the artist and the picture; these things of hers seem to be painted with her very body.” “February Exhibitions: Georgia O’Keefe [sic],” The Arts 3 (February 1923), 130, reprinted in Barbara Buhler Lynes, Georgia O’Keeffe. Catalogue Raisonné (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 194. Similarly, Edmund Wilson maintained that “the dark green stalks of one of her corn paintings have become so charged with her personal current and fused by her personal heat that they seem to us not a picture at all but a kind of dynamo of feeling, along which the fierce white line strikes like an electric spark.” “The Stieglitz Exhibition (1925),” in The American Earthquake: A Documentary of the Twenties and Thirties (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958), 98–99. Against such approaches, which prevail in the O’Keeffe literature to this day, Wagner does “not pretend to any special knowledge about what the painter Georgia O’Keeffe might have felt, understood, or experienced by virtue of her qualities and character as a woman,” and does “not view femininity as the essence of O’Keeffe’s art or self, but as the chief quality attributed to both,” 31.

108 329 photographs have been designated as officially constituting The Portrait. As Wagner details, “an image is considered to belong to the ‘Portrait’ if it exists in a mounted, ‘archival’ print; the total number of photographs making up the whole is swelled by their maker’s habit of printing the same negative using different processes—typically in palladium and gelatin silver prints—and his occasional cropping of a single negative in different ways. O’Keeffe herself was responsible for ordering the Stieglitz archive after his death and for placing his pictures at the National Gallery of Art.” The photographs were occasionally exhibited as part of a Stieglitz photo exhibition alongside his other photographs, while in other instances they were exhibited alongside O’Keeffe’s own paintings. “Stieglitz divided his images of O’Keeffe into six categories, each of which was presented as a demonstration of portraiture.’ The groupings included twenty-seven images entitled “A Woman,” eight images of “Hands,” three images of “Feet,” three images of “Hands and Breasts,” thee images of “Torsos,” and two prints simply entitled “Interpretations.” See Wagner, “O’Keeffe’s Femininity,” 78; and Brennan, Painting Gender, 82–83.

109 Wagner, “O’Keeffe’s Femininity,” 87. Brennan concurs on this point. “No artwork,” she writes, “was more central to Stieglitz’s public self-construction than his composite portrait of Georgia O’Keeffe,” Painting Gender, 82. That this “Demonstration of Portraiture,” was, in Wagner’s terms “taken as specially declarative—a demonstration of the theory its author espoused,” was recognized by work’s primary critics. Lewis Mumford, for example, described the series of photographs as “a crucial turning point in Stieglitz’s ability to establish photographic ‘equivalents.’” Quoted in Brennan, Painting Gender, 71. Henry McBride made a similar claim and more explicitly, suggesting in a 1921 review for The New York Herald that the real subject of Stieglitz’s one man show at the Anderson Galleries, which included forty-five prints from the Composite Portrait, was “Stieglitz himself.” “Art News and Reviews—Stieglitz’s Life Work in Photography,” The New York Herald, February 13, 1921, 5. O’Keeffe would echo the same more than fifty years later. “I never knew him to make a trip anywhere to photograph,” she wrote in the preface to The Portrait’s 1978 exhibition at the Met, “maybe that way he was always photographing himself.” Georgia O’Keeffe: A Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), quoted in Wagner, “O’Keeffe’s Femininity,” 80–81.

O’Keeffe herself pushed back against the critics’ tendency to collapse her painting with her body—with her very self, suggesting, for example, in a letter to Sherwood Anderson in 1924 that her turn to abstraction was motivated at least in part by her desire to obstruct such readings: “I suppose the reason I got down to an effort to be objective is that I didn’t like the interpretations of my other things—so here I am with an array of alligator pears—about ten of them—calla lilies—four or six—leaves—summer green ones—horrid yellow sunflowers—two new red cannas—some white birches with yellow leaves—only two that I have no name for and I don’t know where they
come from.” A decade and a half later she would write bluntly—and publically—of her continued frustration on this score: “When you took time to really notice my flower you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you wrote about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower—and I don’t.” Here O’Keeffe refuses—and in doing so pitifully specifies—the set of claims that Demuth’s portraits challenge—transparency, access, immediacy, and underneath all that, a notion of shared experience. See O’Keeffe as quoted in Wagner, “O’Keeffe’s Femininity,” 61, who cites Georgia O’Keeffe to Sherwood Anderson, February 11, 1924, in Georgia O’Keeffe, Art and Letters, eds. Jack Cowart and Juan Hamilton (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 176; and Georgia O’Keeffe, “About Myself,” statement dated January 1939 and published in the pamphlet accompanying the exhibition “Georgia O’Keeffe: Exhibition of Oils and Pastels,” held at An American Place from January 22 to March 17, 1939. Whitney Museum Papers, AAA. Brennan characterizes O’Keeffe’s relationship to her critics less definitively as “ambivalent.” See Painting Gender, 17–18.

110 In Wagner’s words: “The effect of such … unchecked enthusiasm for the somatic metaphor” on the part of Stieglitz circle critics (particularly in response to O’Keeffe) was “to summon a fleshly embodiment for both painting and painter, conflating the two into one.” She reiterates the point later in her chapter: “The body in the painting becomes the body of the painting: a prosaic demonstration of the terms that create its visual effects.” “O’Keeffe’s Femininity,” 40, 65. To offer just a few examples from the primary criticism: “After viewing an exhibition of his works at The Intimate Gallery in 1929, Dove warmly remarked to Stieglitz that ‘if it had not been for your tenacity these so-called ‘children’ might have had no age and still be stillborn in the mind.’” Arthur Dove to Alfred Stieglitz, March 31–April 3, 1929, quoted in Brennan, Painting Gender, 115. “In 1932 Rosenfeld described Dove’s paintings as embodied, almost sentient presences. Rosenfeld wrote that in Dove’s works ‘the represented objects look at us. There is something behind them, something in them, which watches us inquisitively; menacing at times, at others with secret complicity. The portholes of the boats and boathouses are mute, cryptic, regardful eyes.’ In 1933 Dove again emphasized the notion of artworks as anthropomorphic presences when he told Duncan Phillips that his paintings were like people to him.” Brennan, Painting Gender, 115, who quotes Paul Rosenfeld, The World of Arthur G. Dove, 428–29 and Arthur Dove to Duncan Phillips, May 1933, reproduced in Elizabeth Hutton Turner, In the American Grain: Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marian, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Alfred Stieglitz: the Stieglitz Circle At the Phillips Collection (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995), 151.

111 Wagner, “O’Keeffe’s Femininity,” 89. Demuth also had a tendency to ascribe his paintings a kind of sentience. “Paintings must be looked at and looked at and looked at,” he wrote, for example, in a 1928 essay for Creative Art, “they, I think, the good ones like it. They must be understood, and that’s not the word, either, through the eyes. No writing, no talking, no singing, no dancing will explain them. They are the final, the nth whoopee of sight.” Or consider the following passage from a letter to Scofield Thayer in 1921: “Glad you and ‘the Dial’ ... are to have one of my pictures. I like to think of them being in pleasant places, poor things.” Yet that sentience is never embodied, and moreover, there is always a way in which it seems to separate the paintings from their maker—to make them somehow other as opposed to extensions of himself (closer in this sense to Rosenfeld’s “menacing” watchers than to Dove’s “children”). Recall, to offer one final example, his experience of primary alienation before The Figure Five, which he described to Stieglitz as a “strange strangeness.” See “Across A Greco is Written,” Creative Art 5 (September 1929), 629; Charles Demuth to Scofield Thayer, July 3, 1921. The Dial/Scofield Thayer Papers, YCAL MSS 34; and Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, August 6, 1928, Stieglitz (Alfred) / Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL.


113 Dis/embodied is an awkward but reasoned formulation: the “dis” stands in for the literal absence of the body, while “embodied” signals the perspective we are given unto each landscape—as though we are looking out from within the space of a body.

114 As Yve-Alain Bois has noted, the painting depicted within the painting only roughly “corresponds to what it is supposed to denote; eight years later, in a second version of the same painting done in Antibes [Figure 49], Matisse dotted the i’s and crossed the t’s: this time there’s no room for doubt, since everything, even what is perhaps the painter’s head seen in the rearview mirror, is schematized in the miniaturized double of the painting.” “On Matisse: The Blinding: For Leo Steinberg,” trans. Greg Sims October 68 (Spring 1996), 73.


117 Clark, “Gross David,” 297.


121 Bois, “On Matisse,” 75, who quotes Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty’s original passage reads, “Painters have often liked to draw themselves in the act of painting (they still do—witness Matisse’s drawings), adding to what they saw then, what things saw of them. It is as if they were claiming that there is a total or absolute vision, outside of which there is nothing and which closes itself over them.” L’oeillet l’esprit (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 34.

122 Bois, “On Matisse,” 76. It is not my intention here to make broad generalizations about Matisse. My interest in these early, idiosyncratic landscapes is specifically what they clarify about Hartley. Bois maintains that Windshield and Landscape, St. Tropez are atypical, and indeed run counter to the main thrust of Matisse’s practice, which he argues in this essay sought “expansion” not solipsism: “Neither the 1904 drawing nor The Windshield (Route de Villacoublay) produces the impression of expansion that is characteristic of Matisse. Cutting the frame off abruptly like this—a procedure Degas was fond of, but which Matisse hardly used during the period that interests us here—does not generate any effect of virtual extension. But there is more to it than that. This brief dream of a ‘total vision’ was doomed to failure, since it rests on an ablation. Matisse (and Merleau-Ponty as well) often insists on this point: we don’t see just with our eyes, we don’t only see straight ahead. If I want my painting to have some kind of relation with my experience of the world, it cannot simply be a window onto that world.” “On Matisse,” 76.

123 This, to clarify, is my own interpretation of Mach’s illustration. Mach himself claimed the picture illustrated the tension between objectivity and subjectivity. As Bois glosses, “in his own way, Matisse repeats the little experiment tried by Ernst Mach in 1886, which, among other things, was supposed ironically to demonstrate the indissociability of the physical and psychical domains, the interdependence of the self, the world, and one’s own body, as well as the permeability of the senses. The self is ‘ungraspable’ as a stable entity, says Mach, and the same goes for ‘reality,’” “Merleau-Ponty’s entire enterprise,” Bois continues a few paragraphs below, “is in accordance with Mach’s in that it seeks to demonstrate both the inability ‘to know exactly what one sees’ and the inseparability of vision and the other senses (the passage that I just quoted is negated by everything the philosopher wrote on perception, as if these limit-works by Matisse, perhaps one of the painters whose views best accorded with his own, had obliged him to feign belief in a myth of pure visibility, which he had ceaselessly rejected).” “On Matisse,” 75–76.

124 “Going from Denis Diderot to Michael Fried and beyond,” writes Hal Foster, “one ideal of the proper picture has been the integral human subject, defined first as a unitary (depicted) figure and then as a unitary (abstracted) ego. The integral painting mirrors the integral viewer and vice versa.” “Abstraction, 1910-1925, 8 Statements,” October 143 (Winter 2013), 34.


126 My issue with Bryson’s argument has to do with the universal claims he makes for “Still Life”—the way his argument so often takes the form of what the genre “wants” or “does,” followed by claims that, precisely for their framing as such, can be countered through recourse to specific example after specific example. This question of whether “the body” is or is not temporally (and/or spatially) proximate in still life—“right around the corner” in Bryson’s terms—is a prime example. For the body is so often so palpably conjured by still life—is so often present in its very absence, and so too narrative. Consider, for example, the plethora of still lifes that depict various aftermaths (of kitchens and banquets and hunts) and all those flowers in states from bud to blossom to rot, of milk about to spill, of the dog eyeing the meat, etc. Of course, I make exactly this manner of universal claim for the genre
portraiture. Yet my point is precisely that this—the ability to make such “ontological” claims makes portraiture unique among genres.

127 Bryson, Looking at the Overlooked, 61.


129 That Demuth took artists for his subjects is crucial in this regard, for the artist-as-subject inherently conjoins the subject positions of sitter and author.

130 Krauss, Passages, 23. A few pages later she re-articulates the point in the voice of an archetypal viewer: “I must be able to read back from the surface configuration to the anatomical ground of a gesture’s possibility in order to perceive the significance of that gesture. It is this communication between the surface and the anatomical depths that Rodin aborts. We are left with gestures that are unsupported by appeals to their own anatomical backgrounds, that cannot address themselves logically to a recognizable, prior experience.” Passages, 27.

131 Krauss, Passages, 28–29. “The internal forces that condition the surface of the figure,” she continues, “are, of course, anatomical, muscular. The forces that shape the figure from outside itself come from the artist: the act of manipulation, artifice, his process of making.”

132 I don’t mean to suggest that this architectural interior literally symbolizes or otherwise stands in for interiority (and/or that landscape equals body) but that Hartley destabilizes such binaries even as (because?) it makes them literal/spatial.

133 We have already established the centrality of alterity to these works: because Hartley frames a view rather than figures a body, the subject it posits is not stable, it shifts. The view Demuth figures in lieu of the body is thus not subject-less (in the obvious sense that there is no subject pictured doing the viewing) so much as subject-full. Indeed, Hartley opens up the subject position of sitter, author, and viewer kaleidoscopically: to Hartley, in the sense that composition as a whole cites an amalgamation of Hartley’s own paintings; to Cézanne, in that the landscape we view through the window recalls that of Mt. St. Victoire; to Demuth, the presence of whose cane suggests he himself has just stepped away from this carefully framed view; and finally, to the viewer herself in the way Hartley’s would seem to offer a spatial context for a viewing body to assume. I use the term “textuality” to articulate the distinction between the promise of transparency to embodied experience, and language—which is more opaque, symbolic, mediated and most importantly for my argument, not private, never belonging to just one subject/interiority. Demuth posits textuality as the origin of representation, and does so in answer to the expressionist valuation of the romantic individual, and more specifically, as a counterpoint to the notion of “intercorporeal merger” premised by Stieglitz and his critics.


135 None of the illustrations, however—to return to a concept I borrow from Barthes in Chapter 1—use such text to serve the conventional “anchoring” function of a caption. See Roland Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” in Image-Music-Text, 131–32.


137 Demuth’s illustration dates to 1908, sixteen years after the story’s initial publication. “The Real Thing” was first published on April 16, 1892, in the magazine Black and White. In a journal entry dated 1891, James articulated the
aim of writing “something as admirably compact and selected as [Guy de] Maupassant.” Interestingly, the idea of “the real thing,” can be located in the story’s very conception. As editor John Auchard relays, James suggests in the same 1891 notebook entry that the plot grew out of an anecdote told to him by the cartoonist and author, George de Maurier, about an “oldish, faded, ruined” couple who sought him out to procure work as models. “Despite the compactness” of the resulting text, “the idea would find further complication in [James’s] later fiction,” including “The Ambassadors,” “The Wings of the Dove,” and “The Golden Bowl.” See Auchard’s editor’s note to “The Real Thing,” in The Portable Henry James, ed. John Auchard (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), 79.

138 James, “The Real Thing,” 83.

139 James, “The Real Thing,” 85, 86.

140 James, “The Real Thing,” 83.

141 James, “The Real Thing,” 83.

142 James, “The Real Thing,” 86 [italics mine].

143 James, “The Real Thing,” 82.

144 James, “The Real Thing,” 81.

145 That James’s story likewise belies an interest in the body as a means of representation is indicated by the commonality of the theme in contemporary literature. See, to offer just a few examples, “The Yellow Wallpaper (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Theodore Dreiser’s “Curious Shifts of the Poor (1900),” and not least Zola’s “Nana (1880).” On this trope in “Nana,” see especially Peter Brooks, “Storied Bodies, or Nana at Last Unveil’d,” Critical Inquiry 16, no. 1 (Autumn 1999): 1-32.

146 Allara, for example, argues that “because the ‘meaning’ of the scenes which Demuth reproduces can only be understood through reference to the text, the illustrations are confusing to the casual museum visitors [sic].” As evidence, she points to “the fact that most of the illustrations are done on very poor paper (embossed with the brand name ‘Cloverlinen Goldsmith Bros.’),” which indicates, she suggests, “that Demuth did not plan the works to hang in a public collection,” 78. While I do not view the quality of paper on which Demuth painted these works as a particularly strong indicator of Demuth’s intended audience, public or private, I discuss the question of textual reference and its implication for how the works mean (their legibility as images) at length in what follows.

Several scholars (Allara included) base their assessment that the illustrations were done for Demuth’s “private amusement” on Henry McBride’s claim that Demuth’s dealer, Charles Daniel, showed the Nana series in the back room of the Daniel Gallery, and only to his most discerning clientele: “There are watercolors of Mr. Demuth that have not been hung upon the walls. The subjects were suggested by a reading of Zola’s Nana. They are kept hidden in a portfolio, and are only shown to museum directors and proved lovers of modern art upon presentation of visiting cards. They are quite advanced.” Henry McBride, “News and Comment in the World of Art: Charles Demuth and Edward Fiske,” New York Sun, December 3, 1916, section 5, 2, reproduced in Bruce Kellner, ed., Letters of Charles Demuth, 144. Thirty-six years later, in a review of the first major retrospective of Demuth’s painting held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1950, McBride made the claim more explicitly: “the artist himself,” he suggests, “must have looked at them as essentially private entertainments.” Henry McBride, “Demuth: Phantoms from Literature,” Art News 49 (March 1950), 21.

That Daniel showed these works widely to eager members of the press—and thus that McBride may have exaggerated the claim for writerly effect in 1916 (a claim on which he only much later doubled down)—is indicated by Forbes Watson’s exclamation, made in a 1921 review of Demuth’s work at the Daniel Gallery, that a “man who obtains tickets to this group of illustrations is a lucky man.” See Forbes Watson, “At the Galleries,” Arts & Decoration 14 (January 1921), 215. Pointing to “the extensive exhibition history of these works in Demuth’s lifetime,” Barbara Haskell offers compelling evidence on this score. Contrary to McBride’s claims she suggests that Demuth himself certainly “liked them well enough to allow Albert Barnes to buy eight and to send the remaining one to Stieglitz in 1929, claiming that it ‘wasn’t bad’ … Demuth also exhibited the Nana series at the Daniel Gallery in 1916 and 1920. When the Whitney Studio organized an exhibition at the Grafton Galleries in London as a
supplement to the Venice Biennale in 1921, eight of them were exhibited Barbara Haskell, *Charles Demuth*, who cites Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, May 9, 1929, YCAL.


150 Several scholars have emphasized the autonomy of Demuth’s literary pictures from the texts on which they are based. John Sweeney, for example, insisted in italics in 1943 that “each composition is a picture in itself which may be assessed on its own terms of form and color regardless of literary association. Individually, each may be seen as a completely satisfactory pictorial unit,” and as such, each should be treated as “a presentation rather than a representation.” “The Demuth Pictures,” *The Kenyon Review* 5, no. 4 (Autumn 1943), 524, 531. Likewise, in the catalogue for the 1950 retrospective of Demuth’s painting organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Andrew Carnduff Ritchie locates the merit of Demuth’s illustrations in their departure from their source texts: “It is Demuth’s lack of literalness that raises all of his illustrations to a plane parallel with, and not subsidiary to, the stories and plays in question. He was too independent an imagination to be bound by an author’s actual description of a scene. Like Delacroix’s inspirations drawn from Scott’s novels, or Berloiz’s interpretation of Byron’s poetry, Demuth sough to recreate stories and plays in his own medium and to give them a new and quite different life conceived in visual terms.” *Charles Demuth* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1950), 5-6. This strain of argument still prevailed in the 1970s. Allara, who produced the first comprehensive study of the illustrations, argued in 1970 that Demuth “transformed” the genre of illustrations from “merely pictures added as an appendage to a text to works of art with intrinsic artistic merit.” “The Watercolor Illustrations of Charles Demuth”, 69; while Alvord Eiseman described the series in 1976 as “unique creations from the hand and mind of Demuth alone.” “A Study of the Development of an Artist,” 176.

151 Of Demuth’s choice to illustrate James’s “The Beast of the Jungle,” Barbara Haskell, for example, maintains that “Demuth found a story that embodied his ambivalence about missing out on conventional emotional experiences and traditional forms of happiness,” *Charles Demuth*, 109. On this question of what motivated Demuth’s particular choice of texts, Allara, suggests that “Demuth’s literary tastes” were “a logical result ...of [his] physical sickness.” However, in her third chapters, she goes on to list as first, among the three interests that motivate her study of the illustrations, the question of “why Demuth chose a particular author, book and scene to illustrate,” including “the personal meaning which the books had for Demuth or the way in which the subject matter is related to his homosexuality.” Pointing to “a scabrous [sic] ‘valentine’ to Robert Locher” as evidence of Demuth’s “perversion,” she belies her own prejudice in suggesting that “although it is true that his homosexuality did not affect the quality of his art, Demuth’s homosexual preoccupations are often so strongly expressed in the illustrations that it is not possible to avoid dealing with them.” See Allara, “The Watercolor Illustrations of Charles Demuth,” 28, 74.

152 Ritchie identified the theme of “sex as a symbol of social degeneracy” across the texts Demuth chose to illustrate, arguing in his 1950 catalogue essay that Demuth’s “preoccupations with these illustrations of the morbid and perverse undoubtedly reflects a deep unbalance and disquiet in his own nature.” 6. The “supreme interest” of this work, he maintains however, is not as “merely private records of a complex personality,” in which case “their interest would be limited indeed,” but rather “as distillations of that period of esthetic bohemianism that flowered during the first two decades of this century and whose roots were in Paris, London, and Berlin.” *Charles Demuth*, 6.
In the catalogue for the next major retrospective of Demuth’s work, held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1988, Barbara Haskell extrapolates from “Demuth’s selection of literary subjects” that “he saw damnation as the consequence of his behavior. His obsession with themes involving promiscuity and punishment thus reflects his residual moral ambivalence about sexual pleasure and a concomitant fear of its all-consuming power” Charles Demuth, 98, 99.

153 See, for example, Allara, “The Watercolor Illustrations,” 26, 28, 29, and 42; Jonathan Weinberg, Speaking for Vice, 89; and Haskell, Charles Demuth, 109. I do not mean to suggest that Demuth necessarily did not identify with the character of Marcher. Indeed, his inclusion of the cane signals that on some level he did, as does “The Voyage Was Almost Over” (1912), an unpublished short by Demuth told from the vantage of an unnamed narrator who finds himself unable to connect with the other passengers aboard a transatlantic ship, which thematically hews closely to James’s “The Beast in the Jungle.” This character’s words are perhaps even more typically mobilized in the way I describe Marcher’s dialogue to have been used above. Despite the fact that Demuth himself authored this text, it is equally problematic to take the narrator’s sentiments as though having issued directly from Demuth’s own mouth. My point more broadly: what I take issue with, and what I am arguing Demuth’s work itself challenges, is the notion that his painting can be reduced to any one meaning (Demuth himself, his own experiences, feelings, desires etc.). This is not to say his personal experience doesn’t have any bearing on the work, but that the work itself transcends that experience. The original transcription of “The Voyage was Almost Over” can be found in the Richard W. C. Weyand Collection of Charles Demuth, YCAL. The Weyand Scrapbooks, as Barbara Haskell has summarized, “contain transcriptions of Demuth’s papers and a catalogue of his paintings. At Demuth’s death in 1935, his writings came into the possession of his longtime friend Robert Locher. Locher’s friend, Richard Weyand,”—in fact, Locher’s partner—“subsequently transcribed the writings and compiled the information about the paintings into twelve scrapbooks. In 1956 they were distributed among Weyand’s four siblings.” Some have been lost in the intervening years but the remainder were donated to the Beinecke in 1988 by Weyand’s niece, Ann Grether Hill. Haskell, Charles Demuth, 32. Haskell reproduces the text in full, see pages 46–47.

154 “The present development of human beings requires,” Freud writes in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, “no different explanation from that of animals: What appears in a minority of human individuals as an untiring impulsion towards further perfection can easily be understood as a result of the instinctual repression”—of both the sex and death drives—“upon which is based all that is most precious in human civilization. The repressed instinct never ceases to strive for complete satisfaction, which would consist in the repetition of a primary experience of satisfaction. No substitutive or reactive formation and no sublimations will suffice to remove the repressed instinct’s persisting tension; and it is the difference in amount between the pleasure of satisfaction which is demanded and that which is actually achieved that provides the driving factor which will permit of no halting at any position attained, but, in the poet’s [Faust’s] words ‘ungebändigt immer vorwärts dringt’ [presses ever forward unsubdued]. The backward path that leads to complete satisfaction is as a rule obstructed by the resistances which maintain the repressions. So there is no alternative but to advance in the direction in which growth is still free—though with no prospect of bringing the process to a conclusion or of being able to reach the goal.” In a footnote to the conclusion of this essay, Freud clarifies, “Our speculations have suggested that Eros operates from the beginning of life and appears as a ‘life instinct’ in opposition to the ‘death instinct’ which was brought into being by the coming to life of inorganic substance. These speculations seek to solve the riddle of life by supposing that these two instincts were struggling with each other from the very first.” Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1961), 50–51; 73n21.

155 Demuth in fact painted two versions of Eight O’clock Morning, the second of which I describe in what follows which makes for a less clear illustration of my point here, but ultimately reinforces the argument I make below that Demuth’s interest lies less in encapsulating the “pregnant” moment than in the narrative gaps and disjunctures, or the space between [Figures 90-91].

156 Demuth focused on the genre of illustration most intently in the years around World War I (1915–1919), but his first and last illustrations—The Real Thing (1908) and A Distinguished Air (1931)—bookend his career.


159 Despite the entanglements of sex, greed, and death, Wedekind’s play is itself hardly a moralistic or cautionary tale. See, for example: Kelly Comfort, “Artist for Art’s Sake or Artist for Sale: Lulu’s and Else’s Failed Attempts at Aesthetic Self-Fashioning,” *Women in German Yearbook* 22 (2006); Karin Littau, “Refractions of the Feminine: The Monstrous Transformations of Lulu,” *MLN* 110, no. 4 (September 1, 1995); and Audrone B. Willeke, “Frank Wedekind and the ‘Frauenfrage,’” *Monatshefte* 72, no. 1 (1980).

160 The character of Nana first appears toward the end of the previous novel, “L’Assommoir” (1887), which is the source material for the first illustration Demuth based on the character [Figure 63].

161 It’s likely, moreover, that Hartley himself first introduced Demuth to Wedekind’s plays. Hartley indicated he was planning to visit Wedekind in a letter to Stieglitz from Berlin in 1913, right around the time Demuth and Hartley were first introduced. See Allara, “The Watercolor Illustrations,” 133.


167 The particular position in which Demuth situates the viewer resonates shares something with that he establishes in the second illustration of the Nana series *Count Muffat’s First View of Nana at the Theater* [Figure 64]. Specifically, the reversal of the spectator’s position suggested by “Charlie’s” gaze (from the stage out to the audience) is similar to that established by the low, upturned angle we are given of Nana’s nude body. That vantage, in combination with the fact that Nana’s back is turned to the viewer, and the encroachment of blue washes that frame the central composition, seems to suggest that the viewer—who is placed, via the title, in the position of Count Muffat—is backstage or in the wings. Yet the smattering of smaller figures in the distance framed by a proscenium arch are clearly Nana’s back-up performers. The perspective also calls to mind what I described (following Clark) as the “look of self-portraiture” in Chapter 1.


171 To be clear, the dialogue that appears in Wedekind’s text reads: “SCHÔN. (Groaning.) O God! LULU. (Half startled.) No, no O God! (With emphasis.).” Wedekind, “Earth Spirit,” 75.


174 Wedekind, “Pandora’s Box,” 37.

175 Wedekind, “Pandora’s Box,” 79.
If the function of Lulu’s character as an figuration of bodily desire is relatively self-evident in Wedekind’s text, Jack’s footprints in this final picture, alongside Demuth’s visualization of Geschwitz’s dramatic unbecoming, point to a conception of death as that threshold or boundary between embodiment and being a body no longer—the body’s dissolution into some greater whole, here that of the picture itself. Indeed both drives might be said to transcend the particularity of individual experience—to evacuate the body of its specificity; or put another way (in the terms of Chapter 1) of the referentiality of portraiture.

Demuth depicts his vaudeville and circus figures, that is, as bodies performing as bodies, as opposed to actors who inhabit roles (present as subjects or even characters). This claim relies in part on Jeremy Butler’s description of vaudeville, which

Significantly, vaudeville performance does not demand that we forget the presence of the actor within the guise of the character. That is, vaudeville performance frequently reminds us that we’re watching a performance and that the characters before us are not real people. This is largely achieved through direct address of the viewer. Vaudeville actors often look straight at the audience, perform toward them, and even make comments to them [...]. Vaudeville’s direct address violates the theatrical concept of the invisible “fourth wall” that separates audience from characters ... [the viewer’s] presence is repeatedly acknowledged. And if we are acknowledged as viewers, then the entire illusion of the fiction is undermined. The naturalistic concept of the believable characters becomes immaterial to the vaudevillian.


The divide between text and image has a long history. Lessing’s treatise on the Laocoön is often pointed to as its first significant parsing, but it has even deeper roots (the paragone, the Vitruvian man, the academic hierarchy of genre, etc.), and, of course, the binary between text and image carries forward over into modernism as well. Clement Greenberg famously articulated his position as a “Newer” take on Lessing. See “Towards a Newer Laocoön,” *The Partisan Review* 7 (August 1940): 296–310.

T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 34.


See Haskell, *Charles Demuth*, 109–11. As Jonathan Weinberg has argued, Demuth’s chronic illness is second only to, and in much of the literature written prior to 1980, a barely coded euphemism for his sexuality. See Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice*, 1993. While Weinberg has produced the most nuanced reading of the influence of Demuth’s sexuality on his painting, he often locates (unconscious) intentionality in the work. This is especially true of his analysis of *A Prince of Court Painters* (see pages 87–89). For example, both Weinberg and Haskell quote the full passage Demuth excerpts from Pater, failing to mention (Haskell) or refusing to address (Weinberg) that which Demuth omits. The line that comes before the passage Demuth quotes reads: “He was a sick man all of his life. He was always a seeker...” The inclusion of this omitted text reflects the fact that, almost since the moment of Demuth’s premature death at the age of 52, scholars have read his sickness—or a at the very least, a certain reckoning with mortality—into his entire oeuvre, despite the fact that he wasn’t diagnosed with diabetes until 1919. For a recent instance, see Jonathan Walz, “The Act of Portrayal and the Art of Dying: Charles Demuth ‘Faces’ Mortality,” *Ricerche di storia dell’arte* 118 (April 2016). Such interpretations are especially characteristic of the scholarship on Demuth’s floral still lifes, but are common to the literature on his portraits as well. Robin Jaffee Frank goes so far as to characterize Hartley as a “farewell portrait,” riffing (strangely) off of Hartley’s own memorial to Demuth, “Farewell Charles,” published more than 10 years after Demuth painted his portrait. See Frank, *Poster Portraits*, 42.

Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz. January 2, 1921. YCAL.
Charles Demuth to Scofield Thayer, June 12, 1921. The Dial/Scofield Thayer Papers. YCAL MSS 34. Demuth relayed the same sentiment to Stieglitz upon his arrival in London a few months later, writing on August 31st that he had “chanced” the trip in the hopes of stopping “the ‘Wheels’ going round backwards.” See Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz August 31, 1921. YCAL.

During this time, Demuth also met up with Susan Street, and travelled with Robert Locher and his wife Beatrice. Describing the abundance of New York friends, he wrote to Eugene and Agnes O’Neill that “one corner of Paris looks, as to people often seen and always forgotten, like Miss Christine’s”—the reference here is to Christine Ell, who with her husband, Louis, owned a restaurant above the Playwrights’ Theatre (home to the Provincetown Players) at 139 Macdougal Street in New York—“or the Breevort [Hotel] on a ruff [sic] night. I can’t imagine what of the scenery is left to decorate the Village.” Charles Demuth to Agnes and Eugene O’Neill, September 17, 1921, YCAL. Of his success with Léonce Rosenberg, Demuth updated his mother the following month: “One of the galleries in Paris has taken things,— a quite good place. Of course I only had one or two things which I have done here, still it will be an opening if I ever want to come back, or send things over here. They liked my things.” Charles Demuth to Augusta Demuth, October 15, 1921, YCAL. See also Demuth to Alfred Barnes, October 10, 1921, BFASC; Fahlman, Chiminneys and Towers, 77; and Farnham, Charles Demuth Behind a Laughing Mask, 131.

Charles Demuth to Albert Barnes, n.d. [ca. September 13], BFASC. Soon thereafter, however, he reported to the O’Neill’s that he was feeling “none too well,” and his health must have indeed taken a precipitous turn, for on September 9th Demuth checked himself into the American Hospital in Neuilly, where he stayed for twelve days. See Haskell, Charles Demuth (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with H.N. Abrams, 1987), 144n57. On Demuth’s 1921 trip to Europe and the decline of his health in the months leading up to it, see especially Farnham, Charles Demuth, 123; Haskell, Charles Demuth, 137-141; Fahlman, Chiminneys and Towers, 76-80. Demuth remained in Paris another two months after his hospitalization, returning to Lancaster in November 1921.

This idea of treating the landscape—or more properly, the land—as a picture has its own history and tradition, which can be located in the discourse around the picturesque. A picturesque landscape was one that resembled a painting, denoting what James Elkins’s, citing Joel Snyder, describes as a kind of “pictured vision.” See James Elkins, “Writing Moods,” in Landscape Theory (New York: Routledge, 2008), 73, who cites Joel Snyder, “Picturing Vision,” Critical Inquiry 6, no. 3 (1980). This conception of the landscape as somehow already viewed resonates with Demuth’s landscape paintings. Posed by Uvedale Price in 1794 against the beautiful and the sublime, the concept of the picturesque was popularized in the early nineteenth century, as Brian Lukacher details, by the published travelogues of the Reverend William Gilpin, encouraged discerning tourists to evaluate and classify the scene qualities of topographic locales according to pictorial modes of landscape painting. English scenery could be exoticized (and acculturated) in the eye and mind of the picturesque tourist by virtue of its passing resemblance to the seventeenth-century landscape art of Claude Lorrain and Salvatore Rosa … The tourist well versed in the playful formalism and classifying criteria of the picturesque could take visual possession of and thereby entertain an illusory dominion over nature: the land transformed into landscape through the refining and all-encompassing act of perception.

Where the beautiful, as defined by Sir Edmond Burke in the eighteenth century, derived from order and symmetry, the picturesque was tied to irregularity and variation. Key to this conception was the notion that such irregularity was arranged so as to resemble a picture, in what Lukacher describes as a “permutable interplay between the natural and the artificial.” “Nature and History in English Romantic Landscape Painting,” in Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 120. See also Uvedale Price, Essays on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful; And, on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape (London: Printed for J. Mawman, 1810); and William Gilpin, Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape: With a Poem on Landscape Painting. To These Are Now Added, Two Essays Giving an Account of the Principles and Mode in Which the Author Executed His Own Drawings. By William Gilpin (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1808).

See Fahlman, Chiminneys and Towers, 100. The fact that the titles of at least two paintings shown in this exhibition later changed—After Sir Christopher Wren is listed under the more straightforward title of New England, and the painting now known as Machinery as For W. Carlos W.—suggests that rather than having been lost, the latter three words (Waiting, The Merry-Go-Round, and Chiminneys Ventilators or Whatever) were likewise later renamed. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has identified After Sir Christopher Wren as “New England.”
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/483297, accessed November 12, 2017, while the inscription of “For W. Carlos W.” in the lower left of Machinery indicates that painting was originally titled as such.


189 “Architectural paintings” is the descriptor Betsy Fahlman prefers. Barbara Haskell maintains that Demuth himself referred to the architectural pictures he painted in Bermuda in 1917 as “Interpretive Landscapes.” She doesn’t cite the source but mentions it in the context of discussing Henry McBride’s 1917 review of the two-person exhibition at the Daniel Gallery, which included works by Demuth and Edward Fisk. See Haskell, Charles Demuth, 131; and Henry McBride, “News and Comment in the World of Art: Charles Demuth and Edward Fiske.” New York Sun. 3 December 1916, section 5, page 2.

190 Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, October 1921. YCAL.

191 Betsey Fahlman’s exhibition catalogue, Chimneys and Towers: Charles Demuth’s Late Paintings of Lancaster, exemplifies the “psychobiographic” impulse at work, and provides a clear example of the claim that Demuth’s landscapes are rooted in a sense of place, region, and local and personal identity. The first chapter of her catalogue “charts the artist’s grounding within Lancaster, using the local as a revealing interpretative lens. Place and biography are interwoven within the rich chronicle of friendship he maintained amongst the international avant-garde” (35). More specifically, she considers his late paintings of Lancaster “within the context of Precisionism and Regionalism,” and argues that Demuth’s paintings are “dually grounded in the specifics of time and place” (36). She cites Gallatin, American Water-Colourists. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1922, 23. Haskell likewise maintains these works result from Demuth’s “psychic and visual rapport with a specific place” (199) and My Egypt specifically as an expression “of emotional certainty, of a lifetime’s experience of a specific place distilled down to a single vision” (198).

192 Among the most frequently quoted passages is from a letter Demuth wrote to Stieglitz shortly after his return: “It was all very wonderful,—but I must work, here. Had I stayed in France when I went to it for the first time,—by now I would be into it. It would take years, and after all there are many able Frenchmen,—and New York is something which Europe is not,—and I feel of that something—awful, as most of it is. Marcel and all the others, those who count, say that all the ‘modern’ is to us, and of course they are right, but it is so hard. … What work I do will be done here; terrible as it is to work in this ‘our land of the free.’ … Together we will add to the American scene, more than has been added since the 60s and the 70s,—maybe more than they added. I feel that together we are all more or less fine.” Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, December, 18, 1921. YCAL.

193 Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, August 1921. YCAL.

194 Charles Demuth to Alfred Stieglitz, August 1921. YCAL.

195 Charles Demuth to Scofield Thayer, June 12, 1921. YCAL. Thayer would go on to feature After Sir Wren as a frontispiece in the February 1921 issue of The Dial. See The Dial 70, no. 2 (February 1921). Upon his death in 1982, he willed the painting to The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Long-time friends, Thayer and Demuth connected over their mutual admiration for the work of Aubrey Beardsley, a first edition of whose “Mademoiselle de Maupin” (1897) Demuth would go on to purchase from the antiquarian bookseller, Max Martin, on behalf of The Dial in London while abroad. See Charles Demuth to Scofield Thayer, August 23, 1921. YCAL. The Dial was first established in 1840 under the editorial direction of Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson. In the 1920s, Thayer and his co-editor, J. Sibley Watson, published a range of modernist writers, including works by Sherwood Anderson, Hart Crane, e.e. Cummings, T. S. Elliot, D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Mann, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams, as well as reproducing works of art by Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and others. See Kellner, Letters of Charles Demuth, 12n1.

196 Thus, for example, Demuth’s letters to Barnes don’t appear in the collected volume of his correspondence, published in 2000. The first scholar to make use of these letters was Betsy Fahlman in 2007 and they have been explored in depth by Richard J. Wattenmaker. See American Paintings and Works on Paper in the Barnes Foundation, 260. The Foundation has subsequently changed its policies and generously accommodate the research requests of scholars, including myself. That said, access to them, at least in the case of Fahlman doesn’t seem to
have had much effect on the “America” reading. The letter from Demuth to Barnes in and of itself offers a counterpoint to the passages more usually cited from Demuth’s letters to Stieglitz from Paris, particularly the point about how he could stay in Paris for years.

197 I take a methodological cue here from the way in which Anne M. Wagner treats Monet’s correspondence with Bazille: “What does not always figure in” scholarly accounts that cull from Monet’s letters, she writes “is the fact that the evidence takes the form of a letter to Bazille. So much is obvious. Perhaps I will better make my point if I say that evidence in this case is extracted from an order of discourse with its own aims, traditions, and protocols. Thirty-nine letters make up the discursive category, strictly defined; documents of a friendship, they have that status because they constructed the terms in which a friendship was lived out. How to read them?” “Why Monet Gave Up Figure Painting,” 620-21.

198 Demuth himself wittily described his letters of this period as dispatches from “the provinces,” and often encoded that characterization in the titles of his landscapes, such as In the Province (Roofs) (1919), Lancaster: In the Province No. 2 (1920), and From the Garden of the Chateau (1921) [Figures 121-122].

199 Anschutz served as a mentor to many of the realist painters who, under the rallying cry of Robert Henri, would later come to be known as “the Eight” or the Ashcan School of American Realism. Demuth earned his undergraduate degree at The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts between 1905 and 1910. Several of the Ashcan painters were also Pennsylvania-born and PAFA-educated, as was Charles Sheeler, the other major figure associated with “Precisionism,” who was a student at PAFA during Demuth’s tenure there.

200 “Daniel Robbins, letter to Barbara Haskell, May 14, 1986, provided information (derived from Mademoiselle Gleizes) on the contact between Gleizes and Demuth in Bermuda.” See Haskell, Charles Demuth, 142n6. Together Demuth and Hartley hatched a plan to stay in Provincetown through the fall and then decamp to Bermuda come winter. In September they moved together into John Francis’s vacant cottage but a cold snap forced them to make other arrangements. Demuth headed to his home base of Lancaster while Hartley waited out the autumn on Staten Island, where he stayed with Demuth’s old friends Robert and Beatrice Locher and departed for Bermuda in late December. The two men met back up in Bermuda in February of 1917. On Demuth and Hartley’s plans over the fall of 1916 and winter of 1917, see Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, September 19, 1916, YCAL; Haskell, Charles Demuth, 122; and Farnham, Charles Demuth, 107, who, as Haskell points out, incorrectly asserted that Demuth roomed with Eugene O’Neill in John Francis’s cottage.

201 Gleizes and Metzinger, writes Haskell, “had opposed Picasso’s superficial fragmentation of ‘impressionism’ of forms. Available in English in 1913, the book dominated discussions on Cubism among members of the Arensberg group.” Haskell, Charles Demuth, 142n11.

202 Some of these works were traded in thanks (if not quite direct exchange) for the financial assistance Barnes provided that enabled Demuth’s treatment for diabetes at the Morristown clinic.


204 Haskell cites a September 1916 letter in which Hartley reported to Stieglitz from Provincetown that Demuth’s work “‘has taken on a less frivolous quality and now they are more dignified with more real aesthetic in them.’” Haskell attributes Demuth’s shift toward abstraction to his desire for inclusion in Stieglitz’s inner circle: “The circle around Stieglitz had not yet come to take Demuth’s work seriously. His ambition was to gain their approval.” See Haskell, Charles Demuth, 12, who cites Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz September 19, 1916. YCAL.

205 On Demuth’s blotting technique, see Haskell, Charles Demuth, 121; and Mark Mitchell, “A New Tradition: Cézanne, Demuth, and the Invention of Modern Watercolor,” in Cézanne and Beyond, 287.

206 As Haskell details, “Demuth had shifted his medium in these 1919 architectural works from watercolor to tempera. By applying it lightly and allowing areas of the board to show through, he attempted—not always
successfully—to elicit the same transparency that he had previously achieved with watercolor.” Charles Demuth, 130.

207 Fahlman, Chimneys and Towers, 35.

208 Haskell concurs with the claim I make above about Box of Tricks, which she argues “concerns the artist’s slight of hand in visually transforming reality. Artifice, Demuth implies, is inherent to the process of making art,” 129.

Symonds: “to try the resources of our language in a series of studies of what might be termed ‘blues and blouses.’ For this purpose I resolved to take a single Figure—a facchino with whom I have been long acquainted—and to pose him in a variety of lights with a variety of hues in combination.” ... “A symphony of blues and white—You, the acacias, dewy-bright, Transparent skies of chrysolite. We wind along these leafy hills; One chord of blue the landscape thrills, Your three blent azures merged in those Cerulean heavens above the blouse. The highest tones flash forth in white: Acacia branches bowed with snow Of scented blossom; broken light; The ivory of your brows, the glow Of those large orbs that are your eyes: Those starry orbs of lustrous jet In clear enameled [sic] turquoise set, Pale as the margin of morning skies.” “In the Key of Blue,” in In the Key of Blue and Other Prose Essays by John Addington Symonds (London: 1893), 4, 6.

209 Based on his exposure to the acrostic and cryptographic techniques that Arensberg employed to decipher texts which he believed contained secret codes, such as the Divine Comedy,” Haskell rather oddly suggests the that the jumbled title might be decoded as “M. Sampson Paige. M. Sampson;” though this moniker doesn’t refer to anyone with whom Demuth was known to have been acquainted, nor does it account for the repetition of the initial M followed by a second “Sampson.” Haskell ultimately maintains that the title is “more likely … intentionally unintelligible.” Charles Demuth, 136.

210 Krauss, “The Motivation of the Sign,” 271. This essay is hardly a primer on Cubism; indeed, Krauss draws a definite and distinct line between cubist painting and collage.


212 The fact that cubist painting starts from and remains tied to the object world—is not purely abstract nor non-objective—is an important point for scholars invested in this work (such as Bois, Krauss, Clark), originating with Picasso’s dealer, Daniel Henry Kahnweiler.


216 Quoted in DeLue, George Inness and the Science of Landscape, 128, who cites Asher B. Durand, “Letters on Landscape Painting,” pt. 4 of 9. Crayon 1 (February 14, 1855), 98. “As late as 1834, the art critic, Anna Jameson recounted her somewhat uncomfortable experience of trying to elicit the esthetic interests of an ‘independent English Yeoman’; after describing the picturesque beauty of the surrounding landscape, her admiring remarks about the scenery met with this riposte from the farmer, ‘‘Picturesque!’’ he repeated with some contempt; ‘I don’t know what you call picturesque, but I say, give me a soil, and when you turn it up, you have something for your pains.’” Lukacher, “Nature and History in English Romantic Landscape Painting,” 120.


218 “Before Caspar David Friedrich,” Koerner claims, “no major Western artist had fashioned canvases as empty as these. … the barren scenes of thicket, grove, and hovel were achieved only through a deliberate and epochal purgation of landscape painting’s subject,” The Subject of Landscape, 22.
Koerner, *The Subject of Landscape*, 9, 10.

DeLue, “Elusive Landscapes and Shifting Grounds,” in *Landscape Theory*, 5. For other examples, DeLue points her readers to texts by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Ward Beecher, and Henry David’s Thoreau’s “A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers” and “The Maine Woods,” published in 1849 and 1864, respectively. This essay serves as the introduction to *Landscape Theory* (2008), an anthology of essays and published conversations on the topic of landscape broadly conceived.


“Demuth's interest in the French medieval romance, initiated perhaps by William Carlos Williams, who had been enthusiastic about it in college, may have been rekindled in 1922 when Walter Pater's essay on it was republished.” See Haskell, *Charles Demuth*, 136, who quotes Susan Street from S. Lane Faison, Jr., “Fact and Art in Charles Demuth,” *Magazine of Art*, 43 (April 1950), 126. See also Walter Pater, “Two Early French Stories” (1873), reprinted in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1922). Haskell maintains that “Williams was fascinated with [Pater’s essay on] Aucassin and Nicolette, for which reason Karal Ann Marling …identified the painting as representing a reunion between Williams and Demuth sometime after ill health had reduced Demuth’s social life in New York.” Haskell, *Charles Demuth*, 143-144n45.


Demuth, Charles. “Across A Greco is Written.” *Creative Art* 5 (September 1929), 629.

According to Ann Temkin, “it was reportedly Picasso (although some accounts cite Matisse) who first had declared the work a phallus. Brancusi was infuriated by the comparison. He insisted the sculpture was a portrayal of a feminine ideal and denied alternate readings that characterized it as a sign of his desire for its model or a formulation of sexual duality.” http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51035.html#. Ann Temkin, “Princess X, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska,” in Constantin Brancusi 1876-1957 (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 140, quoted in the Philadelphia Museum’s online catalogue entry for Princess X (1915-1916), accessed November 11, 2017. As Barbara Haskell notes, H. R. Roche, [a collector] who frequented the salons hosted by Walter and Louise Arensberg, was the initial owner of Brancusi’s Princess X but sold it with the help of Marius De Zayas to John Quinn in 1917. The Arensbergs also acquired a version of the sculpture in bronze around 1917. See Haskell, *Charles Demuth*, 212n24, who cites Sidney Geist, *Constantine Brancusi 1876-1957: A Retrospective Exhibition*. Exhibition catalogue (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1969), 79.


Anne M. Wagner, “Why Monet Gave up Figure Painting,” 620.

A fifth image, titled *Two Figures in a Bedroom* is somewhat of an outlier in the group and was later destroyed [Figure 171].

Haskell claims that *A Distinguished Air* was “banned from several exhibitions” but doesn’t cite any sources or specifics. *Charles Demuth*, 206.
As we work through the conundrum each poster presents, we feel in touch with ... his subjective self. We feel his loneliness and desire for intimacy as he tenderly works in other artists’ styles, makes their love lives into metaphors of fruits and vegetables, and exaggerates their names or puts them in lights. ... The living through others and the longing in Demuth’s pictures—the desire for a “hug,” as in [Robert] Indiana’s homage—separates them from other referential portraiture of the time. Even those that fail to communicate are touching because Demuth’s speechlessness seems as much cultural as persona,” Corn, The Great American Thing, 237. Corn refers in this passage to Robert Indiana’s painting The X-5, an homage to The Figure Five.

Wagner points to the same phenomenon in the O’Keeffe scholarship and criticism, to which she argues O’Keeffe consciously responded through her painting in turn. “While O’Keeffe’s art may well have arisen in part from her own experience of bodily sensation, of embodiment, she was resistant to an art that would seem to be about her sensations alone.” For “if O’Keeffe’s painting is herself, it is only herself ... It can have no truck with style or influence: it can exist in no particular relationship with history and can have only a nodding acquaintance with other moments and practices of innovation. Its possible relationship to contemporary politics or culture must be downplayed or derided or stamped out.” Wagner, “O’Keeffe’s Femininity,” 100, 101.

Clark’s full passage reads: “The retreat of art from familiar appearances, of which Picasso’s and Braque’s painting was such a strong example, would issue, Kahnweiler hoped, in a recognition of the deep structures of ‘subjective’ apprehension, and therefore the reconstruction of a shared world.” Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 5.

Frank’s discussion of O’Keeffe offers another explicit example: “Although the form of O’Keeffe is public,” she argues, “the content is private, filled with hidden layers of meaning intended to be understood only by a limited audience yet invitingly designed to attract the un-initiated into the fold... the process of decoding the subtext of Demuth’s portrait of O’Keeffe forces us to become involved with the artist, the sitter, and their shared social milieu.” Charles Demuth, 45. Aiken (like me) draws the opposite conclusion: “Unlike traditional portraiture, [Demuth’s portraits] do not beguile us by physiognomic verisimilitude into thinking we know the subject. To the contrary, they demand that we be willing to enter the game that the artist has established if we are to identify the subject and appreciate the artist’s cleverness in creating a system of signs leading to that identification.” “I Saw the Figure Five,” 179.

Danto also points out this disjunction. The later erotics, he argues “are at the same time painted with that mark Demuth as an absolute master of a elegance and light, a fluidity and authority over watercolor as a medium .. One’s focus alternates between salacious content and high artistry, as difficult to fuse into a single experience ... Indeed, the destabilization of the viewer sometimes seems to be the abiding intention of Demuth’s’ work.” “Charles Demuth,” 102.

In a recent essay, Anne Pasek tests out a “queer phenomenological” methodology that seeks to set “questions of identity aside.” “Given the continual presence of homophobic repression throughout much of the history of the West,” she writes, “queer content was invariably codified, hidden, restricted in circulation censored or destroyed. This led to what [Whitney] Davis identifies as an orientation towards absence, studying a field of representation that is apparent at times only through its ‘constitutive invisibilities.’” Anne Pasek “Disorientations: John Singer Sargent and Queer Phenomenology,” Emaj 7, no. 1 (November 2012), 1. Designed to better “account for the diverse expressions of queer desire” across history, Pasek’s methodology sets out to offer an alternative to previous approaches to the study of art by queer artists, which have tended historically to “essentialize diverse experiences and desires.” Positing “a more attentive and respectful account of sexuality” that “lingers in the traces of lost desire,” queer phenomenology, she maintains, “reads art not as the external proof of an identity or subjectivity, but as a support or index of proximity and embodied attraction.” Pasek begins with a critical survey of the “queer historiography” and in conclusion applies this methodology to the sketchbooks of John Singer Sargent, arguing “that a focus on the spatial orientation of bodies in his album of male nudes provides a more nuanced and ethical account of the queer than focus on identity and identification,” 1.
The potential benefits of Pasek’s methodology are many (she gets a lot right, and helpfully articulates the issues that pertain to this field of study) but in (her) practice, queer phenomenology amounts to something we’ve encountered before: what Harry Berger terms “the fiction of the pose.” For example, after performing a nuanced visual analysis of Sargent’s drawings of the male nude, she draws back to suggest that “the exchange supported by the drawing, therefore, is one of a peculiar corporeal extension between men, even for an artist and his model,” 22 (italics mine). Her phrasing here—“the exchange supported by the drawing”—makes (perhaps unintentionally) plain the privileged term of her analysis: some notion of the real—a real “exchange” or encounter, real feelings, real desires—to which Sargent’s drawings, in her estimation and indeed, inherent to her methodological approach—are understood/ treated as merely a “support.”

239 Haskell continues: “But although the attraction of a self-styled aristocrat like Demuth to lower-class males would have followed a known homosexual pattern, Demuth’s weakened physical condition at this stage makes his participation in such promiscuous behavior as the images depict unlikely.” Charles Demuth, 206-207.

240 Krauss, “The Motivation of the Sign,” 271


244 Krauss, “The Motivation of the Sign,” 275. Krauss draws on Bakhtin’s “The Dialogic Principle.” This has methodological upshots for Krauss, that specifically run counter to iconography: “Suppose we follow Bakhtin in viewing any utterance, enlarged here to include aesthetic decisions—like the interjection of newsprint within the pictorial medium—as a response to another utterance, if we do so, it will not be possible for us to think of such a decision as a direct reflection of the material, such as newspaper, or of a theme. Such as popular culture of the Balkan Wars, but rather as something always-already mediated by the voice. Or utterance, or decision, of someone else: another speaking or acting subject for whom this issue—newspaper—counts.” She writes earlier: “In this question of the intersubjective grounding of meaning Bakhtin would also make very clear that the subjects or persons he had in mind are not the subjects of psychological individualism; they are instead what he would call ‘semantic subjects,’ subjects formed in and through discourse, discourse as the ideological matrix, the very stuff of the social field. For his theory no utterance is, then, originary; each is instead a reaction to what has already been said, or what the speakers knows to be already felt, believed, perceived, by his interlocutor—feelings, beliefs, perceptions, which form what could be called the horizon of reception. The speaker is always, in Bakhtin’s terms, in an evaluative relation to that horizon, probing it, cajoling it, refusing it, seducing it.” “The Motivation of the Sign,” 274-275.

245 Yet one that is different in kind from that espoused by an artist such as Dove. “Fundamental to one of the most proliferate forms of Dove’s pictures,” Rachael DeLue suggest in her recent re-reading of Dove “was the idea and instantiation of communication, understood as a mutually affecting transaction or exchange between entities or parts, a transfer that produced a structure that was essentially relational in nature, forming as it did a conceptual and material network of interrelated entities.” For Dove, then, DeLue suggests, “translation and communication spoke evidently and essentially of connections made and relationships forged. Arthur Dove: Always Connect (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 24, 53, 62.


247 Whether and how such theory maps onto discrete objects and individual practices, however, is an issue often papered over in the extant literature, a propensity this study proceeds consciously not to replicate or reinforce. If, to varying degrees, the Stieglitz paradigm has informed our understanding of the work produced by all the artists associated with the Stieglitz circle, and it follows that each is ripe for reconsideration. This work is already underway. For example, it is in part what I understand it to have motivated DeLue’s recent scholarship on Dove. On the “ossified discourse” of the Stieglitz circle, see Brennan, Painting Gender, 97-98. That said, Brennan herself has a tendency to elide theory and practice. She goes to some length to make the distinction rhetorically, acknowledging,
for example, in her fourth chapter, that the “gendering” of O'Keeffe’s form is not so much endemic to the work itself as it is a “layer of discourse [affixed] to the surfaces of [her] paintings.” 96. Yet, she regularly brings in artworks, with little or no analysis, to stand as evidence for an argument she’s making that takes form within that discourse.

248 DeLue precisely summarized the issue in her catalogue essay for The Museum of Modern Art’s 2012 exhibition, *Inventing Abstraction*. “Put of Stieglitz’s tails, both the transatlantic and the nativist, came the idea of a ‘Stieglitz Circle,’ the fantasy of a cohesive artistic project, and of the centrality to this project of nature, spirit, an aversion to modernity and subjective gender-based expression.” DeLue goes on to provide two brief case studies of Dove and O'Keeffe outlining potential readings that fall outside the scope of the Stieglitz mythology, and concludes with the point that such interpretations only become possible once we stop approaching both artists through the lens of the Stieglitz circle. See “Against the Circle,” 188.

249 Anne Wagner’s description of O'Keeffe’s relationship to Stieglitz circle discourse resonates here. “We [cannot] extract the artist herself from the conditions and culture that gave them rise. Instead we need first to recognize that the imperatives and limitations of criticism imposed conditions that the artist was forced to negotiate not just as a person but also in paint.” Wagner goes on to describe O'Keeffe’s response to her critics as a form of masquerade: “For O'Keeffe the masquerade functioned as the means, if not entirely to conceal, then at least to suppress, the evident ambition of her pictures… By such means she meant to elude the inimical opinions of those critics who ironically were among her most enthusiastic supporters. It is as if she reasoned that by confirming their dearest prejudices about her work—by offering, in the folds and swirls of her sweet peas and cactus flowers, the visual version of something like “You want feminine, I’ll give you feminine”—she could silence them.” Wagner, 52-53, 98.
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Figure 1. Alfred Stieglitz, Photograph of Charles Demuth, ca. 1920

Yale Collection of American Literature

Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven, CT
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Poster paint on pressed-paper board, 20 x 23 1/3 in.

Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT
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Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT
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Watercolor and graphite on paper, 10 1/8 by 8 1/8 in.

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
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Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT
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Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC
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Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Los Angeles, CA
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Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
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Vilcek Foundation, New York, NY
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Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
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Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, NY
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Watercolor & graphite on paper, 13 x 8 in.
Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 104. Jacques Louis David, The Oath of the Horatii, 1784
Oil on canvas, 152 x 206 in.
Musée du Louvre, Paris, France
Figure 105. After Sir Christopher Wren, 1920
Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on cardboard, 24 x 20 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Figure 106. End of the Parade, Coatesville, Pa., 1920
Tempera and pencil on board, 19 7/8 x 15 3/4
The Regis Collection, Minneapolis, MN
Figure 107. Machinery, 1920
Gouache and graphite on paperboard, 24 x 19 7/8 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Figure 108. Amaryllis, ca. 1923
Watercolor over graphite, 18 x 11 15/16 in.
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH
Figure 109. Seven Plums in a Chinese Bowl, 1923
Watercolor & graphite on ivory wove watercolor paper, 10 x 14 in.
Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, IL
Figure 110. Zinnias, 1924
Watercolor & pencil on paper, 18 x 11 15/16 in.
The Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX
Figure 111. Still Life: Apples and Pears, 1925
Watercolor over graphite under drawing, 13 3/4 x 19 3/4 in.
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
Figure 112. Eggplants, 1926
Watercolor & graphite on paper, 13 7/8 x 19 3/4 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Figure 113. Green Pears, 1929
Watercolor over graphite, 13 7/8 x 19 7/8 in.
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
Figure 114. Kiss Me Over the Fence, 1929
Watercolor on paper, 12 x 18 in.
Private Collection
Figure 115. Red Poppies, 1929

Watercolor & graphite on paper, 13 7/8 x 19 7/8 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Figure 116. Yellow Calla Lily, ca. 1925
Watercolor with graphite, 20 1/8 x 13 5/16 in.
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
Figure 117. Welcome to Our City, 1921
Oil on canvas, 24 1/2 x 19 3/8 in.
Private Collection
Figure 118. My Egypt, 1927
Oil, chalk, and graphite on board, 35 15/16 × 30 in.
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Figure 119. And the Home of the Brave, 1921
Oil and graphite on fiber board, 29 1/2 x 23 1/2 in.
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
Figure 120. Paquebot Paris, 1921-22
Oil on canvas, 25 in. x 20 in.
Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH
Figure 121. In the Province, Roofs, 1919
Opaque watercolor over graphite pencil on cardboard, 30 5/8 x 26 1/4 in.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
Figure 122. From the Garden of the Chateau, 192
Oil On Canvas, 25 x 20 in.
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA
Figure 123. Landscape with Windmill #1, 1896
Watercolor & pencil on paper, 3 7/8 x 4 3/4 in.
Demuth Foundation, Lancaster, PA
Figure 125. The Bay #4, ca. 1912
Watercolor on paper, 10 x 13 7/8 in.
Collection of the Demuth Museum, Lancaster, PA
Figure 126. Early Landscape, 1914
Watercolor & graphite on paper, 9 ½ x 12 ¼ in.
Private Collection
Figure 127. Landscape with Stream and Trees, 1912-1914

Watercolor on paper, 7 x 10 in.

Private Collection
Figure 128. Biarritz, South of France, 1913
Oil on board, 12 x 16 in.
Private Collection
Figure 129. Trees and Barnes, Bermuda, 1917
Watercolor & pencil on paper, 9 1/2 x 13 7/16 in.
Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA
Figure 130. Bermuda Landscape No. 3: The Tower, 1917
Watercolor over graphite (recto and verso) on off-white wove paper, 10 x 14 in.
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
Figure 131. Bermuda Landscape, 1917
Watercolor & pencil on paper mounted on cardboard, 11 x 14 1/16 in.
The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC
Figure 132. Bermuda: Stairway, 1917

Watercolor & graphite on wove paper, 10 1/16 x 10 in.

The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 133. Bermuda Landscape No. 1, 1917
Watercolor & graphite on wove paper, 10 x 14 in.
The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 134. Bermuda Landscape #1: Tree and House, 1917
Watercolor, pencil, pen and ink on paper, 10 x 13 7/8 in.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Figure 136. Bermuda: Rooftops through Trees, 1917
Watercolor & graphite on wove paper, 10 x 14 in.
The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 137. Bermuda: Rooftops through Trees, 1917
Watercolor & graphite on wove paper, 10 x 14 in.
The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 138. Bermuda Landscape No. 2, 1917
Watercolor & graphite on wove paper, 10 x 14 in.
The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 139. Bermuda: Tree, 1917

Watercolor & graphite on wove paper, 10 x 14 in.

The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 140. Trees and Barns, Bermuda, 1917
Watercolor over graphite, 9 15/16 x 14 in.
Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD
Figure 141. Rooftops, Provincetown, 1918
Watercolor & pencil on paper, 10 x 14 in.
Private Collection
Figure 142. Red Chimneys, 1918

Watercolor & graphite pencil on paper, 10 1/8 x 14 in.

The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC
Figure 143. Rooftops, 1918
Watercolor & pencil on paper, 10 x 15 in.
Private Collection
Figure 144. Piano Mover's Holiday, 1919
Distemper on composition board, 20 x 15 in.
The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 145. Masts, 1919
Tempera on composition board, 19 7/8 x 16 5/16 in.
The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 146. Tree Trunks, 1916
Watercolor on paper, 14 1/2 x 10 1/4 in.
Private Collection
Figure 147. Sailboats (The Love Letter), 1919
Watercolor on board, 15 ½ x 19 3/8 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA
Figure 148. Lancaster, 1921
Tempera and pencil on paperboard, 19 7/8 x 16 in.
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
Figure 149. Roofs and Steeples, 1921

Watercolor & graphite on textured wove paper, 14 3/8 x 10 7/16 in.

The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
Figure 150. Buildings, Lancaster, 1930
Oil and graphite on fiberboard, 24 x 20 in.
Figure 151. Chimney and Water Tower, 1931
Oil on composition board, 29 1/4 x 23 1/4 in.
Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas
Figure 152. Chimney and Water Tower, 1931

Oil on composition board, 29 1/4 x 23 1/4 in.

Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas
Figure 153. Buildings Abstraction, Lancaster, 1931
oil on board, 27 7/8 × 23 5/8 in.
Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI
Figure 154. After All, 1933
Oil and graphite on fiberboard, 36 x 30 in.
Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida
Figure 155. Box of Tricks, 1919

Gouache and pencil on board, 19 7/8 x 15 7/8 in.

The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 156. Rise of the Prism, 1919
Tempera on paper, 19 1/4 x 5 3/4 in.
Wichita Art Museum, Kansas
Figure 157. In the Key of Blue, ca. 1919
Tempera and pencil on board, 19¼ x 16 in.
Private Collection
Figure 158. Nospmas. M. Egiap Nospmas. M., 1921

Oil on canvas, 20 1/4 x 24 in.

Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute Museum of Art, Utica, New York
Figure 159. Picasso, Houses on the Hill, Horta de Ebro, summer 1909
Oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 31 7/8 in.
Private Collection
Figure 160. Lancaster (In the Province No. 2), 1920

Opaque Watercolor & semi-gloss paint (probably egg tempera) over graphite on board
23 11/16 x 19 7/8 in.

The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 161. Flour Mill (Factory), 1921
Tempera and pencil on paperboard, 18 1/8 x 14 7/8 in
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian, Washington, DC
Figure 162. Lancaster, 1921
Tempera on board, 15 x 15 1/2 in.
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
Figure 163. Business, 1921
Oil and graphite on canvas, 20 x 24 1/4 in.
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
Figure 164. Friedrich, From the Dresden Heath (Bushes in the Snow), c. 1835
Oil on canvas, 12 1/5 x 10 in.
Galerie Neue Meister, Dresden
Figure 165. Aucassin and Nicolette, 1921
Oil on canvas, 24 1/8 x 20 in.
Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH
Figure 166. Brancusi, Princess X, 1915-1916

Polished bronze; limestone block, 24 5/16 x 15 15/16 x 8 3/4 in.

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 167. Three Sailors on a Beach, 1930
Watercolor & pencil on paper, 13 1/2 x 16 1/2 in.
Private Collection
Figure 168. Four Male Figures (Bather Undressing), 1930

Watercolor on paper, 13 x 8 in.

Private Collection
Figure 169. Two Sailors Urinating, 1930
Watercolor & pencil on paper, 9 1/2 x 13 1/4 in.
Private Collection
Figure 170. Three Sailors Urinating, 1930
Watercolor & pencil on paper, 9 1/2 x 13 1/4 in.
Private Collection
Figure 171. Two Figures in a Bedroom, 1930

Pencil on paper, 8 ½ x 10 ½ in.

Destroyed
Figure 172. Twelve Nude Boys at the Beach, ca. 1914
Watercolor & pen and ink, 8 x 10 3/8 in.
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
Figure 173. Turkish Bath, 1915
Watercolor over graphite under drawing, 8 7/16 x 10 7/8 in.
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
Figure 174. Sailor, Soldier, and Policeman, 1916
Watercolor & pencil on paper, 101/2 x 8 in.
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Figure 175. Dancing Sailors, 1917
Watercolor over graphite on paper, 8 × 10 in.
Demuth Foundation, Lancaster, Pennsylvania
Figure 176. Cabaret Interior with Carl Van Vechten, 1917
Watercolor on paper, 8 x 10 3/4 in.
Private Collection
Figure 177. Turkish Bath, 1918

Watercolor & pencil on paper, 11 x 8 ½ in.

Private Collection
Figure 178. Sailors and Girl, 1918
Watercolor on paper, 10\(\frac{1}{2}\) x 8 in.
Private Collection
Figure 179. The Cabaret, 1919

Watercolor & pencil on paper, 8 x 10 1/5 in.

Private Collection
Figure 180. Picasso, Girl with a Mandolin (Fanny Tellier)
Oil on canvas, 50 ½ x 29 in.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
Figure 181. Brancusi, Mademoiselle Pogany I, 1912
White marble; limestone block, 17 1/2 x 8 1/4 x 12 3/8 in.
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 182. Brancusi, Mademoiselle Pogany II, 1919 (cast 1925)

Polished bronze, 17 1/8 x 7 1/16 x 11 1/4 in.

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
Figure 183. Brancusi, Mademoiselle Pogany III, 1931

White marble; limestone and oak four-part base, 17 1/16 x 7 ½ x 10 ½ in.

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 184. Brancusi, Danaîde, ca. 1918

Bronze on limestone base, 11 x 6 3/4 x 8 1/4 in.

Tate Modern, London, England
Figure 185. Brancusi, Sleeping Muse, 1910
Bronze, 6 3/4 x 9 1/2 x 6 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Figure 187. Brancusi, Sculpture for the Blind [I], ca. 1920
Veined marble, 6 11/16 x 11 7/16 x 7 1/8 in.
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
Figure 188. Brancusi, The Newborn, version I, 1920 (close to the marble of 1915)
Marble, 5 3/4 x 8 1/4 x 5 3/4"
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Figure 189. Brancusi, La Négresse blonde (The Blond Negress), 1926
Bronze, marble, and limestone, 70 3/4 in. x 10 3/4 in. x 10 3/4 in.
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA