THE DISPOSITION OF PERSONS: CONVENTIONS OF POSE AND THE MODERNIZATION OF FIGURAL ART, 1886-1912

Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen

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Advisor: Brigid Doherty

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For my parents
Suzanne Butterfield and Stuart Rosen
Abstract

“The Disposition of Persons: Conventions of Pose and the Modernization of Figural Art, 1886-1912” examines the emergence of new conventions for posing and positioning the human figure in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European art. Organized as a sequence of studies on the painting *Poseuses* (1886-1888) by the French Neo-Impressionist artist Georges Seurat, the *Beethovenfries* mural (1902) by the Austrian Secessionist painter Gustav Klimt, and the ballet *L’Après-midi d’un faune* (1912) by the Russian dancer and Ballets Russes choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky, the dissertation argues for the significance of correlations between shifting aesthetic approaches to corporeal presentation, and new conceptualizations (scientific, sociological, psychological) of the human disposition.

The decades around 1900 witnessed a remarkable departure from some of Western figural art’s most enduring conventions for posing human figures, as artists working in various European contexts, and in diverse media, began to abandon techniques of pose that had been standard for several centuries up through Impressionism—the foreshortening and ponderation of bodies, for instance, and the variation of postures and gestures among discrete figures. By eliminating lateral torsions along the body’s central vertical axis, aligning bodies “frontally” (directly parallel or perpendicular to the support, in the case of works of visual art, or to the viewer, in the case of theatrical performances), restricting flexions and extensions of limbs, and often presenting multiple bodies in identical positions, turn-of-the-century artists broke decisively with inherited paradigms of figural mimesis, effecting a formal rupture that destabilized prevailing visual codes for signifying the existence of the inner life of the human subject.
Focusing on three works that engaged these new strategies of figural presentation in distinct ways and to varying ends, “The Disposition of Persons” interrogates the motivating circumstances and theoretical significance of this formal development, addressing the ways in which the appearance of new types of figural poses in modern artworks staged aesthetic and epistemological challenges in turn-of-the-century European culture to many deeply held assumptions about human consciousness and the human being’s privileged status in the world. As a whole, the dissertation argues that the repudiation of inherited conventions of pose across Poseuses, the Beethovenfries, and L’Après-midi d’un faune both reflected and participated in the reconceptualization of the human disposition that took place in the later nineteenth century in the wake of the two major intellectual developments Sigmund Freud described in 1917 as the “biological” and “psychological” blows to “human narcissism;” namely, the recognition by the new field of evolutionary biology of the animal descent of the human species, and the recognition in the modern disciplines of psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis of the unconscious dimensions of human mental life.

The dissertation situates Seurat’s, Klimt’s, and Nijinsky’s works in dialogue with concepts of sexual instincts, of hypnosis, of somnambulism, and of dreams as articulated in writing by prominent period thinkers including Charles Darwin, Jean-Martin Charcot, Gabriel Tarde, and Freud. These are by no means unfamiliar intellectual contexts to bring to the study of modern culture around 1900. This study aims to isolate some very concrete ways in which these new forms of knowledge about the human subject impacted upon aesthetic traditions of figural representation, destabilizing and transforming the enduring enterprise of presenting the human being in artistic form. In doing so, the dissertation also identifies visual forms that enrich and
complicate our understanding of new concepts of subjectivity that emerged as central to a range of discourses in Europe in the decades around 1900.
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Introduction

This dissertation, “The Disposition of Persons: Conventions of Pose and the Modernization of Figural Art, 1886–1912,” investigates the emergence of new conventions for posing and positioning the human figure in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European modernism. Focusing on bodily posture as a new formal lens for examining a crucial transitional period in the history of Western art—the decades following the final Impressionist exhibition in 1886 and leading up to a widespread turn towards non-representational abstraction in 1913—the project demonstrates correlations between shifting aesthetic approaches to corporeal presentation and new conceptualizations (scientific, sociological, and psychological) of the human disposition.

The decades around 1900 witnessed a remarkable departure from some of the most enduring conventions for posing figures in Western figural art. Artists working in various European contexts, and in diverse media, began to present human figures in strictly frontal, lateral, and dorsal postures. By abolishing oblique torsions along the body’s central vertical axis, aligning bodies “frontally” (directly parallel or perpendicular to the support, in the case of works of visual art, or to the viewer, in the case of theatrical performances), restricting flexion and extension of limbs, and often presenting multiple bodies in identical positions, artists conspicuously violated conventions of pose that had been standard for several centuries in European figural art up through Impressionism—the foreshortening and ponderation of bodies, for instance, and the variation of postures and gestures among discrete figures. Those basic techniques for posing figures, inherited from classical art, and reinstated during the Renaissance period, had held fairly constant over centuries and across continual transformations in artistic styles and movements; they were recognized as indispensable to simulating the human being’s
corporeal volume, responsiveness to gravity, and capacity for autonomous thought and movement. In abandoning such techniques in favor of more rigid and repetitive systems of figural disposition—ones that appeared less technically complicated and expressively nuanced—artists at the turn of the century broke decisively with inherited paradigms of representational mimesis, effecting a formal rupture that destabilized prevailing visual codes for signifying the existence of the inner life of the human subject.

“The Disposition of Persons” interrogates the motivating circumstances and theoretical significance of these repudiations of inherited conventions of pose. In broadest terms, my aim in this project is to address the ways in which new approaches to corporeal presentation staged aesthetic and epistemological challenges in European culture at the turn of the century to many deeply held assumptions about human consciousness and the human being’s privileged status in the world.

While the dissertation focuses on a general strategy of figural presentation—the restriction of the body to frontal, lateral, and dorsal postures—embraced widely in different forms by modern artists in this period, I do not survey that tendency here. Rather, I attempt to grasp some of its specific implications by examining in detail the significance of new types of figural poses in individual works of art that deployed this general approach in distinct ways and to varying ends. I analyze three exemplary works by artists from different national backgrounds, produced in different media and in very different styles and cultural contexts: the painting Poseuses (1886–88) (fig. 1.1) by the French Neo-Impressionist Georges Seurat (1859–91); the Beethovenfries mural (1902) (fig. 1.2) by the Austrian Secessionist Gustav Klimt (1862–1918); and the ballet L’Après-midi d’un faune (1912) (fig. 1.3) by the Russian choreographer and dancer of the Ballets Russes, Vaslav Nijinsky (1889–1950).
Seurat’s canvas, Klimt’s mural, and Nijinsky’s ballet provide particularly rich material for examining the larger conceptual issues attending the emergence of these new strategies of corporeal presentation—particularly rich for three primary reasons. First, *Poseuses*, the *Beethovenfries*, and *L’Après-midi d’un faune* are each structured by dense networks of references to other artworks, whether paintings, poems, musical compositions, or sculptures. These self-reflexive engagements with the aesthetic past highlight the ways in which new postural conventions raised questions of historical continuity and rupture. Through their allusions to preexisting artworks, *Poseuses*, the *Beethovenfries*, and *L’Après-midi d’un faune* each made vivid the deliberateness of their departures from preceding aesthetic traditions, and from the assumptions about the human subject underpinning them. Second, *Poseuses*, the *Beethovenfries*, and *L’Après-midi d’un faune* are works of figural art that do not take the human being for granted—by which I mean that these three works, beyond simply presenting human figures, put under investigation the very notion of humanity, grappling with ontological questions about the subject’s inner nature. Seurat’s canvas, Klimt’s mural, and Nijinsky’s ballet each make broad claims about the human constitution, thematizing new ideas of sexuality, creativity, and consciousness. Finally, *Poseuses*, the *Beethovenfries*, and *L’Après-midi d’un faune* were each self-consciously public works, produced for and received within the mechanisms of modern publicity. Large audiences viewed these works, and each garnered sustained critical attention in the press, provoking, in particular, violently censorious reactions to their techniques of figural presentation. By situating *Poseuses*, the *Beethovenfries*, and *L’Après-midi d’un faune* in the contexts of their contemporary receptions, I mean to show how these artists’ departures from inherited conventions of figural presentation both participated in and served to catalyze
contentious public debates in which turn-of-the-century Europeans reflected upon new understandings of what it meant to be human.

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Neither art history nor the broader field of cultural history has directly addressed the question of how conventions of pose might have shifted in modern art around 1900.¹ My interest in studying turn-of-the-century artworks with this question placed in the foreground was motivated not only by formal evidence pointing towards a widespread transformation in approaches to the posing of figures in this period, but also by the observation that, in the decades around 1900, scholars across a range of fields began to direct a new degree of attention towards the poses and gestures of figures in art, analyzing bodily postures to interpret the meaning of specific artworks, or trace the historical evolution of artistic styles, or chart patterns of cultural transmission.²

A scholar who stands as exemplary of this invigorated interest in corporeal language in the figural arts is the German art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929), who in 1905 coined the famous neologism Pathosformel.³ With this new conceptual term, Warburg defined specific postures and gestures—“prefigured” in the art and sculpture of antiquity—that Renaissance artists redeployed as “pre-coined classical forms” for the expression of the human figure’s inner psychic states, specifically states of heightened emotion or pathos.⁴ To trace the enduring afterlife (Nachleben) of these so-called “formulae of pathos” in post-medieval European art and civilization was a core preoccupation of Warburg’s research.⁵ Placing new emphasis on the conventionality of “the language of gesture in art,” and tracking the recurrence of specific corporeal motifs in art over time and across geographical space, his scholarly project is significant for having isolated bodily pose as a primary vehicle of continuity within a European
aesthetic tradition he understood as rooted in the legacy of classical antiquity (der Antike). The culminating project of Warburg’s career, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* (begun in 1924 and left unfinished at the time of his death in 1929), sought to visually document these chains of continuity by creating an “inventory of pre-coined classical forms” that shaped the representation of corporeal gesture and movement from the Renaissance forward. In Warburg’s assemblages of images and accompanying notes, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* demonstrated, for instance, how a modern painting such as Édouard Manet’s *Dejeuner sur l’herbe* (1863) (fig. 1.4) redeployed figural motifs that could be traced back to the Renaissance and in turn to Hellenistic Greece (fig. 1.5).

Warburg’s scholarship provided methodological inspiration for my own project by modeling a form of close attention to bodily postures and to their expressive significance. Yet his ideas also serve as a foil or counterpoint to this investigation. The relevance of his argument concerning the enduring “afterlife” of a “classical language of gesture” in European art lies in the fact that it no longer seems to apply to the modern works treated in this study. (As we shall see, if “pre-coined” classical poses make appearances in these works, they do so only to be travestied, contradicted, or supplanted by different postural modes.) I take it to be historically significant that Warburg emphasized classical antiquity’s enduring bequest of “a primal vocabulary of passionate gesticulation” at a moment when a wide range of modernists were systematically excluding that language from their figural representations. The *Dejeuner sur l’herbe*, it should be noted, was the latest modern artwork included in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, and might indeed be regarded, as Hubert Damisch describes it, as the “last link in [the] long chain” the art historian’s project charted. Warburg’s recognition of the persistence of *Pathosformeln* can be seen,
paradoxically, to coincide with the moment of their exhaustion or obsolescence in much contemporary art practice.

In 1913, the writer Alfred Pichon declared that a “disdain for an art made by formulas had brought [modern art] back to archaism as the best method for violating dead formulas [formules mortes].”\(^\text{12}\) Since the time of Cézanne and Gauguin, he argued, the most conspicuous feature of modern art had been “the absence of what the Renaissance conquered step by step.”\(^\text{13}\) If at the turn of the century Warburg comprehended the defining “creative event” of the European Renaissance as the reappropriation of classical corporeal language to create a figural idiom for “the depiction of human life in motion,” one can argue that many of his contemporaries sought to reverse these Renaissance aesthetic “conquests” by eliminating the kinds of supple, dynamic corporeal poses inherited from classicism.\(^\text{14}\) “Primitive art,” as Pichon asserted, provided modern artists with a means to “violate dead formulas.”\(^\text{15}\) For Pichon and for the other period authors discussed in this dissertation, “primitive art” was a wide-ranging descriptor applied to preclassical, medieval, and non-western artistic production. This heterogeneous definition bears out Frances Connelly’s assertion that “the principal framework through which certain images could be assimilated into European visual and verbal discourse as ‘primitive’” was simply “opposition to classical norms.”\(^\text{16}\) I argue that a primary way that “primitive art” offered this means to “violate dead formulas” was by modeling postural formulae opposed to the basic tenets of classical figuration. A central proposition of the dissertation is that the phenomenon of “primitivism,” so well studied in histories of modern art around this turn of the twentieth century moment, might be seen to manifest itself first and foremost as a pose in modernism.\(^\text{17}\)
As my chapters will show in greater depth, in this period, a range of artists began to adopt modes of corporeal presentation associated with archaic, infantile, or developmentally unadvanced representational systems, systems understood to lack the sophisticated techniques of pose required for the expressive body language Warburg saw to have been “coined” in the classical period. It bears stressing that the “gestures and movements” Warburg recognized European art to have inherited from the antique, as Ernst Gombrich rightly noted, “were only represented in a particular phase of ancient art” that was “relatively late.” By embracing paradigms of figural disposition understood to predate, whether temporally or developmentally, this “relatively late” phase of the antique, artists around the turn of the century can be seen to have departed categorically from the broad tradition of figuration towards which Warburg’s scholarship was oriented.

To demonstrate why modern art’s embrace of forms of pose that contemporary viewers recognized as prototypically preclassical was seen to signal a rupture of epistemic import, I want to introduce briefly the argument put forth by the Danish art historian Julius Lange (1838–96) in his influential book The Representation of the Human Figure in its Earliest Period until the Apogee of Greek Art (1892).19 (I discuss the book at greater length in my opening chapter on Seurat’s Poseuses.) Lange’s book was one of the most influential publications from a new body of literature, proliferating in multiple languages and disciplines beginning in the late 1880s, that studied the distinct formal laws and expressive conventions of figuration in representational systems considered older or developmentally less “advanced” than the one established in the classical period (fig. 1.6).20 While I do not suggest that these writings directly influenced the artists treated in this project, the dissertation draws on formal and conceptual terms articulated in certain key texts to provide an historically specific discursive framework for comprehending why
primitive, or preclassical systems of figural disposition were aesthetically and intellectually relevant for artists and thinkers at the turn of the century.

Lange’s book advanced the argument that the invention of a new type of pose in Greek sculpture in the fifth century BC was the key development that had, as one of his French interpreters asserted, “strictly speaking, created European art.” By breaking with the rigid formal rules governing the positioning of figures in primitive artworks, Lange contended, classical artists inaugurated a new era in Western art and culture. Introducing the innovative technique of incorporating oblique torsions and asymmetries in the pelvis, trunk, and neck of figures (e.g. contrapposto) (fig. 1.7), these artists, for the first time in history, found a method of corporeal presentation that corresponded to a notion of a human being in whom “everything is directed and determined by an interior center”—an “interior center” Lange rendered in French as le moi.

An impulse to revert to techniques of pose understood as preceding this revolutionary postural innovation, which ostensibly “created European art” by inventing a visual form for the moi, was instrumental in what my title characterizes as the “modernization” of figural art in the decades around 1900. This modernization should be understood in two not strictly separable senses. The embrace of primitive conventions of pose introduced into modern artworks certain formal qualities we now recognize as quintessentially modernist. Each of the works in this study, in various ways, imposed upon their presentations of the human body the basic formal law of primitive figuration Lange defined as the “Law of Frontality,” a law prohibiting the primitive artist from introducing any oblique torsions in their posing of the figure. As a mode of figuration governed by the rigorous avoidance of any foreshortened views of the body, the formal strategy of “frontality” was closely bound up with the abandonment of perspectival depth that came to be
recognized as a hallmark of modernist abstraction. In 1948, Clement Greenberg spoke in the same breath of “flatness and frontality” as formal qualities central to the modern “crisis of the easel picture.” Later, Rosalind Krauss’s essay “On Frontality” (1968) identified it as a formal concept pivotal to the practices of “non-objective painters” of the early twentieth century such as Wassily Kandinsky (fig. 1.8) and Kasimir Malevich, as well as postwar abstract painters such as Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland (fig. 1.9).

While neither Krauss nor Greenberg acknowledged the figural derivations of the word frontality, in my view it is crucial that this term, subsequently adopted as an abstract formalist category, first entered art-historical vocabulary through Lange’s 1892 study, where it designated a property specific to the human figure’s bodily postures. The linguistic migration of this term points to the fact that formal qualities that later came to be associated with modernist abstraction had roots in theories and practices of figural representation. Indeed, a central argument of this dissertation is that the appearance of what Lange called “frontality” in modern art in the late nineteenth century was motivated less by merely formalist concerns than by a widely felt aesthetic imperative to “modernize” the representation of the human figure, that is, to find forms of figural presentation adequate to convey dimensions of the human moi or “interior center” newly recognized, and newly urgent, in modern culture, including instinctual impulses and psychological automatisms, or forms of thinking that might be defined as “unconscious.”

My title stresses the concept of “disposition” because a central premise of this project is that, within the history of European figural art, pose or posture functioned as an element of artistic practice wherein formal decisions concretely intersected with abstract ideas about the human being’s “disposition,” in the sense of “mental constitution or temperament; turn of mind.” The word disposition, meaning also “the action of setting in order, or condition of being
set in order” or the “relative position of the parts or elements of a whole,” derives from the Latin *dispositio*, designating “arrangement” or “ordering” of parts into coherent verbal arguments in classical rhetoric. The human being, as Thomas Puttfarken has noted, provided classical rhetoric with its model of proper “order”: in the *Institutio oratorio* (95 AD), Quintilian proposed that successful *dispositio* would be analogous to assembling an anatomically correct statue of the human figure from separate casts of individual body parts. Significantly, the *Institutio oratorio* also invoked different typologies of pose in Greek sculpture to demonstrate the importance of introducing rhetorical devices (*figura*) to bring variety and movement into the ordering of rhetoric. In a passage later frequently cited in Renaissance aesthetic treatises, Quintilian opposed the graceful, dynamic posture of Myron’s classical *Discobolos* (ca. 450 BC) (fig. 1.10) to the characteristic “frontal” pose of the archaic kouros (fig. 1.11), where the body appeared “upright . . . the face looks straight at you, the arms hang down, the feet are joined together, and the work is entirely stiff from top to bottom.”

Renaissance aesthetic theory, which took up many of its terms from classical rhetoric, eventually came to deploy the terms “disposition” and “composition” as virtually synonymous. The vital importance Renaissance writers assigned to the arrangement of postures and gestures inhered in the fact that bodily poses were recognized as serving a dual aesthetic function, simultaneously establishing certain abstract norms of visual order within a figural composition, and conveying certain normative ideas about the human subject’s inner nature. When, for instance, Leon Battista Alberti proposed in *Della Pittura* (1435) that painters should always endeavor to compose a picture with “bodies in many dissimilar poses,” he did so not only because he believed that the human eye was always pleased by “variety,” but also because he took for granted that a variety of poses was necessary, if the painter was to portray the human
being as a being imbued with a unique, autonomous soul. “The movements of the soul are made known by the movements of the body,” he asserted, and in an istoria, “each man . . . [must] clearly [show] the movement of his own soul.”

I draw on this discussion in Della Pittura not only to demonstrate a basic norm of Renaissance figural disposition that modern artists would later “violate” ostentatiously, but also to emphasize how formal conventions for disposing figures were both inflected by, and constitutive of, historically specific comprehensions of the human being’s inner “disposition.” For Alberti, the compositional desideratum of postural variety was tied to a concept of subjectivity oriented around the soul, and the expression of the soul’s passions in visible body actions. In that regard, it is equally significant for my thinking that dispositio provides the linguistic root for Michel Foucault’s term dispositif or “apparatus,” defined as “a set of strategies of the relations of forces supporting, or supported by, certain types of knowledge.”

The disposition of figures, I propose, served as a kind of dispositif for figural art, a primary formal mechanism through which artists visualized for their audiences certain “types of knowledge” about the inner constitution of the human subject. A transformation in concrete “strategies” for posing the figure can be seen to manifest a concomitant transformation in the historical model of subjectivity the figural artist offered up in visual form.

As a whole, this dissertation argues that the turn towards primitivizing techniques of figural disposition across Seurat’s, Klimt’s, and Nijinsky’s works reflected a fundamental reconceptualization of the human disposition that took place in the later nineteenth century in the wake of the two major intellectual developments Sigmund Freud described in 1917 as the “biological” and “psychological” blows to “human narcissism”—namely, the recognition by the new field of evolutionary biology of the animal descent of the human species, and the
recognition in the “distinctly modern disciplines of psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis” of the unconscious dimensions of human mental life. These are by no means unfamiliar intellectual contexts to bring to the study of turn-of-the-century modern culture. The original contribution I hope to make here is rather to demonstrate some very concrete ways in which these new forms of knowledge about the human subject impacted upon aesthetic traditions of figural representation, destabilizing and transforming the enduring enterprise of presenting the human being in artistic form.

I situate Seurat’s, Klimt’s, and Nijinsky’s works in dialogue with concepts of sexual instincts, of hypnosis, of somnambulism, and of dreams as articulated by major period thinkers including Charles Darwin, Jean-Martin Charcot, Gabriel Tarde, and Freud. In doing so, I aim not only to specify an intellectual context in which the emergence of new conventions of pose can become historically and conceptually comprehensible, but also to identify visual forms that can concretize, complicate, and enrich our understanding of new concepts of subjectivity that emerged as central to a range of discourses in Europe in the decades around 1900.

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The body of the dissertation is structured as a chronological series of studies, each unfolding a new interpretation of an individual work, and analyzing how that work’s strategies of pose operated and signified within its broader formal and thematic framework. Although Poseuses, the Beethovenfries, and L’Après-midi d’un faune are three relatively well-studied works by canonical modernist figures, organizing my inquiries around questions of bodily pose has in each case led to fresh discoveries—previously overlooked formal devices, iconographic sources, and modes of public presentation—that open up unexplored avenues for interpreting these works.
My first chapter, “Figures of Thought: Poseuses and the Controversy of the Grande Jatte, 1888,” provides a broad introduction to the issues at stake in the dissertation at large, focusing on a work that titulary foregrounds the topic of bodily “pose.” Seurat’s monumental modern-life canvas, *Un Dimanche à la Grande Jatte—1884* (1884–86), featuring some forty Parisians promenading on the banks of the Seine, was one of the first and most influential artworks in the late nineteenth century to systematically implement archaic or “primitive” conventions of figural disposition. *Poseuses*—a canvas in which the artist depicted a trio of nude models in recognizably classical poses assembled in front of a large section of the *Grande Jatte*—addressed and thematized the implications of the prior canvas’s new technique of figural disposition.

I examine at some length a crucial but previously unacknowledged aspect of the critical reception of the *Grande Jatte*, recounting how Seurat’s figuration instigated a major dispute concerning the question of whether it was viable to adopt an approach to the figure that seemed to withhold exterior indications of the human being’s inner “soul” or “thought.” I situate this debate in the context of then recent research on hypnosis and human evolution, suggesting that the controversy stemmed from the perception that Seurat had depicted modern subjects as existing in a state of restricted consciousness, dominated by automatic and instinctual impulses. In *Poseuses*, Seurat responded directly to this aspect of the *Grande Jatte*’s reception. Reverting to figural practices he had learned from his classical education at the École des Beaux-Arts, and quoting specific postures drawn from a classical canon, Seurat situated the *Grande Jatte*’s new approach to posing the figure in relation to a figural tradition it had conspicuously abandoned. He did so, I suggest, to interrogate whether it was viable to return to a tradition of figural representation organized around the assumption that conscious thought was the human being’s defining endowment.
My second and third chapters elaborate on later works that subverted classical conventions of figural disposition in ways different from but related to those deployed in the *Grande Jatte*. These analyses bear down more closely on two distinct formal features briefly touched upon, but not addressed extensively in my discussion of Seurat’s figuration in the *Grande Jatte*—that is, a turn towards forms of pose that flagrantly neglected to convey both the human body’s physical weight and its capacity for dynamic, autonomous movement.

My second chapter, “Beethoven’s Farewell: The *Beethovenfries*, 1902,” examines Klimt’s jeweled fresco-mosaic within the context of the Vienna Secession’s *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung*, a collective experiment in decorative *Tempelkunst* (Temple Art) organized around the debut of Max Klinger’s monumental polychrome statue of Ludwig van Beethoven. A key event in the history of the pan-European movement of Art Nouveau and Jugendstil, the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung* as a whole reflects the influence of new theories, advanced simultaneously in the fields of art history and evolutionary biology, that emphasized the primordial origin of the arts in ornamental decoration. I argue that Klimt’s *Beethovenfries*, an allegorical composition picturing the final choral movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony (1824), unfurled a narrative about art and its redemptive function in human existence that sought to visualize the new conception of the aesthetic faculties implicit in this conception of art’s derivation in instinctual urges to ornament.

My analysis centers on the formal and conceptual discrepancies between Klinger’s and Klimt’s respective presentations of Beethoven. By figuring Beethoven in a posture and gesture recycled across centuries of Western art to convey mental states of concentrated, contemplative thought, Klinger’s *Beethoven-Denkmal* perpetuated a model of artistic creativity forcefully repudiated in Klimt’s *Beethovenfries*. Klimt embraced decoration as a principle mandating a
return to archaizing conventions of figural disposition, and this embrace was essential to his
elevation of a new conception of artistic appreciation and creativity. The *Beethovenfries*
produced an image of the subject apparently released from consciousness, in part by abolishing
visual indications of the body’s physical weight and subjection to the laws of gravity.
Emphasizing how Klimt imbricated this mode of figural presentation with a series of formal and
iconographic allusions to animal descent and to Darwin’s theory of sexual selection, I argue that
the *Beethovenfries* celebrated art on a new basis, not as the product of highly developed and
uniquely human intellectual capacities, but rather as a product of animal instincts rooted in
biological processes of sexual reproduction.

traces the implementation of archaizing techniques of figural disposition beyond the realm of
static representation into that of embodied enactment. Labeled in its program with the novel
designation of a “choreographic picture,” *L’Après-midi d’un faune* deliberately contradicted the
mobility intrinsic to dance as a medium, presenting its live performers in the guise of static
“figures” arrayed across the surface of an archaic bas-relief sculpture. This novel choreographic
conceit underpinned Nijinsky’s effort to dramatize the sexual “dream” recounted in the
eponymous poem by Stéphane Mallarmé that inspired the ballet *L’Après-midi d’un faune*. I argue
that the performance materialized, in the form of spectacular high-cultural entertainment, a
vision of psychological processes closely analogous to those Freud was theorizing in the new
discipline of psychoanalysis, dramatizing a distinctly modern comprehension of the dream—as a
mode of thinking specific to the unconscious—organized according to primitive representational
methods. *L’Après-midi d’un faune*, I suggest, presented itself as the externalization of a dream
occurring in the mind of its spectator through a deliberately contradictory synthesis of archaic
figuration and modern kinematographic effects. By associating the archaism of unconscious thinking with a specifically mechanical vision of the human being’s mental processes, Nijinsky’s ballet gave form to two principal metaphors exploited to articulate the new theory of mind being formulated in psychoanalysis—archaeology and the apparatus.

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As a whole, “The Disposition of Persons: Conventions of Pose and the Modernization of Figural Art, 1886-1912,” means to contribute to broader, cross-disciplinary questions concerning the changing conception and aesthetic valuation of the human being in turn-of-the-century European culture. The decades treated in the dissertation are those leading up to the widespread emergence of total abstraction in modernism, a period during which the traditional role of figuration in Western art underwent a process of radical renegotiation. The prevailing aesthetic tendency of this period has often been comprehended under the rubric of what José Ortega y Gasset defined in 1925 as “the dehumanization of art.”\(^{35}\) The new presentations of the figure examined in this dissertation, which were consistently condemned by contemporary viewers for producing images of the subject that appeared lifeless and inhuman, could be seen to participate in that “progressive elimination of the human, all too human elements” of art.\(^{36}\) Yet my chapters suggest how these new strategies of pose reflected an abiding investment in giving form to “humanity” in works of art. The chapters of this dissertation might be seen to chart a process of rehumanization, in which artists reconfigured the image of the subject on a new epistemological basis, albeit one that challenged many of Western culture’s most basic suppositions about what could constitute the human person’s “human elements.”
Notes

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

1 Related issues of figural orientation, however, have featured centrally in some accounts of pivotal modern art practices of the earlier nineteenth century. See, for instance, the discussion of the dorsal Rückenfigur in Joseph Leo Koerner, Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 179-269, as well as the discussion of “facingness” in Michael Fried, Manet’s Modernism; or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).


8. For his unpublished essay on Manet’s canvas, composed to accompany the panel in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, see Aby Warburg, “Manet’s Déjeuner sur l’herbe: Die vorprägende Funktion heidnischer Elementargottheiten für die Entwicklung modernen Naturgefühls,” in idem, *Werke in*


11. Damisch, *The Judgment of Paris*, 73–74. While Warburg introduced contemporary imagery into the *Atlas*—such as, famously, photographs of a female golfer or the airship Graf Zeppelin—this imagery drawn from the contemporary world was never imagery of contemporary art. Manet’s presence within the *Atlas* is emblematic of the sense of a divergence between modernist art practice and the figural tradition mapped in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*. Manet, in Michael Fried’s estimation, was the last modern painter who felt “the need to secure the connectedness of his art to that of the distant past, to the enterprise of the Old Masters” (*Manet’s Modernism*, 128). Whether or not Warburg recognized this aspect of Manet’s relationship to the past—and it would seem he did not entirely, for Warburg was historically oriented towards continuities more than ruptures—the painter’s quotations of corporeal motifs from the art of the past manifest the decay as much as the survival of classical *Pathosformeln*. The overtly citational, even parodic quality of Manet’s recycling of postures derived from classical art asserts a kind of “connectedness” to inherited traditions of figuration that can be seen simultaneously as an emptying out or nullification of them. For Manet in the 1860s, *Pathosformeln* were no longer effective means to convey the inner life of the human figure, but mere conventions or schemata. Indeed, as Carlo Ginzburg aptly remarked of Manet’s practice, “if there is a *Pathosformel*, there

12. Alfred Pichon, “Vérité et archaïsme dans l’art ancien et dans l’art moderne,” La grande revue, 10 May 1913, 79: “Notre goût toujours accru pour l’art primitif, notre dédain de l’art figé que se fit par formules, devaient tôt ou tard ramener notre art à l’archaïsme, comme au meilleur moyen de violer les formules mortes.”

13. Pichon, “Vérité et archaïsme,” 76: “La direction où tendent depuis vingt ans, depuis Cézanne et Gauguin . . . est franchement archaïque. . . . cette école nouvelle a pour caractère essential l’absence de ce que la Renaissance avait par degrés conquis. Pour définir telles oeuvres, il nous fait faire en sens inverse le chemin que nous avions fait, voir disparaître tout ce que, au cours de deux siècles, avait apparu.”


17. My use of the term “primitivism” throughout this dissertation is informed by Frances Connelly’s arguments, particularly her notion that “the primitive” was a category created in modern European aesthetic theory and practice in relation to “institutionalized classicism taught in academies of art,” see her The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics, 1725–1907 (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 14.
That is to say, I address primitivism here as a self-reflexive strategy shaped by European artistic traditions and conventions, and addressed to an audience familiar with them. For the period authors I engage with in this study, the primitive did not necessarily designate a racial or ethnographic “other,” but crucially encompassed figures or styles within European culture, albeit ones recognized as “artifact’s of the West’s own childhood,” to use the terminology of Elazar Barken and Ronald Bush, see their “Introduction,” in *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, ed. Elazar Barken and Ronald Bush (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 2. This project does not seek to challenge, but rather to complement the essential work that has been done to situate modern art in the decades before the First World War within the context of European imperialism and colonialism.


19. Julius Lange, *Billedkunstens Fremstilling af Menneskeskikkelsen i dens ældste Periode indtil Højdepunktet af den græske Kunst* (Copenhagen: F. Dreyer, 1892). Lange’s book was never translated from the Danish, but the original publication included a resumé in French, “Étude sur la représentation de la figure humaine dans l’art primitif jusqu’à l’art grec du VIème siècle avant J.C,” 437–66. Lange’s summary was subsequently partially republished, again in French, under the new German title “Gesetze der Menschendarstellung in der primitiven Kunst aller Völker und insbesondere in der ägyptischen Kunst,” in Julius Lange, *Darstellung des Menschen in der Älteren Griechischen Kunst*, trans. Mathilde Mann (Strasbourg: Heitz, 1899), ix–xxxi. As Peter Johansen wrote in 1925, these publications made Lange’s name “famous among all students of the art of antiquity,” see his *Phidias and the Parthenon Sculptures*
(Copenhagen: Nordisk, 1925), 7. I discuss the reception of the publication at greater length in my first chapter.

20. To my knowledge, there are no extant studies treating this body of literature as a whole. A survey of literature on children’s art—a discourse closely connected to studies of “primitive art” in this period—is provided in Jessica Boissel, “Quand les enfants se mirent à dessiner, 1880–1914: Un fragment de l’histoire des idées,” Les Cahiers du Musée National d’art moderne 31 (1990): 15–43. Important studies treating preclassical figuration include Löwy, Lysipp und seine Stellung; Emanuel Löwy, Die Naturwiedergabe in der älteren griechischen Kunst (Rome: Loescher, 1900); Alessandro Della Seta, La genesi dello scorcio nell’arte greca (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1906); Heinrich Schäfer, Von ägyptischer Kunst, besonders der Zeichenkunst: Eine Einführung in die Betrachtung ägyptischer Kunstwerke (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1919).


(J. Lange, Billedkunstens Fremstilling græske Kunst (1892) 54), < frontal adj. + -ity suffix: so German *frontalität*, French *frontalité.*”


Disposition organizes it, links it all up, and binds it together. It is not without good reason that this is taken to be the second of the five Parts of Rhetoric, since without it the first is useless. That all the limbs have been cast does not make a statue, unless they are put together; and if you were to take some part of our bodies or those of other animals and exchange it with another, the result would be a monster, though the body would have all the same parts as before.


32. For an important discussion of how this paradigm was applied practically in figural art in the Renaissance, see Jennifer Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions: The Origin and Influence of Charles Le Brun’s “Conférence sur l’expression générale et particulière”* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).


Chapter 1:
Figures of Thought: Poseuses and the Controversy of the Grande Jatte, 1888

In 1890, six months before his death, Georges Seurat began a written summary of his “Ésthetique” with a preamble that explicitly insisted upon the unequal valuation he gave to the different painterly genres in which he had worked. Referring to the four large figure paintings he had completed thus far in his career, *Un baignade à Asnières* (1883–84), *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte—1884* (1884–86), *Poseuses* (1886–88), and *Chahut* (1889–90), Seurat wrote: “I have committed myself to four great canvases of combat” (*grandes toiles de lutte*), “if you permit me to speak of them that way, and I prefer them to all my landscape studies” (*études de paysage*). Although Seurat eventually crossed out the second half of this sentence, and never delivered his Ésthetique to Maurice Beaubourg, the writer who had solicited it, this statement vividly communicates the artist’s deep investment in figure painting, identified here with a phrase that invokes both violent conquest and personal crusade: *grandes toiles de lutte*.

Central to Seurat’s radical aesthetic program, launched in the vanguard of the movement that would come to be called “Neo-Impressionism,” was an emphatic reinstatement of an academic hierarchy of genre, which had been dismantled by the preceding Impressionist generation. Seurat’s *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte—1884* (fig. 2.1) emerged as the so-called “manifesto-painting” of Neo-Impressionism.² It “aimed, as did few other paintings in the late nineteenth century, to be the great tableau [. . .] to lay claim to the significance of a museum space,” as Martha Ward has noted.³ Similarly, André Chastel identified Seurat as the first in his generation to be “haunted” by the notion of “la ‘grande composition.’”⁴ To fully comprehend the complex implications of Seurat’s investment in this type of “grande composition,” it is crucial to foreground what has been glossed over in previous discussions: for Seurat, the human figure—
above animals, plants or inanimate objects—was an obligatory component of any composition that was to be regarded as grand, whether in terms of its physical size or its aesthetic significance.

During his youth, Seurat assiduously read the works of Charles Blanc, one of the most prominent writers on art history and aesthetics in late nineteenth-century France, and director of the École des Beaux-Arts between 1848 and 1851 and again from 1870 to 1873.\(^5\) While numerous scholars emphasize that Seurat first learned of Michel-Eugène Chevreul’s laws of simultaneous contrast of color while reading Blanc’s major theoretical text, the *Grammaire des arts du dessin* (1867), the overarching anthropocentrism of Blanc’s aesthetic system is less often acknowledged, although it was equally crucial for the formation of Seurat’s Neo-Impressionist aesthetic.\(^6\) In the *Grammaire* and elsewhere, Blanc forcefully asserted the primacy of human beings over all other artistic subject matter. In 1866, for instance, he passionately defended the academic hierarchy of genres, recapitulating a doctrine first officially formulated in André Félibien’s 1667 *Conférence*, and succinctly justified the logic behind elevating artists who paint the figure above those “whose subjects are drawn from the natural, non-human world.”\(^7\)

At the risk of coming to blows with the critics in love with equality in art, we gently remind them that there is a gradation in the kingdom of nature, and if the purpose of art is to express life . . . the human figure is the most exalted image an artist can propose for a model, because it is a summation of all anterior creations and, filling the immense space that separates intelligence from vegetation, it manifests the highest degree of life, which is to say thought [*le plus haut degré de la vie, qui est la pensée*]. To see it only from a plastic perspective, there is in the human figure such a prodigious variety of forms, of contours, of depressions, of projections, of attitudes, of movements, of nuances, that the Greeks needed ten or twelve generations, adding study upon study, genius after genius, to begin to possess a perfect comprehension of a perfect man. Similarly, in the Renaissance, more than a century was needed before one was able to place a human figure on the weight of his feet. Therefore, if the greatness [*grandeur*] of painting is measured by the
difficulty of its enterprise, it is impossible to equate, to give equal merit, to landscape and the human figure.\textsuperscript{8}

Twenty years after Blanc composed this statement, with the debut of \textit{Un dimanche à la Grande-Jatte—1884} at the final Impressionist exhibition, Seurat inaugurated an avant-garde aesthetic movement that reasserted the traditional primacy that figure painting had held within academic aesthetics. And yet, part of the polemical, programmatic aspect of Seurat’s manifesto painting was that it seemed to prioritize the human figure on a basis entirely different from the one Blanc had advocated, one no longer wedded to a notion of thought as the fundament of human existence. The \textit{grande toile de lutte} that launched the Neo-Impressionist movement adopted a new approach to the presentation of the human subject—one that seemed to deny or degrade precisely that “highest degree of life” that had previously, as Blanc asserted, guaranteed the human figure’s “exalted” status superior class of pictorial content.

Seurat had an “appetite for contradiction,” according to the recollections of his friend Paul Signac.\textsuperscript{9} Nowhere is this more evident than in the conflict that organized and animated his figure painting practice. This was a structural issue: Seurat simultaneously returned to the anthropocentrism of the academic tradition in which he was schooled, while emphatically foreclosing, in visual terms, some of its most basic assumptions about how to successfully represent a human subject. Previous centuries of Western figural art, up through and including Impressionism, could be understood to share a guiding principle summed up in Ludovic Vitet’s history of the French \textit{Académie}—that the artist who represents the human figure must “always remember [he] draws a man, that is to say an intelligent and impassioned creature, not a banal and mechanical being.” Seurat, meanwhile, found an approach to human form that challenged this conception of personhood.\textsuperscript{10} If “the human person”—to borrow the provisional definition that opens Hippolyte Taine’s \textit{De l’intelligence} of 1870—was understood in the sense of “a living
body, with active members, a refined economy of organs, a thinking head,” *(une tête pensante)* all “driven by some interior desire or plan,” the *Grande Jatte* presented the human figure in a manner that seemed to subject this definition to a visual cancelation.¹¹

Although Seurat began his career as a “regular and submissive” pupil at the École des Beaux-Arts (fig. 2.2), where for nearly four years he drew and painted on a daily basis from nude models and antique casts (figs. 2.3, 2.4), his “manifesto-painting” conspicuously abandoned the mastery of figural mimesis that, as Blanc recounted, Western art had achieved progressively over “generations” and “centuries”—a legacy Seurat’s classical education had trained him to internalize and perfect.¹² Instead, the *Grande Jatte* adopted a rigid, repetitive, formally abbreviated mode of figural presentation, relinquishing the hard-won mastery of the human being’s “prodigious variety of forms, of contours, of depressions, of projections, of attitudes, of movements.” It startled nineteenth-century viewers with its seeming technical and expressive crudeness. As Robert Herbert and others have long acknowledged, Seurat’s monumental representation of Parisians promenading at a popular suburban park on the banks of the Seine stands as “the first major statement of a new variant of primitivism” to emerge in Western modernism.¹³

Seurat’s trademark invention of a quasi-scientific system of divisionist (or pointillist) color application, which the art-historical literature tends to assume was received as a radical gesture, in fact did not initially ruffle many feathers. When Seurat first introduced divisionism at the final Impressionist exhibition in his “manifesto-painting” and in accompanying landscape canvases, this new facture was far less controversial than the primitivizing approach to the human figure apparent in the *Grande Jatte*.¹⁴ Indeed, when the motif of the human figure was absent in Seurat’s first divisionist pictures, as in the landscapes, critics widely endorsed them.
Yet the new technique of figuration in the Grande Jatte instigated a major critical dispute on the aims and aesthetic effects requisite to figure painting.

This dispute grew increasingly urgent with the painting’s subsequent exhibitions at the Salon des Indépendants of August 1886 in Paris and the Salon des XX in Brussels in 1887, yet it is rarely acknowledged in art-historical scholarship. It is vitally important, not only for understanding the fraught status of the figure within Seurat’s oeuvre, but also for grasping more broadly how some of the most basic objectives of figural representation were reconceptualized in European modernism at the turn of the century. For the dispute around the Grande Jatte concerned at its core the presumed obligation that an artist should endeavor to portray, through his technique of figural composition, the indwelling physical and intellectual liveliness of the human being. While this was, in one sense, a debate about formal conventions, it was inextricably bound to a larger question concerning how to define and represent human interiority at an historical moment when new, popularized sciences, such as evolutionary biology and experimental psychology, had destabilized deeply held assumptions about the human being’s mental disposition and status in the world.


Among the seven figure paintings Seurat completed before his death, one holds singular importance for comprehending the problematic status the figure came to assume within his oeuvre. Exhibited in 1888 under the idiosyncratic title Poseuses, Seurat’s composition of three nude models assembled in front of a section of the Grande Jatte engaged him for longer than any other of his notoriously labor-intensive “canvases of combat.”15 Produced, apparently, in “cloistered” secrecy over the course of two years, and reproduced in miniature immediately after
its completion, *Poseuses* (figs. 2.5, 2.6) was a uniquely introspective as well as retrospective project, a *grande toile de lutte* that self-consciously answered, and thematized, the dispute about figure painting that had emerged from the contentious reception of the *Grande Jatte*.\(^{16}\)

A terse, two-line review published in 1889 provides an apt summation of the discursive structure of *Poseuses*, identifying the canvas as “a reprinted, corrected, singularly augmented edition of the *Grande Jatte*.\(^{17}\) Pointedly deploying the terminology of print, this turn of phrase seems to allude to the influence of Seurat’s critics, underlining their mediating function in the formal and conceptual realization of *Poseuses*, a painting Seurat began immediately after the debut of the *Grande Jatte*, and which he executed while reading and archiving the reviews generated by the earlier work’s year long, three-stop tour of exhibitions.

Seurat operated with an exceptional degree of self-awareness of the media component of the recently consolidated “dealer-critic system,” vigilantly monitoring and archiving his reviews.\(^{18}\) His preoccupation with criticism was particularly acute in the case of the *Grande Jatte*, the canvas which had made his name, and “by far the work of his career which most excited the press,” as Félix Fénéon recalled while preparing Seurat’s catalogue raisonné in the 1930s.\(^{19}\) Indeed, by the time that “famous tableau of Seurat” had reached Brussels in February of 1887, the “sensation” it would create was being “advertised in advance,” so that the notorious canvas was quickly surrounded by “a crowd in delirium.”\(^{20}\)

Although Seurat’s career was launched from the publicity the *Grande Jatte* garnered, the artist—known for his proud and defensive temperament, particularly in regard to journalists—was not immune to the storm of ridicule and condemnation this canvas had elicited. After its tour was completed, he reinstalled the “manifesto-painting” in his cramped studio, where, as the Symbolist poet Gustave Kahn recalled, the artist “reexamined it with an ever-renewing anxiety,
searching for its smallest faults, always trying to satisfy his conscience.”21 This fraught reexamination of the Grande Jatte, in light of its contentious critical reception, is the key to comprehending Poseuses.

Like so many French artists in the 1880s, Seurat had hired one of the newly incorporated clipping agencies to monitor his name in the domestic and international press.22 With the aid of this service, he was able to gather a nearly comprehensive dossier of reviews from the tour of exhibitions the Grande Jatte undertook in 1886–87. More than sixty clippings on the Grande Jatte, as well as several dozen loose pages with thirty-three reviews copied out in longhand, were found in his studio after his death (figs 2.7, 2.8).23 The very title Seurat selected to name his subsequent figural composition—Poseuses—appears as an adjective in a key phrase from one of these hand-copied reviews: “la récréation même est poseuse.”24 To describe Poseuses as “a reprinted, corrected, singularly augmented edition of the Grande Jatte” is therefore apt, particularly since those terms capture its ambivalent position towards the prior canvas—its status as a simultaneous reiteration and redaction.

Poseuses is often described as Seurat’s “most academic” or “most naturalistic” work.25 In the collection of the Barnes Foundation since 1926 (fig. 2.9), where it has been hung at a height that presents significant challenges for close examination, it remains the least studied of Seurat’s seven figural compositions.26 Literature on Neo-Impressionism has been, justifiably, preoccupied with Seurat’s technical innovations, both with respect to his new system of divisionist color application, and his novel approach to composition, which many twentieth-century artists and theorists saw as a precursor to geometric abstraction.27 In stylistic terms, this novelty appears somewhat tempered, or less blatant in Poseuses. Perhaps for this reason, the picture has proven less intriguing to scholars than, for instance, Parade de cirque (1887–88) (fig. 2.10), a much
smaller composition of a circus sideshow Seurat painted and exhibited alongside Poseuses in March of 1888. Described as Seurat’s “most radical” or “most abstract” painting, Parade has occasioned multiple important studies, from an essay in 1929 by Roger Fry, to the central chapter of Jonathan Crary’s book Suspensions of Perception in 2001.

Seriously reckoning with Poseuses, however, is indispensable for comprehending the larger questions—formulated most provocatively in Crary’s wide-ranging consideration of Parade de cirque—about the “nature of the human subject presupposed by Seurat’s practice.” Crary’s argument that Seurat’s project intuited the loss or depreciation of “what might have been contemplation” in modern culture, and “challenged the privileged status of a conscious observer,” is based primarily on an analysis of the ways in which Seurat’s pictures presupposed and solicited a “subrational response” from their hypothetical viewers. Poseuses calls out for a different approach. It demands a more closely contextual understanding of the significance of consciousness and contemplation within the larger artistic framework of Seurat’s oeuvre. The picture demands an interpretation that would give greater weight to the testimony of period viewers who responded critically to the artist’s new formal approach to the figure, as well as to the pedagogical environment from which he emerged. Poseuses occupies a special position in Seurat’s oeuvre, because this canvas self-consciously framed the question of “the nature of the human subject” presupposed in his pictures. It did so by situating the Grande Jatte in triadic relation to specific tropes from its contemporary critical reception, and to specific motifs and practices alluding back to the artist’s academic education.

To comprehend what was at stake in Seurat’s reexamination of the Grande Jatte and its critical reception, more must be said about the pedagogical tradition referenced in Poseuses. As Alexandre Arsène’s obituary of the artist noted: “it was at the École des Beaux-Arts . . . that
[Seurat] learned his alphabet and grammar. An alphabet whose characters he would manipulate with a singular liberty, a grammar whose syntax he would scramble with tranquil indifference.”

If the human figure was the fundamental symbolic unit of the language the artist acquired at school, it makes sense to speak of the *Grande Jatte*, and Seurat’s Neo-Impressionist figure painting in general, as a kind of internal scrambling of an inherited sign system. The specific ways in which Seurat can be seen to have “scrambled” that language, it must be stressed, were imminent to the particular moment he received his education at the École des Beaux-Arts.

By the time Seurat entered this storied institution as an aspirant in 1876, a significant breach had opened between the practical and theoretical components of the curriculum. Despite the modernizing reforms of 1863, instituting painting ateliers in addition to drawing instruction and ending the academy’s ban on female models, which had lasted for centuries, hands-on instruction remained essentially unchanged in its emphasis on mastering figuration by means of the repetitive depiction of classical statuary and live models, as it had since the foundation of the Académie royale in 1648 (figs. 2.11, 2.12). The compulsory anatomy curriculum, however, had been transformed significantly to incorporate the findings of the most recent research on human physiology, psychology, and evolutionary history. Thus, while Seurat studied in the atelier of Henri Lehmann, a devoted former pupil of Ingres who was described by a friend of Seurat as “a master as academic as one could possibly fathom,” he also attended compulsory anatomy lectures by the physiologist Mathias Duval.

In May of 1884, an editorial in the inaugural issue of the Symbolist *Revue Indépendante* included Duval in a list of individuals whose names were synonymous with scientific “materialism.” As Seurat’s future advocate Félix Fénéon explained in this editorial, this “perturbing vocable” stood for a new Darwinian worldview, one which had “replaced a
teleological conception of the universe based upon a ridiculous anthropomorphism with a mechanical one.”

A scholar whose wide-ranging research anticipated key developments in French physiology and psychology in the last decades of the century, Duval was in close contact with many scientists who today are far more widely known—such as the anthropologist Paul Broca, the physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey, and the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot.

Something of Duval’s omnivorous “materialist” sensibility is captured in his celebratory portrait in *Les hommes d’aujourd’hui* (fig. 2.13), where the professor brandishes a basket of hatching eggs, surrounded by jars of embryos and textbooks on anthropology and physiology.

At the École des Beaux-Arts, Duval had instituted “a complete reform of the teaching of anatomy.” The professor’s enormously popular lectures—for which students apparently arrived a half hour early to secure choice seats—were no longer focused on dissecting the body as a static system of muscles and organs, but oriented towards a study of man more generally, including his physiology, evolution in time and space, and rapport with the animal world.

The course concluded with a series of units on Duchenne de Boulogne’s *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine* (1862) (fig. 2.14) and Charles Darwin’s *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) (fig. 2.15), emphasizing the automatic and instinctive bases of human gesture and facial expression.

As Jonathan Crary as well as a range of other scholars have stressed, Seurat’s Neo-Impressionism was predicated upon his general familiarity with some of the most advanced research in physiology and experimental psychology of the late nineteenth century. It is crucial to add that the artist had likely been initiated to the burgeoning field of “physiological psychology,” promoted in France by Théodule Ribot as a new discipline of “psychology without soul,” in his anatomy class at the École. More than any other work in the artist’s oeuvre,
Poseuses points back to this academic context as foundational to the conflict that animated his figure painting practice. For the campaign of figure painting that Seurat launched with the Grande Jatte can be seen as an attempt to reconcile—or perhaps, to demonstrate the impossibility of reconciling—a “grand” tradition of figural representation, such as that of the French academy, with the modernized conception of the human subject already being inculcated under its auspices.

What Seurat reexamined, or worked through, in Poseuses, I will argue, was the controversy sparked by the Grande Jatte’s visual acknowledgement of that modernized conception of the subject, as a work that no longer seemed to presume a fundamental distinction between animal and human nature, or, relatedly, that the activity of an alert, autonomous, and rational consciousness was man’s defining endowment. (And here man is indeed the operative term). As the artist signaled quite explicitly in Poseuses, through the precise terms he took up from critical reviews, and through the precise section of the Grande Jatte—the bottom right corner—he chose to reproduce, the manifesto-painting’s sensational impact on its first viewers and its status, variously, as an affront or enticement, derived from the way it formalized an image of a subject whose instinctual or automatic cerebral functioning supplanted “higher” activities of intellect. It was above all this controversial aspect of the Grande Jatte, located, as the artist underscored in Poseuses, primarily at the level of the bodily poses assumed by the figures in that picture, that had provoked the dispute surrounding the viability of Seurat’s figure painting as such.

Isolating the portion of the Grande Jatte containing the figures that contemporary viewers had responded to with particular vehemence, Poseuses stepped back from the controversy over how to present the human subject in order to situate the Grand Jatte in relation
to a broader tradition of figural representation. Seurat reproduced his “manifesto-painting” as the backdrop to a fictional scene of its own genesis, or to an archetypal origin scene of figure painting in a larger sense—an encounter with “life,” via the naked body of a human model, unfolding in an artist’s studio. Turning introspectively into the interior of the atelier, Seurat thematized questions about the nature of human interiority or “inner life” by staging the transaction with “life” that had been understood to form the necessary basis for figural representation since the foundation of academies in the sixteenth century. Revisiting the figural conventions he had abandoned in the Grande Jatte, Seurat returned to the practices in which he had been schooled, and into the art-historical past as a repository of canonical figural images. By doing so, the artist conceded the degree to which the Grande Jatte had made propositions about the mental disposition of human subjects that threw an entire tradition of figural representation into crisis. Poseuses provided a visual meditation on this crisis, touching on both the nature of figure painting and of the human subject.

Questions of Genre: Figure Painting versus Landscapes

To establish the terms in which Seurat’s Poseuses “reprinted, corrected, singularly augmented” the Grande Jatte, it is necessary to first engage at some length with the critical reception of this “manifesto-painting.” That Seurat felt compelled in 1890 to affirm (if only privately, in an unsent draft of his mission statement) his personal and aesthetic commitment to figure painting admits the degree to which his work in this genre was profoundly embattled after the debut of the Grande Jatte. The response to this “manifesto-painting” immediately established what would become, during the artist’s lifetime, perhaps the most pervasive critical trope surrounding his oeuvre: the notion that the “stumbling block” of Neo-Impressionism was “the
presentation of the human figure.”43 With the exception of a small coterie of self-consciously avant-garde admirers, most of whom were affiliated with new Symbolist journals, the vast majority of Seurat’s contemporaries vocally favored his small “landscape studies,” as the artist dismissively called them.44 Many of the obituaries published after Seurat’s sudden death from diphtheria in April 1891 (at the age of thirty-one) argued that these études de paysage were his “triumph,” or “the best side of his talent.”45

A very large painting, measuring seven by ten feet, of a zone of shaded greenery beside the Seine, the Grande Jatte (see fig. 2.1) is populated with some forty-five promenaders, a throng of Parisian endimanchés in their best Sunday attire, equipped with pets, parasols, walking sticks, all the accoutrements of outdoor leisure, ranging in scale from life-size to the height of a single centimeter. The picture was the centerpiece of a separate Neo-Impressionist gallery at the final Impressionist exhibition, where it was shown alongside divisionist works by the veteran Impressionist Camille Pissarro and fellow newcomer Paul Signac, along with eight more of Seurat’s works—three small conté crayon drawings, two small landscapes of the Grand Jatte environs, with staffage, and three equally sized figureless seascapes, executed in a highly refined divisionist technique.46 The Grande Jatte dominated the room. It was hung facing the threshold and bookended symmetrically by Le Bec du Hoc and Le Rade de Grandcamp, two of Seurat’s figureless seascapes (fig. 2.16).47 Given this hanging, it is unsurprising the canvas was recognized as “the signboard of the new school.”48 Framed in the doorway, flanked on either side by two small pendants, the Grande Jatte would have been confronted almost like a central panel in an altarpiece triptych.

This inaugural hanging demonstrably asserted Seurat’s investment in the grande toile de lutte, over and against the genre of landscape.49 The reception of these works, however,
emphatically rejected the claim the *Grande Jatte*, and its hanging, staked upon the genre of figure painting. Looking back in 1926 at the decidedly hostile reaction to the canvas, Fénéon recalled with some bemusement: “there was apparently something very aggressively insolent in that canvas, because from the first minute it irritated the visitor to paroxysms.” He described how the public’s “rage” was “at first scattered among the forty characters,” and then “localized, for inexplicable reasons, on the monkey held on a leash by the woman on the frontal plane, and especially on its spiral tail.” According to Fénéon, the public responded to these particular figures as if they had been “placed there especially to insult the person who crossed the threshold.”

Numerous other accounts describe the figures in the *Grande Jatte* as a sensational provocation, diverting attention away from other aspects of the painting they appeared in, and from other pictures Seurat exhibited alongside them. As Madeleine Maus recalled, the Exposition des XX in 1887, “presented itself exclusively under the sign of the *Grande Jatte*; I do not say ‘of Seurat,’ but of this work alone, because [of] the riots that it provoked, the battles that took place around it.”

The battles around the *Grande Jatte* were primarily battles around its figures, whose “hieratic aspect” writer Paul Adam noted “at once excited the dumbstruck hilarity of the public, and the approval of a rare few who understood.” If the promenaders in the *Grande Jatte* appeared preposterous to all but the “rare few who understood,” this polarizing quality was patently absent from Seurat’s accompanying landscapes. This was a striking discrepancy in Seurat’s reception, as Adam emphasized after the close of the Impressionist exhibition: “the seascapes of M. Seurat were not even contested by the journalists . . . the fortune of the large *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte* was totally different. Nobody understood the beauty of its hieratic
drawing, the correctness of its yellow tones, or the crowd of figures gradually shrinking into the background.\textsuperscript{53}

Far from being merely uncontested, Seurat’s three Grandcamp seascapes (figs. 1.17–2.19) were singled out for special praise by various journalists. But this critical praise was also an implicit rebuke to the imposing figure painting that dominated the display of Seurat’s works. Contrasting the success of the Grandcamp seascapes with the failure of the figure painting came to be the critics’ most consistent trope in reviews of the Impressionist exhibition.\textsuperscript{54} Many immediately appreciated the unique potential of Seurat’s new chromatic facture for capturing atmospheric phenomena of the natural world, evident in the praise for the Grandcamp seascapes. These were the first pictures ever executed in the technique that came to be named, variously, chromo-luminarism, divisionism, or pointillism, a technique that originated in 1885 during a summer sojourn in Normandy, where Seurat had traveled specifically to make a first attempt at marine painting.\textsuperscript{55} As if intuiting divisionism’s genesis in Normandy, or perceiving a kind of reciprocity between divisionist technique and the characteristic motifs of land- or seascape, many critics seemed to comprehend Seurat’s method of paint application as a specific contribution to the demands of painting a particular type of terrain, of coast and ocean, water and air.\textsuperscript{56}

Had Seurat simply shown these divisionist landscapes, it is unlikely that his debut at the Impressionist exhibition would have caused any consternation, or generated much publicity. As Joris-Karl Huysmans wrote in 1887, from “one point of view, as a landscapist and site painter” (\textit{en tant que paysagiste et sitier}), Seurat was “a newcomer to the so-called Impressionist school,” one who contributed “the newest and most original note” with a technique that could “marvelously render the pulverization of air, the iridescent quivering of water, the blond undulations of sand.”\textsuperscript{57}
That this appreciation for Seurat *en tant que paysagiste et sitier* could also extend to an appreciation of his “manifesto-painting” as a landscape picture makes clear that the core provocation of this work was not its divisionism, but rather its presentation of the human figure. More than one critic spoke of devising methods to physically or mentally expunge the promenaders from the *Grande Jatte* to facilitate their delectation of its masterfully luminous rendering of the island’s greenery, sky and water. The critic Jean le Fustec for example, noting that he himself “share[d] the public’s hilarity in front of the wooden *bonshommes* who perform the gingerbread fair in this canvas,” offered a simple solution for how Seurat might remedy the obvious flaw marring his picture: “Remove [the figures], and you are left with the pure and simple landscape, and then you would be in the presence of a serious, powerful, moving work.”

When the *Grande Jatte* was shown in Brussels, Le Fustec’s proposal was concretized in a satirical review in which A. J. Wauters contrived a viewing scenario that would serve to mask the painting’s largest, most offensive figures. Attempting to demonstrate the canvas’s aesthetic merit to a fellow viewer—a conservative notary forewarned about Seurat’s “scandalous” painting by his morning newspaper—Wauters described how he moved the notary to a position in the exhibition hall such that “the right part of the canvas, with its mannequins sauced in violet, was hidden from his eyes behind . . . sculptures in the middle of the room.” With the standing, life-size figures thus camouflaged in his field of vision, Wauters instructed the notary to look again at the landscape of the *Grande Jatte*, while trying to “ignore certain figures so naive that that they are silly, and . . . only preoccupy [himself] with the effect of light the painter has tried to render.” If Seurat’s new technique of divisionism captured nature and “effects of light” with a facility that might seduce even the most skeptical of bourgeois exhibition audiences, the
presentation of Sunday promenaders on the *Grande Jatte*, by contrast, was recognized as so
affronting that it warranted taking measures to physically shield the viewer.

It was this discrepancy that determined positions within the larger debate on whether
Seurat, in carrying the new divisionist system forward, could or should continue to work as a
painter of figures. The majority of critics unhesitantly urged the artist to abandon figure painting
altogether. Seurat, one of them suggested, “would succeed less badly if he daubed some more
landscapes rather than planting wooden *bonshommes* as in *l’Île de la Grande jatte, un dimanche*
[sic].” The most considered articulation of this position came from Huysmans, who published
an extended meditation on the uneven merits of Seurat’s different genres of work, observing:
“Strange thing! . . . this landscapist whose seascapes serve as an aid to monotonous dreams
becomes all façade, and remains unsuggestive, as soon as he places painted persons on the
scene.”

Directly countering these admonitions, several writers affiliated with Symbolism actively
encouraged Seurat to pursue figure painting further, arguing “one would like . . . a greater place
for the figure, for groups of figures.” Chief among these was Fénéon, who would become the
principal spokesman for Neo-Impressionism. (It was he who coined this appellation in 1887.) At first glance, Fénéon’s dense, influential review of the Impressionist exhibition is striking for
its apparent distance from the controversy around the figures of the *Grande Jatte*, insistently
downplaying this issue in favor of more technical concerns. Now recognized as a milestone in
the history of art criticism for its unprecedented pseudoscientific rhetoric, the review adopted a
depersonalized, clinical tone, created in part by intensively engaging Seurat’s painting at the
level of chromatic microstructure. Fénéon devoted paragraphs to analyzing “square
decimeters” of the canvas’s “immense” surface area, offering mathematical equations for the
relative luminosity of pigments and light waves before tacking on a brief identification of its figurative subject matter: “the subject: . . . the island . . . moving with a random Sunday population in the joy of the fresh air, among the trees, and its some forty characters are invested in a hieratic and summary drawing, rigorously treated from the back or full face or in profile.”

And yet this almost perfunctory verbal acknowledgement of the human figures depicted in Seurat’s canvas belies the degree to which Fénéon recognized the figure to be fundamental to “the complete and systematic paradigm of the new painting” Seurat had offered.

Between the lines of Fénéon’s minute, almost hallucinatory evocation of the colorful superficie of Seurat’s canvas, he took a clear and forceful position in favor of figure painting. Deliberately opposing the critical preference for Seurat’s landscape works, Fénéon neglected to even mention the seascapes, instead focusing his discussion exclusively on the Grande Jatte. His analysis concluded with a strategically polemical prescription for how Seurat should carry his project forward. The naked human body, Fénéon proposed, would be Seurat’s ultimate object: “la peinture au point imposes itself for the execution of smooth surfaces, and above all, the nude, to which it has not yet been applied.”

Fénéon’s declaration that Seurat should build on the achievement of the Grande Jatte by applying his technique to the nude—the most elevated, tradition-bound subject of the classical artistic canon—is a characteristic example of how the writers who endorsed Seurat’s “manifesto-painting” specifically encouraged him to work within an inherited system of aesthetic standards built around the human figure. Fénéon’s suggestion that Seurat should execute a nude seems almost to adopt the institutional logic of academic assessment, where executing a nude figure or académie served as an official test of professional competence, as if the artist’s successful completion of a nude could definitively disprove and silence the chorus of critics who challenged
his legitimacy as a figure painter. Yet the suggestion was also a provocation—in referring to the nude simply as an ideal “smooth surface” for Seurat’s pointillist facture, Fénéon’s language simultaneously supported a kind of flattening or emptying out of the human figure, articulating a pointed lack of interest in those interior qualities underlying the human being’s status as the most difficult and “exalted image an artist can propose.”

The Technique of the Figure in the Grande Jatte

That the Grande Jatte provoked this debate on the legitimacy of Seurat’s prerogative to work as a figure painter is a crucial indication that it raised contentious questions about the nature of figure painting as such. The fundamental problem most critics had with Seurat’s approach to figure painting—articulated most forcefully in Huysmans’s damning indictment of the Grande Jatte—was that there was “not enough life” in it.68 More specifically, Huysmans characterized this insufficient liveliness as an absence of inner life: “Pick away the colored fleas that cover [Seurat’s] characters, and beneath them is void; no soul, no thought, nothing” (aucune âme, aucune pensée, rien). All that was left was “nothingness in a body for which only the contours exist.”69

To Huysmans, human sentience had been nullified, in formal or symbolic terms, by a painter so enamored with the surface effects of light and color that he “forgets to penetrate further and deeper.”70 The vibrant surface monopolized any claim to “life” within Seurat’s figure painting. Little dabs of oil on the canvas epidermis, the swarm of “colored fleas,” appeared more alive, responsive, and alert than the figures they covered, which were treated as inert, vacuous “human armatures.”71 Of their anima or intelligence—le plus haut degré de la vie, qui est la
pensée—Huysmans could find no recognizable outward signs; these “deeper” or “higher”
dimensions of human personhood seemed to him absent in Seurat’s “hard and rigid” figures.

This vacuous quality, Huysmans makes clear, was less the result of the canvas’s colored
surface than its underlying compositional structure, its particular manner of defining the contours
of the “human armature.” But despite its arresting impact on nineteenth-century viewers,
Seurat’s figural technique has not been scrutinized with the same intensity as his system of
divisionist facture. Before more closely examining how this figural technique was interpreted, I
want to further specify the three related formal features I find define the purportedly
“primitivizing” approach the *Grande Jatte* takes to the human figure.

The first is anatomical. While sketchbooks from Seurat’s student days provide ample
evidence of the efforts he initially expended to master the *tête d’expression*, the human foot
making contact with the ground, the delicate motions of fingers, by the time he painted the
*Grande Jatte*, the artist had clearly abandoned the central tenet of academic practice holding that
the *extremités* (head, feet, hands) should be “worked with greater exactitude and precision than
the rest” of the figure (figs. 2.20, 2.21). In effect, Seurat disarticulated, or even dismembered,
his figures, by severely containing bodily extremities and limbs, or eliminating them altogether.
In most cases, the *Grande Jatte* promenaders carry their arms tight against their torsos, so that
the presence of these limbs is sometimes difficult to decipher. Hands, in particular, are often
absent in the *Grande Jatte*, or else condensed into slabs without articulated fingers. Most men
stand with their legs together, so that the bipedal stance appears compacted to a single column
(fig. 2.22). Seurat for the most part eliminated feet, or else concealed them under skirts, so a
sense of freestanding corporeal poise, of “placing a human figure on the weight of his feet,” as
Blanc put it, disappears. The facial features of many figures, even those close to the foreground,
appear imperceptible or oddly blurred, while those in the immediate foreground are simply expressionless.

The second feature is postural. Whether standing or seated, most figures are posed bolt upright, with what Fénéon described as “the verticality of a sundial.” All the promenaders face directly forward, and the majority face in the same direction, staring out toward the water at the left edge of the picture. Maneuvering or flexion of limbs is minimized: figures appear inelastic and inert, and do not appear to shift weight or pace forward, extend or intertwine their limbs, twist their torsos, turn their necks, or tilt their heads. Their “attitudes,” as one critic put it, appear somehow restricted or reigned in, “condensed with an astonishing concision.”

The third feature is orientational. Seurat aligned his promenaders across the picture plane of the canvas in a manifestly regimented order. He marked the symmetry of the rectangular tableau by placing a frontal standing figure exactly on the vertical midline of the picture. All postural torsions requiring oblique, foreshortened renderings of the body he eliminated in favor of body positions at right angles to the picture surface. The Grande Jatte limited the disposition of bodies to a monotonous repertoire of three basic orientations. As Fénéon was the first to note, Seurat’s figures were “treated rigorously, either from the back or full face or in profile” (ou de dos ou de face ou de profil).

Critical Metaphors for Raideur

Again and again, Seurat’s contemporaries described his treatment of the promenaders with the word “stiffness,” raideur. In the following discussion, I explore how his critics deployed this key term, where they saw his figures as exhibiting this quality, and the significance of the analogies and metaphors they deployed to attack or celebrate raideur.
Mannequins and Toy Soldiers

The majority of nineteenth-century critics and viewers remained, like Huysmans, committed to the basic principle that the success of a figure painting as a whole depended upon an artist’s success in simulating convincingly, within the unity of his composition, a living, and therefore moving, feeling, thinking human being, imbued with âme or pensée. But the majority of critics articulated this aesthetic conviction less directly than Huysmans did, by relying on two dominant metaphors to condemn the Grande Jatte, identifying its promenaders variously with the mannequin de mode, newly ubiquitous in the window displays of modern department stores, and with the toy soldier, more specifically the flat tin soldiers produced for mass export in Nuremburg. Their rhetorical selection within this pair—an exaggerated gender binary if ever there was one—depended to a large extent on whether the critic looked to the painting’s male or female promenaders to articulate the distinctive qualities of its figural manner. In either case, however, identifying Seurat’s Sunday promenaders with mass-produced dummies amounted to stating, ipso facto, that the Grande Jatte was a failed attempt at figure painting, an inept, ridiculous, or viciously satirical representation of contemporary citizens taking their leisure—or all of the above, perhaps.

The particular ways in which critics pressed these allusions to mannequins and toy soldiers, however, betrayed that Seurat’s failure, or refusal, to achieve a mimetic simulation of liveliness could not easily be dismissed as mere technical incompetence. For precisely through its failure to produce an illusion of “soul” or “thought,” the Grande Jatte produced an image of the human subject that appeared mimetic of the mechanical or automatic disposition—as a mental tendency or mode of behavior—now recognized as intrinsic to the Parisian populace it sought to picture.
As members of a type known to be, as Charles Baudelaire put it, “more solidly exaggerated in their backs, more bluntly set on their feet, more straight [plus d’aplomb] than the ordinary mortal,” soldiers might have seemed a logical model for describing the Grande Jatte figures in general, who in their supposed Sunday “relaxation” adopted stiffly erect, upright attitudes that easily evoked the “at attention” (garde à vous) posture of military men awaiting orders (fig. 2.23). The soldier, additionally, as a type trained to line up in group formations and execute movements in unison, would also have seemed apt in describing Seurat’s grouping of figures facing in only three directions—ou de dos ou de face ou de profil—the vast majority in perfect profile to the viewer. Although Seurat apparently became a “punctual and disciplined soldier” after he left the École des Beaux-Arts to complete compulsory service, in the Grande Jatte his evocation of a martial habitus functions primarily to convey a sense of docility, obedience, or even simple-mindedness, a corporeal manifestation of the Baudelairean notion that soldiers are “as simple as children.” Indeed, the Grande Jatte leisure seekers seem not so much to imitate soldiers, but figurines of soldiers, “stiff and childish, with the air of having come out of a box of crassly made toys,” as one critic described them.

The widespread perception that Seurat’s canvas resembled “a display [déballage] of toys from Nuremberg” was keyed to two of the picture’s most distinctive formal features. Seurat’s general emphasis on the profile view of the figure created a strong resemblance to the most common type of toy exported from Germany, small, flat, two-sided, poured-metal soldier figurines that balanced upright on grass-green painted bases, most often in profile marching forward (fig. 2.24). His striking treatment of the shadows cast by the promenaders dramatically heightened the likeness to these so-called Zinnfiguren. Oddly solid, dark green ovules spread beneath the often absent feet of the figures in the middle and background of the picture. Herbert
already noted that these oblong green forms resemble “pedestal shadows.” Seurat’s contemporaries described these shadows by means of a more specific analogy to “lead soldiers who move on articulated lozenges” (fig. 2.25).

The two cadets (fig. 2.26) Seurat placed by water’s edge in the Grande Jatte invited, and corroborated, this analogy. Within a perspectival construction that seems contrived precisely to emphasize “the span from the tiny to the large,” Seurat assigned these two soldiers to a position that necessarily makes them appear miniscule in relation to the life-size standing couple who dominate the right foreground of the picture. Seurat also planted these Lilliputian soldiers, who appear doubled as if by a process of mechanical reproduction, on a single and visually prominent “pedestal shadow,” generating an almost unavoidable allusion to Zinnfiguren that necessarily inflects the surrounding figures.

The diminutive pair of toy-soldier cadets by the water, standing as if at attention, shoulder to shoulder and facing forward, form an obvious visual counterpoint to the standing couple in the right foreground of the picture, shown in profile and in grandeur naturelle—a fashionable woman with a pet monkey and a male escort, whose presence the woman almost completely obscures. Through her scale and location, the female half of this couple seems to preside over the composition, in a manner that allows or even invites the perception that she is, ultimately, the painting’s protagonist. The starring role this figure assumed in Steven Sondheim’s musical Sunday in the Park with George (1984) (fig. 2.27) theatrically reconfirms what was, from the first moment of the canvas’s reception, a pervasive tendency to fixate upon the woman in the foreground of the picture. This dominating female figure also concretized the “mannequin” metaphor that dominated the critical descriptions of Seurat’s figures in 1886, as well as in a
century’s worth of subsequent art historical scholarship, which has continued to reflexively apply this metaphor to Seurat’s figures, without acknowledging its historically contingent status.  

Since the Salons of Diderot the word mannequin had been a standard term of censure in French art criticism, applied to figures deemed “raide et peu naturelle,” lacking the vivacity that was supposed to come from study of the live model.  

A crucial semantic shift occurred in the application of the term to Seurat’s figures in 1886. In Seurat’s reception, the original, specifically artistic reference made by Diderot and subsequent critics to the articulated dummy, or mannequin d’atelier (fig. 2.28), used since the Renaissance as a studio tool by figural artists, was displaced by the secondary definition, given in Larousse in 1873 as, “a human form . . . decked out in clothing and serving as a showpiece at tailors and clothing shops.”  

This secondary type of mannequin, the mannequin d’étalage or mannequin de mode, proliferated in tandem with the rise of the department store and the market for ready-to-wear clothing (confection), exploding into what Léon Riotor described in 1900 as “une industrie Parisienne.”  

Annual sales for one Parisian mannequin manufacturer grew from fifty to thirty thousand between 1860 and 1900. The sumptuous publication Riotor devoted in 1900 to “these department store busts, these summary portmanteaux icons” opened with an illustration (fig. 2.29) of an articulated mannequin d’atelier painting the portrait of female dressmaker’s doll.  

As that image announces, in this period the artist’s dummy, an often genderless creature, prized for its “absolute immobility and exemplary docility,” gave way to the fashion industry’s femme docile, an effigy with a more emphatic gender identity, and even less anatomical articulation or potential for expressive movement.  

Seurat made more preparatory studies for female busts than for any other form in the Grande Jatte. Distilling the body into a compactly voluptuous truncation, ignoring or
dramatically de-emphasizing arms, abruptly easing pressure of the conté rubbing at the neck, so that heads appear as pale, disembodied ovals floating over torsos, Seurat echoed in these drawings the period’s most common variety of fashion mannequin, the buste-mannequin (fig. 2.30). The most astonishing specimen from Seurat’s series deploys its mise-en-page to sever one of three identical busts just below the waist and above the neck (fig. 2.31). This formal isolation of the bust carries over strongly in the final painted composition. The silhouetted profile of the female torso, delineated most starkly, in perfect profile and at one-to-one human scale, in the graphic black bodice of the monkey’s mistress, repeats rhythmically (with variations of color) across and into the background of the canvas, beginning with the two pairs of seated, virtually legless women on either side of that figure, and then reverberating outward, for instance to the figure of the woman fishing at the water’s edge, replicated in miniscule form near the vanishing point of the composition (fig. 2.32, see also fig. 2.1).

Seurat’s contemporaries were struck by the resemblance. Le Fustec described the figures in Grande Jatte as a “band of petrified beings, immobile mannequins who have the audacity to captivate the public’s attention and provoke them to laughter,” while Émile Hennequin criticized them for being “drawn up to date, like poorly manufactured mannequins.” The satirical exchange between the fictional notary and A. J. Wauters, in which the critic attempts to obscure the standing woman and her escort behind sculptures, ends when the notary, unable to recover from his initial shock at Seurat’s picture, makes the following retort: “But those figures, my dear, those two large devils of figures resembling dolls from some display of a confectionneur?”

As Wauters’s punchline makes clear, the perceived analogies of Seurat’s figures to inanimate effigies, whether miniature figurines or, perhaps even more outlandishly, life-size dummies, were described in the contemporary criticism as the principal driving force behind the
public’s tendency to respond to the picture with laughter. The dynamics of the *Grande Jatte*’s reception, therefore, might be seen to anticipate the definition of the comic Henri Bergson formulated some ten years later.\(^96\) For Bergson, man was less a laughing animal than “un animal qui fait rire.”\(^97\) The comic, which he defined as a “strictly human” property, was the sensation human beings experienced when confronted with “a certain mechanical inelasticity” (*raideur de mécanique*) located “just where one would want to find the supple attention and living flexibility of a human being.”\(^98\)

At the core of Bergson’s conception of the comic was an opposition between *souplesse* and *raideur*, tied in his argument to a larger antagonism between the opposing principles of intelligent wakefulness and stupid slumber. “In every human form,” he proposed, the human imagination intuitively expects to “see the effort of a soul” (*âme*) engaged in “shaping matter, a soul which is infinitely supple and perpetually in motion.”\(^99\) The soul, which “imparts a portion of its winged lightness to the body it animates,” represented for Bergson “the ever-alert activity of [a] higher principle” (*l’activité toujours en éveil de ce principe supérieur*) that transcended the forces of “mere automatism” (*automatisme*).\(^100\) The comic arose, in his estimation, in those moments when mere automatism demonstrably succeeded in overtaking that superior principle, “fix[ing] the intelligently varied movements of the body into stupidly contracted grooves,” and presenting the spectacle of “the living body stiffening into a machine.”\(^101\)

The laughter directed at Seurat’s “mannequins,” or his “characters [with] the automatic gestures of lead soldiers,” was provoked precisely by the quality of *raideur* exhibited by his figures, a *raideur* Huysmans connected explicitly with the seeming absence of “soul” within these figures, an absence of that “superior” *activité toujours en éveil* that seemed to confer upon them a mechanical or “automatic” character.\(^102\) This *raideur* in the *Grande Jatte* represented
something more than merely a laughing matter, for critics invariably stressed that the public’s “dumbstruck hilarity” veered towards “rage” at Seurat’s figures.

The particularly hostile tone of this “hilarity,” emphasized in the critical literature, points towards the newly urgent, volatile status of “automatism” as a concept in France in the 1880s, when preoccupations with suggestability, hypnosis, and somnambulism pervaded intellectual and popular culture.  

Bergson’s essay on the comic, composed in 1899, responded to and challenged certain key precepts that emerged from this intellectual context of materialist “psychology without soul.” By defining human interiority in terms of the soul, and the soul as an “ever-alert activity of [a] higher principle,” Bergson’s popular essay affirmed what Crary has described as the philosopher’s “normative model of consciousness,” which resisted the recent tendency in science and experimental psychology to reduce mental and social existence to the mechanical operations of “automatic,” unconscious processes.  

Laughter, as Bergson understood it, was both an expression of the human subject’s intuitive resistance to any apparent “deflection of life towards the mechanical,” and a social corrective, the social body’s method of enforcing its ideal of “constantly awake attention.” Laughter was thus for Bergson an expression of social disapproval, or even anxiety: “all stiffness [raideur] of character, of mind and even of the body will be suspicious to society, because it is the sign of a possibly slumbering activity.”

The Grande Jatte generated a powerful formal approximation of this “slumbering activity” operating within the metropolitan public sphere. Pointedly countering Bergson’s ideal of social existence as a condition of “constantly awake attention,” Seurat’s presentation of the rituals of Sunday leisure exhibits instead a particular rapport with the social theories advanced in the 1880s by Gabriel Tarde, Bergson’s predecessor as Chair of Philosophy at the Collège de
France. In 1884—the year memorialized in the title of the Grande Jatte—Tarde published his paper “What is a society?” It launched the thesis that became the crux of his famous book Les lois d’imitation in 1890: “society is imitation, and imitation is a form of somnambulism.” The figuration of the Grande Jatte might be seen as formalizing that proposition, presenting contemporary Parisians in a manner vividly emphasizing the modern subject’s apparent predisposition to a kind of mindless, almost mechanical compliance with social and sartorial conventions.

Certainly, Seurat’s subject—the Sunday promenade, a public ritual of ambulation—held particular resonance with the concept of somnambulism. Alfred Paulet seems to have implied this analogy when he asserted that Seurat gave his figures “the automatic gestures of lead soldiers” because he sought “to demonstrate the routinization [train-train] of the banal parade of endimanchés who walk without sensation in the places where it is conventional one must walk on Sunday.” But if the Grande Jatte concretized an allusion to somnambulism in general by transforming the Sunday promenade into an “automatic” march of tin soldiers, even more particularly, it concretized Tarde’s specific associations between somnambulism and imitation—most emphatically through the figure of the female “mannequin” standing in its foreground.

Quite contrary to Bergson’s subsequent proposition that “la vie bien vivante ne devrait pas se répéter,” Tarde based his sociology on the principle of “Universal Repetition.” Just as inorganic life was propagated through the vibration of matter, and biological life through sexual reproduction, he argued, human society existed through imitation. Drawing heavily on recent physiological and psychological literature, Tarde asserted that there was an “innate tendency to mimicry in the nervous system,” that the human brain was an organe répétiteur functioning predominantly through “a kind of habit, unconscious imitation of self by self.” A tendency for
human beings both deliberately and unconsciously to imitate other persons perpetuated this imitative function of individual cerebration. He argued that the individual’s dependence on habitual repetition for the most basic activities such as “looking, listening, walking, standing upright, writing, playing the flute,” was replicated in the social body’s dependence upon a “treasury of routine, of unfathomable mimicry [singerie] and obedience [moutonnerie], incessantly accrued by successive generations.” To describe the psychological mechanism of this mimicry, Tarde drew heavily on then recent research on hypnosis (by, among others, Charles Richet, Charles Féré, Alfred Binet, Hippolyte Bernheim), and gave absolute centrality to the human susceptibility to suggestion. He viewed the hypnotized subject’s tendency to imitate the hypnotist as the purest form of the “imitativity” that structured all social relationships.

Tarde defined society in general as a group of individuals who imitate one another. Crucially, however, he asserted that societies grew increasingly imitative “as they become civilized.” Although modern democratic civilizations tended to believe they had “become less credulous and docile, less imitative” than more primitive cultures, in fact, Tarde argued, in the nineteenth century mechanisms of suggestion had only become more diffuse and accelerated. The greater proximity and concentration of populations, the emergence of new media for nearly instantaneous and mass communication, a scientific, industrial culture of inventions, and, not least, the new importance of fashion, all conspired to make imitation an increasingly dominant force in modern civilizations.

The Grande Jatte, it would seem, effected a rude awakening from the social “dream,” as Tarde understood it—for the painting’s form brought modern imitativity forcefully to consciousness for contemporary viewers, militating against the tendency of “civilized peoples to flatter themselves with thinking they have escaped this dogmatic slumber.” Seurat’s handling
of the Grande Jatte figures *en masse*—his monotonous repetition of their anatomical forms and postures—formalized imitative processes at work in the Parisian public sphere. As Adam described it, “the stiffness of the people” in the canvas captured the “feeling of the modern,” recalling the new uniformity of ready-to-wear clothing and new homogeneity of the metropolitan expressive affect, “the reserve of our gestures, the British cant we all imitate.”

It was in a similar spirit that Henry Fèvre, deploying a word that connoted a kind of aspirational self-presentation through mimicry of models of prestige, observed that Seurat had translated “the stiffness of Parisian promenading, somber and listless, where even recreation is posturing” (*poseuse*).

While the crowd as a whole could be seen as evoking the “dogmatic slumber” modern civilizations preferred to associate, as Tarde asserted, with more primitive cultures, one figure more than any other—perhaps predictably, a female figure—was seen to stand for this deviation from what Bergson would call the “ever-alert activity of a higher principle,” emblematizing a collective regression to the docile somnulence of imitation. Critical accounts invariably stress that the woman in the painting’s right foreground, outfitted in a modish *toilette de promenade* and accompanied by her leashed pet monkey, monopolized attention, “exciting most especially the verve of the boulevardiers,” as Paul Signac remembered. Although Fénéon summarily dismissed the public’s special antagonism towards this figure as a “phénomène mal explicable,” the explanation for the “enraged” reaction is already implicit in his coy description of the monkey as a piece of “nostalgie bestiole.”

With their overdetermined symbolism and highly calculated formal parallelism, this woman-monkey pair crystallizes the canvas’s broader allusion to the human subject’s automatistic impulses, representing its most outrageous, ostentatious, and perhaps even obscene materialization of them.
The monkey stands as a traditional emblem of imitation (fig. 2.33); in French, as in many European languages, the word itself (singe) came to connote various forms of mimicry. The verb singer meant “to imitate, to counterfeit,” while the noun singerie designated mimicry—whether in the form of clumsy affectation or deliberate parody—of actions, styles, gestures, or manners. Tarde deployed this simian vocabulary strategically, notably to convey the human proclivity to imitate models of prestige, a tendency he saw as “the foundation and origin of society.” Thus, in 1883, he described the tendency for small town inhabitants to ape (singer) metropolitan, and for the lower classes to ape (singer) the upper classes as the “ensemble of simian avidities [convoitises simiennes] that constitutes the potential energy of a society.”

That this “simian avidity” had become a particularly potent engine within the cultural context of the French Third Republic was acknowledged in the Grande Jatte quite explicitly. As T. J. Clark and other commentators have stressed, the picture, depicting what certain period critics recognized as “a Sunday festival of store clerks, apprentice butchers, and women in search of adventures,” attempted to capture a specifically petit bourgeois population, or else a “working class who aspires to become petit bourgeois,” the nouvelles couches sociales taking possession of the bourgeois privilege of leisure. Far more pointedly, the monkey’s owner, through her visible identification with the fashion mannequin, and physical proximity to her simian companion, appears as an unambiguous emblem for these convoitises simiennes.

The monkey’s owner, the figure in the Grand Jatte most explicitly analogized to a mannequin, was also the figure singled out as a “superb cocotte” by numerous viewers. More, perhaps, than any overtly sexual signifiers attached to this figure, it is her rigid and static demeanor, the rigor with which she remains inert, expressionless, assuming a mannequin’s posture, displaying fashion rather than live flesh, that marks her as a figure of commerce. If not a
cocotte, she might allude to another kind of commercial character, a *demoiselle de magasin* (fig. 2.34). These members of the nascent *classe à part* of department store shopgirls became a topic of fascination during the late Second Empire and early Third Republic. As Seurat’s favorite novelist, Émile Zola, noted while researching *Bonheur des dames* (fig. 2.35), his 1883 novel set in a department store, *demoiselles de magasin* could be instantly identified on their (Sunday) expeditions outside the store by their perfect attire, and by “always carrying a bit of the grace of the mannequin.”

Zola’s suggestion that contemporary shopgirls, in bearing and carriage, actually modeled their comportment on the fashion mannequin (a “ferociously obscene” object, in the novelist’s estimation) provides one important framework for understanding the offensive raideur of the monkey’s owner. “The displays of shop windows,” Tarde asserted, were an important component of a modern urban environment in which commercial attractions acted upon subjects almost magnetically, exerting a profound suggestive impact (figs. 2.36, 2.37). The monkey’s owner might be read as a *femme docile* who has succumbed to the magnetism of the shop window, or more precisely, to the magnetism of the mannequin, surely one of the new department stores’s most powerful instruments of suggestion, modeling for the potential customer fashions that they might purchase and then wear. Faithfully replicating the fashionable model of the *toilette de promenade* for the year 1884, the attire of the monkey’s owner clearly marks her as an enthusiastic participant in the widespread aping of the leisure class in late nineteenth-century France, demonstrating that she has acquired the full inventory of articles required for promenading, including an umbrella, that “indispensable complement to any *toilette de promenade*”: the most ubiquitous new pseudoluxury rendered widely affordable by the *démocratisation de luxe*. But her imitativeness appears to exceed mere consumption habits. Her
palpable stiffness, the way in which she seems to do nothing but hold still and face forward, as if to flaunt her bustled silhouette at an ideal angle for the viewer of the canvas, suggests an aping of an inanimate display object. The preposterous or off-putting presence recognized in this “mannequin sauced in violet” inhered in the way Seurat implied that she had internalized the mannequin as “model for imitation” somatically, as a model not only for assembling an external toilette, but also for inhabiting and exhibiting the body in public.130

Seurat’s decision to accessorize this mannequin-like female figure with a domesticated, leashed pet monkey—a capuchin, most likely, or a macaque—an eccentric complement to an otherwise quite conventional toilette, underlines her status as a personification of imitation.131 Anatomy, posture, and fashionable attire create a formal parallelism between these two figures that makes them appear as if they are reciprocally mimicking one another.132 Far more than a mere whimsy or symbol of licentiousness, as the monkey has often been interpreted, the capuchin actualizes the linguistic metaphor of singerie, while simultaneously forging a visual link between the modern tendency Tarde defined as mode-imitation and what he described as “fashionable theories on evolution.”133

While the monkey’s facility for mimicry has long been associated with art and its mimetic function (epitomized in the classical aphorism ars simia naturae) (see fig. 2.33), the popular dissemination of evolutionary theory irrevocably altered the monkey’s iconographic connotations.134 While the monkey had been, for centuries, the standard animal alter ego of the artist, by the 1880s, the animal also served as a visual synonym for Charles Darwin.135 This identification grew so entrenched that, to borrow a striking formulation from one vocal anti-evolutionist of the era, it became impossible to “pronounce [the name Darwin] without immediately seeing it sparkle forth like the silhouette of a monkey.”136 After Darwin’s election
to the Académie des Sciences in 1878, French caricaturists began to follow the English in delineating him as an *homme-singe* (figs. 2.38, 2.39) with a lavish prehensile tail, not dissimilar to the spiraling appendage in the foreground of the *Grande Jatte*, “the length of [which],” George Moore noted, “raised a clamour in the *petite presse*.”\(^{137}\) While critics never discussed this association in print, it seems certain that evolutionary theory inflected the vehement reactions to the simian presence in the *Grande Jatte*. And it seems virtually impossible that Seurat, who had studied Darwin in Duval’s anatomy class, would have been oblivious to current debates concerning the proposition that “man is descended from a hairy, tailed quadruped” when he introduced a monkey’s silhouette into the foreground of the *Grande Jatte*.\(^{138}\)

The specter of animal descent is integral to the painting’s evocation of the modern subject’s automatistic, imitative impulses, and crucially, Seurat seems to have stressed this connection to insist upon a link between “mere automatism” and the flagrant expression of sexuality. While the monkey was part of Seurat’s earliest conception of the *Grande Jatte*, in composing the final version, he painted in this animal last, as a kind of final flourish.\(^{139}\) Extant studies (figs. 2.40, 2.41) show that he gradually adapted the animal’s stance and anatomy to better complement its owner’s posture and dress. It was not until Seurat finally coupled the monkey’s silhouette to that of its mistress that the lavish “ring-tail . . . said to be three-yards long” was added.\(^{140}\) As John Carl Flügel remarked in the *Psychology of Clothes*, for a brief moment in France of the 1880s, the “accentuation . . . of the posterior parts” was so exaggerated that “women were wearing a creditable imitation of a tail.”\(^{141}\) Seurat plainly perceived this dimension of period fashion, and used the monkey to bring it into focus. One could even hypothesize that the artist’s desire to highlight the distinctive contour of the tournure, which achieved notoriety in Germany and elsewhere as the *cul de Paris*, provided initial inspiration for
Certainly, as Gustave Coquiot noted, the Grande Jatte conveys Seurat’s “respect” for the so-called faux cul, or “false-ass,” treating the exaggerated bustle as a “sacred object,” suggesting even a certain “pleasure in delineating it.”

Seurat’s rigorous imposition of the profile posture is one vital sign of his “respect” for the false ass, demonstrating that the artist recognized, as Charles Blanc did in his 1872 “Consideration of Ladies Fashion,” that the fad for the “accentuated rump” was an instance of women “dressing as if to be viewed in profile.” The artist “frankly tackled” the “disgracious profile” of the faux cul, as Gustave Kahn asserted, “taking his model from the side, accentuating the arch of the backside the couturier tried to obtain and translating all the bizarre fantasy of this ornamentation.” The monkey, also posed “as if to be seen in profile,” became integral to Seurat’s faithful translation of the couturier’s vision, reiterating and amplifying this “disgracious profile” though its lateral posture, which showcases the linear contour of its elongated, spiralled tail as it precisely duplicates the posterior swooping curve of its owner’s bustle.

The striking formal mimicries Seurat created between these figures lend their pairing an overtly comic, almost music-hall flavor. It is as if the Grande Jatte presented its audience with a performing monkey, trained to imitate human behaviour, as in the popular performances featuring trained monkeys that proliferated in Paris in the 1880s, including at the Cirque Corvi (figs. 2.42, 2.43), which Seurat frequented and later painted in Parade de cirque (see fig. 2.10). While this “cabaret sign of the Parisian suburbs,” as one critic described the Grande Jatte, surely exuded a whiff of popular theatre, it presented a far more complex and challenging spectacle of mimicry than what might have been encountered there. For the Grande Jatte, surely confounds any clear differentiation between original and imitation—as if to ask who is imitating whom, in other words.
The canvas presented a preening, eminently Parisian, even fashion-conscious monkey, who appears to have learned to imitate “the grace of the mannequin” imitated in turn by its owner, and to coil its copious tail to match the *faux cul* she displays in perfect profile towards the viewer. At the same time, the presence of this monkey insists that we perceive its owner in animalistic terms, as a human wearing a “creditable imitation of a tail,” whose “extraordinary costume,” Osbert Sitwell wrote in 1926, appears as an “eloquent simian shape . . . evolved for [herself] as decoration.” ¹⁴⁸ Indeed, Seurat’s presentation of the monkey presses the concept of “imitation,” in Tarde’s sense, towards its lewdest possible horizons. Replicating the outline of the *cul de Paris* with its tail or *queue*, common slang for penis, the monkey underscores the analogy, recognized in Darwin’s controversial theory of sexual selection, between the attractive functions of modern fashion and bodily ornament within the animal kingdom.¹⁴⁹

The monkey’s presence in the *Grande Jatte* indexes Seurat’s ambition to take on the question of human nature in the broadest possible sense. Through the monkey, the artist framed the imitative behaviours of Parisian metropolitan life at a particular moment in time—1884 AD—within a far more macroscopic historical lens, encompassing the evolution of humanity as species. Here, humankind’s primitive biological progenitor serves, among other things, as a powerful visual emblem for lower, rather than higher, forms of life and of intelligence, or perhaps for forms of experience in which instinct, as opposed to thought, were understood to be predominant.

**The “Hieratic” Figure**

While most critics found it comical, or simply intolerable, that the *Grande Jatte* presented contemporary Parisians as if in a “dogmatic slumber” of reduced or restricted...
awareness, the “rare few” who appreciated the canvas’s figuration adopted a very different attitude towards this aspect of the picture. For these critics, who initiated what became a consistent tendency to celebrate Seurat as *un primitif d’aujourd’hui*, and to praise his figuration for “conferring hieratic austerity to human beings,” the *Grande Jatte* offered a more appealing or authentic image of the subject—perhaps the contemporary subject in particular—precisely because it reverted to a mode of figuration that seemed to lack the capacity to exteriorize the human subject’s inner consciousness.¹⁵⁰

For Paul Adam, the *Grande Jatte* marked an emphatic “return to primitive forms,” announcing a new artistic tendency to “flee the poverty and insignificance of the classical tradition” and “consult the origins instead.”¹⁵¹ Like the rest of Seurat’s supporters, Adam had various and frequently conflicting suggestions about the precise type of primitive “origin” he saw the *Grande Jatte* as having reinstated—he referred at various points to “old frescoes,” to “the characters of Memling,” and to “Egyptians lining up piously . . . across stelas and sarcophagi.”¹⁵² Whether Seurat’s admirers referenced the Gothic primitives or Egyptian sculptors, however, the example of ancient Egypt was always implicitly central to their conception of the painting’s “primitive” figuration, for in every case, they articulated their praise for the *Grande Jatte* with the word “hieratic,” which became, from the moment Seurat’s canvas entered symbolist discourse, “one of those words that quickly infiltrates the critical dialect,” as Coquiot noted.¹⁵³

Literally, the word hieratic means priestly or sacred, and by extension an abbreviated hieroglyphic script used by the priestly class in ancient Egypt. By the middle of the nineteenth century, it had also become an aesthetic term, connoting “a style in which religion imposes on the artist traditional forms,” or “a style of art . . . in which earlier types or methods, fixed by
religious tradition, are conventionally adhered to.” While some critics argued that the author of the *Grande Jatte* was a “reactionary maniac” because he adopted a style that appeared “more conventional than the most academic painting,” Seurat’s Symbolist supporters regarded rigid conventionality as a sign of the strength and seriousness of his new Neo-Impressionist aesthetic, which they celebrated for being “stark like a prophecy, like a marching order, like an inflexible law.” The term hieratic named this inflexibility as a specific property, or posture, of the figure. It at once conveyed Seurat’s compositional technique of posing and positioning figures by conforming to a set of restrictive rules, as well as the physical inflexibility the resulting figures seemed to exhibit. Symbolist critics used the word hieratic more or less interchangeably with stiffness. *Raideur* was thus, within symbolist discourse, not a laughable but a highly positive feature, serving as a privileged sign of Seurat’s return to primordial formal rules that “the classical tradition” had subsequently violated.

Thus, while Adam, Fénéon, and other critics celebrated the “scientific division of tone” in the *Grande Jatte* on the basis of enthusiasm for modernization and scientific progress, they embraced its “hieratic” figuration on opposite terms—as a deliberate formal regression to primitive laws of figural representation that Seurat had recovered as if by means of some archaeological process, “as one discovers forgotten stones underneath the stratifications of earth and soil,” as Émile Verhaeren put it.

This mode of valorizing the *Grande Jatte* must be understood in relation to the new body of literature that began to proliferate in multiple languages and disciplines in Europe in the decades preceding 1900, and which was devoted to the formal and expressive conventions of “primitive” figuration. The *Grande Jatte* just slightly predates the publication of some of the most seminal of these texts—the first significant study of children’s art, for instance, Corrado
Ricci’s *L’Arte dei Bambini*, was published in 1887, while Julius Lange’s enormously influential study *The Representation of the Human Figure in its Earliest Period until the Apogee of Greek Art* was published in 1892, just a year after Seurat’s death. While neither Seurat nor his symbolist critics could have been familiar with this body of literature, it provides—Lange’s book in particular—a key point of reference for establishing what might have been at stake for Seurat’s contemporaries in declaring that the artist had “fled” from the “classical tradition” to “return to primitive forms.”

“Primitive art,” as Lange defined it, “correspond[ed] to what archaeology calls an *age* (stone age, iron age, etc.), which is to say to a provisional state characterized by the absence of that which, in the future, will have great importance.” This definition suggests the degree to which Lange viewed “primitive art” through the prism of a teleological view of history. By defining the features of primitive figuration comparatively, in opposition to more advanced figural styles that developed subsequently, his definition of primitive art emphasized above all its lack of certain techniques and expressive qualities. A similar conception of primitive art was in play for Seurat’s supporters when they valorized his return to “primitive forms.” For these critics, the attraction of the primitivism in the *Grande Jatte* was inextricably bound to a condition of lack or latency. “Hieratic stiffness” signified the absence of the illusion of inner life that the “classical tradition” conventionally simulated through the figure’s corporeal suppleness.

As Robert Rey noted in 1930, the *Grande Jatte* appears to have identified and implemented, *avant la lettre*, the fundamental formal law postulated in Lange’s study of primitive figuration. This book, later cited by scholars such as Alois Riegl and Wilhelm Wundt, achieved what Adolf Furtwängler lauded as “an art historical result of the first order, comparable to the discovery of a natural law.” Lange claimed to have detected a universal
restriction governing the posture of the human figure in the art of all primitive cultures.\textsuperscript{162} Christened by Lange as the “Law of Frontality” (\textit{Frontalitetens Lov}), this formal rule severely restricted the potential corporeal poses that a human figure could adopt in primitive art. After twenty years of scrutinizing a range of “primitive” aesthetic specimens of predominantly Egyptian, but also Assyrian, Oceanic, and Native American art (fig. 2.44), Lange concluded that all primitive artists rigorously avoided any “torsion” or “flexion” along the body’s central vertical axis, always presenting the figure in attitudes in which a vertical line could be drawn straight down from the tip of the head to the sexual organs to evenly bisect the figure.\textsuperscript{163}

Lange’s text explained how this restriction, which essentially consigned the primitive artist to “the uniform reproduction of one and the same pose,” gave “the figures of primitive art a special character.”\textsuperscript{164} The frontal attitude, he asserted, prevented “the expression of what could properly be called a rapport between figures.”\textsuperscript{165} Relations between frontal figures were reduced to “the simplest geometric relations.”\textsuperscript{166} Just as the imperative to conform the individual figure to a “frontal attitude” forbade the introduction of any obliquity in the pose of the individual body, the law of frontality also forbade the possibility of orienting discrete figures at oblique angles to one another. In the grouping of figures, Lange argued, the primitive artist will position figures either “perpendicular to one another” or “parallel,” so that the figures are “standing or seated alongside one another, facing in the same direction, like soldiers in a row.”\textsuperscript{167}

Similarly, the law of frontality precluded the expression of anything that might be described as a “truly natural movement.”\textsuperscript{168} Any suggestion of motion, which Lange saw as confined for the most part to the indication of a simple \textit{walking} posture, would be necessarily “of a simple and uniform nature; if the figure walks, it will walk straight ahead.”\textsuperscript{169} Elaborating on the text a few years later, Riegl commented that because figural art that adheres to Lange’s law
eliminated all “lateral inclination of the head or torso,” any movement beyond simple walking appeared “cut off at the root . . . in the places where one most readily seeks the residence of the spiritual or the soul: in the head and torso.” For this reason, Riegl proposed, any movement approximated by the figure will necessarily “appear mechanical, automatic.”

While Lange understood the law of frontality to be a formal rule eventually standardized by convention, he nevertheless also understood it as a formal expression of “the ethics of primitive human life, which is to say its ensemble of habits and rules.” In his estimation, figures that obey the law of frontality “give us the impression of the empire of habit, in human life in general as in art, which sees itself reduced to the continual repetition of the same motifs.” This “empire of habit” was for Lange characteristic of all “inferior civilizations,” which he argued were essentially “stationary” in their passive resistance to change and their restriction of individual freedom of thought and movement. Indeed, he went so far as to suggest that “uncivilized” peoples still betrayed a certain “lack of suppleness” in their bearing which “gives them a comportment that recalls primitive statues.”

Lange defined Greek art of the 5th century BC as an “Apogee”—an advance of world-historical import—because artists in this period first began to “break with these primitive rules to create a new art that was richer and more varied.” This development, described by Lange’s interpreter Henri Lechat as the “origin” moment that “strictly speaking, created European art,” could be reduced essentially to a change in the human figure’s characteristic posture. By relaxing the prohibition on lateral torsions and asymmetries in the pelvis, trunk, and neck of figures, Greek artists began to allow for, and embrace, greater postural variety in their art. The fact that Greek artists began to transgress the law of frontality to seek out new poses, and “new ones without end,” was in itself, according to Lechat, “a great novelty in the history of art,” for it
suggested a creative, conscious departure from the “empire of habit” that previously had governed the composition of figures in art. Even more significantly, the introduction of flexions and torsions in the head and torso brought about what Lange described as “a remarkable change . . . in the expression of the figure.”

The moment when the sculptor Polykleitos created the posture Pliny termed *uno crure insistere* (standing on one leg), that is, the moment he created the famous contrapposto stance that introduced an assymetrical tilt in the figure’s trunk and neck to convey the shifting of weight (fig. 2.45), marked the moment when Greek art departed from a “completely exterior construction of the human form” (fig. 2.46) to espouse a “representation of man where everything is directed and determined by an interior center” (*un centre intérieure*). Lange’s French synopsis, it should be noted, renders this “interior center” as “le moi.” Or, as Riegl elaborated, this formal development effected a shift from a human figure represented as a “merely physical individuation, which seems to arise from mechanical movement” to a figure conceptualized as a being imbued with “internal spiritual life,” or with “an ego [*ein Ich*], to which all the parts are subordinate.”

When Seurat’s supporters celebrated the *Grande Jatte* for “fleeing” the classical tradition and “reject[ing] the methods that it produced,” they did so in large part because of a distaste for the convention of expressing the *moi*, or interior center, which the postural revolution of classicism was seen to have inaugurated for “European art” in the broadest sense. In praising the painting’s figuration for its “hieratic stiffness,” it would seem, they were praising its obeisance to something like what Lange defined as the law of frontality. Certainly, Seurat’s composition conforms to that law in a strictly formal sense: the artist not only excluded “lateral inclination of the head or torso” in the attitudes of each individual figure, he positioned each
figure ou de dos ou de face ou de profil, so that they all variously face either parallel or perpendicular to the picture plane and to each other. By situating one of these frontal figures, oriented de face, precisely on the vertical midline of Grande Jatte, Seurat underscored the principle of “frontality” as the organizing structure of his picture. More generally, the Grande Jatte was seen to possess many of the expressive qualities Lange and his readers associated with primitive figuration—a lack of evident “rapport” between figures lined up in rows “like soldiers,” a “mechanical, automatic” quality of movement, a general evocation of human existence as “reduced to . . . continual repetition.”

Many of the key reviews endorsing Seurat’s “hieratic” figuration seemed to take for granted that his elimination of exterior indications of his figures’ “interior centers” was a positive aesthetic development. As the poet Gustav Kahn explained in 1887, “in their scenes with figures” the Neo-Impressionists actively worked to “suppress” “any contortion, any movement of joy or suffering,” attempting instead to give to “the modern passerby the hieraticity of an ancient statue,” “recreating the body as a totality and in a normal aspect.”

Also that year, in the first programmatic summation of the aims of the new movement, Fénéon challenged the notion that a painted figure should outwardly convey, as Huysmans had insisted, the internal existence of âme or pensée. In a sardonic passage, almost certainly a direct riposte to Huysmans’s just published condemnation of the Grande Jatte, Fénéon mocked the pervasive tendency to condemn Seurat’s figures for their lifelessness: “Critics in love with anecdotes whine: you are showing us mannequins, not humans. These critics are not yet bored of portraits of a Bulgarian that seem to question: Guess what I am thinking!”

Here, in no uncertain terms, Fénéon implied that the conventional appetite for a certain kind of simulated interiority in figural art was not only idiotic, but outmoded. Crucially, the
“Bulgarian,” a figure who presumably stands in here for an entire population of foreign, working-class models who posed routinely in the ateliers of Paris, is invoked in this passage to personify that obsolescent paradigm of inwardness. In essence, “Le Néo-impressionnisme” inverted the aesthetic value system that established the term “mannequin” as a conventional condemnation in art criticism. If calling a figure a “mannequin” was supposed to denote the artist’s failure to impart to the figure the sense of liveliness that was supposed to come from working “from life,” for Fénéon, it was in fact the life model, and not the inanimate mannequin, that became the problematic term in this equation. The model, and not the mannequin, is held up here as an object of derision, precisely due to the model’s association with an overemphatic, even theatrical insistence that the viewer acknowledge the very existence of its “interior center” or its moi, of its thinking consciousness—Devinez ce que je pense!186

École du Modèle

Two years after the Grande Jatte debuted, Seurat intervened into the critical dispute his “manifesto-painting” had produced. Most fundamentally, with Poseuses, Seurat responded to the most basic, and most contentious, question framed in this dispute: Should he produce figure paintings, or landscapes? Before Poseuses, the new paintings leaving Seurat’s studio had implied assent to the prevailing critical consensus on this question. Following the Impressionist exhibition, the artist exhibited exclusively landscape compositions, with the notable exception of Poseuse (fig. 2.47), a tiny, ten-by-six-inch panel depicting a standing female nude, incongruously included alongside a suite of six seascapes (fig. 2.48) he created for the Salon des Indépendants in 1887.187 At the Indépendants exhibition of 1888, however, Seurat disclosed what
the little Poseuse had intimated: the artist had been methodically and secretly preparing a work that would reassert his staunch commitment to figure painting.

Enlarged to *grandeur naturelle* (four feet ten inches tall), the tiny Poseuse now reappeared at the exact center of a large canvas, almost exactly equivalent to *Grande Jatte* in scale, between, as one critic put it, “two ‘pretty and young girls,’ seen from the back and in profile.”188 This trio of nudes inhabited the corner of an interior—seemingly the artist’s studio, because the *Grande Jatte* was visible there in storage, occupying the entire left wall of the spartan room. This figure painting became the centerpiece of a group of submissions that, for the first time in Seurat’s career, included no landscapes. Instead, he accompanied the large Poseuses with the much smaller canvas *Parade de cirque* (see fig. 2.10), and eight figural conté crayon drawings, half of them focused on the cabaret and *café-chantant* (fig. 2.49).189

In one sense, Poseuses was Seurat throwing down the gauntlet. To paint the nude after having been urged by so many critics to stick exclusively to landscapes announced a defiant bid to “respond victoriously” to Fénéon’s challenge, and to invalidate the general reproach that the artist was “powerless to evoke a figure.”190 As a public statement, however, Seurat’s intervention into the debate sparked by the *Grande Jatte* betrays ambivalence as much as defiance. Structured as a kind of compromise formation, Poseuses, through its calculated interplay of reproduction and deletion, repetition and difference, served simultaneously as an apology for and reassertion of the *Grande Jatte*’s essential challenge.

While Seurat reproduced the quadrant of the earlier canvas containing the two figures that most stimulated public outrage, the monkey who “raised a clamour” and the standing “mannequin sauced in violet,” he ingeniously positioned the leftmost seated nude in Poseuses to camouflage the scandalous simian flourish in the *Grande Jatte*. He countered the latter’s
mannequin-like protagonist by presenting the naked body of the professional studio model in the foreground of *Poseuses*. More generally, the regressive deviation into “hieratic stiffness” in the *Grande Jatte* is both echoed and recanted in *Poseuses* through a figural composition that simultaneously obeys and relaxes the law of frontality that rigorously governed the figures in the *Grande Jatte*. The three nudes, positioned from left to right, *ou de dos ou de face ou de profil*, recapitulate the placement of figures in space in the *Grande Jatte* according to “the simplest geometric relations.” Indeed, by hanging the posterior padding for an “imitation tail” (misidentified as a bag in previous scholarship) on a peg on the wall just to the right of the *de profil* figure, Seurat quite insolently emphasized this restrictive orientational schema, resuming the *de dos* posture in the form of a grass green “false ass” turned around to face (and moon) the viewer (figs. 2.50, 2.51).\(^{191}\) Yet the three nudes, obvious allusions to the classical Three Graces, also evolve out of the strictly frontal attitudes in the *Grande Jatte*, assuming three distinct and comparatively supple poses.

The hedged position Seurat adopted toward the *Grande Jatte* duplicate was reflected in the inconsistency of the reviews on *Poseuses*. When the canvas was first exhibited, critics could not decide whether it reasserted the *Grande Jatte*’s challenge, or retreated from it. Octave Maus declared that Seurat “affirm[ed] with greater force an aesthetic conviction” by “show[ing] once again (by chance or mischievousness?) . . . a large section of the *Grande Jatte* which two years ago scandalized the bourgeois.”\(^{192}\) Henry van de Velde, on the other hand, insisted that Seurat had been “visibly wounded” by the “objections” to his previous canvas, noting that *Poseuses* abandoned the “wooden rigidity” of the *Grande Jatte* along with “its delight in static attitudes more puerile than synthetic.”\(^{193}\) While *Poseuses* was obviously produced in collusion with Fénéon’s avant-garde agenda, the picture could at the same time be interpreted as the remedial
exercise of a chastened École des Beaux-Arts student, a self-imposed endeavor to pass the
official test of figural competence.¹⁹⁴ This, at least, was how one critic understood it: “Seurat has
a large canvas . . . which in his mind will make the Institute swoon with jealousy . . . he is not
afraid to tackle the académie.”¹⁹⁵

Indeed, the académie, as both a designation for studies of nude models, and as a
pedagogical context in which specific figural practices and representations were taught and
sanctioned, was a self-conscious subtext in Poseuses. This painting not only relapsed into the
stylistic terrain of academic classicism, it insistently referenced Seurat’s school. It was in the
summer of 1888, we should remember, just a few months after Poseuses debuted, that Camille
Pissarro wrote Signac with the cryptic grievance: “Seurat is of the École des Beaux-Arts. He is
impregnated with it.”¹⁹⁶

Foregrounding the life model was the most fundamental way Poseuses invoked the École
des Beaux-Arts, known colloquially as the École du Modèle (fig. 2.52).¹⁹⁷ And indeed it seems
that for Seurat the nude model stood as the token of his education; he displayed, as Kahn
recalled, “an academy (a painted study of a nude man)” on his studio wall as a “souvenir” of his
time at school.¹⁹⁸ The illegible vertical sheet pinned up just behind and adjacent to the central
poseuse, whose dimensions formally echo her upright stance, was perhaps Seurat’s discreet
placeholder for this academic totem he had retained in his studio (figs. 2.53, 2.54). It is tempting
to hypothesize that initially, he intended the analogy between the central model and his académie
to be more visible, since recent infrared analysis has revealed significant underpainting beneath
the wall’s blanked out compositions.¹⁹⁹ Certainly, though, the hundreds of académies Seurat
produced while at the École, the countless hours he must have spent participating in the life
class’s attendant rituals, such as the regular student votes to select the model’s weekly pose,
cannot have been incidental to his return to the posing session in *Poseuses*, as a motif, if not as a practice.\textsuperscript{200} By placing a nude model in his studio, Seurat insinuated his reversion to the catholic academic practice of working “from life,” a practice that had in fact played an extremely minor role in the genesis of the *Grande Jatte*. Indeed, the extant studies for the *Grande Jatte* suggest that only one figure—the figure of the monkey’s owner, in fact—was painted with the aid of modeling sessions.\textsuperscript{201}

The academic overtones of *Poseuses* are established not simply by depicting the posing séance, but also through the artist’s emphasis on the figure’s adoption of a series of quite specific poses. If in the 1880s the adjective *académique* was applied, pejoratively, to figures “given the conventional pose of the atelier and not a real attitude, observed from nature,” Seurat’s *poseuses* are paradigmatically academic, for their attitudes demonstrably evoke a classical artistic canon.\textsuperscript{202}

**Restaging the “Greek Revolution”**

Henry van de Velde argued that Seurat’s nudes in *Poseuses* were intended to “oppose” the “hieratic postures of *La Grande Jatte*.\textsuperscript{203} The painting’s compositional evolution bears out this view. Sometime in the late spring or early fall of 1886, Seurat executed two preliminary studies for the central figure in *Poseuses*, a conté crayon drawing and an oil sketch on board, both likely done in front of a hired model (figs. 2.55, 2.56).\textsuperscript{204} These two *première pensées* demonstrate that, initially, the artist solicited his model to pose according to the “hieratic” template used in the *Grande Jatte*.\textsuperscript{205} Both studies show a naked girl posing barefoot on the floor, standing with her back almost up against the studio wall. The figure in both the drawing and the sketch has unarticulated hands and blurry, undefined facial features. Her legs are pressed tightly
together; her head is erect and directed straight forward. Her arms are held tight to the body in a continuous loop. The stiffly upright and symmetrical posture of this preliminary figure has been likened, by more than one art historian, to a *garde à vous* stance. Indeed, for these initial studies, Seurat solicited from his model a pose of strict frontal symmetry along the body’s vertical axis, a pose that evokes, in addition to the soldier at attention awaiting orders, the basic frontal pose Lange identified as characteristic of primitive sculpture.

Before exhibiting the small *Poseuse* (see fig. 2.47) at the Indépendants exhibition in 1887, however, Seurat made calculated revisions to the figure. Whether he made these revisions with the aid of further sessions with a model is unclear—we have no evidence to suggest that he did. The figure in the definitive *Poseuse* miniature (enlarged to *grandeur naturelle* in *Poseuses*) exhibits major refinement in certain of her anatomical features, and a decisively modified posture. Perhaps most strikingly, Seurat significantly enlarged the model’s head, and cocked it off-center. He added delicate facial features, defining her slightly curled lips, in particular, in faint cosmetic pink. At the same time, he relaxed her arms, articulated her hands, and interlaced their fingers—creating this figure’s characteristic gesture, described by the critic Jules Christophe as “hands simply clasped slightly below the pudendum.” In tandem with this anatomical refinement of the nude, Seurat altered her basic attitude. Separating her legs and shifting weight onto her back foot, the artist introduced a visible interplay between a *Standbein* and a *Spielbein*, imposing on the figure what the archaeologist Emanuel Löwy described in 1891 as the Polycleitan “movement-schema” of the “liberating step.”

As Daniel Catton Rich observed, in his progression from the *Grande Jatte* to *Poseuses*, Seurat “reversed his process.” This reversal is encapsulated in the artist’s reworking of the painting’s central figure. If for the *Grande Jatte* the compositional process was subtractive,
achieved through successive phases of “honing the [figure] down to its signifying minimum,” as Linda Nochlin has argued, Seurat’s reworking of the premieres pensées show how, by contrast, the process for Poseuses was essentially additive.\textsuperscript{210} By far the most densely worked of all Seurat’s canvases, the physical facture of Poseuse and Poseuses evince how this additive process was directed in particular towards those “expressive” bodily extremities the Grande Jatte had excised or neglected. The accretion of colored marks on the large canvas concentrates most thickly on the face and folded hands of the central figure.\textsuperscript{211} This almost obsessive attention to extremities is underscored and complemented by the cornucopia of accessories for adorning the head, hand, and foot that spill out into the bottom foreground of Poseuses.\textsuperscript{212} Simultaneously, this “reversal of process” involved restoring to the figure some sense of the corporeal suppleness the Grande Jatte had absented.

Quite obviously, Seurat’s reversal of process for Poseuses was intended to reverse the flaw that had marred the Grande Jatte—“pas assez de vie,” as Huysmans put it.\textsuperscript{213} It would seem that the essential task the artist took upon himself in this subsequent project was one of revivification—specifically in the sense of enlivening the mechanical or automaton-like presence of the Grande Jatte’s figures. If the critics had bemoaned the absence of soul or thought in the previous canvas, Poseuses would correct or augment the manifesto painting by bringing those intangible entities back. Seurat approached this task with a deliberateness that can be seen to equivocate between irony and earnestness. Deploying certain practical, time-tested solutions for conferring inner life upon the figure, he initiated a kind of concrete augmentation process—replacing absent extremités and working them with “greater exactitude,” supplementing the canvas’s uniform divisionist texture at the location of these expressive anatomical features. At the same time, he fell back on certain conventional techniques for posing the figure.
This reversal of compositional process—the switch from a subtractive mode in the *Grande Jatte* to an additive one in *Poseuses*—was weighted with historical valences. Seurat’s visual honing down of his figures in the *Grande Jatte* could be understood as a process of sloughing off the supplementary refinements accrued over generations and centuries of Western artistic practice, a devolution to the baseline condition of the “visual hieroglyph,” as Nochlin has termed it. His additive process for *Poseuses* functioned in the opposite temporal sense. Seurat’s progression from the initial sketches to the version of the figure exhibited in the 1887 *Poseuse* follows the trajectory of an historical or developmental “advance.” With the changes the artist made to the pose of the figure, Seurat’s little *Poseuse* reenacted, essentially, the “Greek Revolution” in miniature. By breaking the law of frontality to introduce an asymmetrical contrapposto, a pose Paul Richer described in 1894 as the “preferred” stance of artists, “used and abused” ever since its “invention” in the 5th century BC by Polykleitos, Seurat made his nude step out of the *Grande Jatte*’s primitive attitude. In doing so, his compositional process recapitulated the most hyperbolically celebrated stylistic development in the history of Western art, the development that, for Lechat, “strictly speaking, created European art.”

In the process that generated the little *Poseuse*, as well as in the final composition of *Poseuses*, Seurat foregrounded this epistemic “revolution” as the product of concrete postural mechanics. The opposition van de Velde noted between the “hieratic” poses in the *Grande Jatte* and those of the nudes in front of them corresponds to a larger opposition between different degrees of stylistic evolution, between a “primitive” mode of figuration and a later, more “advanced” one. Seurat’s initial pairing of *Poseuses* with *Parade*, a composition Fry described as “more than Egyptian, more than hieratic,” confirms the deliberateness of this opposition. Indeed, it seems likely that the central musician in *Parade* was based, at least in part, on the
initial conté crayon study for *Poseuses*, but subjected to a process that “reversed” the additive one that produced the nudes. The trombone slide loops over the musician’s crotch to echo the clasped arms of the central model in *Poseuses*, while the figure’s lower body schematically mimics her legs in their *Standbein/Spielbein* configuration (fig. 2.57). This appears to willfully undo that central model’s postural “advance” into a classical attitude, for this figure conveys, as Crary has argued, a sense of “mechanical and automatic movement” that “[negates] the possibilities of classical *contrapposto*.”

The opposition between the “hieratic” figures in the *Grande Jatte* and the “more than hieratic” figures in *Parade* on the one hand, and the nudes in *Poseuses* on the other, betrays how for Seurat, this deliberate shifting between more “primitive” and more “advanced” postural modes was linked to the larger expressive goal of making the figure appear to shift in and out of different states or degrees of consciousness. Seurat’s presentation, in the center of *Poseuses*, of a figure in the classical contrapposto attitude seems motivated by the recognition that this pose, as Lange would soon argue, represented the art-historical moment when a postural paradigm for the *moi*, or “interior center,” was ostensibly discovered. If, as Ernst Gombrich has noted, art history often recounted the “Greek Revolution” in the “terms of the episode from ‘The Sleeping Princess,’” in which a “thousand-year-old spell” is broken and figures “stir from the rigors of unnatural sleep,” *Poseuses* could be seen to restage that “awakening of art from primitive modes” precisely in order to effect a kind of arousal from the “slumbering activity” evoked by the figures promenading in the *Grande Jatte*. By countering the “hieratic stiffness” of the figures depicted behind them, the nudes in Seurat’s studio, to return to Bergson’s terms, could be seen to oppose “mere automatism” with a seemingly alert and conscious mental disposition, subject to “the ever-awake activity of a higher principle.”
Seurat’s staging of this “awakening . . . from primitive modes” in *Poseuses* decisively shifted the dynamics of its reception. In contrast to the prior canvas, *Poseuses* generated far fewer reviews and did not create a public sensation. While the promenaders of the *Grande Jatte* were described as possessing a presence capable of “captivating the attention of the public and provoking them to laughter,” the nudes in *Poseuses* did not attract that kind of notice. Those reviews that did focus on *Poseuses* show a marked shift away from the rhetoric used to characterize the figures in the *Grande Jatte*. While the promenaders were described again and again in terms of *raideur*, the word often used to characterize the nudes in *Poseuses* was *souplesse*. When Seurat exhibited the little *Poseuse*, Kahn noted that she possessed “the fluid extremities of a dancer,” and that her attitude was “contemplative.”220 The reviews of the large canvas amplified this critical emphasis on corporeal pliancy and gracefulness. Gustav Geffroy described Seurat’s models as possessing the “suppleness and young grace, the slender limbs and malnourishment of young girls pushed into maturity, hastily pubescent.”221 Henry van de Velde likewise defined these foreground figures as “moving, undulating . . . supple.”222 Crucially, in certain key reviews, this new sense of physical suppleness was explicitly linked to vitality in a larger sense—that is, to vitality of mind, of being, or of consciousness. Adam, for instance, markedly reversed the terms of his description of the *Grande Jatte*, writing: “One feels that these supple, alert, smooth women are, even at rest, ready to live, to charge, to laugh, to will” (*vouloir*).223

This shift in perceptions of the physical and mental disposition of the nudes had the effect of dramatically altering the range of figural associations *Poseuses* evoked. Rather than referring to mannequins, to toy soldiers, or to primitive art, critics spoke of the nudes in terms of their perfect compatibility with the grand tradition. Jules Christophe referred to Ingres’s *La Source*
(1856), while Fénéon described the central figure as one that would “glorify the haughtiest of museums.”

**Typologies of Pose**

While Seurat’s contemporaries recognized that *Poseuses* evoked a “grand tradition,” they do not seem to have apprehended the degree to which this evocation was deliberately calculated. Today, however, it is generally accepted that Seurat’s nudes mimic iconic attitudes from a classical or academic canon.

Scholars have proposed convincing sources for the poses of the two peripheral seated nudes. The figure at left, shown *de dos* with a white sheet wrapped around her buttocks, has been linked to Ingres’s *Baigneuse Valpinçon* (1808) (fig. 2.58), which featured a sensual back view of a seated female torso in a pose Ingres himself requotied throughout his career, in *Petite Baigneuse* (1826), *Petite Baigneuse, Intérieur d’Harem* (1828), and *Bain turc* (1867) (figs. 2.59–2.61).

That the *de dos* nude alludes to Ingres’s *Femme assise* seems indisputable, particularly given the painting’s broader framework of references to Seurat’s academic training. Ingres had been Seurat’s dominant pedagogical model while he studied under the supervision of the master’s former pupil Henri Lehmann. Of the two surviving paintings from Seurat’s student years, one dated to 1878 is a copy of the female nude from Ingres’s *Roger et Angelique* (1819) (figs. 2.62, 2.63).

More broadly, as philosopher Eugène Véron asserted that same year, with a touch of sarcasm, Ingres stood as “the official prototype of artistic perfection for France of the nineteenth century.” Seurat’s reprise of the *Baigneuse* in *Poseuses*, therefore, served as an announcement that, after the fiasco of the *Grande Jatte*, his figuration would now fall back in line with an
“officially” sanctioned paradigm. Seurat’s citation of Ingres can be seen simultaneously as a kind of remedial exercise, a revisitation of his student efforts to learn figural technique by copying Ingres’s figural “prototypes,” and as an aggressive assertion of “official” professional mastery, a bid to claim for Poseuses that canonical, authoritative status.

The model on the right, shown de profil pulling up her left stocking, appears to quote the pose of the Spinario (fig. 1.64), a Roman bronze (ca. 100 BC–100 AD) of an adolescent youth extracting a thorn from the sole of his left foot.227 The so-called Thorn Puller, one of the most widely copied of all antique statues, would have been known to Seurat through multiple media—a bronze version in the Louvre, illustrations in his École des Beaux-Arts textbooks, and photographic académies that circulated among École students (fig. 2.65).228 It seems likely as well that Seurat would have encountered models posed in the Spinario attitude (fig. 2.66) in his drawing classes with Adolphe Yvon at the École.229

More than simply an allusion to an antique “prototype of artistic perfection,” Seurat’s specific selection of the Spinario pose evokes classical art’s invention of poses capable of conferring a powerful sense of inner life upon the figure. The Spinario was the “random . . . example” Lechat selected in his article on Lange’s law of frontality in 1895 in order to demonstrate the kind of pose that would have seemed inconceivable, even repellent, in ancient Egypt or Assyria.230 “A statue like the Spinario, a seated adolescent who looks at the sole of his foot where the thorn has penetrated, and thinks of nothing but that thorn which pains him and which he is in the midst of extracting,” would have appeared to primitive artist, Lechat wrote, as “a veritable monstrum.”231 As Heinrich von Kleist suggests with a pointed allusion to the Spinario in his prose sketch of 1810, “On the Puppet Theater,” the wide appeal of this statue for nineteenth-century viewers had to do with its seemingly vivid embodiment of a psychic state of
“perfect absorption,” as one textbook put it in 1882.\textsuperscript{232} Precisely because the \textit{Spinario} is turned in upon itself, displaying an attitude that demonstrates obliviousness to the presence of a beholder, the figure exudes a powerful sense of an autonomous “interior center,” a free and conscious mind that “thinks” of the thorn while deliberately executing, in a feat of proprioception and eye-hand coordination, a specific (albeit simple) task.

A definitive source for the pose of the central \textit{de face} nude, by contrast, has not been attributed. In general, this figure, perhaps the only figure in Seurat’s entire oeuvre to whom the artist has given a finely wrought, highly nuanced facial expression, possesses a palpable oddness scholars have found difficult to characterize and interpret. Fry, for instance, suggested that she projected “something too literal, something of the unassimilated fact.”\textsuperscript{233} Françoise Cachin noted in her expression a “willful, perhaps unpleasant cast.”\textsuperscript{234} Because of Seurat’s matter-of-fact handling of her full frontal nakedness, which seems to exhibit “no prurience, no hint of delicious victimization,” Nochlin has recognized \textit{Poseuses} as a major intervention into the history of the female nude as a topos of European art.\textsuperscript{235}

Herbert noted that the central \textit{poseuse} “recalls the antique statues [Seurat] drew in his youth,” statues that were, as Cachin rightly pointed out, almost exclusively statues of men.\textsuperscript{236} At the same time, because her folded hands obscure her crotch, others have described her as a variation on the classical \textit{Venus Pudica} (figs. 2.67–2.69).\textsuperscript{237} The central model’s unembarrassed outward gaze, however, and the resolute quality of her stance, strongly contradict this erotic typology, characterized in all its antique variants by thighs pressed together and a coy sideways glance. Yet it is clear that the figure does allude to a sculpture of some sort. When Seurat reworked the figure into its definitive pose for the 1887 \textit{Poseuse}, he added a circular white form beneath the feet of the figure—presumably a dropped petticoat—that unmistakeably recalls the
marble base of a statue. This detail, which seems to deliberately answer the “pedestal shadows” recognized beneath the “toy soldier” promenaders of the Grande Jatte, insists upon an analogy between the central figure and a free-standing sculpture. And there is convincing evidence to confirm that one specific classical sculpture served as the source for the central model’s posture. This somewhat surprising source goes some distance towards clarifying the extraordinarily enigmatic, multivalent presence of this figure.

The defining features of the central model’s pose—a contrapposto stance with weight shifted to the right foot, hands clasped together below the waist, a quality of seriousness in countenance—correspond closely to a Hellenistic portrait of the Athenian orator Demosthenes (fig. 2.70), attributed to the sculptor Polyeuktos. Created in commemoration of the orator’s fierce resistance to the Macedonian conquest, this Demosthenes stood originally in the Agora of Athens, on a base bearing the inscription: “if you had bodily strength equal to your intelligence [γνώμη, gnome], O Demosthenes / The Macedonian Ares never would have ruled the Greeks.” Two full-scale Roman copies survived, and by the end of the nineteenth century, it was claimed, “few statues [were] better known.” The statue of Demosthenes would certainly have been known to Seurat, as he would have confronted it regularly during his studies at the École. The facade of the Palais des Études, the main building facing the gated entrance to the school, featured a parade of sculptural copies sent back to Paris by winners of the Prix de Rome. There on the facade (fig. 2.71), nestled between a copy of the Capitoline Venus and a copy of a Danaïade, stood a copy of the Demosthenes from the Braccio Nuovo, made in 1831.

That the facade of the Palais des Études might have entered Seurat’s frame of reference in planning Poseuses would not be surprising, given the self-conscious allusions to his academic formation he inserted throughout the composition. Moreover, the formal and conceptual
principle of the facade’s decoration—a horizontal row of figures spaced at regular intervals, an arbitrary inventory of unrelated specimens from the classical canon—resonates in important ways with Seurat’s treatment of the nudes in *Poseuses*, who are presented, in one sense, simply as “three statues in the classical bearing,” as Gustave Coquiot observed in 1920. It is as if, to counteract the deviation of the *Grande Jatte* into “primitive” or “mechanical” figuration, Seurat returned in *Poseuses* to the actual gateway through which he had entered the academic tradition, superimposing over the offending canvas a triad of classical figures echoing those arrayed across the facade of his school. Indeed, the facade in its metaphorical connotation, as a surface that conceals something behind it, resonates strongly with the relationship established between the foreground nudes and the figures in the *Grande Jatte*. In a certain sense, Seurat’s composition actually implemented the strategy of disguise described in A. J. Wauters’s review, when the latter concealed the most offensive figures of the *Grande Jatte* behind “sculptures in the middle of the room.” *Poseuses* simulated that strategy even as it sabotaged it, for only the monkey, and not his offending mistress, was effectively concealed behind Seurat’s facade of classical nudes.

While the facade of the Palais des Études might have provided Seurat with a kind of compositional dispositif for *Poseuses*, there is nevertheless a crucial difference between the ordering of figures on the building’s facade and the ordering of the nudes in the painting, for Seurat arranged his sequence of classical figures to create a legible, if ambiguous, narrative. The nudes are embedded within an integral space and scenario, and, in keeping with the classical motif of the Three Graces, there is a physical similitude among them that invites us to read them as “sisters,” or even as permutations of a single figure. That similitude is pressed to a point of uncanniness in *Poseuses*. As René Hughe argued, “these three different women . . . who seem
too similar” appear “multiplied . . .by the enigma of a mirror with three faces.” Seurat’s three nudes have “a shared face,” as one critic noted, and are identical even in minute details—most tellingly, the placement of the red barrette which secures the chignon. The painting can thus be read as a narrative continuum tracking three discrete intervals of an unfolding chronological sequence: from left to right, a single model waiting to begin her session, posing for the painter, and putting her clothes back on after the session has ended. Because Seurat’s original title has very often been distorted, I should stress that this reading of a single figure is further invited by the fact that the artist deliberately elided the plural article “les” when he named the canvas, simply adding the “s” to the title Poseuse used for the individual figure of 1887.

Within this narrative continuum, Seurat’s use of the Baigneuse and Spinario postures makes sense. The Baigneuse translates easily into a transitional moment of naked repose, and the Spinario practically begged for adaptation to ladies stockings, a stock motif of nineteenth-century erotic representations. The logic driving the Demosthenes quotation is less evident. A monument to the man renowned as the “most forceful of [Attic] orators” is far from an obvious reference for a depiction of a working-class adolescent female who strips down and poses for hire. Yet precisely the incongruity of that allusion must be recognized as central to the larger thematics of Poseuses. Seurat placed the model in the Demosthenes posture, whose clasped hands occupy the canvas’s exact center, at the physical and narrative crux of this picture. She enacts the climatic moment of the implied narrative sequence, when the poseuse referenced in the painting’s title presents herself in a “pose” to be painted. Indeed, Seurat treated the central figure almost as the painting’s mascot. Twice he deployed her in isolation to stand in publicly for the large canvas: first in the small painted panel that presaged Poseuses in 1887, and again in the
pen and ink replica produced for the April issue of *La Vie Moderne* in 1888 (fig. 2.72), circulated while the painting was still on view at the Indépendants exhibition.  

Why then, might Seurat have chosen to make the pose of Demosthenes so central to *Poseuses*? The motivations can only be grasped from within the larger context of Seurat’s working through of the *Grande Jatte*’s reception. If that prior painting had been excoriated for possessing *pas assez de vie*, specifically because of its refusal to produce the illusion of the human figure’s “soul” or “thought,” the Demosthenes statue, today the common textbook illustration for Hellenistic art’s invention of the so-called “psychological portrait,” was a sculpture renowned in the nineteenth century as a particularly “pregnant representation of the inward life,” to quote an 1882 study by the archaeologist Adolf Michaelis.  

Perceptions of the Demosthenes statue differed in certain key details—most crucially, whether the orator appeared “in the act of speaking,” as if in the midst of publicly delivering one of his “thunderbolt-like” orations, or engrossed in a private “moment of meditation.” The descriptions, however, were all in agreement that the Demosthenes possessed an arresting and deeply compelling “seriousness of expression.” The sculpture was perceived by nineteenth-century viewers as “the very image of immoveable conviction,” the perfect embodiment of “a man whose soul was devoured by ambition and constantly on the stretch.” The “attitude” of the Demosthenes statue so convincingly conveyed a “forgetfulness of self and everything but the subject on which the mind of the orator is intent,” that, one observer noted, “an actor would seek to imitate it.”  

In 1887, in the first major art historical study of the monument, Michaelis characterized the Demosthenes as “full of the exertion of thought and the energy of the will” (*voll Anspannung des Denkens und voll Energie des Willens*). More recently, Paul Zanker has identified the
Demosthenes as a work that inaugurated “a new paradigm for expressing intellectual activity,” announcing the dawn of a new epoch in classical culture, one which came to assign a new degree of reverence to “superior intellectual power,” or “the rigors of thinking.” The “pose and expression” of the Demosthenes, which Zanker reads as conveying “a state of extreme mental tension,” “proclaim for the first time the extraordinary intellectual capacity required for political achievement.” For Zanker, Demosthenes functions as the artistic embodiment of gnome (γνώμη), the Greek word designating thought or intelligence, in the sense of mental activity producing convictions and judgments. Indeed, the statue’s original epigram—“if you had bodily strength equal to your intelligence [γνώμη, gnome], O Demosthenes . . .”—seems to insist upon a reading of the statue as a figuration of “superior mental powers” or intellect.

These expressive valences of the Demosthenes statue—the figure’s particular capacity to convey its gnome to the viewer—must have been decisive for Seurat’s appropriation of its posture. Rather than simply relapsing into a generic classicism, Seurat precisely isolated and placed in the center of Poseuses a pose from the classical tradition associated particularly with the “inward life,” indeed with inward life in its most elevated manifestation—the thinking intellect, the “superior intellectual power” that enables the human subject’s political “conviction,” his resistance to being conquered and vanquished.

Seurat’s deployment of the pose of Demosthenes in Poseuses was in some ways quite consistent with that sculpture’s already rich history of quotation. As Salvatore Settis has shown, there is a “long iconographic chain” extending from antiquity through early Christian art up through Caravaggio in which figures adopt the Demosthenes posture to indicate “moments of reflection” or “meditation.” Polyeuktos’s monument was originally displayed in the Athenian agora on a base bearing an inscription specifying the Macedonian conquest as the object of
Demosthenes’s reflection, answering precisely the question formulated mockingly by Fénéon as: “Guess what I am thinking?” Indeed, it replies with an epigram that, as Plutarch noted, most ancient viewers assumed the orator himself had composed. Yet the sculpture’s pose was readily detached from that specific significance. Migrating beyond its initial meaning, context, and gender, the pose became what Settis describes as an “image-sign” or “iconographic scheme” for “meditation.”

Significantly, Settis’s discussion of how Caravaggio might have come to quote the Demosthenes pose, in an alterpiece consecrated to Saint Anne in 1605 (fig. 2.73), formed the basis for a broader argument about the “codification of gestural language used in the figurative arts,” or, as he more emphatically put it, the “progressive ‘petrification’ of gestural language.”

Since the copy of the Demosthenes in Rome was not associated with the historical figure described in Plutarch and other ancient sources until 1737, Caravaggio quoted the statue’s pose to express Saint Anne’s spiritual meditation without knowing that the pose was intended to convey “political meditation.” Moreover, Caravaggio “correctly ‘restored’” the original sculpture’s pose despite the fact that the statue, as he would have known it, was “shorn of its hands, and thus of the gesture that most characterizes it” (fig. 2.74). But Caravaggio seems to have grasped intuitively the original disposition of the pose, comprehending it precisely as an “iconographic scheme” for meditation. The fact that he did so proved, for Settis, how certain postural, gestural schemes in art are “perpetuated almost by [their] own ‘inertial force.’”

“For Seurat, as for Caravaggio, the Demosthenes pose seems to have been “ready for use” to the painter’s own ends—and for each, putting that pose to use also necessitated restoring the
pose to its original configuration. While the Polyeuktos original, as Plutarch insisted, “stood with its fingers interlaced” (fig. 2.75) the copy that entered the collection in the Braccio Nuovo, as well as the second copy owned by the Duke of Dorset, were both restored with the figure’s hands clasped below the waist around a scroll (fig. 2.76). Thus the Demosthenes that decorated the facade of the Palais des Études appeared in this distorted form.

While it is certainly possible that Seurat was aware of the identity and history of the sculpture he was quoting in Poseuses, and that he deliberately “restored” the pose of his central figure to match the Greek original, such specialized knowledge would by no means have been necessary for Seurat to perform a historically “correct” restoration of the Demosthenes pose. As the traditional attribute in Western art of philosophers and other celebrated intellectuals, a scroll in the hands of a contemporary artist’s model, a young adolescent female, would certainly have strained credulity, and so we might understand Seurat’s omission of this attribute, associated with the “rigors of thinking,” as a necessary concession to adapting Demosthenes’s pose “for use” in the modern, everyday studio scenario of Poseuses. Yet it is of equal importance that, by removing the scroll and restoring Demosthenes’s “fingers interlaced” gesture, Seurat recovered the original pose’s expressive force as a scheme for the “exertion of thought,” a scheme for which the “folded hands” were understood to be the “keystone.”

When Paul Hartwig discovered, in 1903, a pair of folded hands (fig. 2.77) in the Palazzo Barberini garden he believed to be a lost fragment from the Braccio Nuovo marble, he argued that the restoration of the hands completed the picture of Demosthenes as “in his thoughts.” In some sense, as Zanker hints, Demosthenes’s manual gesture might be seen to prefigure the symbolic function of the hands for Stoic philosophers, who made a gripping gesture (the left hand around the right fist) to demonstrate the concept of mental comprehension, or katalepsis.
That Demosthenes, likely through the renown of his sculpted portrait, might also have become associated with such a symbolic hand gesture is strongly suggested in a passage by Friedrich Nietzsche, in which he compares Richard Wagner to the orator: “Taken as a whole, Wagner as an artist has about him something of Demosthenes: a tremendous seriousness as to his subject combined with a strength of grip that seizes it everytime without fail; he lays hold of it in a moment and his hand clings fast as though it were of brass.”

Whether deliberate or intuitive, Seurat’s quotation of the Demosthenes pose in *Poseuses*, and his recreation of the original gesture that formed its “keystone,” suggest that he was concerned with depicting what Blanc had deemed “the highest degree of life, which is to say thought” in this figure painting. The quotation of the pose indicates that Seurat comprehended the controversy around the *Grande Jatte* as one about the status of thought, and understood that the hostile reactions to the figures in the prior canvas arose from their suggestion of a reduced or restricted capacity for conscious reflection. To “correct” the *Grande Jatte*, therefore, Seurat seems to have sought specifically to provide a figuration of those “higher” inner faculties the prior canvas had absented. In *Poseuses*, he sought to oppose the figures in the *Grande Jatte* with an image of a “thinking” subject.

Assuming a canonical posture of meditation, one derived from a famous monument to a charismatic male political agitator, the central model in *Poseuses* (who, to repeat, was described by Kahn as “contemplative”) demands to be seen, in some sense, as a depiction of a thinking person, or perhaps specifically as a *thinking woman* with considerable intellect and capacity for self-determination—“alert” and “ready to will,” as Adam described the figure. It is just this suggestion of active, conscious contemplation, structured in and through the Demosthenes posture, that would seem to invite a potentially feminist reading of *Poseuses*, a picture Seurat
composed at a moment when a liberal feminist movement was gaining ground in the Third Republic, and when the _femme nouvelle_—a female type perceived as “exquisitely cerebral”—was becoming increasingly ubiquitous in French culture.\(^{273}\) It is possible to read the Demosthenes posture as a device that dignifies the central model, exalting while also distinctly desexualizing her. Compared to the mannequin-like woman pictured behind her, the central _poseuse_ appears androgynous, with an almost masculine bust. Simultaneously, she projects a quality of contemplative “inward life” that seems antithetical to the animalistic and automaton-like presence of the monkey’s owner. And yet, _Poseuses_ makes propositions about the inner life of the female subject that the painting leaves profoundly unresolved, for there is also a sense of travesty that undercuts Seurat’s evocations of the “highest” faculties of consciousness through the person of this naked figure, a kind of feminized Demosthenes stripped bare.

If Seurat intuited the original meaning of the Polyeuktos statue, apprehending the Demosthenes in the sense invited by the original epigram—as a figuration of _gnome_, as, in essence, a figuration of _a thinker_—we are compelled to ask whether the artist intended to retain that original significance as he transposed the Demosthenes pose across genders.\(^{274}\) As Naomi Schor asserted in relation to Auguste Rodin’s _Le Penseur_ (fig. 2.78), first exhibited under that title in 1888, “the figure of a woman cannot be substituted for that of the male _Thinker_ without evoking laughter.” Indeed, as she notes, the caricatures of Rodin’s sculpture as “‘_la penseuse_’ attest . . . to the absurdity of such a figure” (fig. 2.79).\(^{275}\) While _Poseuses_ sustains a conflicted, ultimately open-ended reading antithetical to the simple punch-line logic that governs the ‘_la penseuse_’ caricature, Seurat’s figuration of his _poseuse_ as a _penseuse_ was also, in some sense, a travesty of the very notion of a thinker.
This travesty necessarily hinges on the ambiguous but conspicuous presence in *Poseuses* of a professional model who mediates the recovery of the classical attitudes that serve to “oppose" the “hieratic postures" of the *Grande Jatte*. Seurat’s calculated reversion to what Adam had derided as “the poverty and insignificance of the classical tradition” went hand in hand with foregrounding the motif Fénéon had denounced, in one section of his review of the Impressionist exhibition in 1886, as “the irritating image of the ‘model’ who ‘poses’” (*le pénible image du ‘modèle’ qui ‘pose’*).  

The “Model” who “Poses”

*Poseuses* employed a highly specific iconography that spoke knowingly to the trade secrets and social milieu of modeling in Paris. The 1880s, the historical moment when, as Marie Lathers has demonstrated, “interest in the model peaked in the nineteenth century,” saw the rise of a new type of sociological journalism in which modeling emerged as a topic of often prurient interest. Seurat self-consciously situated *Poseuses* within this new discursive context. He produced the drawing of the central *poseuse* for circulation in the same magazine that had in 1887 published Paul Dollfus’s article series *Paris qui pose* (figs. 2.80, 2.81), which was expanded the following year into the first book-length study of the modeling profession, *Modèles d’artistes* (fig. 2.82).

The peaked interest in the model during the 1880s resulted from the fact that this was “the critical decade in the evolution or de-evolution of the modeling profession as it was then known.” A significant transformation in the demographics of the modeling populace occurred at this moment, at the same time that the model’s traditional role within the compositional process was being practically and philosophically reformulated by a range of modernist artists, to
such an extent that it raised the specter of the model’s eventual obsolescence as an obligatory instrument of advanced artistic practice. In this regard, it is relevant that Poseuses was almost certainly the last grande toile de lutte for which Seurat hired a professional model to pose.²⁸⁰

While Dollfus’s Modèles d’artistes opened with the declaration that models are “indispensable” to artists, as obligatory as “the human document for the naturalist novelist,” he returned continually to the idea that modeling as it currently existed might soon vanish.²⁸¹ His articles emphasized that a generalized adaptation of le naturalisme, and “the abandonment of classical art, of history painting, of religious painting, of allegory,” had caused the extinction of what he called the modèle classique or modèle antique, giving rise to a new category of modèle technique or modèle moderne.²⁸² Rather than the specialized families of Italian immigrants, who had monopolized the modeling profession in Paris for much of the recent past, in part because of their presumed genetic link to Greek and Roman classicism, artists were now tending to hire French women indistinguishable from the general working-class population of Parisiennes.²⁸³ A pressing demand for this new type of model, a category that was, unlike the modèle classique, almost overwhelmingly female, was generating, Dollfus reported, “daily vacancies in the ranks of hat dressers, dressmakers, and department store shopgirls” (demoiselles de magasin de la capitale).²⁸⁴

Seurat’s model, with her hair worn “à la moderne,” with her fashionable bon marché articles strewn about the studio, is clearly a modèle moderne drawn from such ranks, which is to say, from the ranks embodied by the scandalous protagonist of the Grande Jatte.²⁸⁵ Indeed, Poseuses is set up to suggest that the model in Seurat’s studio is the same woman who is in that painting “found again dressed, on the arm of a superb gentleman,” as Adam noted.²⁸⁶ The presentation of the modèle moderne in Poseuses therefore returned to the offensive female
subject who had dominated the *Grande Jatte*—returned, that is, to the ranks of those *demoiselles de magasin* who “always carried a bit of the grace of the mannequin,” to the kind of women whom Zola also described derisively as *poseuses.*287 The specter of such a woman seems to hover over Seurat’s presentation of the central model in *Poseuses.* A haze of purple shading, at right just over the head and shoulder of the central *poseuse,* cascades down the wall, bisecting the bottom leftmost picture pinned up behind her (see fig. 2.5). Although ostensibly a shadow cast by the standing model’s body, this shading bears no logical visual relationship to her corporeal contours. Instead, its downward swoop and upper curve exactly mimic the contour of the *faux cul* worn by the monkey’s owner in the *Grande Jatte,* visible to the model’s left. The green rear-end padding, hung up like a picture on the wall to the right of the model, drives home Seurat’s deliberate reemphasis on this particular form from the *Grande Jatte,* as if to suggest that the model standing in the center of *Poseuses* has only just shed her “imitation tail,” which is in fact still visible in the shadow her body casts.

While it is clear that the model in the studio is supposed to represent a *modèle moderne,* part of the ambiguity of the modelling scenario presented in *Poseuses* stems from Seurat’s deliberate scrambling of signals about the type of model represented. The choreography of the poses inscribes this *modèle moderne* within the domain of the *modèle classique* or *antique,* suggesting she is the kind of experienced professional model more likely to be found in an academy than in a progressive artist’s private studio, the kind of model who might possess a codified repertoire of practiced, self-consciously artistic poses. These types of practiced poses were, in part, what modern artists sought to avoid when hiring the *modèle moderne,* who might have little to no experience in the professionalized craft of the “pose.”
An essential goal for many of Seurat’s modernist contemporaries who worked extensively with models, such as Degas or Rodin, was to reorganize the posing session in ways that would subvert academic art’s perceived dependence upon “the repetition of certain pre-approved movements,” as Rainer Maria Rilke described it. Pas une pause, ni une pose was one of the mottoes of Edmond Duranty’s Impressionist manifesto of 1876, which drew its inspiration above all from the work of Degas. For Degas, this subversion of “pose” took shape through two concurrent strategies. On the one hand, he tended to replace the professional model with the professional ballerina, a figure he often represented executing numbered balletic “positions” that frankly proclaimed their status as codified, conventional, repeatable movements. On the other hand, as Fénéon noted, Degas at the same time eradicated “the irritating image of the ‘model’ who ‘poses’” by embracing the imaginative process of working from memory, creating his figural works in the absence of the model, with the aid of multiple accumulated sketches (fig. 2.83). Rodin, for his part, attempted to deformalize the posing séance: accounts of his studio practice (no doubt embellished) describe multiple models aimlessly wandering naked, with no demarcated posing areas or platforms, and no clear beginning or end to the posing sessions (fig. 2.84). The sculptor emphatically refused to physically manipulate models into desired positions, and only rarely gave them vocal directions. He appeared to work in a manner such that, as Paul Gsell said, “models seem to give orders to you rather than you giving orders to them.”

In Poseuses, by contrast, Seurat enlisted the modèle moderne to return precisely to academic art’s perceived dependence upon “certain pre-approved movements,” or, to put it in Settis’s terms, to openly embrace art’s “progressive ‘petrification’ of gestural language.” Indeed, the painting seems to insinuate the model’s complicitity in that petrification process. It is
possible to read the scenario presented in *Poseuses* as a restaging of the kind of audition Seurat would have witnessed in his École des Beaux-Arts life class. As Alexis Lemaistre recalled in 1889, the models (*modèles classiques*) who arrived Monday mornings seeking employment for the weekly posing sessions “would give their repertoire of poses, turning themselves *de dos, de face, de profil*, with dignified or furious gestures, eyes bathed in ecstasy or veiled in sadness.”²⁹³ William Chambers Morrow also described these Monday morning solicitations, recounting how many of the Italian models still favored at the École created their “repertoire of poses” by “spending idle hours in studying the attitudes of figures in great paintings and in sculptures in the Louvre . . . and adopting these poses when exhibiting themselves to artists.”²⁹⁴ But Morrow, writing in 1899, emphasized that these kinds of “stud[ied] . . . attitudes” no longer impressed a younger generation of artists: “the trick is worthless.”²⁹⁵

*Poseuses* seems to perform one of these worthless “tricks.” Seurat showed a model cycling through what appears to be a “repertoire of poses”—*Baigneuse, Demosthenes, Spinario*—and turning herself *de dos, de face, de profil* as she cycles through these poses. More broadly, *Poseuses* alluded to the way in which the model’s “repertoire of poses” might have been molded by certain “pre-approved” artistic prototypes for the exteriorization of inner consciousness. The central figure in *Poseuses* might be evoking a posing scenario analagous to the one captured in an 1890 photograph of a male model Seurat drew while at school, a certain Gélon (figs. 2.85, 2.86), who was apparently the *doyen des modèles* at the École des Beaux-Arts.²⁹⁶ We know from Lemaistre (fig. 2.87) that Gélon possessed skill and enthusiasm for exhibiting himself in poses meant to evoke in particular the cogitations of ancient rulers and literary characters, a skill he appears to be putting into practice in the photograph from 1890, where he appears with his fist clenched, his head cocked, and his chin resting on his hand. The
pose Gélon assumes in this photograph suggests his intention to aid the artist in producing an image that will raise the question: “Guess what I am thinking?”

The photograph suggests the kinds of corporeal practices deployed in an environment such as the École in order to instantiate the aesthetic illusion of a human being imbued with the “inward life” of contemplative consciousness. Gélon’s pose in the photograph reproduces gestures repeated throughout centuries of European figural art as conventional signs for contemplation (the chin resting on the hand, most obviously). It is clear these corporeal practices involved a kind of circular, mutually reinforcing feedback between “the attitudes of figures in great paintings and sculptures” and the mise-en-attitude of models who would internalize and imitate these attitudes when posing before artists.

This document of Gélon’s pose offers an analogy with the central figure of Poseuses. By replicating the posture of Polyeuktos’s sculpture, Seurat’s young model can likewise be seen to assume a “studied pose” contrived to exteriorize the activity of a contemplative intellect, a pose designed to evoke a form of thought that was something more or “higher” than the mind’s subjection to automatic, instinctual impulses. Seurat’s painting also conjures something like the mood of that photograph. Although the photograph palpably evokes the sympathetic character of Gélon, a man beloved and respected by generations of Parisian artists and art students, it also captures the preposterousness of the posing scenario. The dissonance between the grave pose of contemplation Gélon affects, as he stands on a platform before a curtain, in a shabby, evacuated environment set up for the posing session, and as he executes a physical task for which no intellectual involvement is demanded, reveals his thought to be a simulation. That sense of preposterousness is carried over in Poseuses. The studio setup, the model’s gender, the ambiguous quality of her facial expression (of which more below), the status of her pose as a
quotation, a “studied attitude” that mimics an antique monument—all collude to convey the notion that thought presented here is not really that, but merely an imposture of it, indeed merely the pretense of a *poseuse*, “a man, or a woman, who affects postures or a studied language; someone who seeks to produce an effect through a studied attitude” (*attitude étudiée*).²⁹⁹

Certainly, the very title *Poseuses*, if we understand it as referring to the *modèles* (this was the standard term in usage) in the foreground of the canvas, insists upon the notion of performative artifice, or affectation. That connotation would have been deepened by the ensemble of works with which *Poseuses* was originally exhibited—the painting *Parade de cirque* and a group of conté crayon drawings of the *café-chantant*. Given the subject matter of those pictures, it seems likely Seurat would also have had in mind, in the naming of this canvas, the specifically theatrical meaning of the word *poseuse*, a term for women who sat onstage at the *café-chantant* flanking the main performer (fig. 2.88).³⁰⁰ Seurat’s arrangement of the nudes, with two seated subsidiaries flanking a principal standing figure, evokes that theatrical setup, almost as if to analogize the central figure to a theatrical performer, perhaps specifically a kind of mimic actress.

The nude *poseuse* obscures the monkey pictured in *Grande Jatte*, and functions within the pictorial economy of *Poseuses* to “oppose” associations with the instinctual, unconscious dimensions of psychic life that that monkey had emblematized in the prior canvas. At the same time, by displacing the monkey, the model also substitutes for it. She becomes a kind of metaphorical monkey figure, who reiterates and shifts the notion of “imitation” into a different, classically aesthetic register. Indeed, if Seurat sought to create in *Poseuses* the pictorial illusion of a figure imbued with inner life—“with the highest degree of life, which is to say thought”—he did so in a manner that presented that illusion as the product of mimicry, or *singerie*. In that
connection, it is not incidental that it is the Demosthenes monument that is aped by this mimic-actress, for that sculpture, we should recall, was described as embodying such a compelling expression of a man engrossed in thought that “an actor would seek to imitate it.” Demosthenes himself was known for having worked with actors to perfect his physical comportment for oration—the renowned force (deinotês) of his rhetoric was widely understood to derive from his “power of acting.” Nietzsche wrote, “who even in the last night of his life dreamed of himself as an actor on the tragic stage . . . discovered the last stage of eloquence, hypocrisis.”

The Fatigue and the Ecstasy of Pose

While Seurat undermined the illusion of thought he provided in Poseuses by stressing the staged, “studied,” imitative status of the model’s pose, there is a deeper sense in which that suggestion of thought was radically subverted. Not only because the central model’s contemplative aspect appeared as an imitation, but also because it was possible to read the central model as a woman who had in fact relinquished consciousness.

It is a point of some interest that Fénéon praised Poseuses as a masterpiece despite the fact that the painting foregrounded precisely what he had condemned in his criticism. The central nude seems to propose the question devinez ce que je pense!, while manifesting the studio contrivance coinciding with that tiresome paradigm of inwardness, “the irritating image of the ‘model’ who ‘poses.’” But Fénéon’s ecstatic review of Seurat’s canvas suggests that he perceived a radical subversion of those aesthetic conventions in Poseuses, for, as Martha Ward has noted, his review strongly implies that he saw the central poseuse to be in a state of hypnotic “trance from her posing.” The model was, in Fénéon’s description, “standing on a square of
linen . . . her arms at rest and her hands united, her eyes . . . contracted from the fatigue and the ecstasy of the pose” (*les yeux un peu contractés par la fatigue et l’extase de la pose*) (fig. 2.89).304

There is ample evidence that after Charcot began his spectacular public demonstrations of hypnosis in 1878, the hypnotic séance and the posing séance began to present themselves, to both artists and scientists, as analogous. We know from multiple student memoirs of the period there was an “enthusiasm for hypnotic experiments” among students of the École des Beaux-Arts.305 For example, the endeavors of the young men in Jean-Léon Gérôme’s class to replicate some of Charcot’s experiments on “young women of the modeling persuasion” were recounted by John Shirley-Fox, who also recalled hiring one such young woman “so used to being hypnotized that a little more or less of it made no difference to her.”306

While this “enthusiasm” was widespread in French society by the late 1880s, it makes sense that it would have spread particularly among École des Beaux-Arts students, given the robust alliances between the art school’s faculty and the physicians of the Salpêtrière. A full five years before Charcot ventured into this territory, the professor of anatomy Mathias Duval had published a significant paper on hypnosis, advocating experimental psychology’s embrace of “provoked somnambulism.”307 He became a regular at Charcot’s Tuesday lectures, and appears in Brouillet’s group portrait of 1887 (figs. 2.90, 2.91).308 Duval’s own professional portrait, François Sallé’s *Une leçon d’anatomie à l’École des Beaux-Arts* (1888) (fig. 2.92), was directly modeled on Brouillet’s *Une leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière* from the previous year.309 When he retired in 1903, Duval appointed Charcot’s assistant Paul Richer to succeed him as professor of anatomy at the École.310 This interpenetration of the official spheres of the Salpêtrière and the École des Beaux-Arts is unsurprising, since, as Freud and subsequent scholars have stressed,
Charcot “had the nature of an artist,” embracing a distinctly aesthetic conception of medical practice, a conception based upon the belief that both art and medicine shared the human subject as their ultimate focus. Charcot proposed, for instance, that doctors “should know the nude as well as or even better than painters.”

Significantly, scientists affiliated with the Salpêtrière polyclinic described and promoted their hypnotic experiments “as a model for the artist,” as Andreas Mayer has observed. In an article on “Cerebral Automatism” in 1883, Richer and Charcot asserted that their hysterical female subjects (fig. 2.93), after entering the initial, cataleptic phase of hypnotism (followed by lethargy and somnambulism), became “transformed into a sort of expressive statue, a motionless model.” Because the cataleptic subject could “preserve a perfect equilibrium” if “placed standing and in a forced attitude,” they noted that catalepsy was a state “which artists, without doubt, might avail themselves to very great extent.”

Again in 1887, the use value of hypnotism for the figurative artist was reiterated. As a “perfectly docile automaton, but without stiffness, on whom one can imprint with the greatest facility the most varied poses” (un automate parfaitement docile, sans raideur, auquel on peut imprimer avec la plus grande facilité les poses les plus variées), the cataleptic test subject presented herself as the ideal modeling subject. Richer, writing with Gilles de la Tourette, went so far as to suggest that classical artists had been disadvantaged by their ignorance of these cataleptic states. “The sculptors of antiquity,” they suggested, would certainly have selected “cataleptic women” for their posing subjects had they possessed the requisite knowledge to exploit hypnosis.

The apparent facility for expressive posing demonstrated by Charcot’s hysterical test subjects in graphic and photographic images and in his public “Tuesday Lessons” made an
impression on the public. Dollfus even concluded *Modèles d’artiste* with the prediction that in the future, “models will only be chosen from among the pensionnaires of the Salpêtrière.” The popularization of hypnosis did more than to simply foster the recognition of a concrete analogy between the roles performed by the artist’s model and the hypnotized female test subject, however, since it also enabled a new recognition of the fundamentally ambiguous mental condition intrinsic to the posing session in a more general sense. In *Modèles d’artistes*, Dollfus characterized modeling as an act that fostered the inhibition of conscious “thought,” a regression into a state of slumber or trance: “Look closely at a model who has stood for several minutes on a posing table. . . . not thinking [*Ne pensant pas,*] the eyes fixed in vagueness without seeing . . . some actually find ways of putting themselves to sleep with their eyes open, and resting like that. Others—and there are more than one. . . . reach magnetic slumber, like a catalepsy.”

The central model in the Demosthenes pose can be read in Dollfus’s sense. She offers a fundamentally dual, or conflicted, subjective presence, simultaneously embodying the pose of meditation and displaying signs of an opposing mental state, the *ne pensant pas* of a sleeplike trance. Indeed that duality is manifest in the very enigma of the central model’s facial expression (see fig. 2.89). While these effects may be difficult to perceive when examining *Poseuses* in its current perch at the Barnes Foundation, the longer one studies the countenance of the central *poseuse* at eye level, the more her expression seems to oscillate between vacuity and knowingness, her eyes shifting between glazed and communicative, her lips at times curled in a kind of beatific “archaic smile,” at times stern and pursed as if on the verge of some elocution.

This sense of a duality of mental states embodied in the central model also bears on the highly ambiguous question of agency in the transaction between painter and model alluded to in *Poseuses*. As Ward has observed, there is “no painter for whom to perform” in *Poseuses*—
model appears to “pose for no one.” No palette, paint, easel, or other tools mark the active presence of an artist in the studio depicted in Poseuses. This conspicuous absence can be seen to consign to the model a degree of authorial control, presenting her almost as the female surrogate for the artist himself.

The picture supports a perception that the central model is the living incarnation of the “mannequin” standing in the composition behind her, that is, the figure who became the scapegoat for the larger offenses of the Grande Jatte. If so, then it is possible to read her very pose in Poseuses as a conscious, calculated effort to refute the insults that had been flung at her. It is as if the monkey’s owner descended from the canvas and turned de face toward the public to stand, upon the “improvised pedestal” of her underclothes, in a pose in which she identifies herself with a celebrated classical thinker. If read in this manner, it is difficult not to recognize in the central model a semblance of a knowing address to Seurat’s critics, half defiant, and half mournful, perhaps.

Moreover, as a conventional scheme for meditation, the Demosthenes pose, as Settis has shown, necessarily derives its specific meaning from context. Textual or visual clues enable the viewer to “guess” what the figure is thinking about. We recognize that Polyeuktos’s Demosthenes meditates upon the Macedonian conquest through the epigram inscribed beneath him, that Caravaggio’s Saint Anne meditates upon the resurrection through the adjacent presence of the Christ Child bruising the head of the serpent. In Poseuses, the Grande Jatte plays that contextualizing role. If we read the central model as figuring a mode of thought that could be characterized in terms of “thinking about,” then the picture invites the interpretation that the object of the central model’s meditation is the Grande Jatte itself. Her meditation, on this reading, restages Seurat’s meditation.
Standing before the *Grande Jatte*, this figure can be seen to embody and perform the self-reflexive rumination undertaken in *Poseuses*. She can be read as a figure engrossed in a meditation on the larger questions raised by the “manifesto-painting’s” contentious reception—asking not the question “*Devinez ce que je pense?*” perhaps, but the question “what is thinking?” in the broadest sense. Or, perhaps the painting asks, “what does it mean for art to visually acknowledge that the human subject’s mental disposition encompasses a duality of consciousness and unconsciousness?” — and does so by representing its central figure as if she herself might be in the throes of reckoning with that question.

At the same time, it is possible to read the model as stripped of agency and awareness, as simply an *automate parfaitement docile, sans raideur*, oblivious to the significance of the poses she is adopting in front of the *Grande Jatte*. Read in this sense, she appears not as the author of the image, but as a woman who has relinquished her autonomy of consciousness and is now subject to the artist’s external suggestion and control. Although invisible, Seurat seems to preside over this studio as if by proxy, by virtue of his “famous *tableau*.” His dominating presence may be implied all the more powerfully by his absence, for we are invited to imagine the artist standing in the position we adopt in front of the picture, to imagine him in a face-to-face confrontation with the model in the center of the canvas. 321 If we read *Poseuses* as implying an interaction in which the artist dominates, or even magnetizes, a docile, unconscious woman, then *Poseuses* becomes a somewhat bitter joke at the model’s expense—a kind of systematic undoing of its own depiction of the plenitude of contemplative thought by means, once again, of the spectacle of a woman as *automate*.

Both of these potential readings are left open, indeed I suggest they coexist in *Poseuses*. Seurat’s “reprinted, corrected, singularly augmented edition of the *Grande Jatte*” both did, and
did not, retract the core offense of that prior canvas—the apparent degradation of the human subject by means of a visual negation of “the highest degree of life, which is to say thought.” What is certain, however, is that “re-examining” the *Grande Jatte* resolved some of these questions for Seurat. His revisitation of classical figuration in *Poseuses* served at once as a kind of requiem for and exorcism of the figural conventions the *Grande Jatte* had abandoned. After 1888, the artist’s figure paintings are visibly unburdened by the weight of tradition, embracing an unambiguously mechanistic figural language closely allied with both psychophysics and new mass-produced media such as the advertising posters of Jules Chéret and the animation strips of Émile Reynaud (figs. 2.94, 2.95). That decisive shift, however, was authorized in and through *Poseuses*, which simultaneously summoned and obliterated the illusion of inner life valorized within the tradition of figuration Seurat inherited. As Fénéon noted in the close of his review: “this work humiliates in the memory the nudes of galleries and of legends.”
Notes

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

1. Seurat drafted four different versions of his “Ésthétique” in August 1890, at the request of his friend Maurice Beaubourg. The version with the above sentence is quoted in Georges Seurat, 1859–1891, ed. Robert Herbert et al., exh. cat. (Paris: Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 1991), Appendix E, 309: “J’ai commis quatre grandes toiles de luttes si vous voulez bien me permettre de parler ainsi, et je les préfère à toutes mes études de paysage.” Seurat left the completed figure paintings Parade de cirque (1887–88) and La Poudreuse (1889–90) off this list, presumably because Parade is a much smaller picture, and Poudreuse is a single figure portrait. Seurat would produce only one more major figure painting before his death, Cirque (1890–91).


5. For Seurat’s indebtedness to Blanc’s theoretical writings, see Georges Seurat to Félix Fénéon, 20 June 1890, in César-M. de Hauke, Seurat et son oeuvre (Paris: Gründ, 1961), 1:xxi;

6. Blanc’s most extensive discussion of Chevreul is in Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin: Architecture, sculpture, peinture* (Paris: J. Renouard, 1867), 594–611 (book three, section XIII). It should be noted that the color theory Seurat extracted from the *Grammaire* was an explicitly minor component of this book, which offered a sweeping overview of immutable laws of art, and categorized the various mediums (architecture, sculpture, painting) as subspecies of an overarching art of *drawing*. In section V of the *Grammaire*’s opening “Principes,” “Du dessin et de la couleur,” Blanc articulated his rationale for “la supériorité du dessin sur la couleur,” linking it to the superiority of the masculine to the feminine sex, of thought to emotion, of absolute to relative properties, in short, to a wholly conventional set of binaries which had been used, since Aristotle, to assert the supplemental or parergal status of color. The following section, “De la figure humaine,” deepens and expands this argument in terms of a hierarchy of the organic world, arguing that color is characteristic of creations ranking lower than man in the chain of being, animals, plants and inorganic matter, until, “quand l’homme arrive, et avec lui l’intelligence, c’est le dessin qui triomphe.” Thus Blanc argued that man, God’s most exalted creation, was “l’oeuvre d’un dessinateur suprême, et non celle d’un coloriste,” see Blanc, *Grammaire*, 21–25, 25–35, 31.

7. As Mark Ledbury has noted, this first official statement of the French Académie’s doctrine of genre conceived of it primarily in terms of a “dividing line, between painters of human figures and those whose subjects are drawn from the natural, non-human world,” see his

André Félibien, Conférences de l’Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture Pendant L’année 1667 (Paris: Frederic Leonard, 1669), préface:

il y a differens Ouvriers qui s’appliquent à differens sujets; il est constant qu’à mesure qu’ils s’occupent aux choses les plus difficiles & les plus nobles, ils fortent de ce qu’il y a de plus bas & de plus commun, & s’anobilissent par un travail plus illustre. Ainsi celuy qui fait parfaitement des paisages est au dessus qu’un autre qui ne fait que des fruits, des fleurs ou des coquilles. Celuy qui peint des animaux vivans est plus estimable que ceux qui ne tent que des choses mortes & sans mouvements; et comme la figure de l’homme est le plus parfait ouvrage de Dieu sur la terre, il est certain aussi que celuy qui se rend l’imitateur de Dieu en peignant des figures humaines, est beaucoup plus excellent que tous les autres. Cependant quoy que ce ne soit pas peu de chose de faire paraître comme vivante la figure d’un homme, & de donne l’apparence du mouvement à ce qui n’en a point; Néanmoins un Peintre qui ne fait que des portraits, n’a encore atteint cette haute perfection de l’Art . . . il faut pour cela passer d’une seule figure à la representation de plusieurs ensemble; il faut traiter l’histoire & la fable; il faut representer de grandes actions comme les Historiens, ou sujets agreables comme les Poëtes.


Sans nous brouiller avec les critiques amoureux de l’égalité devant l’art, nous leur ferons observe avec douceur qu’il y a une gradation dans les règnes de la nature, et qui si la destination de l’art est d’exprimer la vie,—c’est justement leur manière de définir,—la figure humaine est l’image la plus élevé que l’artiste puisse se proposer pour modèle, puisqu’elle est un résumé des créations antérieures et que, remplissant l’espace immense qui sépare l’intelligence de la végétation, elle manifeste le plus haut degré de la vie, qui est la pensée. A ne voir même les choses que par le côté plastique, il y dans le corps humain une si prodigieuse variété de formes, de contours, de dépressions, de saillies, d’attitudes, de mouvements, de nuances, qu’il fallu aux Grecs dix ou douze générations d’artistes, ajoutant l’étude à l’étude, le génie au génie, pour en venir à posséder la connaissance parfaite de l’homme parfait. De même, à la Renaissance, il s’est écoulé plus d’un siècle avant qu’on sût mettre un figure humaine d’apliomb sur ses pieds . . . Donc,
si la grandeur du peintre se mesure à la difficulté de son entreprise, il est impossible de mettre sur la même ligne, à mérite égal, le paysage et la figure humaine.


10. Ludovic Vitet, *L’académie royale de peinture et de sculpture: Étude historique* (Paris: Lévy, 1861), 71: “ils s’étaient toujours souvenus qu’ils dessinaient un homme, c’est-à-dire une créature intelligente et passionnée, et non pas un être banal et mécanique . . . ne sentant rien, n’exprimant rien, vivant à peine.” This passage, significantly, discusses potential pitfalls of working from the model.


Lorsque vous montez sur l’arc de triomphe de l’Étoile, et que vous regardez vous dessous de vous du côté des Champs-Élysées, vous apercevez une multitude de taches noires ou diversement colorées qui se remuent sur la chaussée et sur les trottoirs. Vos yeux ne distinguent rien de plus. Mais vous savez que sous de ces points sombres ou bigarrés il y a un corps vivant, des membres actifs, une savante économie d’organes, une tête pensante, conduite par quelque projet ou désir intérieur, bref une personne humaine.


In light of Nancy Ireson’s recent archival discoveries, I follow the chronology that places Seurat at the École for four rather than two years, from 1876 to 1880. Ireson also convincingly argues for the enthusiasm with which the young Seurat sought to excel within the École’s prescribed frameworks of excellence, in particular competing for the Prix de Rome; see her “Seurat and the ‘Cours de M. Yvon,’” *Burlington Magazine* 153, no. 1296 (2011): 174–80. The
The four-year duration of Seurat’s academic training sets him apart from other modernists, such as Pissarro, Degas, or Renoir, who passed through the École for significantly briefer periods.

13. Robert Herbert, “Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte,” in Herbert et al., _Georges Seurat_, 175. For Herbert’s most comprehensive definition of primitivism, see Robert L. Herbert, ed., _Seurat and the Making of “La Grande Jatte,”_ exh. cat. (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2004), 107: “Lacking another all-embracing term, we use ‘primitivism’ to label Seurat’s departures from the conventions of post-quattrocento art . . . In truth the term’s only meaning for Seurat and all early modern art was a departure from academic practices. Early Renaissance art, popular broadsides, toys, and Egyptian art, all bearing some similarities with Seurat’s painting, do not really share one style or set of conventions. The only trait in common is the absence of three-dimensional renderings of the post-Renaissance period.”


15. Zimmerman, _Seurat_, 332.

16. Alexandre Arsène, “Chroniques d’aujourd’hui: Un vaillant,” _Paris_, 1 April 1891: “il s’était comme cloîtré dans un petit atelier du boulevard de Clichy . . . il voulait à ce moment prouver que sa théorie très intéressante . . . était applicable à de grandes figures . . . et il fit son tableau des Poseuses.”

18. Seurat kept numerical tally of the content of his reviews. See Georges Seurat to Félix Fénéon, 24 June 1890, in Hauke, *Seurat et son oeuvre*, 1:xxiii: “sur 30 articles me désignant comme novateur je vous compte 6 fois.”


19. Félix Fénéon to César-M. de Hauke, 29 August 1937, Fonds César-M. de Hauke, Bibliothèque de l’INHA–Collections Jacques Doucet, Paris: “Par chance, j’ai retrouvé les très nombreux articles de journaux et de revues . . . que l’Argus de la Presse et autres agences ont fournis . . . à Seurat lui-même de 1883 à 1891 . . . Pour *Un Dimanche à la Grand-Jatte*—qui à la
Fénéon instantly recognized the significance of these documents for comprehending Seurat’s work in its historical context, and proposed beginning the catalogue raisonné with a selection of criticism, to be titled “L’opinion à l’origine.”


The criticism that came out of Brussels is of particular interest, because it offers a mediated, second-order reception of the Grande Jatte, one in which many of the general tropes of previous criticism were crystallized in sharpest form. Previous scholarship on Seurat has largely overlooked this corpus, but I will rely on it heavily here.


22. Most of Seurat’s clippings were supplied by the service Argus de la Presse, founded in 1879. Signac, Pissarro, Monet, and Rodin are among the other artists who subscribed to such clipping agencies. Martha Ward has already highlighted the importance of Argus de la Presse in
establishing a dynamic interplay between painterly production and print reception within Neo-Impressionism; see her *Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism*, 12.

23. Seurat’s personal collection of press clippings is conserved in the Fonds César-M. de Hauke, Bibliothèque de l’INHA, Archives 036, Carton 1. The booklet of handwritten transcriptions is unusual for the period, when agencies issued printed passages pasted onto sheets with standardized labels. By comparison, Signac’s archive, also rich in press specimens supplied by a professional clipping service, does not contain handwritten press excerpts. (I am grateful to Robert Herbert for generously supplying this information about Signac’s archive, which I have not yet accessed.)

The question of who copied these passages has not previously been considered, and the writing, because copied very quickly in cursive, is difficult to confirm as in Seurat’s hand. After reexamining the papers on my behalf, Sébastien Chauffour, archivist at l’INHA, was able to confirm that transcriptions of the reviews of the Salon des Indépendants in 1884 are in Seurat’s hand, but he remains unsure about the transcriptions for 1886. I believe it likely Seurat also copied these reviews himself, but further work with a professional graphologist will be necessary to confirm this. Herbert also offered the intriguing hypothesis that the copyist of the later reviews might have been Ernestine Seurat, devoted mother of the artist.


seven important pictures. The rather apparent classicism of its design and the somewhat overrealistic treatment of the central figure ally it to Ingres and the École des Beaux-Arts."

26. I thank Judith Dolkart, former chief curator of the Barnes Foundation, and Judy Dion, Associate Project Conservator, for allowing me to examine Poseuses at eye level during the collection’s relocation in December 2011, and for sharing the results of preliminary infrared analysis undertaken during the move. Much of the analysis that follows would have been impossible without their extreme generosity in facilitating my study visit.


28. Herbert et al., Georges Seurat, 275: “it is as though Poseuses had brought on Parade, in the same way that La Grande Jatte had led to Poseuses.”


31. Crary, Suspensions, 224, 169, 239.

32. Arsène, “Chroniques d’aujourd’hui,” n.p.: “c’est à l’École des beaux-arts . . . qu’il appris son alphabet et sa grammaire. Alphabet dont il devait manier les caractères avec une singulière liberté, grammaire dont il devait bouleverser la syntaxe avec un tranquille sans-gêne.”


34. Arsène, “Chroniques d’aujourd’hui,” n.p.: “c’est à l’École des beaux-arts qu’il fit ses études, et c’est chez Lehman, un maître aussi académique qu’on peut raisonnablement le souhaiter.”


Other individuals included in the list include Charles Darwin, Hermann von Helmholtz, and Julien Offray de la Mettrie.

36. Elected professor of anatomy at the École in 1873, Duval received his agrégé with a thesis on the physiological functions of the retina. Also in 1873, Étienne-Jules Marey cited

Alongside experimental psychology, Duval was steeped in evolutionary biology. As early as 1873, he joined Paul Broca’s Société d’Anthropologie, later delivering there a series of lectures that would become the first major summary of Darwin’s theories in French.


On le voit à l’École des beaux-arts opérer dans l’enseignements de l’anatomie une réforme complète, en même temps qu’il donne aux étudiants en médecine un Cours de physiologie, dont la première s’épuise en quelques jours. C’est qu’il répondait dans les deux cas à un besoin de l’élève; c’est qu’à l’un il faisait comprendre tout le parti qu’on pouvait tirer de la physiologie, en exposant clairement les premiers principes de cette science; c’est que, d’autre part, il prenait à l’anatomie juste ce que les artistes lui demandent, en tout ce qu’ils lui demandent. C’est qu’en cherchant partout à surprendre la vie, là, dans un de ses premiers phénomènes, dans une de ses manifestations les plus simples, ici, dans un mouvement, dans une attitude, il intéressait tour à tour l’étudiant et l’artiste.


deux. Dès midi et demi, les élèves arrivent en foule . . . Une tonnerre d’applaudissements salue son [Mathias Duval’s] arrivée.”

39. Darwin was incorporated into the course in 1874, see Comar, “Une leçon,” 53.

40. For Seurat’s familiarity with physiology and experimental psycholatry see Crary, Suspension, passim; Zimmerman, Seurat, 227–75.

41. The term psychologie sans âme was popularized by Théodule Ribot, first in La psychologie allemande (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1879), viii. Ribot’s Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger, founded in 1876, became a key venue for promoting these disciplines in France in the 1870s and 1880s.

42. Significantly, Maurice Denis dated the “decadence” of art to the formation of academies organized around the model, see his “Préface de la IX Exposition des Peintres Impressionnistes et Symbolistes,” (1895) in idem, Théories, 1890–1910: Du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique, 4th ed. (Paris: Rouart et Watelin, 1920), 28: “Depuis le fin de la Renaissance, nous ne lassons pas de le répéter, depuis cette triste époque de peinture qui marque le déclin du XVI siècle, il existe des Académies, des endroits sombres et sales, où, sur une table, de pauvres diables se tiennent nus et immobiles. Qu’un jeune homme se sente attiré par le daimon de la peinture, on lui recommande d’aller là, de copier ça.”

43. Gustave Kahn, Les dessins de Georges Seurat (Paris, 1928) 1:n.p.: “L’écueil du pointillisme, alléguait quelques critiques, c’est le nu et surtout la présentation de la figure humaine.”

44. With the exception of Chahut, acquired by the symbolist poet Gustav Kahn, Seurat’s landscapes were the only paintings that found buyers during his lifetime.

Of the three conté crayons drawing, only one has been identified with an certainty: _Condoléances_, ca. 1886, conté crayon on laid paper, 24.13 x 31.75 cm, private collection (Hauke, _Seurat et son oeuvre_, cat. no. 655); the other two drawings submitted to the Impressionist exhibition, listed in the catalogue as _Une parade_ and _La banquiste_, are less certain. Berson proposes _Clowns et poney_, ca. 1885–87, conté crayon on laid paper, 31.75 x 24.13 cm, Phillips Collection (Hauke, _Seurat et son oeuvre_, cat. no. 668); and _Banquistes_, ca. 1880, conté crayon on laid paper, 31.1 x 23.5 cm, private collection, (Hauke, _Seurat et son oeuvre_, cat. no. 671). Apart from the _Grande Jatte_, the paintings exhibited were _La Seine, à Courbevoie_, 1885, oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm, private collection (Hauke, _Seurat et son oeuvre_, cat. no. 134) (Following Zimmerman and Herbert, I depart from Hauke and date this work firmly to 1885); _Les pêcheurs_, ca. 1883, oil on panel, 16 x 24.5 cm, Troyes, Musée d’art moderne (Hauke, _Seurat et son oeuvre_, PAGE?, cat. no. 78); _Le Bec du Hoc, Grandcamp_, 1885, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 81.6 cm, London, National Gallery (Hauke, _Seurat et son oeuvre_, cat. no. 159); _View of Fort Samson (Le Fort-Samson, Grandcamp)_ , 1885, oil on canvas, 65 x 81.5 cm, St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum (Hauke, _Seurat et son oeuvre_, cat. no. 157); _La Rade de Grandcamp_, 1885, oil on canvas, 65 x 80 cm, private collection (Hauke, _Seurat et son oeuvre_, cat. no. 160).

Zimmerman, _Seurat_, 223; Herbert, _Seurat and the Making of “La Grande Jatte,”_ 118. _Le Bec du Hoc_ and _La Rade de Grandcamp_ again accompanied _Grande Jatte_ at the Salon des
Indépendants in 1886 and the Exposition des XX in 1887, but it is unclear if the same triptych hanging was repeated in these exhibitions. We can presume Seurat had a direct hand in the hanging for the Impressionist exhibition, since Pissarro described the advantages of the separate Neo-Impressionist gallery as complete control over the installation of works. See Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, 8 May 1886, in Janine Bailly-Herzberg, ed., Correspondance de Camille Pissarro (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1980–91) 2:47, letter no. 335: “Nous allons exposer, toi, moi, Seurat et Signac, dans la même salle, de cette façon nous pourrons ainsi nous entendre parfaitement de notre placement.”


49. Arguing that Seurat’s Grande Jatte “returned to figure painting with a vengeance,” Michael Fried suggests that the debut of the Neo-Impressionist movement restored the priority figure painting held for Manet and his generation, see Michael Fried, Manet’s Modernism; or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 171–72.

51. Madeleine Octave Maus, Trente années de lutte pour l’art: Les XX, la Libre Esthétique, 1884–1914 (Brussels: Oiseau bleu, 1926), 52. Alongside Grande Jatte, Seurat exhibited five landscapes: Le Bec du Hoc, Grandcamp and La Rade de Grand-Camp as well as Coin d’un bassin, Honfleur, 1886, oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm, Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum (Hauke, Seurat et son oeuvre, cat. no. 163); L’hospice et le phare d’Honfleur, 1886, oil on canvas, 67 x 82 cm, Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art (Hauke, Seurat et son oeuvre, cat. no. 173); Embouchure de la Seine, Honfleur, 1886, oil on canvas, 64 x 80 cm, New York, Museum of Modern Art, DH 167 (Hauke, Seurat et son oeuvre, cat. no. 167).


55. Seurat produced eleven small painted panels and five marine canvases on this trip. For the Grandcamp campaign, see Zimmerman’s chapter “The Invention of Pointillism in Grandcamp and on La Grande Jatte,” in idem, *Seurat*, 197–223, esp. 205–11. The term pointillism derives from Fénéon’s review of the eighth Impressionist exhibition, in which he referred to Seurat’s technique as “peinture au point.” Signac advocated for the term divisionism, while Seurat himself favored “chromo-luminarism,” see Paul Signac, *D’Eugène Delacroix au Néo-Impressionisme* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue blanche, 1899). Although the ocean landscape had served as the testing ground for divisionism, Seurat implemented and quite likely conceived of it as one technical component of a broader program already focused around figure painting. The composition of the *Grande Jatte* was already fully laid out when Seurat went to Normandy. Immediately after returning to Paris he set out to expand the technique from landscape to figural motifs, first executing *La Seine, à Courbevoie* in 1885, which depicts a woman and animal strolling at the tip of the island of *Grande Jatte*—by all appearances, she is the same scandalous *promeneuse* as in the right foreground of the *Grand Jatte*. He then returned to the large figure painting, sharpening the contours of certain figures and resurfacing it with an overlay of dabs and dashes of pointillist color; see Zimmermann, *Seurat*, 219–20; Herbert, *Seurat and the Making of “La Grande Jatte,”* esp. 200–202.


Prenons la grande toile de Seurat. Elle se compose d’un terrain gazonné, d’une large tache d’eau, et d’une foule de bonshommes. Je crois qu’il est impossible de rester froid devant les qualités de transparence et de coloris qui caractérisent les deux premières parties. Mais d’un autre côté, je partage l’hilarité du public devant les bonshommes en bois qui jouent la foire au pain d’épice dans cette toile. Ils sont la une bande d’êtres pétrifiés, immobiles, de mannequins qui ont le tort de fixer l’attention du public et de le pousser au rire. Supprimez-les, il vous reste le paysage pur et simple, et vous êtes alors on présence d’une oeuvre sérieuse, puissante, émouvante. D’autres oeuvres du même artiste le preuvent.

Significantly, Seurat had already produced such a version of the picture: *L’Île de la Grande Jatte* (1884), a landscape identical to the one in *Un Dimanche à la Grande Jatte—1884*, but much smaller in format (65 by 81 cm, a standard size twenty-five canvas) and devoid of all figures. Seurat had exhibited *L’Île de la Grande Jatte* two years earlier, in the Indépendants exhibition in December 1884. And Le Fustec had reviewed it, mentioning the landscape with qualified enthusiasm, praising its skillful rendering of the light and water, while noting its odd lack of solidity or definition in the foreground, see “Le salon d’hiver des indépendants,” *Journal des Artistes* 3, no. 15
(12 December 1884): 2. In a separate article manuscript, I elaborate in detail the complex set of issues at stake in this piece of criticism, which bears deeply upon the compositional history of Grande Jatte as well as its self-reflexive investment in the hierarchy of genres.


Conduisant le notaire au fond de la salle, je le plaçai près de l’entrée, cachant à ses yeux, derrière les sculptures du milieu de la salle, la partie droite du tableau, avec ses mannequins saucés de violet. . . . —Regardez maintenant, et jugez sans parti-pris. Négligez certaines figures tellement naïves qu’elles en sont bêtes; ne vous préoccupez, pour le moment, que de l’effet de lumière que le peintre a voulu rendre, et reconnaissiez que l’impression y est. Le résultat est atteint.

Given the notary’s importance here as a personification of bourgeois propriety and aesthetic conservatism, we should recall that Degas, inspired by Seurat’s unfailingly correct bourgeois attire for punctual nightly dinners with his mother, nicknamed the artist le notaire; see Gustave Kahn, Les dessins de Georges Seurat, 1859–1891 (Paris: Bernheim-Jeune, 1928) 1:n.p.

60. Louis-Pilate de Brinn Gaubast, “Exposition des artistes indépendantes,” Le Décadent 1, no. 24 (1886): 2: “le Soir à Grandcamp permet de juger qu’il réussirait moins mal à barbouiller des paysages qu’à camper des bonshommes en bois dans l’Ile de Grand Jatte, un dimanche [sic].”


figures.” Adam made this statement in response to Seurat’s submissions to the Salon des Indépendants of 1887, which focused on landscape.


65. Fénéon, “Les Impressionnistes,” 443–44: “Le sujet: par un ciel caniculaire, à quatre heures, l’île, de filantes barques au flanc, mouvante d’une dominicale et fortuite population en joie de la grand air, parmi des arbres; et ces quelque quarante personnages sont investis d’un dessin hiératique et sommaire, traités rigoureusement ou de dos ou de face ou de profil, assis à l’angle droit, allongés horizontalement, dressés rigides.”


68. Huysmans, “Chronique d’art,” 53: “pas assez de flamme qui pétille, pas assez de vie!”

69 Huysmans, “Chronique d’art,” 53: “Décortiquez ses personnages des puces colorées qui les recouvrent, les dessous est nul; aucune âme, aucune pensée, rien. Un néant dans un corps dont les seuls contours existent. Ainsi que dans son tableau de la Grande Jatte, l’armature humaine devient rigide et dure; tout s’immobilise et se fige.”

70. Huysmans, “Chronique d’art,” 53.

71. Several critics spoke of Seurat’s individual colored marks as living matter, and more specifically, a kind of living matter that reproduces or spreads contagiously. For example a Belgian critic wrote in 1889, the year that the Salon des XX employed pointillist typography for its poster, that contemporary artists should be vaccinated against the spread of “le microbe de petite point,” see “Chronique,” 2 February 1889, unidentified press clipping in the Fonds Octave Maus, AACB.

73. Marcel Fouquier conveyed this in his quip that Seurat’s “jockey” appeared to have lost a leg in his last race. Fouquier, “Les impressionnistes,” 449: “il y a là un jockey couché et ayant perdu visiblement sa jambe à la dernière course de haies.”


75. Hermel, “L’Exposition de peinture,” 457: “il y a des attitudes condensés avec une concision étonnante.”

76. Fénéon, “Les Impressionnistes,” 444: “quelque quarante personnages sont investis d’un dessin hiératique et sommaire, traités rigoureusement ou de dos ou de face ou de profil, assis à l’angle droit, allongés horizontalement, dressés rigides.”


78. Robert Rey, La Renaissance du sentiment classique, la peinture française à la fin du XIXème siècle (Paris: Les Beaux-Arts, 1931), 115: “un soldat ponctuel et discipliné.” I thank Nancy Ireson for her insight that, given the many drawings in Seurat’s early sketchbooks depicting military exercises, it is possible Seurat’s service at Brest in 1879–80 had a decisive impact on his representation of bodily movement. He continued to be called for short periods of service throughout his life. Baudelaire, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” 368: “les soldats sont, en beaucoup des choses, aussi simples que les enfants.”


For the Zinnfiguren, see Henry Kurtz and Burt R. Ehrlich, The Art of the Toy Soldier (New York: Abeville, 1987), 18: “the flat Zinnfigur was the principal type [of soldier] produced until the last decades of the 19th century.” The German company Ernst Heinrichsen, founded in 1839, dominated this market until the middle of the twentieth century. Their most significant innovation was to standardize the height of the soldiers at twenty-eight centimeters. See also Léon Duplessis, “L’empire d’allemagne: les soldats de plomb,” Bulletin consulaire français; Recueil des rapports commerciaux adressés au ministre des affaires étrangères par les agents diplomatiques et consulaires de France à l’étranger 17, no. 1 (1889): 97–111.

The term déballage might also be translated as “unpacking,” in the sense of the removal of a purchased good from its emballage or commercial wrapping, a translation that would further point towards an allusion to these toy soldiers, sold in sets with multiple figures boxed in a distinctive wooden packaging.


83. It seems likely that Seurat’s cadets were modeled directly on some image of the soldier produced for children. “Sheets of toy soldiers” were found among Seurat’s papers, which could have served as a blueprint for the cadets, see “Appendix C: Seurat’s Collection of Prints, Reproductions and Photographs,” in Herbert et al., Georges Seurat, 378–80. The preliminary inventory was made in 1956, and the papers were subsequently destroyed by Seurat’s relatives. The only information about the imagery provided in Herbert’s catalogue is: “A series, each 12 x 9 cm, crudely colored etching perhaps of the 1840s: five images of mounted soldiers, of which two are identical except for their colors.”

84. I quote here Meyer Schapiro, who aptly observed that the “span from the tiny to the large is . . . one of the many polarities in [Seurat’s] art,” see his Modern Art: 19th & 20th Centuries, Selected Papers (New York: George Braziller, 1978), 101. Much more could be said about questions of scale in the Grande Jatte and in Seurat’s work in general. Suffice it to say here that Seurat’s notion of the grande toile de lutte seems to have entailed necessarily for him grandeur naturelle. The Grande Jatte makes vivid that the canvas is scaled to the dimensions of the life-size standing human body. The standing couple in the bottom right corner seem to both mark and determine the vertical dimensions of the picture. The picture, however, radically denaturalizes, or estranges, the visual experience of grandeur naturelle, in part by embracing extreme registers of scale, in terms of both the relative proportion of painted mark to support within the work, and the relative proportions of figures to one another. It is worth noting here as well that Seurat created his grandes toiles de lutte by making paintings on standard-sized small boards (16 by 24.5 centimeters), a mode of production he christened with the diminutive croqueton, or “little sketch.”

Portions of the discussion that follows are adapted from my essay entitled "Mannequin and Monkey in Seurat's Grande Jatte," which will appear in *Fashion in European Art: Dress and Identity, Politics and the Body, 1775-1925*, edited by Justine deYoung, under contract with I.B. Tauris.


Diderot also conflated the academic model and the mannequin to critique the inauthentic body language inculcated by the academic system, see the “Salon de 1765” and “Mes pensées bizarres sur le dessin” in *Oeuvres de Denis Diderot*, vol. 10, *Salons*, ed. Jacques André Naigeon (Paris: Brière, 1821), 282, 209, 412.

87. Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire*, s.v. “mannequin”: “1) forme humaine sur laquelle les artistes disposent les draperies qui doivent leur servir du modèle . . . 2) forme humaine en bois, affublés de vêtements et servent de montre aux tailleurs et aux marchands de vêtements”


92. See the table of related works in Hauke, *Seurat et son oeuvre*, 1:200–201. Seurat was clearly attentive to the scenic tableaus through which the new department stores cultivated the public’s taste for ready-to-wear fashion. In the years leading up to the *Grande Jatte*, the artist produced several sketches of urban strollers approaching luminous window displays. See the two
drawings reproduced in Hauke, *Un magasin et deux personnages*, ca. 1882 (cat. no. 476) and *Rencontre*, ca. 1882 (cat. no. 477); *Seurat et son oeuvre*, 2:84.


95. Wauters, “Aux XX,” n.p.: “Mais ces personnages, mon chère, ces deux grands diables de personnages qui ressemblent à des poupées descendues de quelque étalage de confectionneur?”


société exigent de chacun de nous, c’est une attention constamment en éveil, qui discerne les contours de la situation présente, c’est aussi une certaine élasticité du corps et de l’esprit, qui nous mette à même de nous y adapter.”

106. Bergson, *Laughter*, 10; Bergson, *Le rire*, 396: “Toute raideur du caractère, de l’esprit et même du corps, sera donc suspecte à la société, parce qu’elle est le signe possible d’une activité qui s’endort.” Emphasis in original. I have modified the translation here in reference to the original.


108. Paulet, “Les Impressionnistes,” 469: “Le peintre a voulu montrer le train-train de la promenade banale des endimanchés qui se promènent sans volupté aux endroits où il est convenu qu’on doit se promener le dimanche.”


111. Tarde, “Qu’est-ce qu’une société?” 499; Tarde, The Laws of Imitation, 86, 74, 75. For these observations, Tarde drew on psychological studies by Hippolyte Taine and Henry Maudsley.

112. Tarde, “Qu’est-ce qu’une société?” 500; Tarde, The Laws of Imitation, 75.


114. Tarde, The Laws of Imitation, 68, 82.

115. Tarde, The Laws of Imitation, 77. On fashion, as opposed to custom, as the hallmark of modern imitation, see Tarde, “Extra-Logical Influences,” in idem, The Laws of Imitation, 244–55, 192: “Our smart tailors and dressmakers, our big manufacturers, and even our journalists, bear exactly the same relation to fashion-imitation as these masters of civil or religious ceremony bore to custom imitation.”

116. Tarde, The Laws of Imitation, 82, emphasis in original.


   Homme, Femme, qui affecte des allures ou un langage étudié.—Celui, celle qui cherche à produire de l’effet au moyen d’une attitude étudiée. Au théâtre le poseur fait des effets de torse; il projette sa poitrine sur le devant d’une loge, lorgne avec affectation; au bal, il s’accoude sur le marbre de la cheminée; au Bois de Boulogne, il se fait piaffer sa monture devant les équipages de luxe; dans la conversation, il récite avec emphase un tirade
politique lue, le matin, dans un journal, ou il traite une question d’art étudiée, la veille, dans un livre (308).


120. Fénéon, “Sur Georges Seurat,” 1:488: “Il semblait que cette nostalgie bestiole et cette queue fussent là pour insulter nommément personne qui franchissait le seuil.”


For the visibility of *demoiselles de magasin* promenading on their Sundays off, see Pierre Giffard, *Paris sous la Troisième République: Les grands bazars* (Paris: Havard, 1882), 13, 116. For the *demoiselle de magasin* as a figure of obsession in Parisian culture in the later nineteenth century, see Miller, *The Bon Marché*, 195; Theresa McBride, “A Woman’s World: Department Stores and the Evolution of Women’s Employment, 1870–1920,” *French Historical Studies* 10, no. 4 (1978): 664–83. Notably, shopgirls were known for their distinctive attire in uniform black silk. The black bodice worn by the monkey’s owner, which, somewhat un fashionably for the period, does not match her dark purplish skirt, might therefore be read as a conspicuous marker of her professional relationship to a store.


129. Octave Uzanne, *L’ombrelle, le gant, le machon* (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1883), 61:
il n’est point, à l’heure actuelle, de femme ou de fille du peuple qui n’ait son Ombrelle ou son en-tout-cas de satin; il semble que ce soit le complément indispensable d’une toilette de promenade . . . Les dimanches et les ‘jours fériés,’ dans les bousculades de la foule aux fêtes suburbaines, c’est comme un remous d’Ombrelles.


131. While Seurat’s monkey may be an eclectic construction combining features of various species observable in Parisian zoos, the special emphasis given to the long prehensile tail and the contrasting fur coloration in the facial region strongly suggests he deliberately depicted an animal from the genus *Cebus*: new-world monkeys with distinctive caps of fur on their crowns, named for the robed monks in the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin. Highly trainable and considered to be the most intelligent species of new-world monkeys, capuchins in human attire were the ubiquitous companions of organ grinders in nineteenth-century cities. See Dorothy M. Fragaszy, Elisabetta Visalberghi, and Linda M. Fedigan, The Complete Capuchin: The Biology of the Genus *Cebus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–15; Desmond Morris, *Monkey* (London: Reaktion, 2013), 73–74.

133. Tarde, *The Laws of Imitation*, 244. Tarde refers to the “almost instantaneous” spread of Darwinian theory to exemplify the accelerated pace of imitation in modernity, 370.


135. For a discussion of the monkey as “an emblem of the arts, and more particularly painting and sculpture” in the early modern period see H. W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, 1952), 287–325.

In eighteenth-century France there was a widespread vogue for so-called *Singeries*, depictions of monkeys in human attire engaging in cultured, and very often artistic, activities. This genre, practiced by major figures such as Jean-Antoine Watteau and Jean-Siméon Chardin, had an important afterlife in art and caricature of the July Monarchy, when painters such as Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps and illustrators such as J. J. Grandville repeatedly engaged the motif of the *singe-peintre* to parody Romantic artistic culture. See Bertrand Marret, *Portraits de l’artiste en singe: Les Singeries dans la peinture* (Paris: Somogy, 2001), esp. 59–85. A terminal figure in this tradition is Vermilion, the rhesus macaque who plays sidekick to artists and even tries his hand at painting in the Goncourt brothers’ novel on the lives of artists, *Manette*
Salomon, in 1867. Tellingly, after Vermilion’s death, the painter Anatole abandons art to become a zookeeper at the Jardin des Plantes.

136. Constantin James, *Du Darwinism, ou, L’homme-singe* (Paris: Plon, 1877), 67: “on ne puisse le prononcer sans voir miroiter aussitôt comme la silhouette d’un singe.” Note that here James is referring to both Darwin and Émile Littré, who he describes as “l’*alter ego* de Darwin.”


Most likely, Seurat’s methodical campaign of monkey studies was executed at a zoo known to be affiliated with a specifically evolutionary or adaptive perspective, the Jardin zoologique d’acclimatation, which by the 1880s had begun incorporating displays of “savage” humans among their animal exhibitions. The presence of what appear to be cage bars in three of the five conté crayon studies supports Robert Herbert’s claim that “when Seurat decided that his promenading woman would have a monkey, he went to the zoo,” see Herbert et al., *Georges Seurat*, 199.

I believe the Jardin zoologique d’acclimatation is the likeliest candidate, because it was highly publicized in the 1880s, and because the singerie contained *sajous*, or brown capuchins,


The monkey, as various period critics noted, appears in the canvas in an unlikely bluish tone, a hue closely matched to the deep navy-violet skirt of his mistress. The tether connecting these figures also accentuates the monkey’s reduplication of human attire—in marked contrast to the frenetic little pug, which leaps in front with a bow around its collar, the monkey wears its harness cinched around its waist like a corset. Seurat also extended the length of the monkey’s lead from the original sketch so that it “no longer seems to strain against it,” heightening, as Herbert noted, the echo between its deliberate, quite nonanimal-like stillness, and the stiffness of its owner’s stance, see Herbert, *Seurat and the Making of “La Grande Jatte,”* 77.


143. Coquiot, *Seurat*, 112: “Faux-cul . . . est encore, pour Seurat, un objet sacré . . . il se plaît à préciser.”


157. Émile Verhaeren, “Georges Seurat,” *La société nouvelle*, 30 April 1891: “il s’était retrouvé lui, au fond de tous les autres, à travers les leçons et les règles, comme on découvre des pierres ignorés sous des stratifications de terrains et de sols.”

158. Julius Lange, *Billedkunstens Fremstilling af Menneskeskikkelsen i dens ældste Periode indtil Højdepunktet af den græske Kunst* (Copenhagen: F. Dreyer, 1892). For translations of this publication from the Danish, see note 15 in the introduction to this work.


160. Rey, *La Renaissance du sentiment classique*, 120: “on serait même tenté de se demander s’il n’essay e point d’appliquer, en certains endroits, cette ‘loi de frontalité’ que Lange disait chère aux sculpteurs antiques.”


163. Lange notes that his studies for the book were conducted predominantly at the British Museum, see Lange, *Billedkunstens*, 437, 439: “quelque position que prenne la figure, elle est soumise à cette régé, que le plan médian qu’on peut se figurer passant par le sommet de la tête, le nez, l’épine dorsal, le sternum, le nombril et les organes sexuels, et qui partage le corps en deux moitiés symétriques, reste invariable, ni ne se courbant nie ne se tournant d’aucune coté. . . . il ne se produit ni flexion nie torsion latérale dans le cou, soit dans l’abdomen.”

164. Lange, *Billedkunstens*, 464, 445: “la reproduction uniforme d’une seule et même pose”; “Tout cela contribue beaucoup à donner aux figures de l’art primitif un caractère spécial.”


166. Lange, *Billedkunstens*, 440: “la frontalité empêche d’elle-même l’expression proprement dite d’un rapport . . . le groupement est lui même aussi assujetti à des règles rigoureuses; les plans médians de figures groupées ont entre eux les rapports géométriques les plus simples.”


169. Lange, *Billedkunstens*, 442: “si la figure marche, elle marche, elle marche tout droit devant elle, d’un pas qui est toujours le même.”


171. Lange, *Billedkunstens*, 445: “dans l’attitude frontale . . . il y quelque chose de correspondant à ce qui se passe dans la vie réelle, à l’éthique de la vie humaine primitive, c’est-à-dire à l’ensemble de ses habitudes et ses règles.”

172 Lange, *Billedkunstens*, 442: “les statues nous donnent ainsi une impression de l’empire de l’habitude, tant sur la vie humaine en général que sur l’art, qui se voit réduit à des répétitions continuelles des mêmes motifs.”


174. Lange, *Billedkunstens*, 442:

Comparés avec les Européens et les personnes élevées à l’européenne dans d’autres parties du monde, tous les autres hommes se distinguent encore aujourd’hui par une plus grande uniformité dans leur tenue; leurs notions plus ou moins développées sur la dignité de la maintien que demande la vie sociale, leur donnent une attitude qui rappelle celle des statues primitives. On s’en aperçoit surtout en voyant des Orientaux se présenter dans le monde en même temps que des Européens: ils marchent à la suite les uns des autres, s’asseyent à côté les un des autres dans la même attitude compassée, etc.—en un mot, ils conservent dans leur manière d’être, non seulement quelque chose de la frontalité des statues, mais aussi des règles simples de la composition des groupes, telles qu’on les a mentionnées plus haut. Dans toute leur manière de ce conduire, on remarque en général un manque de souplesse pour mettre en harmonie les positions d’une figure avec celles d’autres figures; ils ont un syntaxe plus simples dans les formes de leurs relations.
175. Lange, *Billedkunstens*, 437: “rompirent avec ces règles primitives et créèrent un nouvel art plus riche et plus varié.”

176. Lechat, “Une loi de la statuaire primitive,” 3: “ont créé l’art européen proprement dit, lequel à son tour a conquis la plus grande partie du globe terrestre.”


180. Lange, *Billedkunstens*, 464: “L’ancienne statue frontale avait représenté une construction tout extérieure de la forme humaine: une paire de pieds était surmontée d’une paire de jambes; celles-ci, à leur tour, étaient surmontées d’un tronc se prolongeant dans un cou qui portait une tête, etc. La statue nouvelle, au contraire, est la représentation de l’homme où tout est dirigé et déterminé par un centre intérieure, le moi.” Emphasis in original.


182. Adam, “Peintres Impressionnistes,” 430: “on rejette les méthodes qu’elle produisait.”


Given Fénéon’s close contact with Huysmans, and given that this review was published just a month after Huysman’s “Chronique d’art,” it seems certain Fénéon was specifically countering the forceful terms of his condemnation.

186. Referring to Fénéon’s commentary on Degas’s bathers series in “Les impressionnistes en 1886,” discussed in a later portion of this chapter, Fried has aligned Fénéon’s critical stance towards the model with Denis Diderot’s critique in the 1750s and 1760s of the role of the professional model as structural to the pictorial problem of “theatricality,” see Michael Fried, Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 222n144.

As Fried has argued, the status of the model was “unresolvable within the framework of [Diderot’s] thought,” because although the practice of modeling raised the ineluctable problem of the model’s awareness of being beheld, rendering the model’s comportment before the painter
unnatural and affected, for Diderot the practice of working from life was still “a seemingly indispensable support” (Fried, *Manet’s Modernism*, 336). The question at stake for Diderot was how to work from life most effectively, how to access the “natural,” unselfconscious attitudes necessary for the painter in providing a convincing illusion of interiority, how to depict the human being absorbed by their own emotions and mental states. For Diderot the problem with the academic model, described as a “pauvre diable . . . gagé pour venir trois fois la semaine se déshabiller et se faire mannequin par un professeur,” was precisely that this rich inner life became inaccessible as the model was reduced to the status of an inanimate object; see Denis Diderot, “*Mes pensées bizarres sur le Dessin*” (1765) in *idem, Essais sur la Peinture pour faire suite au Salon de 1765* (Paris: Buisson, 1795), 7, my emphasis.

Within the framework of Fénéon’s thought, however, these terms are profoundly shifted, because Fénéon no longer regards working from life as an “indispensable support,” and, perhaps inseparably, he no longer seems to presume that the figural artist should provide an image that secures the illusion of the inner life of the depicted subject.

187. A facsimile of the catalogue entry listing Seurat’s submissions to the 1887 Indépendants is included in Hauke, *Seurat et son oeuvre*, 1:221.

According to measurements I made together with Judy Dion, the central figure in *Poseuses* is exactly 4 feet 10.26 inches tall, certainly an accurate lifesize for a nineteenth-century adolescent female.


190. Kahn, “Peinture: Exposition des indépendants,” 160–64, 161: “M. Seurat en progrès tous les ans répond victorieusement à l’objection qu’on faisait à sa technique, que, bonne pour le paysage, elle était impuissante à évoquer une figure.”

191. Most recently, Michelle Foa described the tournure as “an item of female clothing or an accessory of some sort,” see *Seurat*, 98; for the common misidentification as a bag, see for instance Françoise Cachin, “Poseuses 1886–1888,” in Herbert et al., *Georges Seurat*, 273–95, 278; Nochlin, “Body Politics,” 75. My gratitude to Joseph Rishel for introducing me to Kristina Haugland, and to Kristina Haugland for very generously sharing her knowledge of the nineteenth-century undergarments depicted in *Poseuses*. I thank Bridget Alsdorf also for her insights on Seurat’s comic placement of the *tournure* within the composition.

exposée aux Indépendants, dans laquelle la technique du jeune maître s’affirme, victorieuse, et qui montre à nouveau (hasard ou malice du peintre?), comme pour affirmer plus de force une conviction esthétique et mieux marquer l’étape parcourue, un grand pan de cette Grande Jatte qui scandalisa les bourgeois, voici deux ans.”

193. Henry van de Velde, “Georges Seurat,” La Wallonie 6, nos. 3–4 (1891): 167–71, 169: “Une objection, entre autres: un mode qui immobiliserait la vie, vêtait les figures d’une rigidité de bois, se complaisait en des attitudes statiques plus puériles que synthétique, avait visiblement frappé Seurat et aux promeneurs roides et qui deviendront le fond même de son tableau les Poseuses, il oppose de belles chaires mouvantes de femmes!”

194. The French academy’s institutionalization of the nude as an official test of qualifications derives from the elevated position of the nude in Renaissance art theory and painting, where as Kenneth Clark has argued, nudes appear in paintings “like certificates of professional capacity,” see his The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1956), 352.


199. I thank Judy Dion for discussing the results of her infrared analysis. Until further scientific research is undertaken, we cannot know what Seurat actually chose to efface in Poseuses. The recent discovery of an effaced self-portrait beneath the flowerpot in Seurat’s Jeune femme se poudrant, however, confirms a tendency to paint in and then obscure personally revealing information; see Aviva Burnstock and Karen Serres, “Seurat’s Hidden Self Portrait,” Burlington Magazine 156, no. 133 (April 2014): 240–42.

In the Poseuse of 1887, the standing model is positioned directly below this large, vertical format picture, almost as if Seurat was cross-referencing or coordinating the model’s placement with this image.


201. Herbert argues that only two preparatory studies for the Grande Jatte were executed in the studio, one a fabric study of the standing woman’s bustle, probably done from a
mannequin (Hauke, *Seurat et son oeuvre*, cat. no. 624), and the other a full-length sketch of the standing woman, done from a posed model (Hauke, *Seurat et son oeuvre*, cat. no. 625). See Herbert, *Seurat and the Making of “La Grande Jatte,”* 86.


203. Van de Velde, “Georges Seurat,” 169: “aux promeneurs roides et qui deviendront le fond même de son tableau les Poseuses, il oppose de belles chaires mouvantes de femmes!”

204. For the dating of this sketch see Cachin, “Poseuses 1886–1888,” 275.

205. For the claim that these were executed from life see Thompson, *Seurat*, 137.


Löwy’s text, composed simultaneously with Lange’s study on primitive figuration, offered another key discussion of the shift in pose that occurred in the transition from primitive to classical figuration. My third chapter on *L’Après-midi d’un Faune* treats Löwy’s work on preclassical art at greater length.
209. Rich, Seurat, Paintings and Drawings, 16. A number of scholars have used the term “reversal” to describe the relationship between Poseuses and Grande Jatte, see also Kinney, “Fashion and Figuration,” 229.


211. I refer here to Judy Dion’s infrared analysis in December 2011.

212. Seurat’s reproduction of Grande Jatte in Poseuses appears to streamline the extremities of the figures even more aggressively, which makes this contrast more vivid.


221. Gustave Geffroy, “Chronique: Pointillé-Cloisonnisme,” *La Justice*, 11 April 1888: “un grand tableau où trois modèles femmes se tiennent, la séance finie, dans des attitudes différents, l’une assise, vue de dos, l’autre debout, de face, les bras pendants, les mains croisées, la troisième, assise, de profil, remettant ses bras . . . les chairs, toutes piquetées qu’elles sont, présentent des souplesses et des grâces jeunes, les membres ont la gracilité et le mal nourri des maigres fillettes vite poussées, hâtivement pubères . . . le modèle assis, se rhabillant, est surtout vrai de la vérité des villes et de métiers hasardeux.”


225. Herbert first suggested that the right figure alluded to the Ingres, see *Seurat’s Drawings*, 128. Scholars who accept this source include Cachin, “Poseuses 1886–1888,” 286; Nochlin, “Body Politics,” 121; Thompson, *Seurat*, 141.


228. For the Louvre bronze, an Italian copy of 1540, see Cuzin, Gaborit, and Pasquier, *D’après l’antique*, 220, cat. no 64. The bronze original from the Palazzo dei Conservatori, one among the many spoliated antiquities transferred to Paris under Napoleon, also had a brief tenure at the Louvre between 1798 and 1816; for the Spinario illustrated in Seurat’s textbook, see David Sutter, *Esthétique générale et appliqué: Contenant les règles de la composition dans les arts plastiques* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1865). For the use of this textbook during Seurat’s tenure at the École des Beaux-Arts, see Zimmerman, *Seurat*, 403. For the photographic
académies, see Sylvie Aubenas, _L’art du nu au XIXe siècle: Le photographe et son modèle_ (Paris: Hazan, 1997).

229. For Seurat’s participation in Yvon’s drawing class, see Ireson, “Seurat and the ‘Cours de M. Yvon,’” 177–80; for the tradition of posing the model after antique sculptures, see Emmanuel Schwartz, “Poser l’antique,” in Cuzin, Gaborit, and Pasquier, _D’après l’antique_, 103–9.


231. Lechat, “Une loi de la statuaire primitive,” 22: “Pour prendre un exemple au hasard, une statue comme le Spinario, un adolescent assis qui regarde la plante de son pied où une épine est entrée, et qui ne pense qu’à cette épine, qui lui fait mal et au moyen de l’extirper—une telle statue . . . sûrement ne se rencontrera jamais dans l’art égyptien ou assyrien, mais on ne saurait même pas l’y concevoir; elle y serait quelque chose d’anormal, un véritable _monstrum_.”

232. Heinrich von Kleist, “The Puppet Theater,” in _Heinrich von Kleist: Selected Writings_, ed. and trans. David Constantine (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2004), 411–16; Clara Clement, _An Outline History of Sculpture for Beginners and Students_ (New York: White, Stokes, and Allen, 1885), 81. Further consideration of the complex symbolic function of the Spinario in Kleist’s prose sketch and its relevance for _Poseuses_ is beyond my scope here, but this is an issue that would reward further consideration. Suffice it to say that Bergson’s definition of “grace” in _Le Rire_ is a mirror inversion of Kleist’s in “The Puppet Theater,” where gracefulness is associated precisely with the absence of consciousness. Seurat’s painting, alongside Bergson’s essay, suggests how new psychological models by the end of the nineteenth might have radically reoriented thinking about the grace of body and spirit.


236. Herbert, Seurat’s Drawings, 128. As Cachin points out, among Seurat’s thirty-three surviving drawings of antique sculpture, three are of female figures and thirty are of males, see Cachin, “Poseuses 1886–1888,” 275.

237. Nochlin, “Body Politics,” 121; Thompson, Seurat, 141.

238. I thank Richard Neer for initially pointing me towards the resemblance during a discussion at CASVA in February 2011.


More than fifty copies of the bust survive, a fact which speaks to the sculpture’s transitional status towards an emerging category of the psychological portrait, in which the
expressive head took on a new degree of communicative significance; see Frederick Paulsen, *Catalogue of Ancient Sculpture in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek* (Copenhagen: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1951).

241. For a list identifying the copies on the facade of the Palais des Études, see Eugène Müntz, *Guide de L’école nationale des beaux-arts* (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1889), 45–46. The sculptures remain in place today.


245. This tension between an arbitrary inventory and a narrative sequence is left deliberately unresolved. Seurat made versions of each “pose” as separate panels, making clear how easily the figures can be extracted from the tenuous continuity into which they are inserted.

246. In his letter to Maurice Beaubourg, Seurat wrote and then crossed out the article “Les” when he listed his works. The composition was exhibited under the title “Poseuses” at the Salon des Indépendants in 1888, for a facsimile of the catalogue see Hauke, *Seurat et son oeuvre*, 1:222.

I do not mean to suggest that *Poseuses* should be read as unequivocally representing a single figure. Seurat deliberately planted the painting with contradictory evidence, which can be
read selectively to support either a reading of three bodies present simultaneously or one individual figure enacting a sequence. While the shifting position of the red barette on the right side of the model’s head clearly indicates that we are tracking the movement in time of a single figure, Seurat also supplied enough clothing for three separate women: three parasols, three hats, and two pairs of shoes. Recent infrared analysis revealed that he added the second pair of boots in the bottom right corner of the canvas at the very end of the compositional process, replacing a green bottle he had originally placed in that position. This last-minute revision suggests Seurat’s concern to keep open the question of how many bodies were present in the studio.

247. See, for example Gustave Courbet’s Woman with White Stockings, 1864, oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm, Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia.


249. The drawing was produced to accompany Paul Adam’s review, see Adam, “Les Impressionnistes à l’exposition des Indépendants,” 229. That Seurat reproduced this figure for circulation in print perfectly crystallizes the feedback loop between print media and art production that was structural to Poseuses.


the question of whether Demosthenes is represented in the “Moment des Redens” or the “Moment des Meditierens,” see Adolf Michaelis, “Die Bildnisse des Demosthenes,” in Arnold Dietrich Schaefer, Demosthenes und seine Zeit (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1887), 401–30, 422.

While this ambiguity is crucial for our purposes, Paul Zanker has argued that it stems from a modern miscomprehension of the statue, which he believes certainly depicts the orator in the act of oration, a reading I believe is substantiated by the original siting of the statue in the public, political arena of the Agora: “those who would interpret the mood of the statue as one of melancholy introspection would have to offer evidence that such a possibility even existed at this period. In that case, where are we to think the speaker is actually standing? At home? There is no indication that the viewer is meant to imagine him in private,” see Paul Zanker, The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity, trans. Alan Shapiro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 86n65.

258. The Greek γνώµη, root of the verb “to know,” designates activity of mind, thought, judgement, opinion, and in plural γνώµαι, a rhetorical term for concise or gnomic sayings,


260. Settis, “Images of Meditation,” 197; Plutarch, *Demosthenes* 30.5; Plutarch, *Lives*, 77: “Of course those who say that Demosthenes himself composed these lines in Calauria, as he was about to put the poison to his lips, talk utter nonsense.”


265. Settis, “Images of Meditation,” 211.


267. Plutarch, *Demosthenes* 30.5; Plutarch, *Lives*, 77. The error of the restoration was noted in scholarship as early as the 1830s, see Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles*, 418. Michaelis refers to a terracotta statuette of Demosthenes from the Campana collection at the Louvre that retained the clasped hands posture of the Polyeuktos original. I have been unable to locate documentation of the statuette, now apparently lost, but it might have remained on display in the Louvre in the 1880s. In 1898, Sandys also locates this statuette in the Louvre, but notes that its authenticity was in doubt, see Sandys, “La Statue de Démosthène à Knole Park,” 426.


“Als Künstler im Ganzen betrachtet, so hat Wagner, um an einen bekannteren Typus zu errinnern, Etwas von Demosthenes an sich: den furchtbaren Ernst um die Sache und die Gewalt des Griffs, so dass er jedesmal die Sache fasst; er schlägt seine Hand darum, im Augenblick, und sie hält fest, als ob sie aus Erz wäre. . . . doch ist er, gleich Demosthenes, die letzte und höchste Erscheinung hinter einer ganzen Reihe von gewaltigen Kunstgeistern.”


274. That the Demosthenes was perceived in the nineteenth century as a work that, in both subject and execution, exuded intense masculinity is hinted at in Henry James’s allusion to the sculpture in Roderick Hudson, see “Roderick Hudson IX” in The Atlantic Monthly 36 (1875), 269–81, 278: “Once, when they were standing before that noblest of sculptured portraits, the so-called Demosthenes, in the Braccio Nuovo, she made the only spontaneous allusion to her projected marriage . . . ‘I am so glad,’ she said, ‘that Roderick is a sculptor and not a painter . . . It’s not that painting is not fine, ‘she said, ‘but that sculpture is finer. It’s more manly.’”

276. Fénéon, “Les Impressionistes,” 441: “Dans l’œuvre de M. Degas—et de quel autre?—les humaines vivent d’une vie expressive. . . . Art de réalisme et qui cependant ne procède pas d’une vision directe:—dès qu’un être se sait observé, il perd sa naïve spontanéité de fonctionnement; M. Degas ne copie donc pas d’après nature: il accumule sur un même sujet une multitude de croquis où son oeuvre puisera une véracité irréfragable: jamais tableaux n’ont moins évoqué le pénible image du ’modèle’ qui ‘pose.’”

Ward argues that *Poseuses* is a direct response to this commentary on Degas’s bathers, see Ward, *Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism*, 98–103.


280. Seurat’s *Jeune femme se poudrant* (1889–90), which followed *Poseuses*, is a portrait of Madeleine Knobloch, a model with whom Seurat had a relationship, which began perhaps as
early as 1885 and produced two children, both of whom died as infants. Seurat, however, did not include this portrait in the list of his major compositions. His involvement with Knobloch, whose existence he kept secret from family and friends until the eve of his death, proves not only that Seurat found occasions to interact with models, but also that these interactions closely followed certain established (sexual) patterns of relation between bourgeois male artists and working-class female models. It is tempting to speculate about the role Knobloch might have played in modeling for Grande Jatte, as well as for Poseuses. It does not seem impossible that she might have modeled the monkey’s owner, as well as for the models of Poseuses, but given the absence of all documentary evidence, that possibility is necessarily purely speculative.

281. Dollfus, Modèles d’artistes, 5: “Le modèle est à l’artiste, à quelque école qu’appartienne celui-ci, ce que le document humain est au romancier naturaliste.”


This idea was widespread. See for instance, Adeline, Lexique, s.v. “Modèle vivant”: “de nos jours, l’artiste se préoccupant davantage de reproduire dans ses oeuvres des types moins conventionnels, plus modernes, plus réalistes parfois, les types classiques du modèle tendent à disparaître” (289).

283. For an overview of trends in modeling prior to the 1880s, see Susan Waller, The Invention of the Model: Artists and Models in Paris, 1830–1870 (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2006).


290. Fénéon, “Les Impressionnistes,” 441: “Art de réalisme et qui cependant ne procède pas d’une vision directe:—dès qu’un être se sait observé, il perd sa naïve spontanéité de fonctionnement; M. Degas ne copie donc pas d’après nature: il accumule sur un même sujet une multitude de croquis où son œuvre puisera une vérité irréfragable: jamais tableaux n’ont moins évoqué le pénible image du ‘modèle’ qui ‘pose.’”


292. Rodin, L’Art, 26: “Si bien que c’est vous qui paraissez être à leurs ordres plutôt qu’eux aux vôtres.”
293. Lemaistre, *L’École des Beaux-Arts*, 36: “Ils donnent leur répertoire de poses, se tournent, de dos, de face, de profil, avec des gestes dignes ou furieux, les yeux noyés d’extase ou voilés de tristesse.”


296. Lemaistre, *L’École des Beaux-Arts*, 308. Ireson offers convincing visual evidence that an *académie* by Seurat from ca. 1877 is of Gélon, who began posing regularly at the École in the 1860s and was still working there as of 1890; see Ireson, “Seurat and the ‘Cours de M. Yvon.’” 175.

297. For Lemaistre’s description of Gélon’s posing skills and his biography, see Lemaistre, *L’École des Beaux-Arts*, 308–15. Lemaistre presents Gélon as the successor to the famous Charles-Alix Dubosc, known now primarily for the annoyance he provoked in Édouard Manet when he encountered him in Thomas Couture’s studio. For this anecdote, see Antonin Proust, *Édouard Manet: Souvenirs* (Paris: H. Laurens, 1913), 21: “Dubosc, Gilbert, Thomas l’Ours étaient les professionnels les plus illustres. En montant sur la table, ils prenaient par tradition des attitudes outrées. ‘Vous ne pouvez donc pas être naturels, s’écriait Manet. Est-ce que vous vous tenez ainsi quand vous allez acheter une botte de radis chez la fruitière?’ Un jour, Dubosc, qui avait plus que tout autre la conviction d’exercer un sacerdoce, prit de haut une observation de Manet . . . Monsieur Manet, articula Dubosc d’une voix étranglée par l’émotion, grâce à moi, il y en a plus d’un qui est allé à Rome.”

298. For the motif of the chin resting on the hand, see Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, 90; Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the*
History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art (Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1979), 286. I discuss this motif at greater length in the following chapter on Klimt’s Beethovenfries.

299. Rigaud, Dictionnaire d’argot moderne, 308, see note 118 above.


303. Ward, Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism, 128.

304. Félix Fénéon, “Le Néo-impressionnisme à la IVième exposition des artistes indépendants,” in idem, Oeuvres plus que complètes, 82–85, 84: “debout sur un carré de linge parsemé de pétales, les bras allongés et les mains unies, les yeux un peu contractés par la fatigue et l’extase de la pose.”


306. Shirley-Fox, Art Student’s Reminiscences, 185.


309. For extended analysis of Sallé’s painting, see Callen, “The Body and Difference,” 41–43; for the argument that Sallé’s composition in The Anatomy Class is based on Brouillet’s of Charcot, see Anthea Callen, “Doubles and Desire: Anatomies of Masculinity in the Later Nineteenth Century,” Art History 26, no. 5 (2003): 669–99, 672. Callen argues that the pairing of Charcot with the hysterical patient is replicated in “the mind/body, or more properly intellectual-sensual split . . . again figured in the Duval/model duality,” 694.

The circularity between the two pictures is furthered by the fact that Brouillet, who was a pupil in Jean-Léon Gérôme’s atelier at the École, based his composition of Charcot and the partially nude hysterical patient on imagery strongly associated with the artist’s model. Morlock provocatively proposes that Brouillet’s clinical portrait derived its composition from Gérôme’s Phryne before the Tribunal (1861), a canvas that makes obvious reference to the sensual
transaction between artist and female life model, and more loosely, from Courbet’s The Artist’s Studio, with Charcot here replacing Courbet “in the role of artist,” see Morlock, “The Very Picture of a Primal Scene,” 134.

310. Paul Richer was anatomy professor from 1903 to 1922; for his tenure, see Comar, “Une leçon,” 56–60.


quelque sorte en un automate parfaitement docile, sans raideur, auquel on peut implanter avec la plus grande facilité les poses les plus variées.”

316. Richer and de la Tourette, “Hypnotisme,” 89: “si les sculpteurs de l’antiquité ont fait poser comme modèles des femmes cataleptiques, bien certainement il s’agissait de la catalepsie que nous décrivons.”

317. Dollfus, Modèles d’Artistes, 301: “peut-être bien qu’un jour les modèles ne seront plus choisis que parmi les pensionnaires de la Salpêtrière. Ce jour-là, ce n’est plus moi que pourrais écrire une étude sur les ‘Modèles d’Artistes,’ je devrais passer la plume à un élève de M. Charcot.” He connects this prediction with an increasing aesthetic predilection for “nervous” figures in French art.

318. Dollfus, Modèles d’artistes, 21: “Regardez fixement un modèle debout depuis quelques instants sur la table de pose . . . Ne pensant pas, les yeux fixés dans le vague sans voir aucune chose, il s’engourdit, entend à peine. Quelques-uns trouvent positivement moyen de s’endormir, les yeux ouverts, et de repose ainsi. D’autres—il y en a plus d’un exemple—parviennent également au sommeil, mais au sommeil magnétique, à la catalepsie.”

319. Ward, Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism, 104.

320. French models were known for the coquettish practice of letting their petticoats drop around their feet, see Henri Detouche, Propos d’un peintre (Paris: Librairie de l’art indépendant, 1895), 46: “Les Françaises, avec une persistance de coquetterie invétérée, quand elles arrivent à l’arrachement du vêtement intime, baissant la tête pour entrouvrir, le laissent tomber, et la chemise glisse sur les seins; la hanche, qu’un petit mouvement de côté fait saillir, en retarde bien
un peu la chute, mais elle finit par tomber à terre et forme un piédestal improvisé.” Dollfus also alludes to this practice in *Modèles d’artistes*, 73–75.

321. It must be said that the face-to-face encounter *Poseuses* establishes, a kind of reciprocal mirroring between the standing figure and the standing viewer, is altogether lost in *Poseuses*’s high hanging position at the Barnes Foundation. My argument here depends to a large degree on my experience of viewing *Poseuses* at eye level.


Chapter 2: Beethoven’s Farewell: The *Beethovenfries*, 1902

I was remembering a time, when I was happy in the Paradise of the Gods of Olympus
But in the Secession’s Eden
I was terribly “lousy.”

Thus in “Beethoven’s Abschied,” a satirical poem in the magazine *Wiener Bilder* (fig. 3.1), the composer recounted his experience of being “excommunicated” to a “temple of modern art” on the occasion of the Fourteenth Exhibition of the Union of Austrian Artists, popularly known as the Vienna Secession. For some ten weeks in the spring of 1902, this new organization, devoted to propagating international modern art in Austria, held an exhibition to unveil Max Klinger’s *Beethoven-Denkmal*, a monumental sculpture just completed after seventeen years of labor (fig. 3.2). Hosted in the Secession’s recently constructed Kunsthalle (fig. 3.3) just off the Ringstraße—a hulking, white, windowless edifice, ornamented with stylized owls, snakes, and gorgons, crowned with an extravagant dome of gold foliage, now simply known as the Secession Building—the exhibition staged around Klinger’s sculpture was a manifesto for the association’s guiding artistic aspirations. The endeavor represented, as the Secessionists claimed in their catalogue, an attempt to produce art on par with “the highest and best that man has achieved in any time period.” Namely, to reconsecrate art to a lost ideal identified by the Secessionists as “monumental,” or more specifically “the art of the temple [Tempelkunst].”

The striking neo-primitive design of the Secession’s exhibition hall, based on a sketch (fig. 3.4) by the association’s founding president, the painter Gustav Klimt, and executed by the architect Joseph Maria Olbrich according to a plan partially inspired by the Temple of Segesta (ca. 420 BC), made obvious allusions to ancient sacred architecture. The building’s visual
incongruity with Vienna’s urban fabric, not to say its aura of sanctimonious self-importance, provoked some local residents to mock this “mysterious cult sanctuary for the new art” as the “Golden Cabbage,” the “Mahdi’s Tomb,” or the “Assyrian Toilet.” Klinger’s *Beethoven-Denkmal* (fig. 3.5) offered the Secessionists an opportunity to more explicitly assert the elevation of art to sacral status that their exhibition hall insinuated. A massive work in precious stone and colored marbles, it was inspired by Phidias’s chryselephantine cult statue of Zeus from the Temple at Olympia (ca. 470–457 BC) (fig. 3.6). The Fourteenth Exhibition, titled the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung*, transformed the modern art gallery into a quasi-religious shrine for Klinger’s cult-like statue of Beethoven.

The stated aim of the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung* was to create a “worthy frame” (*würdige Umrahmung*) for “the beautiful and serious homage Klinger offered to the great Beethoven.” Under the direction of the architect and designer Josef Hoffmann, the Secessionists reconfigured Olbrich’s gallery internally into a “modern three-nave temple in brick and roughcast plaster.” Twenty-six participating members then produced “painted and sculpted ornaments” to adorn this quasi-sacred interior, ranging from massive wall paintings and mosaics to small decorative plaques and sculptures. At the very center of this decorative constellation, they placed Klinger’s sculpture, which was meant to function as the exhibition’s “binding element” and serve, as the catalogue put it, “[to] give the enterprise consecration.”

“Beethoven’s Abschied”—the fanciful chronicle of the sculpted Beethoven’s experience at the center of this so-called “Beethoven temple”—vividly testifies to some of the contradictions this enterprise raised with respect to the status of the human subject purportedly deified within its decorative ambiance. Although the Secessionists claimed to be restoring art to a “higher,” more sacred purpose, promoting their exhibition as a “space of consecration, a temple ambiance for
one who has become a God,” their veneration of both art itself, and the individual artist, through the decorative activity of Tempelkunst, was also recognized to be a degradation—of art as such and, more specifically, of Beethoven.12

The “Beethoven” given voice in the pages of the Wiener Bilder recounted his experience of the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung as a fall from divine status, a descent from “the Paradise of the Gods of Olympus” down to the decidedly earthbound realm of the “Secession’s Eden.” This Eden, as “Beethoven” experienced it, was an eminently demeaning, even sickening environment. The “disfigured walls” (verunzierten Mauern) inside the Secession’s temple petrified the poor musician, and, even worse, rendered him silent: “I turned to stone / trying to resist the horror. . . . I still don’t dare to make a sound / standing in front of all those impudent art ornaments” (schnoddrigen Kunstzierath).13

Deploying here the term Zierath (now spelled Zierrat in modern German) that Immanuel Kant equated with the word parergon, “Beethoven’s” complaint suggests the degree to which the framing parerga of “painted and sculpted ornaments” at the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung visually overwhelmed Klinger’s monument.14 This eclipse of the central ergon (ἔργον, work) in the “Beethoven temple” by “impudent art ornaments” can be understood to stand, in a larger sense, for the inversion of a range of entrenched hierarchical binaries at the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung—God and animal, sacred and profane, high and low, ergon and parergon. That inversion took form, most fundamentally, in the exhibition’s undermining of the priorities of a Kantian aesthetic philosophy, premised upon the priority of “reflection” over “mere sensation,” or the essential disinterestedness of all human judgment that might properly be called “aesthetic.”15
The *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung* took place at a moment when a range of recent or just-emerging disciplines—from evolutionary biology, to art history, to psychoanalysis—were starting to discredit the received wisdom that “art obviously represented—or so one thought—a higher stage of intellectual evolution,” as the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl put it in the introduction to his *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament* in 1893. The Secessionists’ ornamental frame for the *Beethoven-Denkmal* seemed to materialize, and to revel in, this new, deintellectualized conception of artistic creativity. For that reason, the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung* challenged the terms of Klinger’s celebration of Beethoven. In their visual insistence on decoration as the expression of the most elementary of human or even animal drives, the Secessionists cast into twilight the quasi-divine paradigm of the artist that the *Beethoven-Denkmal* was seen to have “crystallized,” that of the “Genius as Type.”

The title of the satirical address, “Beethoven’s Abschied,” although specifically referencing the departure of Klinger’s monument from Vienna at the close of the exhibition, can also be read metaphorically, as an acknowledgement of the demise of the ideal of the artist embodied by Beethoven. The apotheosis of Beethoven, as staged by the Secession, was also a kind of *Götzendämmerung* (Twilight of Idols)—to borrow a phrase Friedrich Nietzsche coined in mocking reference to Richard Wagner’s opera *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods) (1876). At a moment when the popularization of evolutionary theory had given the lie to the enduring metaphor of God as an artist or “Supreme Designer,” and when Freud would soon advance psychoanalytic readings of art that would “unmask” what Sarah Kofman has described as “a theological conception of art”—the notion of the work of art as the artifact of “an autonomous, conscious subject who was the father of his works, as God was of creation”—the Fourteenth Exhibition challenged Klinger’s vision of Beethoven as an artist deity, visibly laden with the
weight of his creative consciousness. The Secession’s decorative “frame” for the *Beethoven-Denkmal*—most pointedly, Gustav Klimt’s monumental contribution—venerated an opposing ideal of the creative subject as a biological being whose creations originate from instinctual drives and unconscious thought processes.

**The Aim of Artistic Integration**

During its roughly two-month duration, the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung* received more visitors (nearly sixty thousand) than any other exhibition in the eight-year existence of the Secession (1897–1905) (fig. 3.7). Today, it is remembered as the organization’s signature project, and, more broadly, as an event that “concentrated and summed up the whole conceptual world of Art Nouveau.” Indeed, the event represented a programmatic attempt to realize an ideal vital across the interlinked aesthetic orbits of Symbolism, Art Nouveau, and Jugendstil around 1900, when, as the architect and designer Henry van de Velde put it, “ornamentality suddenly appeared . . . as the unsuspected womb whose blood nourished all [artistic] creations.” At this moment, there was a widespread longing (or *Sehnsucht,* to use an untranslatable term designating a main “leitmotif” or “key situation” of Art Nouveau) to return to a primordial, decorative conception of the artwork, understood to have declined under the modern Beaux-Arts system. This yearning manifested itself simultaneously in efforts to level hierarchical distinctions between the “Fine” and the “Applied” arts, and to reconceptualize the “Fine Arts” of painting and sculpture on a newly decorative basis.

Although bringing together the “higher arts” and the “minor arts” had been central to the Secession’s mission since its founding in 1897, the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung* represented a bid to more thoroughly realize that aim. Conceived to fulfill the “longing” (*Sehnsucht*) of the
Secession “for a great task which would lead them beyond the usual daubing and picture-painting,” this exhibition departed categorically from the Salon paradigm that had guided the Secession’s previous thirteen exhibitions, or Bilderausstellungen, as the catalogue to the Fourteenth Exhibition dismissively called them. While these previous exhibitions had embraced a self-consciously “artistic and modern” approach to installation, seeking to create harmonious unity between the display space and exhibited art objects, the experimental effort of the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung allowed the Secessionists to realize “a more unified space” in which the autonomous “Fine Art” media of painting and sculpture would no longer be a primary focus, but would rather “serve to decorate” (schmücken) the main focus, “the spatial concept.”

Despite the centrality Klinger’s statue assumed within the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung, the catalogue’s introductory text made clear that the decision to transform the gallery into a unified decorative environment had in fact preceded the decision to stage an unveiling of the Beethoven-Denkmal. Recognizing that Tempelkunst required a “binding” element, some object or idea for consecration, the Secessionists had gone in search of a “fantastic work of art” that might appropriately serve this function. The Beethoven-Denkmal was thus a foil for the Secessionists to engage in the decorative activity of Tempelkunst. As a pretext, however, Klinger’s monument was an ideal one.

More than simply an homage to Beethoven, the Beethoven-Denkmal was a sculptural manifesto for a lost ideal Klinger defined as Raumkunst. In his treatise Malerei und Zeichnung from 1891, excerpted in the catalogue of the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung, Klinger had argued that art’s “ideal, highest task” was “the transformation of a space into an artwork.” This ideal had been achieved, he asserted, in “great epochs of the past,” when the three arts (architecture, painting, sculpture) worked collectively to create unified spatial environments.
Klinger’s argument for a revalorization of the decorative ideals embodied in Raumkunst took its inspiration from two related models—ancient polychromy, and the modern operatic Gesamtkunstwerk, the total work of art integrating disparate media, advanced in the writings and theatrical productions of the German composer Richard Wagner. Through both its colorful materials and its subject, the Beethoven-Denkmal explicitly referenced both of these models. Klinger, who asserted that the “concerted interplay of all the visual arts” in Raumkunst was the visual equivalent to what “Wagner was striving for and attained in his music dramas,” was undoubtedly aware that Wagner esteemed Beethoven as the “Evangel” of the Gesamtkunstwerk because he had taken the unprecedented step of incorporating human voice into symphonic form in the Ninth Symphony, and in so doing, elevated music to the realm of a “universal art.” 27 By rendering Wagner’s “Evangel” in a form that simulated a chryselephantine cult object, the Beethoven-Denkmal forged a link between the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk and its ancient visual exemplar.

Wagner’s evangelism in favor of “the redemption of the egoistically severed humanistic arts into the collective Artwork of the Future” was considerably influenced by the theories of the architect Gottfried Semper, whose unrealized design for a Munich opera house for Wagner provided the template for the eventual Festspielhaus in Bayreuth. 28 Semper’s writings on art and architecture contributed to the much wider reconceptualization of the origins and functions of the arts that had been sparked by Quatremère de Quincy’s landmark study of 1815 on Phidias’s chryselephantine Zeus, which emphasized previously ignored evidence of the polychromy of ancient Greek sculpture (see fig. 3.6). 29 Quatremère’s stress on antiquity’s preference for colored sculptures—a feature perceived as “barbaric” by many modern European viewers accustomed to “the venerable vergine of antique sculptures”—prompted a range of theorists in nineteenth-
century Europe to lay new stress upon the ornamental origin of painting and sculpture, and the genesis of these arts within the context of lavishly decorated temple interiors. Semper held up ancient temple decoration as the primordial “quintessence” of art, and as a form in which the arts had “collaborated so closely . . . that their boundaries completely dissolved and merged into one another.” The “dissolution” of the “intimately connected” arts in modernity, he argued, represented an “enfeeblement or degeneration” of art.

The presentation of Klinger’s Beethoven-Denkmal seemed to require a return to Semper’s “quintessence” of art. Because of the sheer costliness and delicacy of its materials, the work precluded any possibility of display outside, demanding some subsuming architectural environment. As one critic aptly put it, in producing the sculpture, Klinger had acted as a “king who built for his God an agalma, for the cella of a temple yet to be built.” As a project that sought to realize the “temple” the Beethoven-Denkmal called out for, and more broadly to dissolve the disparate arts into a collective enterprise of interior decoration, the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung has often been described as a visual Gesamtkunstwerk. Yet despite their mutual investment in integrating the arts through the decorative ideal of Raum- or Tempelkunst, Klinger and the Secessionists failed to convincingly cohere the exhibition around its stated aim of providing a “worthy frame” for the monument. If, as Carl Schorske has described it, the exhibition was “a Gesamtkunstwerk of aestheticized inwardness,” it was one riven with internal tensions, rivalries, and contradictions, not least around the question of the nature of the psychological “inwardness” it celebrated.
Klinger’s Beethoven / Klimt’s Beethoven

The press described the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung as a “strange exhibition” that “contain[ed] only one work,” for which “all the other creations by artists serve only the decorative embellishment.” At the same time, however, a striking aspect of its reception was the degree to which one work from among the Secessionists’s many framing embellishments “overshadowed” the exhibition “as a Gesamtkunstwerk,” and much more pointedly, overshadowed the sculptural monument that was supposed to be its centerpiece.

Josef Hoffmann, the architect responsible for the layout of the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung, described the project as a “self-sacrificing activity,” demanding that the contributing Secessionists relinquish the egotism of authorship in deference to Klinger’s monument. As he explained in the catalogue, the Secessionists’ “painted and sculpted ornaments” had been distributed around the three main halls of the “temple” with the express aim of preventing any element from drawing attention away from the Beethoven-Denkmal, which was shown enthroned on an octagonal podium in the center of the central hall (see fig. 3.2). Complementing this posture of self-effacement was the feigned anonymity of the Secessionists’ decorations, which were labeled with abstracted monograms, as if to simulate the namelessness of craftsmen or long-dead ancient artists. (The catalogue, however, included a legend (fig. 3.8) that rendered the monograms, and the corresponding authors, readily decipherable.)

Integral to this “self-sacrificing” posture was also the supposed ephemerality of the decorative environment the Secessionists had created. While it was widely assumed that the Austrian state would purchase the Beethoven-Denkmal after the close of the exhibition (a possibility that raised considerable public debate, and never actually happened), there was a widespread public misperception that the accompanying “painted and sculpted ornaments”
would be destroyed when the exhibition terminated.\textsuperscript{40} Even though the final page of the exhibition catalogue provided information on how to purchase the decorative works, the Secessionists seem to have encouraged this misperception. No less than Hermann Bahr, literary advisor to the Secession, invoked the possibility of imminent destruction in the press.\textsuperscript{41} The idea served the Secessionists’ overarching pretense of \textit{Tempelkunst} as a “self-sacrificing activity,” symbolically converting their ornamental artworks into sacrificial offerings to the Beethoven monument.

Although the Secessionists encouraged the perception that, as one reviewer articulated it, they regarded the \textit{Beethoven-Denkmal} “as so immeasurably superior to any other of the contributed art works that it was . . . both just and expedient to subordinate everything else to this masterpiece,” one “painted ornament” from the Secessionists’ decorative framework came to dominate the exhibition, both physically in its design, and discursively in its reception.\textsuperscript{42} Klimt, the painter-president of the Secession, had been assigned by Hoffmann—or had assigned himself, perhaps—a prime location. He was granted more space than any other participant: three full walls in the first room entered in the course of the exhibition’s choreographed itinerary (figs. 3.9, 3.10). For this inaugural hall of the exhibition, Klimt created a continuous mural traversing a length of one hundred and twelve feet in a band seven-feet high, wound around the top edge of the three walls (figs. 3.11–3.13). Described in the catalogue as a suite of “ornamented plaster surfaces” (\textit{ornamentierte Putzflächen}), Klimt’s mural deployed a new, self-consciously ornamental painting technique, while simultaneously appropriating Beethoven’s chef d’oeuvre as its subject, unfolding a narrative figural composition loosely approximating the arc of the Ninth Symphony, which had been considered, since its premiere in Vienna seventy-eight years prior, the pinnacle of the composer’s achievement.\textsuperscript{43}
Klimt was already notorious in Viennese society after the unveiling, in 1900 and 1901 respectively, of *Philosophie* and *Medizin*, two allegorical pictures of the faculties of higher learning, commissioned in 1894 by the University of Vienna. Klimt’s unconventional realization of these allegories had provoked a large segment of the faculty to petition for their rejection, a move adamantly opposed by small group of the painter’s ardent supporters. After the opening of the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung*, Klimt’s so-called *Beethovenfries* was repeatedly singled out for both praise and condemnation. “Beethoven’s Abschied,” for instance, appeared above a border parodying the horizontally outstretched female figures that formed the principal leitmotif of Klimt’s frieze (compare figs. 3.1 and 3.11). In the satirical poem, the appalled composer’s description of the “disfigured walls” he encountered at the Secession clearly referenced these allegorical figures in Klimt’s *ornamentierte Putzflächen*, or as “Beethoven” called them, the “ultramodern shrews” that “threaten[ed] gruesomely . . . from the walls.”

For critics hostile to the Secession, the “three frescoed walls [Klimt] had ‘decorated’”—a number of reviewers placed the phrase “decoration” in quotations for derisive emphasis—defiled the very concept of art. The *Beethovenfries* was deemed suitable for “some ethnographic museum,” for an “underground location where pagan orgies were celebrated,” for the “ladies side of a bathhouse built in the modern taste for Nineveh,” but not for a museum in “civilized,” “Christian” Vienna, in the advanced year of 1902, no less. At the same time, many positive reviews of the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung* pointed to the *Beethovenfries* as its crowning achievement. The two primary critical spokesmen for the Secession, Bahr and Ludwig Hevesi, celebrated Klimt’s mural as a “masterpiece” on a par with Klinger’s *Beethoven-Denkmal* in aesthetic significance. Both writers immediately began campaigning in the press against its destruction after the close of the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung*, urging Austrians to come
together to resist the eventuality that, as Hevesi put it, “a masterpiece would go up in smoke on the altar of Beethoven.”

Hevesi’s language suggests quite pointedly the degree to which the Beethovenfries resisted the exhibition’s “sacrificial” economy, asserting itself as a “painted ornament” on an equal footing with Klinger’s sculpture, or perhaps even with Beethoven’s music. That Klimt’s frieze ultimately became, in Gottfried Fiedl’s words, “the principal memento of the most famous of all Secession exhibitions,” confirms that initial sense of insubordination. Although designed to appear as an ancient fresco or mosaic, integral to the wall and architecture, the Beethovenfries was in fact executed in situ on detachable panels that only simulated the wall’s plaster surface—a decision Klimt clearly made with an eye toward the work’s future preservation beyond the short duration of the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung. The mural was covered and left in place after the close of the exhibition, and then unveiled again for Klimt’s solo exhibition at the Secession in 1903, and finally removed to storage after its purchase on that occasion. Acquired by the Austrian state in the 1970s (under now-contested terms), the Beethovenfries was restored and reinstalled at the Secession in 1986 (fig. 3.14), in a specially constructed room matching the dimensions of its original antechamber at the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung. Since then, it has become one of the most popular artifacts of fin-de-siècle modernism found in any European museum, while Klinger’s sculpture, now in the collection of the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig (fig. 3.15), has been “largely forgotten.”

I stress the divergent legacies of the Beethoven-Denkmal and the Beethovenfries because they are symptomatic of a conflict that was already intrinsic to the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung in 1902. The exhibition was received to an extent as a confrontation between two “masterpieces”—Klimt’s frieze and Klinger’s monument—even despite its self-stylization as a
collective Gesamtkunstwerk. That Klimt and Klinger shared the head of the table on the evening of the exhibition’s opening banquet encapsulates the parity, or even rivalry, set up between the painter and the sculptor. The sense of contention between Klinger’s and Klimt’s works has importance beyond its indication of the personal tensions inherent in the “self-sacrificing” activity of Tempelkunst, or the difficulty of undoing the dominance of the “higher arts” of painting and sculpture in European aesthetic culture. More fundamentally, this contention stemmed from the two competing visions of Beethoven offered by the Beethovenfries and the Beethoven-Denkmal. If Klimt can be said to have ultimately “won” this competition, generating the work that would become the “principal memento” of the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung, it was because his vision of Beethoven more closely aligned with contemporary comprehensions of the human subject’s capacities for artistic creation and appreciation.

“Poisoning” Beethoven

The Secessionists’ decorative frame contained an embedded challenge to Klinger’s Beethoven-Denkmal, residing in the very different ways in which Klinger and the Secessionists conceptualized decoration as a distinctive mode of artistic production. As Anna Celenza has argued, it “appears obvious to us now” that there was a “discontinuity between Klinger’s musically inspired statue and the rest of the artworks in the exhibition.” Although this discontinuity is infrequently noted, as Celenza suggests, it is plainly visible in the works produced to frame the Beethoven-Denkmal. The Secessionists went far beyond Klinger in adopting ornamentality as a new formal principle, governing not only the use of materials, but also figural composition.
As the critic Joseph Lux described it, the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung crystallized the Secessionists’s new decorative style, one in which “the memory of nature, of the model, of anything human dissolves, shattered in a purely ornamental, almost geometric form in which the human body’s contours are only schematically indicated.”54 The poster for the exhibition (fig. 3.16), which notably eschewed any visual references to either Klinger or Beethoven, programmatically demonstrated this new figural approach. It reproduced the leitmotif repeated in the inlaid, stenciled mural Die sinkende Nacht, which Alfred Roller had created to decorate the wall behind the Beethoven-Denkmal (see fig. 3.2). This mural, Hevesi provocatively asserted, “signified the humanization of ornament.”55 If Roller’s poster and wall decoration can be seen to stand for that operation, we could say that the “humanization of ornament” entailed incorporating the human figure’s integral boundaries into a larger field of pattern, conventionalizing the figure into a schematic silhouette, and abandoning foreshortening and obliquity so that the figure’s body parts align at right angles to an ornamented surface—for Roller’s design presented the schematic, silhouetted profile of a naked, footless female body partially obscured beneath a superimposed pattern of stylized evil eyes, its head and torso neatly contained within a rectangle and half-circle.

With a visage directly modeled from Franz Klein’s life cast of Beethoven from 1812 (fig. 3.17), the Beethoven-Denkmal instead conveyed an adherence to what the art historian Julius Meier-Graefe derided in 1905 as Klinger’s “cheap anthropomorphism.”56 The “ornamental” status of Klinger’s sculpture was largely confined to its use of materials. Klinger spent years, and more than one hundred and fifty thousand marks of his personal fortune, gathering rare colored marbles and semi-precious stones for his simulated chryselephantine idol.57 His life-size figure of Beethoven, sculpted in the nude, wearing Grecian sandals, sits with an onyx mantle spread
over his lap, and an amber-eyed, black marble eagle perched at its feet, confirming the work’s obvious allusion to the Phidian Zeus. Klinger positioned the figure on a massive bronze throne inlaid on its inner side with a mosaic of opals, agate, jasper, mother-of-pearl and gold, capping it with five angel-heads sculpted in rare African ivory. He placed the throne atop a ragged slab of purplish marble, suggesting a position atop a rocky precipice—Mount Olympus, perhaps.

Yet Klinger deviated crucially from the ancient practices of sculptural polychromy to which his monument alluded. Abandoning an initial plan to render the figure of Beethoven in colored materials (fig. 3.18), he ultimately restricted these to the supplementary surroundings of the composer’s face and body.58 These decorative materials orbited around a naturalistically modeled marble effigy of the composer, one that retained the achromatic whiteness that—despite being unmasked by Quatremère, Semper, and others as a historical fiction—still remained a privileged sign for the mimetic ideals embodied in classical statues. When Klinger produced a second version of the Beethoven-Denkmal for the Wittgenstein family (fig. 3.19), he condensed the monument to the composer’s white marble torso, a gesture that made explicit the degree to which he still conceptualized this sculpture, at its core, according to conventions established by a fine art tradition that upheld a hierarchical division between ergon and parergon, form and color, figure and ornament.

The formal divergence between Klinger’s statue and the decorations surrounding it created a sense of dissonance in mood or tone that dismayed many viewers in 1902. There was, as one critic described it, “a hiatus between the soulful character of [Klinger’s] musician” and the “quasi-mortuary chapel, in the decoration of which the [Secessionists] reveled in gruesome conceits.”59 Karl Kraus, one of the Secession’s most fervent and biting critics, alongside the architect Adolf Loos, stressed this “hiatus” with particular vehemence. For Kraus, Klinger’s
sculpture exuded an “inner life of utmost tension” (*aufs höchste gespannten inneren Leben*) that was fundamentally incompatible with the decorative environment that “the Secession gentlemen thought appropriate to daub on its behalf.”60 He likened the interior of the Secession’s “temple” to that of a well-known Berlin variety theater (fig. 3.20), designed by the Jugendstil architect August Endell, referred to variously as the *Buntes Theater* (Motley Theater, or, literally, Colorful Theater) or the *Überbrettl* (Superstage), in playful homage to Nietzsche’s concept of the *Übermensch*.61 Kraus’s allusion sardonically pinpointed some of the key terms in the Secession’s visual and philosophical vocabularies, while implying that the Jugendstil and Nietzschean inspirations for their homage to Beethoven had the effect of trivializing the composer. Indeed, Kraus humorously implied that Beethoven—the crowning figure of the artistic period known as the *Wiener Klassik*, and of “classical music” as it would come to be known more generically—had been reduced to the role of a cabaret entertainer on the stage of the Secession’s *Buntes Theater*.62

Kraus singled out Klimt’s *Beethovenfries* as the work that played the primary role in trivializing the *Beethoven-Denkmal*. Because the visitor to the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung* had to pass through the room adorned with Klimt’s “superficial allegories with their shallow materialistic punch lines,” Kraus argued, he or she arrived at the statue with their “soul and aesthetic perception poisoned.”63 I shall return to Kraus’s notion that Klimt’s mural conveyed a “materialistic punch line.” For now, I simply want to stress that many critics of the exhibition echoed his perception that the Secessionists’ decorative frame for the *Beethoven-Denkmal*, and in particular Klimt’s contribution, sullied the subject honored in the exhibition. Seeing Beethoven “in the claws of the Secession,” one reviewer wrote, was like seeing “something beloved and sublime dragged into the dust.”64 This sense of soiling at times even carried
scatological undertones. Eduard Pötzl, playing upon the similarities the Viennese public had perceived between Olbrich’s Secession building and an “Assyrian Public Toilet” (assyrische Bedürfnisanstalt), mocked that the Secessionists “could think of no greater honor for Beethoven than to relocate him to the middle of an ancient Assyrian bathhouse,” an environment that seemed to celebrate the notion that the composer had been a mudlark (Schmutzfink).65

A Pondering God of Thunder

The way that Klimt “poisoned” the ideal of Beethoven as a subject instilled with, as Kraus put it, an “inner life of utmost tension,” comes into focus most clearly if we compare the different means Klimt and Klinger employed for conveying the human figure’s postural, gestural language. In the previous chapter on Seurat’s Poseuses, I discussed the artist’s quotation and travesty of a specific classical statue—Polyeuktos’s monument to the orator Demosthenes, erected in the Athenian agora circa 280 BC. According to the classicist Paul Zanker, the novel corporeal disposition of this sculpture heralded a new tendency in classical culture to idolize “superior intellectual power.”66 The Beethoven-Denkmal, which Klinger’s friend Paul Hartwig analogized to the Demosthenes statue in 1903, notably figures in Zanker’s sweeping study of “the image of the intellectual in antiquity” as the key exemplar of the exhaustion in modernity of a long, classically-rooted tradition of monumentalizing the “intellectual hero.”67

Identifying the Beethoven-Denkmal as the prime example of a type of late nineteenth-century monument that “rendered the apotheosis of the great mind in such exaggerated form that, not just for modern taste, it verges on the ridiculous,” Zanker regards Klinger’s sculpture as the product of a moment when the “great mind” became a notion “utterly divorced from the present.”68 At the turn of the century, he argued, the image of the “intellectual hero” became an
artifact of the past, or, more precisely, a subject purely for art, with “no certain function in the real world.” “Unlike the Hellenistic monuments that they may seem to evoke, and despite all their mighty pathos,” monuments such as the Beethoven-Denkmal carried “no weight as cultural artifacts and [did] not express any values with which the society around them could identify.”

The juxtaposition of Klimt’s mural with Klinger’s “pondering god of thunder,” as Otto Julius Bierbaum identified the Beethoven-Denkmal, is exemplary of this moment when monumentalizations of the “intellectual hero” began to lose their “weight as cultural artifacts,” to use Zanker’s apt terminology. While Klinger’s sculpture exploited figural conventions reaching back to antiquity in order to render the “greatness” of intellectual activity, the Beethovenfries conspicuously transgressed, or even inverted, those conventions by means of a decorative mode of posturing the human body. Evoking realms of mind beyond the “grasp” of intellect—or psychic states unburdened from conscious thought’s metaphorical “weight” or “gravity”—Klimt’s decorative disposition of his figures conveyed a devaluation of “pondering” as a privileged mental activity, and more specifically as one understood to play a privileged role in artistic creativity.

First conceived in 1885 during Klinger’s sojourn in Paris, the Beethoven-Denkmal worked from within, or perhaps at the limit of, an inherited language of classically derived expressive gestures. It shares this feature with the sculpture many viewers around the turn of the century recognized as its complement, and perhaps its inspiration—Auguste Rodin’s The Thinker (Le Penseur) (composed 1880–81) (fig. 3.21). This sculpture of a nude seated male, a universalized figuration of the poet Dante, first created to top the tympanum of the Porte de l’Enfer (1880–1917) (fig. 3.22), resonates deeply with Klinger’s sculpture as an analogous effort
to monumentalize a revered artist-hero in the throes of creative contemplation, in a form that appears to many today (as it did already for certain viewers around 1900) as a “visual cliché.”

In terms of sculptural technique, Klinger and Rodin could hardly be more different, and Rodin had nothing but contempt for Klinger’s forays into the medium. (Klinger’s considerable fame was due primarily to his prolific work as a graphic artist, notably for the thirteen series of prints he published beginning in 1881 with the now famous cycle *Ein Handschuh*). After visiting the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung* in 1902, Rodin issued a singularly withering assessment of the *Beethoven-Denkmal*, stating that it was, “a wonderful work, one should make a million copies from it. But it’s got nothing to do with sculpture . . .” Still, something about the monument summoned Rodin for turn-of-the-century viewers. After seeing the *Beethoven-Denkmal* installed at the Secession, Franz Servaes asserted that Rodin was the only artist to whom Klinger might be compared, because in each of their works, as he put it, “we sense the same spiritual depth.” It is on this basis that we might align Klinger’s *Beethoven-Denkmal* and Rodin’s *Penseur*—as two works that conveyed “spiritual depth” in the form of a figure recognized as engaged in a profound contemplative state. And it is relevant that both works, despite obvious formal and conceptual divergences, figured this state of contemplation by exploiting certain preexisting corporeal conventions for expressing the inner activities of the intellect, notably, a clenched hand, a weighted head, and a seated posture.

Like Rodin’s *Penseur*, the *Beethoven-Denkmal* elicited a hyperbolically thought-focused rhetoric from viewers. One admiring critic wrote of Klinger’s composer, “a world operates in him, a world of thoughts.” This interior “world of thoughts” was deduced from the pose of the sculpted figure. In the words of one art historian, “Beethoven’s gesture is just about the simplest gesture of thoughtfulness.” As noted above, Paul Hartwig, an archaeologist and antiquities
dealer who became close to Klinger during his sojourn in Rome (1888–93), compared the
Beethoven-Denkmal to the Demosthenes figure, noting that the monument deployed the gesture
of manual grasping used in Polyeuktos’s sculpture, reiterating “the artistic idea of conveying the
inner storm of an agitated soul through hands firmly clasped against any contact with the outside
world.” 78

“How he sits!” Hevesi exclaimed of Klinger’s sculpture, noting that its posture evoked
“precisely that raccoglimento” (contemplation) that “Donatello knew how to show . . . the whole
figure is like that right hand’s clenched fist, an expression of the highest mental concentration”
(fig. 3.23). 79 Hevesi proclaimed, “it is the originary gesture of the individual” (Es ist die
Urgebärde des Individuums). 80 The closed fist, as noted in the previous chapter, symbolized
mental comprehension for the Stoic philosophers. In the case of Klinger’s Beethoven, the
exaggerated size of the fist was singled out for mockery in the popular press (fig. 3.24). Hevesi’s
observation that Beethoven’s stooped body exhibits in every aspect of its posture the tension of
this “clenched fist” suggests that Klinger’s portrayal of the composer, like Rodin’s Penseur,
hyperbolized the inherited convention, stretching back to antiquity, for indicating a state of
intellectual exertion through a clenching or grasping hand gesture. Indeed, Hevesi’s praise for
the way the figure’s entire body signifies as a “clenched fist” recalls Rodin’s description some
years later of his Penseur: “what makes my Thinker think is that he thinks not only with his
brain, his knitted brow, distended nostrils, and compressed lips, but with every muscle in his
arms, back, and legs, with his clenched fist and gripping toes.” 81

In addition to emphasizing the “clenching” disposition of the figure, whether through the
gesture of a hand or the extension of that manual tension to the figure’s body, both the Penseur
and the Beethoven-Denkmal signified “thought” by exploiting an established formal association
between intellectual and physical ponderation, imparting to their sedentary figures a sense of physical weight and conveying the downward force of gravity. Significant, the depiction of corporeal weight as such was recognized as foundational to the illusion of consciousness in figural art in the nineteenth century. As noted in the previous chapter, Julius Lange’s study of the laws of primitive figuration identified the invention of contrapposto—a pose which, for the first time in the history of art, presented the figure as if shifting the weight of the body from one foot to the other—as the moment when art first began to portray a human being that appeared imbued with an alert, autonomous “interior center,” or moi. Writing in 1892, Lange dated this pose to the 5th century BC. The emergence, subsequently, of conventions for signifying a specifically “pondering,” or contemplative “interior center” can be seen to have built upon this association between inner psychology and the external expression of the physical weight of the figure’s body.

“The motif of the drooping head,” as it was termed by Fritz Saxl, Raymond Klibansky, and Erwin Panofsky, was a conventional mode for signifying thought in Western art over millennia. Crystallized in Greece in the early third century BC (fig. 3.25), this motif underwent “a renaissance” in European art in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, culminating in Albrecht Dürer’s iconic print Melencholia I (1514) (fig. 3.26), which firmly established the convention of denoting a human figure’s engagement in intellectual activity through visually emphasizing the physical heaviness of the head.

Rodin’s Penseur, whose head rests on his fist, propped up in turn by an elbow on the knee, operates within this long iconographic tradition of the “drooping head.” Klinger’s Beethoven-Denmal does as well, if somewhat less overtly. The body of the sculpted composer appears “bowed . . . [with a] massive inclined head,” his shoulders hunched, head projecting
forward as if the neck had buckled beneath its weight. The sense of heaviness Klinger imparted to Beethoven’s head and body reverberated in the massiveness of the Beethoven-Denkmal altogether. The sculpture’s exorbitant weight—around four thousand kilograms, at one point erroneously reported to be twelve thousand—was a topic of much speculation in the press coverage of the exhibition.

“The motif of the drooping head,” as it appeared in Hellenistic statuary or in Dürer’s complex allegory, was not a neutral motif. Whether deployed to signify the “rigors of thinking” revered by ancient Greek culture, or the “conscious sorrow of a human being wrestling with problems” embodied by Dürer’s melancholy artist-geometer, the drooping head dignified thought by visualizing its difficulty, conveying the literal onus it placed upon the individual who exercised his capacity for conscious exertion of his intellectual faculties. The degree to which this complex of associations could be tied to a particular heroic narrative about “man” as a being whose “glory” was defined by his unique capacity for “highest mental concentration,” found a succinct formulation in a quatrain Arthur Symons composed for a hypothetical plaque for the monumental Penseur upon its erection in 1906 outside the Paris Panthéon (fig. 3.27): “Out of eternal bronze and mortal breath / And to the glory of man, me Rodin wrought / Before the gates of glory and of death / I bear the burden of the pride of thought.”

Presenting Beethoven as a mortal human who had ascended or was ascending to divine status, to a perch on Mount Olympus, on the basis of his “highest mental concentration,” the Beethoven-Denkmal was a work that celebrated the equation of “the glory of man” with “the burden of the pride of thought.” Indeed, one might suggest that Klinger’s monument glorified the creative artist’s capacity for thought in a form far more triumphal, or less challenging, than Rodin’s Penseur. While Klinger rendered the composer as a slightly over life-size, monumental
figure, Rodin conceived the *Penseur* as a twenty-seven-inch figure, to be placed above the twenty-foot doors of the *Porte de l’Enfer* (see fig. 3.22). Within this context, as Debora Silverman has argued, the *Penseur* was embedded within a dualistic structure that represented the artist’s creative process in terms of an explicit conflict between “thought and instinct, conscious order and unconscious dissolution,” a dualism expressed through a “division between upper figure and lower forms.”

Poised precipitously on the edge of the horizontal shelf of the tympanum, the figure of the *Penseur* on the *Porte de l’Enfer* represented a force that was “conscious and form giving,” regulating and mediating the “instinctual and unharnessed” impulses embodied in the writhing bodies arrayed across the surface of the vertical doors beneath it.

Although that explicitly dualistic structure was lost in the isolated, enlarged version of the *Penseur* Rodin first decided to create in 1901, the figure’s form itself internalizes that sense of tension, or even reciprocity, between thought and instinct, upper and lower. Rodin’s remark, quoted above, that his *Penseur* “thinks not only with his brain” but also with his “gripping toes,” echoed Rainer Maria Rilke’s description of the figure as “the one who sits, thinking with his entire body.” These statements articulate how Rodin exceeded the same conventions for signifying thought that the *Penseur* also perpetuated, figuring a mode of “thinking” that might be extended from the “drooping head,” the privileged locus of the brain, or the clenching hand, the organ that signified by tradition as the brain’s bodily surrogate, to the figure’s “entire body,” indeed down to its “gripping toes.” Rodin thus figured creative “thought” in the *Penseur* as a bodily as much as an intellectual activity.

“The fertile thought slowly elaborates itself in his brain. He is no longer a dreamer, he is a creator,” Rodin wrote of *Le Penseur*. While the artist conceived this sculpture as a
representation of a heroic “creator,” its mode of signifying “fertile thought” with the entire body could also be seen to undermine the dignity of intellectual activity. The vaguely “excremental effect” evoked by Rodin’s figure, derided by certain viewers as a “symbol of Thought in [the] attitude of a constipated man exerting himself on a chamber pot,” emblematizes how the Penseur maintained a set of inherited conventions for signifying “the pride of thought” at the same time that it pursued a set of grossly physical metaphors for the creative process, locating “fertile thought” less in the brain than in “lower” bodily processes that were, so to speak, productive.95

As Albert Elsen notes, Le Penseur was one of the last works in which Rodin employed conventional “poses from art history.”96 The sculptor’s transformation of this inherited language of “poses from art history” finds particularly vivid expression in the work that might be described as the Penseur’s successor: Rodin’s monument to Honoré de Balzac (1891–98), author of an epic Comédie humaine inspired by Dante’s Divina Commedia.

Rodin’s Balzac transformed the corporeal conventions employed in Le Penseur to signify thought in a number of crucial aspects.97 Conceived from the first as a standing rather than seated figure, the Balzac took its final form from a study of the author (fig. 3.28) standing with his hand clenched around his erect penis.98 Rodin retained a strong suggestion of that posture in the final monument, which cloaked the towering verticality of Balzac’s body beneath a billowing monk’s robe that bulges distinctly in the groin area (fig. 3.29). As a symbolic expression of Balzac’s “fertile thought,” this gesture of a hand gripped around the aroused genitals evokes and transforms the “clenched fist” motif, and displaces the point of manual contact associated with the “drooping head” propped up on a fist or palm. Balzac’s gesture can be seen to point, with an almost pantomimic vividness, to a physical and conceptual displacement of the locus of creative potency, or “fertile thought,” from above to below, from the
head to the genitals. Further, that displacement was coupled to a repudiation of the metaphorical “burden” of thought expressed through the head’s heaviness. Balzac’s head, Rilke noted, appears to “crown this figure like those spheres which dance upon the jets of fountains.” Indeed, as the poet declared of the Balzac, “all heaviness had become light.”

That Rodin’s new corporeal vocabulary for the creative thinker as monumentalized in Balzac could be seen as an assault upon the “pride of thought” is evident in the decision of the Société des Gens de Lettres to reject the statue and reassign the commission to Jean Alexandre Joseph Falguière. In 1902, the Société erected Falguière’s sculpture (fig. 3.30), which presented Balzac in a more traditionally contemplative aspect, seated and with his hands clasped together, gently bowing his head—a pose in striking opposition to that of Rodin’s figure, as was noted in numerous caricatures (figs. 3.31, 3.32).

Perhaps Klinger’s Beethoven-Denkmal might ultimately be closer to Falguière’s Balzac than Rodin’s Penseur. His Beethoven lacks the strained or “constipated” tension evident in Rodin’s seated figure. As in Falguière’s Balzac, the expressiveness of Klinger’s Beethoven is not so much distributed throughout the “entire body” than it is concentrated in the upper extremities, the “drooping head” and clenched hands, or the “fist balled-up with strong will,” as Klinger’s partner Elsa Asanijeff described this feature, invoking the fist as a metonym for the composer’s conscious will to create. Far more than Rodin’s Penseur, the Beethoven-Denkmal figured “the pride of thought” as an unequivocally elevated, intellectual activity.

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Well before he produced the Beethovenfries to accompany the Beethoven-Denkmal, Klimt had already departed decisively from the iconographic conventions that Klinger had exploited to signify and dignify thought. The deliberateness of this departure is obvious in the
compositional genesis of his *Philosophie* (fig. 3.33), the first of the three allegorical panels he produced for the University of Vienna (comprising also *Medizin* and *Jurisprudenz*).102 As Alice Strobl has demonstrated, Klimt’s initial conception for these allegories was deeply indebted to Rodin. The basic structure of each panel—vertical columns of bodies contorted into diverse, gesturally dynamic positions—strongly recalls the *Porte de l’Enfer*, while a number of individual figures within the columns quote postures from specific Rodin sculptures.103 Significantly, Stobl also suggests that the pose of Rodin’s *Penseur* served as an initial model for Klimt’s personification of *Wissen* in *Philosophie*.104 Just as Rodin did for *Le Penseur*, Klimt initially posed his allegorical figure of knowledge seated, and propping up her head against the downward force of gravity (fig. 3.34). But Klimt ultimately abandoned this initial conception. As Strobl notes, his reworking of *Philosophie* in 1899 exchanged a centuries-old posture of contemplation for a “frontal” figure, a virtually floating head at the bottom of the canvas depicted with “mask-like rigidity” (figs. 3.35, 3.36).105

Carl Schorske has associated Klimt’s new figure of *Wissen*, in her revised aspect of “challenging frontality,” with the “midnight singer” who appears in a recurring section of Nietzsche’s *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883–85).106 Leaving aside the question of Nietzsche’s specific relevance to the philosophic vision of *Philosophie*, Schorske’s association offers insight into Klimt’s abandonment of the conventional pose of contemplation. For Nietzsche was a historical figure who, in the words of Gilles Deleuze, initiated “a new image of thought,” overthrowing its “dogmatic image.”107 With this phrase Deleuze meant to convey that Nietzsche reconceptualized philosophy as a vocation, rejecting the presumption that “truth” was its object, that it might have a “method,” or that its mission could be compromised by the “body, passions,
and sensuous interests.”\(^{108}\) More concretely, this “new image of thought” corresponds to Nietzsche’s rejection of what can be described as the “dogmatic” pose of contemplation.

In *Götzen-Dämmerung* (1888) and elsewhere, Nietzsche railed against the received wisdom that, as Gustave Flaubert put it, “on ne peut penser . . . qu’assis.”\(^{109}\) Flaubert’s seemingly banal observation, quoted in Nietzsche’s text, incited the philosopher to proclaim that “sitting down” or sedentariness (*das Sitzfleisch*) “is a true sin against the Holy Spirit.”\(^{110}\) Playing here on *Sitzfleisch* as an idiomatic expression for perseverance, Nietzsche’s denunciation of sedentary thinking concretized his critique of a conception of creative or intellectual achievement as an activity defined by struggle and difficulty, demanding willful intentness of effort. Thoughts produced while sitting, the philosopher asserted in *The Gay Science* (1882), will always betray the “cramped intestines,” the “eagerness . . . seriousness . . . [and] rage” of the thinker who thought them.\(^{111}\) The same constipated quality of expression visually evident and ridiculed in *Le Penseur* was thus nearly simultaneously reviled by Nietzsche as literarily apparent in Flaubert.

Nietzsche himself, who through the mouth of Zarathustra had preached a dogma in which “all heaviness becomes light,” claimed to do his thinking only while standing up, “walking, jumping, climbing, dancing.”\(^{112}\) His rhetorical stress on this image of a light-footed, mobile thinker deliberately counters the “dogmatic image of thought” maintained in a work such as Klinger’s *Beethoven-Denkmal*, which figured “highest mental concentration” as a sedentary activity, defined by heaviness and a gravely serious, grasping exertion of effort.

Klimt’s decision to abandon “the treasury of classical forms . . . which since the time of Raphael, have been decked with the label of ‘Philosophy’”\(^{113}\) betrays an analogous impulse to reject a “dogmatic image of thought.”\(^{113}\) As Richard Muther observed, Klimt’s figuration of *Wissen* was an assertion that the credibility of these conventional forms had been exhausted, or
that “their historical significance is nil.” What then characterizes the “new image of thought” Klimt deploys to replace them in Philosophie?

Departing from the initial conception of a seated figure, Klimt concentrated Wissen into a disembodied head at the bottom of the canvas, her chin just touching its lower edge (see fig. 3.36). No longer inclined or “drooping,” her head is erect and turned directly forward, aligning frontally with the canvas support. Her face is framed within an abstracted, egg-shaped oval of hair, liberally flecked with gold. Her countenance now conforms precisely to what Claude Quiguer has characterized as the quintessential female visage of Jugendstil—“empty eyes, immobile traits, cold hieraticism.” Her expressionless gaze and disembodied frontality are echoed by a large sphinx’s head that appears to congeal from out of the sparkling metallic ether hovering in the composition’s background. Klimt’s reduplication of Wissen with this floating sphinx, a figure frequently identified in Western culture as the emblem of Egyptian art, seems to insist that Wissen appears here as a formal archaism, or a “hieratic motif,” identified by Walter Benjamin as the first among “the three defining ‘motifs’ of Jugendstil.” (The two others were “perversion” and “emancipation.”)

At the same time, the formal echo between this newly hieratic Wissen and the floating sphinx’s visage emphasizes a sense of disencumberment, or “emancipation,” from forces of gravity. If previously Klimt relied upon Sitzfleisch and the physical “burden” of the head as conventional symbols for the labors of thought, his new personification of Wissen negated suggestions of physical effort or weight entirely, introducing what would become a key visual trope in the Beethovenfries and in Klimt’s art more generally—what I will call “the motif of the levitating head.” This motif coincided with a stylistic shift towards a simultaneously archaizing
and ornamental figural technique, and it signified, I suggest, a form of release from the metaphorical “burden” of conscious thinking.

**Ornamented Plaster Surfaces**

Just as Klimt’s *Philosophie* rejected a “dogmatic image of thought,” the *Beethovenfries* pointedly countered Klinger’s celebration of Beethoven on the basis of his “pondering.” It did so by setting up an integral relationship with Klinger’s monument.

Referred to by many critics as “Klinger’s Ninth Symphony,” the *Beethoven-Denkmal* not only evoked a state of “highest mental concentration,” it invited more specifically the perception that the composer was represented in the moment when he was conceiving his Ninth Symphony, his “highest” musical creation. Klimt exploited this aspect of the sculpture. As a visual translation of the Ninth Symphony, the “ornamented plaster surfaces” of the *Beethovenfries* could have appeared, within the mise-en-scène of the *Klinger-Beethoven-Austellung*, as the visible materialization of the “pondering” enacted by the sculpted Beethoven at the center of the exhibition. Hoffmann, perhaps at the painter’s suggestion, built an aperture into one wall of the room in which Klimt exhibited, so that beneath the third and final section of the *Beethovenfries*, the *Beethoven-Denkmal* was visible in the adjacent hall through a break in the lower wall (fig. 3.37). Klimt organized his mural to visually incorporate the exposed sculpture into its narrative flow. The *Beethovenfries* incorporated the *Beethoven-Denkmal* not only so that the frieze appeared to externalize the invisible creative thoughts of the sculpted Beethoven, but also so that Beethoven could become the symbolic protagonist of its larger allegorical narrative about art and its function in human existence. This narrative presented the composer’s creative process as an ecstatic gratification of unconscious instinctual impulses, rooted in animal descent and sexuality.
The full force of Klimt’s counterpoint to Klinger’s vision of Beethoven resided in the interface between the ornamental forms of the mural and their explanation in the catalogue’s short didactic text (figs. 3.38, 3.39), whose form was akin to musical program notes. Both caricatures and criticism describe visitors as dutifully, if somewhat skeptically, allowing the catalogue to direct their experience of the *Klinger-Beethoven-Ausstellung* (fig. 3.40). The catalogue informed visitors to the exhibition that Klimt’s “three painted walls form[ed] a coherent sequence,” although the allegorical meanings the text provided sometimes jarred with the forms depicted. From left to right, the walls traced the emotional arc of the Ninth Symphony as Wagner had glossed it in his program notes from a Dresden performance in 1846, interpreting the music as a narrative of a “titanic struggle of the soul” against a “joy-devouring demon,” ending ultimately with the triumph of joy as “Light breaks on Chaos.”\(^{118}\) As the exhibition catalogue made explicit, the *Beethovenfries* pictorialized this Wagnerian account of the symphony’s narrative while adapting it into a broader allegory of art and its redemptive role in human existence.\(^{119}\)

The frieze’s first wall, opposite the entrance, began with a series of figures the catalogue identified as symbolizing humanity’s “Longing for Happiness” (*Sehnsucht nach Glück*) making a plea to a “well-armed warrior” to “take up the fight for happiness” on their behalf (fig. 3.41). Klimt’s “warrior,” a medieval knight encased in an extravagant gold, silver, and jewel-studded suit of arms, was placed along a nearly direct spatial axis with the *Beethoven-Denkmal* in the adjacent central hall. The location of this figure suggested a symbolic equivalence between Beethoven and the frieze’s heroic champion of human happiness.\(^{120}\)

The mural’s second, middle wall, which the “warrior” faced in pure profile, depicted the obstacles humanity confronted on the path to happiness, identified in the catalogue as “the
Hostile Forces” (see fig. 3.12). Dominated by the figure of a large gorilla surrounded by nude and semi-nude female figures, this central section of the mural, significantly shorter and more densely painted than the first and third, presented a series of allegorical figures the catalogue identified as “the giant Typhon . . . his daughters, the three Gorgons. Sickness, Madness, Death. Lust and Unchastity, Excess.”

The third, concluding wall (see fig. 3.13) resumed the mural’s opening motif of the “Longing for Happiness.” This section, as the catalogue explained, depicted the “satisfaction” of humanity’s longing as “the Arts lead us into the Kingdom of the Ideal, the sole realm where we can find pure Joy, pure Happiness, pure Love.” Klimt commenced this section with an allegorical figure of “Poetry,” and then abruptly halted the decorative program, leaving a large section of unpainted blank plaster. He placed this caesura directly above the cut in the lower wall that allowed the exhibition visitor a view onto the Beethoven-Denkmal in the adjacent hall (see fig. 3.37). After this pause to showcase Klinger’s monument, Klimt moved immediately into the mural’s finale, resuming the decoration with a direct visual rendition of the Ninth Symphony, identified in the catalogue as a painted translation of the fourth movement, in which a chorus of human voices intones modified lines from Schiller’s ode of 1785, “An die Freude”: “Seid umschlungen, Millionen! / Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt! . . . Freude, schöner Götterfunken!” (Be embraced, you millions! / This kiss for all the world! . . . Joy, beautiful spark of the gods!). That Klimt conceptualized the Beethovenfries—as the catalogue made explicit—not merely as a decorative tribute to Beethoven, but moreover as an allegory of art itself, suggests that he approached his contribution to the exhibition as an extension of the project he had begun with the so-called Fakultätsbilder for the University of Vienna. The Beethovenfries functioned as a sort of fourth faculty, albeit one that shifted from the domain of higher learning to that of
artistic creativity and appreciation. Notably, the mural fulfilled exactly the brief Klimt had received from the university—to convey in his allegories “the victory of light over darkness.”

But if Medizin and Philosophie provoked scandal for their failure to communicate that triumphant message, the Beethovenfries proved equally disturbing for the way that it did convey that “victory of light over darkness.” The “ornamented plaster surfaces” of the Beethovenfries proposed in both form and narrative that the “enlightenment” art provided was opposed to an advance of reason or historical progress. “Enlightenment,” as Klimt’s mural envisioned it, entailed an ecstatic devolution, a regression at the level of psychology, biology, and artistic technique.

Klimt advanced this vision concretely through the decorative technique and materials of the mural’s “ornamented plaster surfaces.” Although Klimt had trained in Austria’s recently founded Kunstgewerbeschule (now known as the University of Applied Arts Vienna or Die Angewandte) and had launched his career painting ceilings and spandrels of major public buildings, including the Burgtheater (1886–88) (fig. 3.42) and the Kunsthistorisches Museum (1890–91) (fig. 3.43) in Vienna, the Beethovenfries was the first of the painter’s decorative works conceived in a self-consciously ornamental style. As the catalogue specified, it was composed according to a deliberately “decorative principle.” Numerous scholars have stressed that the project marked a “turning point” in Klimt’s development, establishing him, as Arpad Weixlgärtner observed in 1912, as a “master of a purely decorative style.”

If we compare the Beethovenfries to Philosophie and Medizin, the major decorative works that preceded it, the key features of Klimt’s new “decorative principle” come into view clearly. To begin with, Klimt adopted a new format in the Beethovenfries. He replaced the pictorial or tableau-like support of vertical canvases, used for the Fakultätsbilder, with a long
and narrow band of plaster panels. Both the new substance and new shape of this ground prompted corresponding changes in compositional style and painterly technique. In the *Beethovenfries* Klimt abandoned oil paint for the older, milk-based medium of casein, and more broadly for a technique of ornamental encrustation Hevesi would later term mosaic painting, or *Malmosaik.* Klimt applied color to bare plaster in combination with stucco relief as well as outlines drawn in charcoal, graphite, pastel, and colored pencil, with accents added in gold leaf, aluminum foil, mirror, upholstery tacks, mother-of-pearl, polished colored glass, and costume jewelry.

This departure from the traditional painterly materials of oil on canvas went hand in hand with an abandonment of a “pictorial” mode of composition. His shift followed the differentiation the Secessionists had outlined in the catalogue text for a previous exhibition between “pictures” (*Bilder*) and “surface decorations” (*Flächendecorationen*). If the *Fakultätsbilder* maintained an illusion of spatial recession, the *Beethovenfries* frankly asserted the wall’s flatness, switching from a hypotactic to a paratactic narrative structure, lining up figures alongside one another across the horizontal extension of the mural’s surface.

This new principle of *Flächendecoration* asserted itself most forcefully in the mode of presenting human figures in the *Beethovenfries.* While Klimt positioned individual, directly frontal-facing figures in the *Fakultätsbilder*—the personification of *Wissen,* and the similar figure of *Hygeia* in *Medizin* (fig. 3.44)—before columns of rounded, writhing, Rodin-inspired bodies, the distinction between naturalistic and hieratic figures fell away entirely in the frieze. All the figures in the *Beethovenfries* exhibit a “hieratic quality,” their bodies aligning exclusively in “frontal and profile” positions against the wall’s surface, in a manner that both Klimt’s contemporaries and recent scholars have recognized to be “Assyrian” or “Egyptian” in
Abandoning the dizzying variety of poses and body types employed in the backgrounds of the *Fakultätsbilder*, Klimt instead placed conspicuous emphasis in the *Beethovenfries* on the repetitive device of parallelism. In addition to limiting the disposition of figures to the two orientations of frontal and profile, Klimt standardized the bodies and facial features of many of the mural’s figures, creating a majority from generic stencils.

As is clear from the archive of journalistic denunciations Hermann Bahr collected in his publication *Gegen Klimt* in 1903, the *Beethovenfries* provoked a degree of outrage in Vienna similar to that achieved by *Philosophie* and *Medizin* when they were first exhibited at the Secession in 1900 and 1901. Yet while the denunciations of the *Beethovenfries* perpetuated stock accusations of obscenity that had also been leveled against the *Fakultätsbilder* (primarily due to the graphic anatomical realism of the female nudes in the backgrounds of those pictures), the perceived obscenity of the *Beethovenfries* went beyond its presentation of several female nudes in the mural’s central “Hostile Forces” section. The brazenness of the *Beethovenfries* was also seen as inhering in its schematic stylization of the body—the way in which Klimt’s “humanization of ornament” seemed to demean the human being and also, inseparably, the work of art itself. As one critic exclaimed with regard to Klimt’s mural: “the hideous gorilla, the shameless caricatures of the noble human form—this is no longer a work of art, these are insults to our most sacred feelings!”

The perceived insult to “the noble human form” in the *Beethovenfries* was tied to the way in which its ornamental “caricatures” of human figures seemed to abandon a conception of humanity premised upon “the pride of thought.” As the mural’s opening figural leitmotif of humanity’s “Longing for Happiness” immediately established, Klimt’s “humanization of ornament” went hand in hand with an emphasis on dimensions of psychic life beyond the grasp
of consciousness. Alternating between two standard stencils (each used nine times throughout the frieze), Klimt created a pattern of elongated horizontal female figures (fig. 3.45) presented in profile with their arms extended forward with open, downward-facing palms, and eyelids closed as if in sleep.\textsuperscript{131} The repeating forms of these “Longing for Happiness” figures, almost resembling graphic directional arrows, articulate a strong horizontal vector of movement from left to right across the length of the mural. They propel the allegorical narrative, driving the linear progress of the \textit{Beethovenfries} from the “Well-Armed Warrior” across the “Hostile Forces” wall, up through the passage on the final wall that introduces “Satisfaction” of the longing for happiness, to where the mural’s decoration halts to showcase the \textit{Beethoven-Denkmal}.

At the same time that these sleeping figures propel the mural’s narrative, they reiterate the ornamental form of the frieze itself, creating what Hevesi described as a “continuous ornament . . . a rhythmic series of flowing shapes of stylized human limbs and heads.”\textsuperscript{132} Klimt used the wall’s bare plaster for the flesh tones of these figures, adding color only to their disklike, jewel-dotted circles of brown or golden hair.\textsuperscript{133} The narrow, elongated, colorless silhouette of each echoes the narrow elongated form and the cool plaster color of the first and third walls of the \textit{Beethovenfries}, where Klimt exposed large swaths of unpainted grey plaster. Positioned at the uppermost edge of the mural, these figures also duplicate the entire mural’s hovering spatial position, some eight meters high on the wall, just beneath the ceiling. Through this recursive relationship, Klimt established a forceful visual association between the “ornamented plaster surface” of the mural itself and a condition of corporeal buoyancy presented precisely as the expression of an inner mental state of unconsciousness.
If, as Joseph Koerner noted, these female figures evoke “an unconscious realm of life,” they do so primarily by visually opposing the ponderous, “burdened” thought Klinger stressed in his Beethoven-Denkmal. They appear to float, as if impervious to the downward pull of gravity. Indeed, Eduard Pötzl, who sardonically titled his review of the Klinger-Beethoven-Ausstellung “The Assyrian Swimming School,” derided them as “elongated women swimming with life preservers,” a comment that emphasized not just Klimt’s general evocation of corporeal flotation, but more specifically the strange resemblance between these figures’ graphic disks of brown hair and toroidal life preservers. While Pötzl’s humorous observation obviously implied that Klimt’s figures appeared ridiculous, it aptly captured the degree to which his treatment of this leitmotif was defined by a dramatic emphasis on buoyancy. More pointedly, Pötzl’s remark indicates a sense of buoyant weightlessness conveyed particularly through what I have called “the motif of the levitating head”—he seems to suggest that these figures had been depicted as if wearing flotation devices encircling their faces.

The emphasis on corporeal buoyancy initiated in the frieze’s leitmotif of the “Longing for Happiness” recurs in the third wall’s climactic decorative passage, which represents a “Choir of Paradise Angels” (fig. 3.46) proclaiming humanity’s joyous satisfaction of this longing for happiness. Klimt’s sixteen female angels, drawn frontally and from a single stencil, are arrayed in serried rows resembling a patterned wallpaper, the top row of angels abruptly cropped at the ceiling just above their lips. The salmon-hued tunics they wear form a continuous color block across the wall, over which Klimt superimposed a pattern of wavy gold lines and oculi punctuated by pink rosebuds. A carpet-like expanse of flowering grass extends beneath the angels’ dangling feet to the frieze’s bottom edge, reaching also just slightly above the leftmost angel’s head. Underscoring the flat vertical plane of the wall, Klimt’s extension of the grass from
the top to the bottom edge of the mural insists that these angels float, for it visually cancels any sense of a horizontal “ground” upon which their physical weight might be supported, thus creating a flattened pictorial world in which the laws of gravity do not appear to exist. The white, toe-less feet of these angels hang directly downward, parallel to the grass, reinforcing the connection between the decorative flatness of these figures and their imperviousness to the grounding forces of gravity.

As he did with the figures in the opening passage of the “Longing for Happiness,” Klimt depicted these angels with closed eyes, so that they appear asleep, or perhaps in trancelike reverie. His treatment of their hands, visible only in the front row of angels, intensified that suggestion of a suspension of conscious thought. Holding rosebuds between their thumbs and index fingers, the angels closely approximate the Buddhist *Vitarka Mudra* finger posture (figs. 3.47, 3.48). Although the *Vitarka Mudra* communicates teaching, exposition of laws, and argumentation within the Buddhist tradition, this hand gesture would have taken on a different, context-specific meaning within the decorative environment of the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung*. Rather than as a didactic gesture, the angels’ finger posture would have been seen as a visual counterpoint to the “fist balled-up with strong will” that Klinger used to express “[Beethoven’s] inner life of utmost tension.”

If a fist squeezed tightly around itself to expel any pockets of air functioned as a conventional gestural symbol for the “highest mental concentration,” or an intellectual grasp of concepts, Klimt’s reversal of that gesture here—turning the angels’ palms up and framing circular voids of space between their thumbs and index fingers—suggests a psychic state opposed to the one expressed in the *Beethoven-Denkmal*. This state can be read as suggestive of the absence or cessation of willful, directed thought, or perhaps as an exoticized, orientalizing
form of mindfulness presented as an antithesis to the conscious “pondering” celebrated in Klinger’s monument.

The Beethovenfries began and concluded with “human ornaments” representing, respectively, humanity’s longing for happiness and the fulfillment of that longing as unconscious drives or states. These figural leitmotifs served as ornamental settings for two narrative passages in the mural—the middle wall depicting the “Hostile Forces” and the concluding passage visualizing Beethoven’s Freudenmelodie—that link these drives or states to sexuality and humanity’s animal descent.

Recent scholarship has rightly emphasized that in the Beethovenfries Klimt presented the struggle for happiness in evolutionary terms. As Emily Braun has observed, the middle wall of “Hostile Forces” appears as a painted materialization of Darwin’s conviction that, “our descent . . . is the origin of our evil passions!!—The Devil under the form of Baboon is our grandfather!” Dominated almost entirely by a figure the catalogue identified as “the giant Typhon,” the middle wall presents this fiercest monster of Greek mythology in a form departing markedly from ancient descriptions, namely as a gorilla with wings and snake tails (fig. 3.49, see also fig. 3.12).

The wall of “Hostile Forces” presents “evil passions” inherited from animal descent as closely bound to instinctual sexual appetites. The trio of “Lust, Unchastity, and Excess” appears just to the right of “Typhon’s” head, framed within an abstract egg of gold pattern. The design consists of intersecting vertical and horizontal lines that integrate stylized gold phalli and quasi-vaginal triangles in various sizes and colors (fig. 3.50). Surrounding the central golden phallus, Klimt painted black triangles with tips bisected in red lines that echo the black wedges of pubic hair on the three naked, black-haired Gorgons standing at “Typhon’s” left, as well as the genital
area of “Lust,” whose lavish ginger tresses (which she fingers) sweep down from around her face to delineate a red vaginal gash between her legs. This entire area of sexualized pattern appears also as an extension of the copiously jeweled golden headpiece worn by the figure of “Excess,” who stands directly beneath it. Modeled on Aubrey Beardsley’s extraordinary illustration of Ali Baba from 1897 (fig. 3.51), this obese, “Oriental” woman (fig. 3.52) was seen to personify the revolting qualities of the Beethovenfries as a whole, provoking one critic to “silently calculate . . . how many millions in dowry would be necessary to win [her] a husband.”

As this comment indicates, the offensiveness of “Excess” stemmed not only from the undaintiness of her feminine silhouette, but also from the suggestion of a crude sexual lure (directed outward towards the viewer) conveyed through the ornate immodesty of her bodily adornments, which, despite their copiousness, fail to cover her bare protruding belly and sagging breasts. Klimt concentrated the mural’s densest encrustation of shiny, reflective jewels and other applied ornaments on the belt, armbands, and headpiece of “Excess.” His presentation of this figure recalls Alois Riegl’s assertion, in his Foundations for a History of Ornament, that “the urge to decorate” was “one of the most elementary human drives, more elementary in fact than the need to protect the body.” The wall of “Hostile Forces” registers this comprehension of ornament as an expression of “elementary human drives.” Indeed, the formal association Klimt created between the copiously decorated body of “Excess” and the area of sexualized abstract pattern hovering above her helps to frame this wall within the broader cultural and philosophical reconceptualization of ornament in the wake of Darwin’s controversial theory of “sexual selection” in the second part of The Descent of Man (1872).

As Winfried Menninghaus has argued, Darwin’s evolutionary theory essentially “turned on its head” Kant’s “idealist notion of a purely ‘intellectual interest’” elicited by the aesthetic
object, suggesting instead that aesthetic judgments were biologically motivated by “sexual interest.”¹⁴³ By demonstrating that bodily “ornaments” or “attractions” on animal organisms (non-functional anatomical features such as decorative coloring, feathers, horns, or antlers) had evolved as the functional byproduct of aesthetic preferences animals exercised when selecting mates for sexual reproduction, Darwin proposed that aesthetic sensibility was not an exclusively human faculty, reliant upon highly developed intellectual capacities, but an animal instinct rooted in the biological processes of sexual reproduction. The genital-like forms Klimt embedded within the golden patterning above “Excess” seem to allude to something like this biological function of ornament as a mechanism for attracting sexual interest. The wall of the “Hostile Forces” also suggests an equivalence between cultural ornaments produced to answer the human being’s “urge to decorate” and biological embellishments on the animal organism, as, for instance, in the transition from the bright cerulean of the gold-studded sarong of the “Excess” figure, cinched beneath her gut, into the striated blue highlights in “Typhon’s” fur, which then in turn swoop up into a grey-blue feathered wing that extends across the wall’s top right half (fig. 3.53). Indeed, more than half of the wall of “Hostile Forces” appears as if the monster’s skin had been stretched across its surface, suggesting an equivalence between Klimt’s own decorative cladding of the wall and an animal’s ornamented epidermis.

The critics who asserted that the Beethovenfries was “no longer a work of art”—or else “a work of art” only “suitable for a temple to Krafft-Ebing,” the pioneering sexologist who chaired the department of psychiatry at the University of Vienna between 1889 and 1902—were responding to the way Klimt’s “ornamented plaster surfaces” presented themselves in this Darwinian sense, as an aesthetic creation seeking to arouse sexual, rather than “intellectual interest.”¹⁴⁴ If the sexualization of Klimt’s decorative aesthetic was perceived to stand for an
“incursion of the new barbarism” (*Einbruch der neuen Barbarei*), it did so most forcefully, perhaps, because it enthusiastically endorsed a biological, sexual basis for aesthetics, reversing the negative connotations of the “Hostile Forces” section in a climactic final passage that invoked animal descent in a positive, celebratory sense, as a new ground for venerating art and aesthetic experience.¹⁴⁵

Klimt’s visualization of the Ninth Symphony’s closing choral refrain (*Freude, schöner Götterfunken . . . Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!*) recasts Beethoven’s joyous proclamation of universal brotherhood—premised upon the Enlightenment tenets of, as the composer scribbled in 1820 in a conversation notebook, “the moral law within us. the starry heaven above us. Kant!!!”¹⁴⁶ He turns it instead into a celebration of art’s address to an animal and unconscious, rather than rational and moral, human subject.

The final passage of the *Beethovenfries* (fig. 3.54) matches the wall of “Hostile Forces” in ornamental density, and revisits a number of its central iconographic motifs. At the base of a large, gold oval superimposed over the repeating figural pattern of the “Choir of Angels,” Klimt depicted the roots of a rosebush branching upwards, supporting a series of successively narrowing, uterine-shaped forms. A solid gold phallic column, a dramatically enlarged reiteration of the ornamental phallus in the “Hostile Forces” section, extends up the center of the nested series of ovals.¹⁴⁷ Within this phallic form, Klimt enclosed two naked bodies, pressed up against one another. The female half of the couple barely is visible, apart from a tuft of brown hair and upraised arms. A dorsal view (the frieze’s only dorsal view) of the legs, muscular back, and clenched buttocks of the male partner dominates this image of the couple. Their embrace, decidedly not a “Kiss” in the sense to which Beethoven’s lyrics would seem to have alluded, has been described by Koerner as an image of “the conjugal bed, the holy sanctuary of domestic
space where husband and wife unite to create a family." Connubial connotations aside, the embrace certainly suggests penetrative coitus. Indeed, one can easily read the image of the couple as a verticalized, bird’s eye view of two bodies spread horizontally over the golden phallic column and red, fan-shaped lozenge whose pattern distinctly evokes a textile or blanket.

One of the oddest and most striking details of the Beethovenfries—a pair of flat gold circles with stylized facial features (fig. 3.55)—hovers over the embracing couple. These forms, only rarely discussed in the extant literature, have been interpreted as symbolizations of the sun and moon, in keeping with the cosmic motifs central to the Secessionists’ overall decorative theme. As sun and moon, these two disks do prepare for the two murals behind and in front of Beethoven-Denkmal in the main hall, Adolf Böhm’s Der werdende Tag and Roller’s Die sinkende Nacht. But in addition, and more importantly, they bear an earthly, indeed specifically biological, symbolic significance.

With these two floating golden faces, Klimt returned to, and pressed to a formal and symbolic extreme, the “motif of the levitating head” deployed in the figures of the “Longing for Happiness” and the “Choir of Angels.” In this regard it is useful to examine Klimt’s preliminary studies for the lovers more closely. These sketches reveal the willfulness with which the artist decapitated his “kissing” couple (fig. 3.56). In the final form in which they appear in the Beethovenfries, he preserved only the merest suggestion of hair poking up above their grasping arms to indicate that their bodies extend upward beyond the neck. This rendering of the two lovers as virtually akephalos allows the viewer to read the two subtly gendered facial discs, suspended directly above the male and female figures, as floating substitutes for their invisible or absent heads.

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Bringing to a formal climax the mural’s association between a repudiation of physical weight and gravity and a state of release from the metaphorical “burden” of conscious thought, these levitating gold faces here express that release as a state of gratification simultaneously erotic and aesthetic. Positioned at the apex of the culminating decorative passage of the Beethovenfries, the golden faces seem to externalize the interior mental states of the kissing couple, expressing the “satisfaction” the human subject experiences within the “Kingdom of the Ideal”—a “Kingdom” only ever accessed, so the catalogue claimed, through the arts. They can be read as expressing the aesthetic rapture of two listeners hearing the final movement of the Ninth Symphony. Or, equally, if we read the naked man beneath the two floating faces as the “Well-Armed Warrior” at the triumphant conclusion of his “fight for happiness,” the floating head at left can be read as expressing Beethoven’s state of inspiration as he realizes his creative potential, perhaps specifically in the moment of creating his Ninth Symphony.

The formal aspect Klimt gave to these levitating gold faces corresponds to the comprehension of art as embedded in unconscious instinctual functions that the Beethovenfries narrates. In these two facial forms, art’s return to its primordial decorative function merges directly with a reversion to an earlier phase of biological evolution, for the gold disks appear at once as archaic metallic ornaments, echoing the circles and dots that form the basic decorative vocabulary of the Beethovenfries, and as stylized monkey visages. There is a distinct suggestion of facial fur in the mottled, spotted golden patterning that encroaches upon the features of both faces; it is especially conspicuous in the face hovering over the male figure. Both hovering monkey-like faces resemble illustrations of species of new-world monkeys (figs. 3.57, 3.58) found in the Illustrierte Naturgeschichte der Thiere, which Klimt kept in his library, and which it seems certain he consulted in composing the figure of “Typhon” (fig. 3.59).
The evolutionary allusions Klimt embedded throughout this climactic passage of the *Beethovenfries* substantiate a reading of these levitating gold faces as deliberately simian in aspect. The branching structure of his Edenic rosebush or “tree of life” strongly evokes the “arboreal diagram of diversification by genealogical descent published by Darwin and extrapolated by [Ernst] Haeckel in his sprawling phylogenetic trees,” as Braun has argued.\(^\text{152}\) Notably, Klimt attached the floating faces to what have been described as “comets’ tails” that wriggle downwards to meet the base of the tree beneath the kissing couple.\(^\text{153}\) The potentially astronomical symbolism of these forms again merges with a biological one, for these comets’ tails also plainly resemble the tails of sperm, particularly since they attach to two golden heads that appear to push from the exterior into the center of the large gold ovum-like form hovering over the couple (compare figs. 3.60, 3.61 and fig. 3.54).

What I am describing as Klimt’s invention here—the deployment of two frontal, ornamental, monkey-faced sperm, suspended as if in the moment of fertilization, to symbolically express the inner mental states of a man and woman experiencing Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, or perhaps to express Beethoven’s own inner mental state in the transcendent moment of creative inspiration evoked by Klinger’s monument, that moment when the Ninth Symphony took shape in his imagination—is, admittedly, rather outrageous. It is an invention that would seem to invite the sort of reception recounted by Kraus when he wrote of the “shallow materialistic punch line” he felt had “poisoned” his encounter with the *Beethoven-Denkmal* at the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung*.

For the *Beethovenfries*, in translating the Ninth Symphony into its own ornamental narrative, countered the terms for celebrating Beethoven’s artistic achievement commonly deployed by many writers at the turn of the century. As “one of the most enduring hero-types of
modern man,” Beethoven was idolized as a human being who had reached a higher stage of
evolution; accordingly, he was regularly represented as a personification of humanity’s ongoing
intellectual or even biological development. Indeed, Hevesi remarked on viewing Klinger’s
Beethoven-Denkmal: “Darwinian evolution goes from the skull of the Neanderthal to the
Beethoven mask” (see fig. 3.17).

A very similar view of the composer’s significance was advanced by Adolf Loos, the
Viennese architect who emerged in the decade following the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung as
an outspoken “enemy of ornament” (Ornamentenfeind). Hevesi and Loos shared a similar
view of Beethoven, despite the fact that they had opposing aesthetic agendas—one being an
advocate for, and the other an enemy of, the Secession. For Loos, Beethoven (alongside Kant,
quite tellingly) was a figure of enormous symbolic importance. He regularly referred to the
composer, and to his final symphonic creation, to exemplify the kinds of “undreamt-of heights”
Western culture had achieved in the arts and in intellectual culture by harnessing energies that
less culturally advanced societies would have expended upon the production of ornament. As
Loos memorably put it, “The Critique of Pure Reason could not be written by a man with five
ostrich feathers in his cap, the Ninth did not come from a man with a plate-sized wheel around
his neck.” While Loos took for granted the Darwinian notion that “all art is erotic,” he equated
the progress of Western civilization with an ever-increasing capacity to sublimate sexual
“surplus energy.” The first primitive artists who “smear[ed] the walls with erotic symbols,”
Loos asserted, had “felt the same urge as Beethoven,” felt themselves to be “in the same heaven
in which Beethoven created the Ninth Symphony.” But for a modern subject to engage once
again in this ornamental production represented, for Loos, a degenerate or even criminal activity,
and certainly a deviation from art’s essentially progressive purpose.
“Art is there to lead humanity always further and further, always higher and higher, to make humanity more godlike,” Loos asserted.161 The Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung, and more specifically the Beethovenfries, can be regarded as an elaborate counterpoint to that proposition. Presenting an allegorical narrative in which “the Arts lead us into the Kingdom of the Ideal” by leading culturally and biologically backwards, Klimt’s mural proposed instead that “art is there” to restore humanity to its “lower,” animal origins.

Klimt’s Apotheosis

The new conception of art’s purpose advanced in the Beethovenfries went hand in hand with a new basis for idolizing the artist—not as the “pondering,” godlike creator Klinger’s Beethoven-Denkmal venerated, but rather as a primitive being, gifted not with a contemplative “inner life of utmost tension” but rather with a particular facility for externalizing instinctual sexual impulses. The cultural ascendance of this new “idol” of the artist is exemplified, I propose, in the emergence of Klimt, rather than Klinger or Beethoven, as the ultimate luminary of the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung.

A well-known photograph of Klimt posing inside the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung (fig. 3.62) suggests that the painter and his Secessionist colleagues were more or less aware that the painter had stepped into this new role.162 Klimt sits in the main hall of the exhibition, directly facing the Beethoven-Denkmal, in one of two armchairs Ferdinand Andri designed for the exhibition. Andri’s “throne” clearly apes the ivory angels’ heads that appear on Klinger’s throne to enframe and point towards the visage of the sculpted Beethoven (figs. 3.63, 3.64). His own finials, featuring stylized, half-human, half-reptilian faces (fig. 3.65), clearly mock these in an ostentatiously primitivizing, even animalistic fashion. Surrounded by men in black suits, Klimt
assumes Adri’s throne while wearing his signature painting kaftan, looking like some ancient ruler dropped down incongruously into a room of modern city-dwellers. His face framed between Andri’s ornamental finials, Klimt here affects an expressionless aspect, holding his head erect and turned directly frontal towards the camera, in a pose that almost recalls the one he gave to his figure of Wissen in *Philosophie*. Obviously mimicking, while also transforming, the aspect of the deified artist embodied so powerfully in the sculpture across the room from Klimt, this photograph mischievously announces the new aesthetic hierarchy the Secessionists proposed at the *Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung*, one in which the throne of a “pondering god of thunder” was usurped by the man who “smeared the wall with erotic symbols.”
Leb’ wohl, mein Wein, das jederzeit
Begeist’ rungsvoll mich verehrte
Und daß dem Abbild von Klingsers Hand
Das Bleiben hier verwehrte.

Leb’ wohl, Du Tempel moderner Kunst
An dessen verunzierten Mauern
Ich grimmigen Sinnes gebannt jetzt war
Zu meinem größten Bedauern.

Wie gräulich drohten mir von der Wand
Die ultramodernen Megären,
Vor ihnen wurde ich erst zu Stein,
Des Grauens mich zu erwehren.

Das ich einst taub war, ist üb’ rall von mir
in Biographien zu lesen,
Hier wünscht ich, ich wäre zu meinem heil
Daneben auch blind gewesen.

Was ich da seh’n mußt, war fürchterlich
— Ich wage jetzt keinen Laut noch—
Vor all dem schnoddrigen kunstzierrath
Erschaudert mir jetzt die Haut noch.

Die magersten Herzen bemuhten sich,
Die Glieder sich recht su verrenken
Und andere Bildner versuchten sich noch
Mich bitter und böse zu kränken.

Wie dacht ich der Zeit, in der ich so froh
in des Olymps Paradies war
Wogegen im Eden der Secession
Es mir schon gar fürchterlich “mies” war

Und was ich allda zu hören bekam
Mir gellen davon noch die Ohren
Verzüchtung des Lobes, Gespött des Humors
Die mich zum Ziel auserkoren
Ich’ kann’s in Worten und Tönen kaum
Ausdrücken, wie sehr ich erfreut bin,
Zu scheiden aus diesem “Krautkopf-Palast,”
Nach Berlin zu wandern bereit bin.

Dort grüßt mich der Spree-Athener-Humor,
Ich schrei vor den neuen Reden
Und schaud’re vor der Frage: ‘Hab’n Sie
“Den kleinen Kohn nicht gesehen?”

Wo finde ich endlich dann Ruhe und Rast,
Ich, einst so ein Freudenbringer,
Wo ist der Mäcen, der mir einen Palast
Erbauet für mich und für Klinger?

Ich lausche gespannt auf das Echo der Welt,
Was soll mir ihr Leben und Treiben,
D’rum denk’ ich sein friedlich in unser’m Olymp
Für ewige Zeiten zu bleiben!”

2. For a history of the construction of the Beethoven-Denkmal see Elsa Asenijeff, Max
Klingers Beethoven: Eine Kunst-Technische Studie (Leipzig: H. Seemann, 1902); Georg

On the history of the Beethoven exhibition, see Stefan Lehner, “The Beethoven
Exhibition 1902, A Documentation,” in Gustav Klimt, Josef Hoffmann: Pioneers of Modernism,
Alessandra Comini, “Vienna’s Beethoven of 1902: Apotheosis and Redemption,” in idem, The
Changing Image of Beethoven: A Study in Mythmaking, revised ed. (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press,
2008), 388–415; Marian Bisanz-Prakken, Gustav Klimt—Der Beethovenfries: Geschichte,
Funktion, Bedeutung, 2nd ed. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980), 1–45; Sabine
Plakolm-Forsthuber, *Moderne Raumkunst: Wiener Ausstellungsbauten von 1898 bis 1914* (Vienna: Picus, 1991), 65–89; I am also indebted to Kevin Karnes’s discussion of the historical and philosophical context for this exhibition; see his *A Kingdom Not of This World: Wagner, the Arts, and Utopian Visions in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 85–92, 114–21.


Olbrich wrote of the design being inspired by the Temple of Segesta; see his “Das Haus der Secession,” *Der Architekt* 5 (1899): 5.


21. Both Claude Quiguer and Georges Teyssot pinpoint the concept of *Sehnsucht* as a leitmotif of the modern aesthetic circa 1900.

“Variously translated as longing, nostalgia, regret or aspiration,” Teyssot identifies *Sehnsucht* as “a category that was simultaneously moral and aesthetic, lyrical and visual,” see his


somewhat problematic English translation can be found in Max Klinger, *Painting and Drawing*, trans. Fionna Elliot and Christopher Croft (Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 2005). I do not adopt it here entire.


28. Wagner, “The Artwork of the Future,” 162. It should be noted that Wagner’s ultimate goal was the elimination of the “plastic arts” of painting and sculpture altogether—with the advent of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, sculpture would be replaced by “the mimic expositor who sings and speaks” (174), while painting would be reduced to set-painting, “picturing forth the background of Nature for living, no longer counterfeited man” (191).


38. Josef Hoffmann, *Selbstbiographie=Autobiography* (1948), eds. Peter Noever, Marek Pokorny (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 22/91: “not all our members wished to be involved in this self-sacrificing activity; instead, they wanted to show their studio-made easel paintings in closed exhibition.”

39. Hoffmann summarized his aims in the catalogue, see Hoffmann, “Rundgang durch die Ausstellung,” 23–24.


44. For the controversy, see Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna*, 226–52; Alice Strobl, “Zu den Fakultätsbildern von Gustav Klimt,” *Albertina Studien* 2, no. 4 (1964): 138–69. The controversy raged on for several years, forcing Klimt to ultimately resign the commission in 1905.


“Der linke Seitensaal, den man auf dem Rundgange zuerst betritt, ist offenbar die Damenabtheilung des im modernen Geschmacke von Ninive errichteten Bades.”


irgend ein Menschliches verwischt, aufgelöst in reine ornamentale, fast geometische Formen, in denen die Linie der menschlichen Gestalt bloss schematisch angedeutet ist.”


56. Julius Meier-Graefe, Der Fall Böcklin und die Lehre von der Einheiten (Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann, 1905), 269: “genau desselben billigen Anthropomorphismus, der Böcklin blendete.”


62. For this term and Beethoven’s relation to it, see Grove Music Online, s.v. “classical,” by Daniel Heartz and Bruce Alan Brown, accessed 24 May 2015,


The fact that there were two burbling fountains in the main hall, and that Klinger sculpted Beethoven nude, deepen the humor of Pötzl’s association.


67. Klinger became acquainted with the archaeologist, collector and private antiquites dealer Hartwig during his sojourn in Rome (1888–93), see Richard Hüttel, Petra Roettig, and
Hubertus Gassner, *Eine Liebe: Max Klinger und die Folgen*, exh. cat. (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2007), 345. Klinger designed Hartwig’s ex libris in 1900. They exchanged more than eighty letters between 1894 and 1915.


71. Since Klinger was in Paris in the 1880s, it is possible he knew of Rodin’s work on the *Porte de l’Enfer*, and, as Ina Gayk notes, might have seen the *Penseur* illustrated in *L’Art* in 1887, while he was working on the plaster model for the *Beethoven-Denkmal*; see her *Max Klinger als Bildhauer: Unter Berücksichtigung des zeitgenössischen französischen Kunstgeschehens* (Hamburg: Kovač, 2011), 95. It is certain he saw the plaster model of the *Penseur* when he visited Rodin’s exhibition in 1900 at the Pavillon de l’Alma. It was at this point that Klinger began to correspond frequently with Rodin.

That many viewers at the turn of the century presumed the *Beethoven-Denkmal* had been inspired by Rodin, specifically by his monument to Victor Hugo or *Le Penseur* is certain, given the special pains Klinger took to deny his reliance upon the French sculptor for inspiration. See his letter quoted in Willy Pastor, *Max Klinger* (Berlin: Amsler, 1919), 168:


72. Albert E. Elsen, Rodin’s Thinker and the Dilemmas of Modern Public Sculpture (New Haven: Yale, 1985), 3. Elsen quotes an unsigned review in the Chronique d’art from 1909 that asserted that, “to rest a head heavy with creation on a fist is a symbol like those of the Epinal school.”

73. Marsha Morton’s recent book on Klinger, the first major study in English, deals exclusively with the graphic works, see her Max Klinger and Wilhelmine Culture: On the Threshold of German Modernism (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014).


Rodin’s suggestion that the Beethoven-Denkmal had nothing to do with sculpture, but would be an appropriate prototype for producing a million copies, seems to echo others who compared the Beethoven-Denkmal to a domestic decorative bauble. For instance, Otto Julius Bierbaum similarly wrote in his Mit der Kraft, 55:


79. Hevesi, “Max Klingers Beethoven,” 388:

Und wie er sitzt. Es ist ganz und gar das raccoglimento das der große wilde Quattrocentomensch Donatello zu bilden wußte, das zusammenfassende Massieren und Summieren der Form, das auf sich Zusammengedrängte, in sich Verdichtete der Gebärde. Die ganze Gestalt ist wie jene geballte Faust der rechten Hand, ein Ausdruck höchster seelischer Konzentration.


85. Many have specifically associated Rodin’s *Penseur* with Dürer’s *Melancholia I*. Drew Daniel has argued that in Rodin’s sculpture, “the melancholy posture becomes elided with the activity of thought itself,” see his *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 41.

86. Morgenthal, “Max Klinger’s Statue of Beethoven,” 309.


92. Rodin decided to enlarge the *Penseur* to monumental proportions in 1901, just at the moment of the *Beethoven-Denkmal*’s completion; see Elsen, *Rodin’s Thinker*, 75–141.

93. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, trans. G. Craig Houston (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2006), 49. I thank Brigid Doherty for directing me towards Rilke’s remarks and for her insights on them, as well as for sharing the manuscript of her forthcoming essay, “Rilke’s Magic Lantern: Figural Language and the Projection of ‘Interior Action’ in the Rodin Lecture,” in *Interiors and Interiority*, eds. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth and Beate Söntgen (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, October 2015), 313-345. I have modified Houston’s translation of Rilke’s comments in accordance with Doherty’s text, 334.


99. That the head’s “burden” is in fact displaced to the genital region is aptly articulated in Anne Wagner’s observation that the figure’s “right hand holds the penis; the left encircles the right wrist as if helping to support its weight,” see “Rodin’s Reputation,” in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 191-242, 223.

100. Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, 39. For a discussion that more fully treats the complexity of Rilke’s comments on the *Balzac*, see Doherty, “Rilke’s Magic Lantern” (forthcoming), 341-345.


102. For the commision, see Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna*, 226–52. Klimt completed and exhibited his first two faculties, *Philosophie* and *Medizin*, before beginning the *Beethovenfries*. The third faculty, *Jurisprudenz*, had not been completed, and was taken up again in 1903. The result is radically different from *Medizin* and *Philosophie*, precisely because it absorbs the formal lessons of the frieze. Klimt also substantially reworked *Philosophie* and *Medizin* while working on *Jurisprudenz*. All three burned in 1945, so my discussion here relies on photographic documentation.

103. Strobl, “Zu den Fakultätsbildern,” 150:

104. Strobl, “Zu den Fakultätsbildern,” 150. The canvas was exhibited in the spring of 1900 at the seventh Secession exhibition, and was glossed in the catalogue as follows: “Linke Figurengruppe: das Entstehen, das fruchtbare Sein, das Vergehen. Rechts: Die Weltkugel, das Welträtsel. Unten auftauchend eine erleuchtete Gestalt: das Wissen,” see Secession, Katalog der VII. Kunstausstellung der Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs Secession (Vienna: Secession, 1900).


106. Schorske, Fin-de-siècle Vienna, 231. This section of Also sprach Zarathustra is usually called “Das trunkene Lied” or in some English translations, “Zarathustra’s Roundelay,” and forms a key refrain of the philosopher’s text.


108. Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 103.

sans s’exaspérer; et il déclarait, avec sa voix mordante, sonore et toujours un peu théâtrale: que cela n’était point philosophique. ‘On ne peut penser et écrire qu’assis,’ disait-il.’’


118. As Bisanz-Prakken has demonstrated, the Dresden program notes are the most directly relevant source for the frieze’s iconography; see Bisanz-Prakken, *Gustav Klimt—Der Beethovenfrieze*, 49–51.


    119. Klimt’s level of involvement in authoring the unsigned catalogue text is unclear.

The full original text is as follows, Secession, *XIV. Kunstausstellung*, 25–26:

wohlgerüsteten Starken als äußere, Mitleid und Ehrgeiz als innere treibende Kräfte, die ihn das Ringen nach dem Glück aufzunehmen bewegen.


120. The warrior’s armor is a nearly exact copy of Lorenz Helmschmied’s suit of arms for Archduke Sigismund of Tyrol from 1485, which Klimt was able to view in the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum; see Bouillon, Klimt: Beethoven, 44.

Because Klimt contributed an image of the knight to the volume Gustav Mahler: ein Bild seiner Persönlichkeit in Widmungen (München: Piper, 1910), many readings of the frieze view the “well-armed warrior” as a veiled portrait of Mahler. For a typical reading in this vein, see Anna Celenza, “Vienna’s Golden Knight: A Tale of Science, Symphonies, and Scandalous Art,” Hopkins Review 3, no. 4 (2010): 464–95, 484. I agree with Kevin Karnes in doubting that Klimt intended this direct reference, see Karnes, “Wagner, Klimt, and the Metaphysics of Creativity,” 682n83. To my mind, the spatial position of the knight within the frieze insists upon a relationship to Beethoven, or Beethoven as a personification of the artist in general.

121. Strobl, “Zu den Fakultätsbildern,” 142. In the scheme proposed by the University for the decoration of the Aula ceiling, the various allegories of the Faculties would orbit around a central panel by Franz Matsch explicitly treating the “Sieg des Lichtes über die Finsternis.”

122. Secession, XIV. Kunstausstellung, 25: “Dekoratives Prinzip: Rücksichtnahme auf die Saalanlage; ornamentierte Putzflächen.”

Diese Ausstellung lehrte in jenem Fries eine Arbeit Klimts kennen, die wie schon bemerkt, darum als Wendepunkt in seiner Entwicklung anzusehen ist, weil se ihn im sicheren Besitz eines rein dekorativen Stiles zeigt. In der Art ägyptischer Fresken etwa arbeitet er fast ohne Modellierung, bloß mit farbigen Flächen und mit Umrißlinien.

Marian Bisanz-Prakken, the leading expert on Klimt, also sees the *Beethovenfries* as a turning point, the beginning of his so-called golden period; see Bisanz-Prakken, *Gustav Klimt— Der Beethovenfries*, 36, 77.


For a discussion of the reception of the faculty pictures, see Strobl, “Zu den Fakultätsbildern,” 152–62; Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna*, 225–44.


133. Berta Zuckerkandl emphasized this aspect of the frieze; see Zuckerkandl, “Klingers Beethoven in der Wiener Secession,” 387–88: “Er fasste die Freske als ornamentierte Putzfläche auf. Die Mörtelwand benützte er als Grundton für die von ihm darauf ausgeführten Figuren, so dass er eigentlich nur eine Konturen-Zeichnung auf die Wand auftrug und zur Fleischfarbung der Körper grösenteils den Mörtelton direkt benützte, oder nur ganz leicht die konturierten Flächen mit Farbe ausfüllte.”


136. For a discussion of this mudra see E. Dale Saunders, Mudra: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 66–75. While we know Klimt was an avid admirer of Japanese woodblock prints, the question of his familiarity with Buddhist iconography, and the possible sources he might have seen, requires further research.


140. Bouillon, Klimt: Beethoven, 56; Reichswehr [pseud.], unidentified article, 20 April 1902, reprised in Bahr, Gegen Klimt, 68: “wie viele Millionen Mitgift es bedürfte, um diese Damen an den Mann zu bringen, besonders die Dicke rechts, die vegeblich damit entschuldigt wird, daß sie Unmäßigkeit heißt.”


144. Dr. Robert Hirschfeld, unidentified article, 20 April 1902, reprised in Bahr, Gegen Klimt, 68: “Klimt’s Fresken passen für einen Krafft-Ebing-Tempel.”


147. Schorske was the first to emphasize the sexualization of these shapes. He describes this passage as “a young man in transport, framed with his mate in a column shaped unmistakeably like an erect penis within Art’s uterine bower of bliss,” see Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna*, 263.


150. I am grateful to Julia Hyland Bruno, an animal behavior specialist in the department of Biopsychology and Behavioral Neuroscience at CUNY, for pointing out the simian resemblance.

151. A partial catalogue of Klimt’s library can be found in Nebehay, *Gustav Klimt: Dokumentation*, 52–53. Twenty-seven titles are listed. The complete contents of the library are unknown.


155. This satirical moniker was derived from the anonymous article “Der Ornamentenfeind,” Ulk, 18 March 1910, reprinted in Kontroversen: Adolf Loos in Spiegel der Zeitgenossen, ed. Adolf Opel (Vienna: Georg Prachner, 1985), 33–35. Loos never referred explicitly to the Klinger-Beethoven Ausstellung exhibition in his writings, yet it seems likely that the exhibition was a deliberate subtext in his commentaries on Beethoven.


For the problematic dating and publication history of this text, see Christopher Long, “The Origins and Context of Adolf Loos’s ‘Ornament and Crime,’” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 68, no. 2 (2009): 201–23. First given as a lecture in Berlin in 1909, the text appeared initially as “Ornament et crime” in 1913 in *Les Cahiers d’aujourd’hui*. Loos himself dated “Ornament und Verbrechen” to 1908, when he had it published in *Trotzdem* in 1931 (Innsbruck: Brenner-Verlag). My citations to the essay (and to *Trotzdem*) are to the modern edition of 1982, given above, as well as to the Bullock translation of the essay.


162. The photograph is undated. It seems likely, however, that it was taken just before the official opening of the exhibition.
Chapter 3: The Mise-en-scène of Dreams: L’Après-midi d’un faune, 1912

On 29 May 1912, Vaslav Nijinsky, the most celebrated soloist in Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, made his debut as a choreographer at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, premiering a short dance, or, as it was termed in the company program, a tableau chorégraphique. Loosely based on the scenario of Stéphane Mallarmé’s eclogue L’Après-midi d’un faune (1876), Nijinsky’s so-called “choreographic picture” was set to Claude Debussy’s corresponding symphonic poem, Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune (1894).

Several paragraphs from the theatrical trade journal Comœdia illustré vividly encapsulate the aesthetic audacity of this historic dance. In a special issue dedicated to L’Après-midi d’un faune, Henri Gauthier-Villars (Willy) described how the novelty of the performance announced itself through an apparent dissonance between the “vision” presented on stage and the poem and score that inspired Nijinsky’s dramatization—two works that were by 1912 familiar, even canonical, artifacts from the recent artistic heritage of Impressionism and Symbolism:

As soon as the first sonic curl rises from the Debussyan flute like the intoxicating smoke from a pipe of opium, our little personal kinematograph starts itself up and unwinds its fairy-like film under our closed eyelids. With unconscious memories of literature, of painting and of sculpture, everyone models their own particular faun and makes the sunny light of the undergrowth dance on his supple body: this naive young lady colors him with the palette of Bouguereau, that ardent virgin outlines him with the burin of Rops. Monsieur Arthur Meyer mentally essays him in bulging underpants, a detachable collar and cuffs. Monsieur Gaston Calmette, holding in his hand the razor of Le Figaro, duplicitously approaches the pursuer of nymphs to propose a tryst in the rafters of the Sistine Chapel, while that old widow, embellishing to her liking the exploits of her obliging satyr, forges for herself a felicity that makes her weep with tenderness!

All that, Nijinsky endeavored to replace at a single blow with his own vision. The attempt was almost impertinent: and we know with what unexpected means he realized it.1
In its attention to the psychological and sexual appetites of the spectator, and more specifically, in its envisioning of a mechanics of dreaming, of a human mind functioning like a “little personal kinematograph,” mechanically activating figures stored in a mental archive of pictures, Gauthier-Villars’s review lays out certain premises I take as fundamental to *L’Après-midi d’un faune*’s conceptual architecture. Nijinsky’s ballet materialized, in the form of spectacular high-cultural entertainment, a new conception of dreaming, one closely correlated with a new theory of mind being formulated during the decades in which the choreographer was active. A psychoanalytic theory of mind, that is, which “regard[ed] the process of dreaming as a regression occurring in our hypothetical mental apparatus,” and looked to dreams for the discovery of “mental antiquities,” interpreting them as privileged evidence of thought processes distinctive to a mental system defined as the Unconscious.  

As Gauthier-Villars made plain in the preamble to his description of the ballet’s “unexpected” realization, in staging *L’Après-midi d’un faune* Nijinsky had taken on aesthetic material with a particular imaginative, fantasmatic potency for its theatrical audience, and with a particular density of visual, poetic associations. To mount a *L’Après-midi d’un faune*, Gauthier-Villars observed, was to court the risk of “disappointing the auditor’s imagination,” for the Debussy *Prélude* “posed more than ever the question of the superiority of the interior dream over theatrical exteriorizations.” Nijinsky danced to a piece of music famous for its exceptionally suggestive sonic properties, a score composed to echo in the minds of its listener the erotic fervor of Mallarmé’s faun-narrator, a stock mythological protagonist whose hallucinatory musings the poet had based upon the classical myth of Pan and Syrinx and its imagistic afterlives in both Renaissance and Rococo painting. It was in 1912, significantly, that scholars first raised the possibility that a specific rendition of the myth by Boucher in London’s National Gallery had
inspired Mallarmé’s poem (fig. 4.1). Inserting itself into this long and continuous chain of visual, verbal, and musical remediations, "L’Après-midi d’un faune" brought a disruptive new visual language to this well-trodden terrain of the mythological imagination.

Nijinsky was repeatedly faulted for his mistranslation of the dream evoked by Mallarmé’s faun. The poet had praised Debussy in 1894 for his utterly faithful translation of the eclogue’s spirit, writing to him: “Your illustration of "L’Après-midi d’un faune" has no dissonance with my text, except to go further, truly, into nostalgia and brightness.”5 By contrast, the composer despised how le terroriste Nijinsky had illustrated his own musical illustration. Describing his “horror” at seeing his “soothing, flexible, curling” music accompanied by “figures of cardboard” who moved “as if their schematic gestures were regulated by the laws of pure geometry,” Debussy dismissed the ballet as “an atrocious dissonance, without possible resolution!”6

If, as Gauthier-Villars indicates, Mallarmé’s poem and Debussy’s prelude were especially suited to stimulating the human capacity for reverie, it was precisely this capacity Nijinsky’s ballet was seen to disappoint, estrange, or frustrate. The impertinence of "L’Après-midi d’un faune," in Gauthier-Villars’s telling, had to do with its invasion of this realm of reverie—its move to supplant or obliterate a range of inherited erotic dreamscapes. Nijinsky’s “theatrical exteriorization” (fig. 4.2) appeared as a violent blow to an aesthetic imagination conditioned by “unconscious memories of literature, of painting, and of sculpture,” presenting a disconcerting departure from the aesthetics of reverie associated with Mallarmé’s poem and Debussy’s music. Yet in this departure, I shall argue, Nijinsky’s choreography could be seen to substitute one kind of erotic dreamscape for another. Overwriting interior dreams confected from memories of pastoral paintings and poems of past centuries and decades, Nijinsky replaced “fairy-like film[s]” unwinding in the mind of an auditor with a different and more jarring type of motion picture: a
tableau chorégraphique constructed out of something older, “unconscious memories,” or archaeological remnants, of the crudest, most immature, and least apparently sensual specimens of archaic visual culture.

Nijinsky’s choreography relied on certain qualities, both structural and stylistic, that might be defined as paradigmatic of what Sigmund Freud described as “the regressive, archaic character of the expression of thoughts in dreams.” In recent scholarship, Simon Hecquet and Sabine Prokhoris briefly pointed toward Freud’s relevance to Faune in their study of Nijinsky’s dance notation, primarily with regard to the dream as a system of writing. Indeed as a whole, as a tableau chorégraphique that is, L’Après-midi d’un faune predominantly deployed the kinds of symbolic mechanisms Freud conceptualized as “condensation and displacement”—mechanisms he posited as central to the operations of dreamwork. In Faune, the curtain opened onto a picture in which sexual drives were expressed, flaunted even, through combinations of contraries—most pointedly through paradoxical, contradictory condensations of motion and stasis.

Styling itself as a mobilized fragment recovered from a distant artistic past, the dance enlisted its performers to embody a type of archaic figural imagery that featured prominently among the antique objects Freud studied, collected, and displayed within the mise-en-scène of psychoanalytic treatment (fig. 4.3). The ballet staged an interpretation of archaic figuration that was specifically psychological in character, echoing the one formulated in the writings of Emanuel Löwy, Freud’s lifelong friend and closest art historical associate. At the same time, L’Après-midi d’un faune mobilized its static archaic figures by means of choreography in a manner that advanced a specific set of mechanical metaphors for unconscious psychological processes.
Without any direct (or even indirect) knowledge of psychoanalysis, Nijinsky visualized and brought together two key metaphors Freud had exploited to articulate his conception of human psychology—archaeology and the apparatus. And crucially, the ballet deployed these metaphors of archaeology and the apparatus to address the operations of the sexual drives and the phenomenon of infantile sexuality. Because Nijinsky’s ballet shares this crucial set of problems and metaphors with psychoanalysis, *L’Après-midi d’un faune* is a work that demands to be situated in relation to the intellectual and cultural context of psychoanalytic discourse, not only to enrich and complicate our understanding of the terms in play in Nijinsky’s choreography, but also to enrich and complicate our understanding of Freudian concepts.

**Ce n’est pas ‘L’Après-midi d’un faune’**

Nijinsky’s perceived “mistranslation” of *L’Après-midi d’un faune* hinged upon a movement backward, a willful regression into a psychological realm anterior to the one expressed in Mallarmé’s poem. The audiences who arrived at the Châtellet to witness the premiere of this “choreographic picture” were given a program (fig. 4.4) containing the following explanation, a gloss in the form of a disavowal: “This is not Stéphane Mallarmé’s *L’Après-midi d’un faune*, but a short scene, set to the musical prélude to this panicked episode, which precedes it.” These unsigned program notes, which were almost certainly composed by Jean Cocteau, specified that the dance would dramatize something prior to the eclogue, the aborted erotic encounter remembered and recounted in the lyrical monologue of Mallarmé’s faun.

This program note alone was enough to suggest a fundamental misreading of the poem that had provided the ballet’s dramatic conceit, for the crucial innovation in Mallarmé’s
decadelong textual revision of *L’Après-midi d’un faune* was his progressive derealization of the scene which ultimately became the absent center of his poem. In the final eclogue of 1876, the poet abandoned the initial format of a *poème dramatique* used in 1865, which had been complete with stage directions, in favor of a soliloquy, or internal dialogue, whose printed typography merely evoked a theatrical script. In this last version, the elision of the encounter that would have been staged in the dramatic version was repeatedly signaled and invoked.

From the outset of his compositional process, Mallarmé recognized that his poetic ambition was “absolument scénique, non possible au théâtre, mais exigeant le théâtre.” He acknowledged, in other words, that physically staging the scene that prompted his faun’s aesthetic reveries was technically or conceptually impossible. This impossibility became crucial to the thematics of *L’Après-midi d’un faune*. In the final version of the eclogue, the faun recounts his failed attempt to ravish two succulent sister nymphs, while parsing his uncertainty as to whether that encounter was actual, or dreamed. The eclogue follows the faun’s train of thought as he conducts what Leo Bersani has described as an “analytic and critical” disquisition on his self-described “dream” of the nymphs, a self-analysis that leads the narrator from mere desire to a “consciousness of desire,” and to a pleasurable awareness of his own “sublimating consciousness.”

Eventually, the faun arrives at the ironic realization that it is inconsequential whether his sexual encounter was real or imagined, for in either case he can reproduce and amplify the experience artistically. As in Ovid’s original telling of the Pan and Syrinx myth, which recounts the goat-god’s invention of flute music after the nymph eludes his attempted rape, it is the transfiguration of sexual desire into artistic creativity that is the ultimate subject of Mallarmé’s *L’Après-midi d’un faune*. The monologue hinges on the self-reflexive activity of
Pan’s piping—and, metaphorically, of the poet’s poeticizing (fig. 4.5)—“en un solo long . . . une sonore, vaine et monotone ligne” (in a long solo . . . a sonorous, empty, monotonous line). If the fable of Pan and Syrinx provided Mallarmé inspiration to reflect upon the narcissistic pleasures of artistic creation, the same cannot be said for Nijinsky; his “myth-work” in L’Après-midi d’un faune betrays less faith than either literary original in a subject’s psychological capacity to move beyond the initial, arousing scene, or to progress successfully to art from sexual stimulus.  

The choreographer seems to have relished announcing to journalists that his French was “not yet good enough . . . for reading literary texts.” Yet his claim to have choreographed L’Après-midi d’un faune without reading the eclogue was obviously false—the ballet responded very sensitively and often quite explicitly to the poem’s structures and motifs. If the choreographer was not fluent enough to grasp the considerable subtleties of Mallarmé’s French, Cocteau, or someone else, must have discussed the poem with him in depth. Nonetheless Nijinsky’s disavowal carries great conceptual significance, for it underscores the degree to which his “reading” of the eclogue wanted to stress, against the grain of the text, the primacy of the scene, rather than its aesthetic sublimation into “literary text.”

The choreographer’s decision to remain fixated within that realm of the scene, or the dream, that “precedes” the faun’s monologue, which is to say his decision to remain within the domain of something “anterior” to a “sublimating consciousness,” entailed a crucial shift in mood between poem and performance. Rather than recognizing in Mallarmé’s meditation on Pan and Syrinx a triumphant origin myth of art or music, the ballet, as the program notes insisted, found in it an origin (or an etymology) of panic, a “panicked episode” (épisode panique) as Cocteau called it. If these terms ring oddly as descriptors of the original eclogue, which voiced
its animal ardency in a tone of supreme and serene nonchalance, they are nonetheless apt for speaking about the “choreographic picture” *L’Après-midi d’un faune*. In both form and narrative, the ballet presented its audience with a vision of psychological processes evidently far more unsettling than the one recounted in the faun’s poetic monologue.

**This is not Dance**

Just as Nijinsky’s *L’Après-midi d’un faune* was founded upon a kind of negation of Mallarmé’s poem, it was also founded upon a negation of balletic tradition. Sometime in the summer of 1910, Diaghilev presented Nijinsky with an opportunity to star in a ballet of his own creation. The dancer immediately set about countering all the qualities that had gained him celebrity as one of the Western world’s most idolized performers. Over the course of two years, at first working secretly with his sister Bronislava, and then presiding over somewhere between sixty and one hundred and twenty rehearsals with seven female dancers from the troupe, Nijinsky conceived a performance that, for the majority of his audiences, was not even recognizable as dance.

Before the premiere of *L’Après-midi d’un faune*, Nijinsky (fig. 4.6) had been known to his fans as the “young hero of rhythm and movement,” an idol of “life in action, in the force of its indomitable élan.” He was celebrated for his extraordinary gifts as a mimic actor and his uncanny, acrobatic capacity for jumping, leaping, and “hanging” in the air (fig. 4.7). These qualities were conspicuously absent from his “choreographic picture” (figs. 4.8, 4.9). As the *Sketch Supplement* explained, *Faune* was a ballet with “no dancing in it whatever, but only certain postures and movements.” This replacement of “dancing” with mere “movements” and “postures” stimulated in Nijinsky’s audiences feelings of both deprivation and bafflement.
“What? They paid four hundred francs per box to see the flying Nijinsky and the fluttering Karsavina, and suddenly they are shown a boring bas-relief! . . . What does this ‘ballet without dance’ mean?”

_Faune_ was, in the words of one astonished American reviewer, “a strange vision—as motionless, almost, as if it had been mute—of pagan and primitive, yet of ultra-modern and a little perverse, fancy.” Indeed, the performance was the first in a series of three ballets, comprising also _Jeux_ (1913), and _Sacre du Printemps_ (1913), that established Nijinsky’s reputation as the founder of “modernism” in theatrical dance. Unlike _Jeux_ and _Sacre du Printemps_, however, _Faune_’s original choreography is still accessible today because of the unprecedented measures the choreographer took to preserve it in graphic media. Most of the photographs that illustrate this chapter are drawn from a lavish picture book of _Faune_ (fig. 4.10) that Nijinsky personally financed. We can accurately reconstruct the original performance because the choreographer invented his own system of dance notation in 1915 in order to write out the definitive “score of movement” (fig. 4.11) to _L’Après-midi d’un faune_. These unusual efforts to translate _Faune_ into graphic media indicate Nijinsky’s particular investment in this performance, which was by far the most painstakingly planned of the four dances he realized in his short career, and one whose central character he identified with intensely. Indeed, in his 1919 diary, Nijinsky wrote “the faun is me.” At the same time, and inseparably, these graphic translations of _Faune_ were the logical outgrowth of its novel principle of composition.

Nijinsky’s essential premise in _L’Après-midi d’un faune_ was to create a tableau chorégraphique, that is, to create a dance that appeared to be a static, two-dimensional image existing outside the flow of time or three-dimensional space. His production notes further stipulate, “the aim is for everything to be almost flat . . . like a low-relief.” To this end, the
production designer Léon Bakst created a set that aggressively implemented the *Reliefbühne* technique recently pioneered by director and theater-reformer Georg Füchs at the Münchner Künstlertheater. Bakst and Nijinsky hung the painted backdrop less than a meter behind the footlights, pressing the area of action radically close to the auditorium. The minimal set primarily asserted a sense of surface and constricted the stage’s depth; it consisted simply of Bakst’s painted *toile de fond* (fig. 4.12) with an almost imperceptibly protruding moss-covered rock attached to it. The backdrop presented a highly decorative approximation of a Grecian summer landscape that proclaimed its flatness through an allover, fur-like patterning of tawny, mottled greys, russets, yellows, and greens.

This picturelike set determined the ballet’s postures and pathways of movement. Within the shallow band of space at the stage’s front edge, the dancers assimilated their bodies to the planarity of the painted surface behind them, holding postures rigorously in parallel to the backdrop, so that it appeared as if they existed “inside the backdrop” (*dans le décor*), to quote the unusual phrasing in the company program. They contorted their bodies to maintain postures that appeared stiff and graphically two-dimensional, modeled more or less directly on painted and sculpted figures found in ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, Etruscan, and archaic Greek artworks. The dancers held these archaic postures for extended intervals of complete stillness, or maintained them partially while moving parts of their bodies (arms, legs) in isolation. Transitions between individual static postures were sudden and rapid. The dancers traversed the stage exclusively from side to side, gliding back and forth past each other like sliding doors, moving between the two left- and right-facing vectors of movement “as if in a slot, with abrupt profiled turns.”

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It was while conforming to these “strict two dimensional limitations” that Nijinsky’s dancers enacted the “short scene” meant to “precede” Mallarmé’s poem. The program notes outline the scene as follows:37 “A Faun rests—Some nymphs dupe him—A forgotten scarf satisfies his dream; the curtain falls for the poem to commence in everyone’s memories.”38

The curtain rose to reveal the faun: Nijinsky alone onstage, in profile and motionless, “disguised as a baby cow” or “piebald horse,” as one critic put it, in a nude body stocking painted with brown splotches, accented with little horns and a prominent scut (fig. 4.13).39 For the first ten measures of music, in time with the opening arabesque of a solo flute, this unconventionally equine or bovine “faun” remained lying propped up on the rock with a flute held to his lips.40 He continued to rest there as the music progressed, holding up a bunch of grapes and periodically lifting his instrument. As the faun sat motionless again, two groups of Grecian nymphs (fig. 4.14) in gauzy, semitransparent tunics slid in from house left, walking in unison in triplet groups.

A taller nymph (Lydia Nelidova) arrived. As the other nymphs began to help her disrobe, the faun stirred and his head abruptly reversed direction.41 He rose and descended from his rock, walking backward. Gliding in a parallel line behind the row of nymphs, the faun remained unobserved until he swiveled abruptly to face and startle one of them. The smaller nymphs scattered, leaving the tallest clutching a veil across her chest and alone on stage with the faun, who approached, gesticulating towards her with flat palms and sharply extended thumbs (fig. 4.15). The nymph and faun began a short pas de deux punctuated by repeated intervals of stillness, culminating in a brief walk in unison back and forth across the stage with elbows linked (fig. 4.16).
The groups of nymphs returned, and the tall nymph departed with them, dropping a part of her robe in the process. Again alone onstage, the faun walked toward the abandoned garment. Several nymphs returned, gesticulating in his direction with abrupt, angular stabbing motions, to “jeer the faun” (in Nijinsky’s words), before exiting again. The faun then picked up the gauzy fabric, “laugh[ed] like an animal,” “smell[ed] the dress,” and then, returning to where here he sat when the curtain opened, “carrie[d] the frock carefully to his bed on the hillock” and “[had] fun with it” (Nijinsky’s wording again). Maintaining his body in constant profile to the viewer, the faun laid the fabric flat on the rock, suspended himself over it in a plank position, pointed downward towards it from his pelvis with a stiff, flattened palm (fig. 4.17), and finally lowered his body lengthwise over it. In time with the clinging bells that conclude Debussy’s Prélude, and with his hand positioned just under his pelvis (fig. 4.18), the faun arched his back and lifted his head. And then the curtain fell so that the “memory” of Mallarmé’s poem could commence—or so the program said.

An ‘Exhibitionism’ of Prudery

The novel, radical address Faune made to its theatrical audience is evident from the extreme excitation it generated in the press. As is well known, the ballet precipitated an historic, high-pitched public debate on the topic of modern art and obscenity. While this outburst is now one familiar episode in a longer list of “scandals” canonized within the history of modernism (the premiere of Nijinsky’s Sacre du printemps exactly one year later being an even more canonical example), it must be emphasized that the succès de scandale of Faune was a benchmark event in establishing a linkage, increasingly integral to twentieth-century artistic practice, between publicity and shock tactics. What demands particular examination in the case
of *Faune*, however, is the aesthetic construction of the supposed obscenity undergirding the scandal, for the controversy *Faune* produced cannot be taken as obvious.

Although Nijinsky would later profess to be “astonished, even shocked, that part of the public and some journalists discovered an unhealthy intention in his gestures,” since, he claimed, “in composing his character, he simply sought to go back to classical attitudes,” the choreographer was aware of his ballet’s incendiary character.44 Harry Graf Kessler (at that time the owner of Seurat’s *Poseuses*) recalled that Diaghilev and Nijinsky were “fearful that this presentation [would] alienate the public,” and so together they mounted an ambitious promotional campaign to generate favorable press coverage in advance of its premiere.45 The impresario and the dancer gave several interviews to explain the ballet’s “totally new plastic composition,” resulting in several articles announcing that Nijinsky was modernizing ballet “with the aid of avant-garde formulas,” referring somewhat vaguely to both Cubism and Futurism.46 Diaghilev also hosted several dress rehearsals catered with champagne and caviar for established members of Parisian artistic society, which resulted in two laudatory reviews just in advance of the debut: Jean Cocteau’s “Une répétition du ‘Prélude à l’après-midi d’un Faune,’” and Jacques-Émile Blanche’s “L’antiquité en 1912,” published on the front page of *Le Figaro* the morning of the premiere.47

Most significantly, extraordinary measures were taken to secure a public endorsement of *Faune* from the sculptor Auguste Rodin—an éminence grise known to be an enthusiast of dance, and also, not incidentally, “to have a high tolerance for explicit eroticism.”48 Rodin, who had never before seen Nijinsky perform, was escorted to a dress rehearsal by Kessler. The next day the journalist Roger Marx was dispatched to the sculptor’s studio to record his encomium for the newspaper *Le Matin*.49 Because Rodin could produce no more coherent statement of appreciation
than repeating “c’est de l’antique, c’est de l’antique” again and again, Marx composed a text himself and forged Rodin’s signature. The article, signed “Rodin” and published the morning after the premiere, praised Nijinsky as the greatest genius in a new lineage of modern dancers “recovering the liberty of instinct,” and identified Faune as his greatest achievement thus far. Provocatively, “Rodin” singled out as especially affecting the two most radical moments of the dance: the protracted period of total stasis at the rising of the curtain, when the faun reclined motionless on his rock so that “one thinks Nijinsky is a statue,” and then, just before the curtain closes at the ballet’s end, the “dénouement, when he spreads out . . . over the discarded veil.”

These interventions into the operations of the press, which aimed, ostensibly, to mitigate the potentially scandalous effects of the ballet’s explicit sexuality and dancelessness by publicly broadcasting their aesthetic merits, were instrumental in provoking the reaction one journalist coyly diagnosed as an “‘exhibitionism’ of prudery” perpetrated by the French press. Immediately after the public premiere, numerous articles appeared denouncing “the faun’s too expressive and too precise pantomiming.” Journalists repeatedly singled out the final movements as overly explicit, most often without overtly articulating what took place in the moment invariably described as the ballet’s dénouement: “The faun represented by the Russian dancer translates his voluptuous sentiments in an excessive manner, certainly at the falling of the curtain;” his final attitude was “a little too precisely amorous;” the moment was “absolutely immoral in its naturalism;” its “realism offended taste and decency.”

The most emphatic of these denunciations came on the front page of Le Figaro the morning after Faune’s premiere (figs. 4.19, 4.20). There, the editor-in-chief Gaston Calmette replaced the review by his regular theater critic with his own front-page editorial—“Un Faux Pas”—condemning the performance. Calmette’s invective is worth quoting nearly in full here,
for its simultaneously overheated, euphemistic rhetoric captures some of Faune’s willful contradictoriness:

Our readers will not find, in the regular theater column, the account of my excellent colleague Robert Brussel on the first performance of L’Après-midi d’un Faune, choreographic picture by Nijinsky, directed and danced by this astonishing artist. I have suppressed the review . . . I am persuaded that all the readers of Figaro who were at the Châtelet last night will approve if I protest against this too special exhibition [l’exhibition trop spéciale] which pretends to serve as a profound production, perfumed with precious art and harmonious poetry. Whoever speaks of art and poetry in this spectacle is making fun of us. This is neither a gracious eclogue nor a profound production. We had an indecent faun with vile movements of erotic bestiality and gestures of stiff immodesty. That’s it. And righteous hissing accompanied the too expressive pantomime of this badly constructed beast’s body, hideous from the front, even more hideous in profile [hideux de face, encore plus hideux de profil]. The true public will never accept these animal realities. Mr. Nijinsky, little accustomed to such a reception, took his revenge a half an hour later, with his exquisite interpretation in Spectre de la rose . . . These are the kinds of spectacles one must give to the public.  

Calmette’s objection to Nijinsky’s “too special exhibition” had to do, in part, with its perceived attempt to put something over on its audience. Rather than providing a spectacle capable of “provoking the enthusiasm of a room conquered by poetry, emotion, dreams and beauty,” the kind of spectacle epitomized for Calmette by Spectre de la rose, Faune instead showed disdain for its spectator through an obscene pretentiousness—an aestheticized front that made as if to disguise its perverse content.  

Perhaps intuiting how Nijinsky would later invoke the dance’s literally facade-like structure to protest that Faune was an utterly innocent product of purely archaeological interest (i.e., “it is simply a fragment from a classic bas-relief”), Calmette preemptively unmasked this disingenuous disavowal.  

Nijinsky’s engagement with “precious art and harmonious poetry,” he proposed, was merely a pretext to exhibit “vile movements,” to throw in the face of an audience some kind of réalité animale that was indecent, or “too expressive.”
This aesthetic pretense grew still more offensive, we can imagine, with Diaghilev’s reply to *Le Figaro* defending “the result of several years of effort and grave and conscientious research.” Diaghilev supplied a letter of praise from Odilon Redon and a passage from Rodin’s article, beseeching Calmette to “offer to the public the opinion of the greatest artist of the epoch.” At this point the sculptor’s forged testimony became, as one member of the British press reported, “the fertile seed of a world-wide scandal.” Calmette reprinted Rodin’s praise on the front page of *Le Figaro*, accompanied by an editorial suggesting that this famously womanizing “priapatriarche,” known as *le satyre brut* even among his friends (fig. 4.21), was ill equipped to arbitrate in affairs of public morality. Rodin, he pointed out, had deigned to exhibit, in the converted chapel and convent bestowed to him for a studio by the French government, a “series of libidinous drawings and cynical sketches specifying, with even more brutality, the impudic attitudes of the faun.”

As one editorial observed acidly, “the best-laid schemes of the most unscrupulous press agent in the United States could never have generated such a tornado of publicity.” In newspapers around the Western world, the alleged obscenity of Nijinsky and Rodin produced headlines such as “Blush on the Face of Paris,” or “Wicked Paris Shocked at Last,” provoking Diaghilev to double the number of scheduled performances of the *Faune*. At the second showing, supervised by the prefecture of police, “all Paris was there. There were the Nijinskyists and Anti-Nijinskyists, the Rodinists and the Anti-Rodinists, the Calmettistes and the Anti-Calmettistes . . . You’re going to see the wagging [*Vous allez voir le frétilllement*], everyone was saying in the audience.”

While it has been maintained that the press never specified the violation of propriety that took place in *Faune*, there was little ambiguity about what fueled the immediate uptick in ticket
As the above editorial makes obvious, “all of Paris” flocked to *Faune* in anticipation of witnessing an act of (simulated) masturbation—*frétiller la queue* meant literally to wag a tail, and *queue* was typical slang for penis. (An extraordinary prose poem from 1892, possibly by Rémy de Gourmont, confirms the verb’s specifically onanistic connotations: “Leur queue frétille, frétille, frétille, et nul sperme n’en sort pour féconder le réseau des œufs femelles, car leurs organes sont stériles et c’est en vain qu’ils se masturbent”). Indeed, such an interpretation was almost demanded by the ballet’s program notes. As Anatolii Lunacharskii pointed out in his review, Calmette’s (implied) accusation that Nijinsky had depicted a “kind of ‘alleviating’” onstage was reinforced by “the absurd phrase with which the anonymous compiler of the explanatory libretto concluded his work,” (i.e. “*un écharpe oublié satisfait son rêve.*”) More generally, audiences came anticipating exposure to an act of “sexual demonstration” or “ostentatious” self-exhibiting such as those modern sexologists like Richard von Krafft-Ebing had recently catalogued and christened. Deploying with flourish a new diagnostic term (coined in French in 1877, in wide, crosslinguistic circulation by 1912), the conservative pages of *L’Autorité* issued the following assessment:

Nijinsky having heard it said that the natural is the summit of Art wanted to be faun right down to the tail [*queue*] and presented himself, on stage, in front of the crowd of attentive spectators, in a mimicry so unexpected and so singular that a profound stupor, diversely manifested, seized its spectators: a magistrate confirmed to me that each week, individuals who are neither Russians, nor dancers, find themselves condemned by the correctional tribunal for an offense known by the name of exhibitionism.

Mallarmé, known for his “discrete” aversion to publishing (he issued his eclogue in a limited, luxury edition of one hundred and ninety-five copies), reportedly observed that appearing in print gave him the feeling “of an indecency, of an aberration resembling that form of mental disease called exhibitionism.” An enthusiastic courting of print publicity, by contrast, served as both a
mechanism of and metaphor for Nijinsky’s engagement with “the disease called exhibitionism.” And crucially, the reception of Faune seemed to demonstrate that disease’s contagion, implicating the very journalists who took up the pen in denunciation.

The “‘exhibitionism’ of prudery” Faune provoked in the press had less to do with its “demonstrative” sexuality per se than the type of sexological concepts the faun’s performance activated. The very same Parisian journalists who denounced Nijinsky’s choreography as obscene had approvingly received orgy scenes in previous Ballets Russes productions of Shéhérazade (1910). Their far less enthusiastic reception of Faune can be attributed to its deviation from an entrenched erotic paradigm of heterosexual copulation in favor of dramatizing something modern European culture deemed pathological, or else as an “infantile sexual activity,” as Freud put it in 1912 in his “Contribution to a Discussion of Masturbation.” Still, the significance of the outcry cannot be reduced merely to disgust at the ballet’s evocation of acts such as masturbation and genital exhibition—already well-known tropes of Rodin’s art by 1912. The special obscenity perceived in Faune was contingent upon its expression of this infantile dimension of sexuality by means of a novel formal approach to the human body in general.

Although in the context of the “world-wide scandal” around L’Après-midi d’un faune in 1912, the ballet’s obscenity was received under the flag of Rodin and “the liberty of instinct” the sculptor advocated, there was a profound breach between the sculptor and the choreographer in terms of their respective approaches to corporeal presentation. This breach reveals a transformation of figuration as much conceptual as merely formal. Rodin’s apparent speechlessness in the face of Nijinsky’s performance, his inability to produce any statement beyond “c’est de l’antique, c’est de l’antique” suggests the degree to which Faune mobilized, as Juliet Bellow has noted, “a presentation of the body at odds with Rodin’s own conceptions.”
The decidedly hesitant, partially effaced sketches Rodin made of the faun on the evening of the premiere (figs. 4.22, 4.23) attest to his difficulty in assimilating the ballet into his own aesthetic vocabulary.

If Rodin and Nijinsky could both be understood to proceed from a conviction that, to return to L’Autorité’s authoritative assessment, “the natural is the summit of Art,” they took diverging approaches towards realizing that “naturalism.” Rodin’s art, Arthur Symons noted, was “founded on the conception of . . . .the vivifying force of sex.”76 The sculptor tried to access that “vivifying force” of sexuality by liberating the body, by enforcing its freedom of movement. Rodin conceived of himself as releasing his subjects from both psychological inhibitions and the disciplinary conventions of academic posing, so that the model, perhaps the female model in particular, would be able to perform for him with a kind of animalistic freedom, “to come and go in the studio like an escaped horse,” as the sculptor put it.77 This calculated (or, we might say, sexually coercive) liberation of the posing session very often resulted in sculptures and drawings of splay-legged or masturbating women (figs. 4.24–4.27), artworks which possessed, according to Anne Wagner, “something like the character of mime: wordless demonstrations of the very existence of the female genitals.”78

The disinhibited expression of sexuality in Rodin’s art went hand in hand with a formal emphasis on unconstrained, even fluid movement, in terms of both the sculptor’s preferred materials (watercolor, pliant clay, bronze cast to retain the traces of its molten state), and the restlessly writhing, surging bodies he so often represented with these materials. Rodin’s figures often appear to “coast and roll as if on air currents,” or at times, I would suggest, to glide and bob as if submerged in watery substances. Indeed, Rodin’s erotic watercolors return continually to the visual trope of figures immersed in amorphous bodies of liquid (figs. 4.28, 4.29).79
Rodin’s *Monument to Balzac* (1891–98), a work that, when unveiled in Paris fourteen years earlier, produced a media sensation similar to the one that unfolded around *Faune* in 1912, epitomizes this association between sexuality and liquefaction. As discussed in the previous chapter, Rodin developed this standing cloaked figure of Balzac from a study of a man gripping his erect penis (fig. 3.28). In the final monument, the figure’s “phallic verticality” surges upward towards a head that, as noted previously, Rainer Maria Rilke likened to a ball dancing on a jet of water (fig. 3.29). The distinctly ejaculatory quality of the figure’s presentation is captured in Alain Kirili’s apt, if somewhat inexact, assertion that Rilke described the *Balzac* as a “phallic-fountain.”

I stress the importance of Rodin’s formal emphasis on fluidity because it was structural to the way that, in works such as the erotic watercolors or the *Balzac*, masturbation and exhibitionism were presented through a formal idiom that communicated a specific attitude towards human sexuality, one that celebrated sex as an organic force that was generative and emancipatory. Nijinsky’s divergence from such a formal idiom, I propose, conveys a more ambivalent, less celebratory attitude towards sexuality, one that might come closer to a Freudian comprehension, which recognized that sexuality could function psychically as a source of constraint and fixation. Thus, while Nijinsky took up motifs of exhibitionism and masturbation that had appeared throughout Rodin’s work, his choreography decoupled them from a formal language of “vivification” expressed specifically through unconstrained movement.

Paradoxically, given their respective media, the distinction between the sculptor and dancer could be said to follow the one Spyros Papapetros has drawn between “dynamic” and “static animation” (compare fig. 4.30 and fig. 4.16). *Faune* dramatized sexual excitation by seeking out “hieratic forms, inflexibly rigid,” by controlling and inhibiting motion, by making
every pose conventional and premeditated. Nijinsky’s choreography demanded not only that the dancer become more still, but also more self-conscious of his or her body “from the outside,” as it would appear from the perspective of an observing audience. Far from the sensation of emancipated embodiment Rodin wanted his “escaped horses” to feel, dancing in Faune was for many of Nijinsky’s nymphs an alienating, disciplinary experience, one which made them feel “restricted,” robbed of “a single free movement,” so detached from their own organic vitality that they sensed their bodies as “carved of stone.” The art of Nijinsky, as Sergei Volkonskii noted, was characterized by the “lack of that which in military school is called ‘at ease.’” Nijinsky’s dancers appeared “always held at gunpoint, always in subordination.”

For many observers, Faune’s subjugation of bodily freedom to the exacting, planimetric demands of the tableau chorégraphique appeared unnatural and inhuman, seeming to contradict the very eroticism Rodin had celebrated in it. As the critic Yakov Tugendkhol’d noted in his report home to Russia on the scandal, it was well and good for Rodin to speak of a “liberation of instinct” through dance, but it was “not from that point of view that one should approach Faune.” The music critic Pierre Lalo came closer to the mark, Tugendkhol’d wrote, when he denounced the ballet for being “more austere than erotic” and “innocent to excess.” One of the great contradictions of Faune, registered vividly in its polarized Parisian reception, was that it could be faulted for being at once insufficiently and excessively sexual, as both an overly naturalistic demonstration of “animal realities” and as an overly artificial stylization of them.

While the publicity revolved around the allegedly pornographic content of Faune, a large segment of the ballet’s first serious critics, particularly those with established aesthetic investments in Mallarmé or Debussy, faulted Nijinsky’s interpretation in precisely opposite terms. These critics emphasized the dance’s frigidity, its failure to apprehend the powerful
eroticism of the Prélude and its corresponding text. Pointing to the dance’s dryly archaeological self-presentation and to the fact that its action “unfold[ed] in extremely conventional and deliberate frames—in austere, minimalistic planes of two dimensions,” these critics could easily turn Calmette’s critique on its head to argue that the offensive sexuality he perceived in this “austere” composition could only be the figment of the prurient mind he brought to it.89

“Where did the director of Le Figaro spend his evening,” Gauthier-Villars wondered, “when he denounced the bestiality and immodesty that so profoundly troubled him? Certainly not at the Châtelet . . . Between us, it’s only Debussy who has committed an affront against modesty . . . his exhibitionistic score . . . breathes with a lasciviousness ignored by the Châtelet’s erudite goat-man.”90 For Gauthier-Villars, Nijinsky’s “satyre de la bibliothèque” had committed a “sin” against his audience “because of an insufficiency and not an excess of sensuality.”91 Lalo shared that perspective, seeing in Faune “no offense against morality,” but rather an offense against “art.”92

“It would be impossible to go further in miscomprehending the works interpreted,” he asserted, stating moreover that:

There [was] about as much sensuality in contemplating these mechanical silhouettes of dancers, these schemas of nympha, as in considering the figures that serve in a demonstration of the square of a hypotenuse.93

Lalo’s evocation of the sensuous boredom of a schoolroom proof of the Pythagorean theorem points towards an essential insight that emerges through Nijinsky’s new approach to corporeal presentation: “figures of men and women with the aspect of geometric diagrams” could in fact generate a more graphic “sexual demonstration” than the mobile, expressive, apparently disinhibited organic bodies that populated Rodin’s erotic works. Part of the shock of L’Après-midi d’un faune resided in the seeming incongruity between an austere, static, “geometric”
presentation of the body and the carnality expressed through it, an incongruity that registered in
the telling complaint that the ballet was “archaic without a doubt, but too expressive
nevertheless.”

_Faune_, paradoxically, delivered an excessive dose of sexuality by composing a _tableau
chorégraphique_ populated with archaic figures that appeared to lack the organic mobility and
three-dimensional corporeality of human beings. The dance thus had the disturbing quality of
seeming to deny the very “animal realities” it flaunted, or perhaps even more disturbingly, to
imply that the perception of those “realities” was merely interpolated in the mind of the
spectator, not visible in the “picture” itself. As Cyril Beaumont remembered, “the movements
and poses were performed so quietly, so impersonally, that their true character, with their power
to offend, was almost smoothed away.”

**From Dynamics to Statics: The _Tableau chorégraphique_**

Nijinsky’s departure from the paradigm of erotic figuration exemplified by Rodin—one
rooted in the expressivity of “dynamic animation”—mirrors the broader rupture _Faune_ made
with a long and broad tradition of dance. This tradition had taken mobility for granted as a
property intrinsic to the medium. In an interview a few weeks prior to the premiere of _Faune_,
Nijinsky and Diaghilev voiced an imperative to release dance from its current stagnation, or
evolutionary inertia, through an embrace of stillness:

> For a long time dance has remained immobile in its style, unchanging in its
aspect, inexpressive in human sentiment, stationary in its evolution, in a word,
icapable of drawing movement or life other than through a false and banal
agitation in place.

This passage encapsulates the willfully paradoxical logic that drove the innovative approach to
staging motion in _L’Après-midi d’un faune_. The historical rationale for _Faune_’s innovation
rested upon the construction of a reversible antithesis, such that stasis meant motion and vice versa.

_Faune_ fulfilled the evolutionary step prophesied in the above passage, staging a performance in which, as Tugendkhol’d wrote, “movement [gave] way to pose, dance to gesture, mimic acting to the ‘archaic smile,’ dynamics to statics.”

While its embrace of “statics” visibly flouted expectations built upon an entire history of Western dance, more pointedly, _Faune_ flouted the convention of intensified mobility audiences had come to expect and relish from the Ballets Russes. In particular, I propose that the choreography of _Faune_ positioned itself in opposition to one specific dance in the company’s repertoire, a dance which may have come to epitomize for Nijinsky the medium’s overreliance on “banal agitation,” as well as the public’s insatiable appetite for it.

The dances of Michel Fokine, chief choreographer for the company’s first three seasons (1909–11), were “org[ies] of animation.” They injected classical ballet with a new degree of energy and drama, in part by giving unprecedented prominence to the role of the male dancer. Fokine was celebrated precisely on the basis of his intensification of dynamism, lauded as a choreographer who “love[d] above all movement, force, passion.” He “knew,” as Jacques Rivière asserted, “that dance is the art of movement, that the dancer cannot concern himself with pleasing a painter with his attitudes, that he must remain free and never cease spinning.”

If one were to identify the individual Fokine ballet that achieved greatest popularity during the Ballet Russes’s first three seasons, it would have to be _Spectre de la rose_. This short piece, which premiered in the 1911 season, was also the work Rivière singled out in 1913 when he reassessed Fokine’s legacy after the revelation of Nijinsky’s _Sacre du Printemps_. Riviere deemed it the best demonstration of the older choreographer’s technique, one he now understood
to be overreliant on a superfluous “sauce dynamique.” Fokine, Rivière observed, favored a type of “liquid and continuous movement” that prevented the spectator from clearly apprehending the dancer’s bodily contours. He saw that tendency epitomized in Spectre, a ballet in which “Nijinsky literally disappear[ed] into his own dancing . . . he [was] plunged . . . into a dynamic atmosphere.”

Dance itself, as both the stimulus for and the stuff of fantasy, was the subtext of the short scenario in Spectre. With an unprecedented format, this romantic one-act ballet was essentially a vehicle for a long and virtuosic male solo. It was set to Hector Berlioz’s orchestration in 1841 of Carl Maria von Weber’s Aufforderung zum Tanz, and enacted a quatrain from Théophile Gautier’s poem “Le spectre de la rose” (1837): Soulève ta paupière close / Qu’effleure un songe virginal; / Je suis le spectre d’une rose / Que tu portais hier au bal. Tamara Karsavina played an adolescent girl who, upon returning to her Biedermeier bedroom after a stimulating evening out at a ball, is visited by a life-size, fluttering, flower blossom (Nijinsky, in a pink, petal-covered body-stocking). Circling the armchair where the girl sits snoozing (fig. 4.31), fluttering ceaselessly as if suspended on currents of breeze, the rose caresses the air around her, guides her gently to her feet, waltzes her briefly, and then flies out the window just before she wakes.

Spectre de la rose invariably delighted audiences of the Ballets Russes; in this dance, the acrobatically levitating, gravity-defying ballon Nijinsky was known for was seen to achieve its apotheosis. His aerial fluttering and in particular his spectacular parting grand jeté out the window became legendary (fig. 4.32). On several evenings Nijinsky’s performance produced such thunderous applause that Diaghilev took the unprecedented step of ordering an immediate encore of the entirety of Spectre de la rose. This was feasible, of course, only because of its exceptionally short duration—circa eight minutes.
When Gaston Calmette issued his condemnation of *Faune* in *Le Figaro*, he contrasted its failure specifically with the success Nijinsky achieved half an hour later performing *Spectre de la rose*. This invocation was not arbitrary, for a significant number of those who first viewed *Faune* felt impelled to make the same comparison. Reviewing the Ballets Russes’s season for 1912, the music critic Albert Bazaillas remarked that Nijinsky “achieved his usual success in *Spectre de la rose,*” and then, turning to *Faune*, he wondered: “Is it the taste for contrast which has driven Mr. Nijinsky to give a completely opposite impression?”

Indeed, Nijinsky’s first piece of choreography must be understood as a deliberate antithesis to the ballet that had brought him, as a performer, his greatest success. The “taste for contrast” Bazaillas noted is manifest in a more or less one-to-one inversion of the choreographic structure of *Spectre*. They are so closely matched that their similarities are worth reciting. Like *Spectre*, *Faune* took its name and basic plot from a French poem, also a poem that gave voice to an erotic dream narrative: *Ces nymphes, je les veux perpétuer. / Si clair, / Leur incarnat léger, qu’il voltige dans l’air/ Assoupi de sommeils touffus. / Aimai-je un rêve?* Like *Spectre*, *Faune* was an unusually short ballet, less than ten minutes long, with a simple and climactic plot proceeding from a protagonist in solitude to a brief danced encounter and back to solitude again. And, like *Spectre*, *Faune* was designated in the program of the Ballets Russes as a *tableau chorégraphique*, a choreographic picture (compare fig. 4.33 and fig. 4.4). In fact, *Spectre* was the first performance by the Ballets Russes to have been designated thus, gaining this designation possibly due to its exceptionally short duration.

Within this framework of symmetries, however, Nijinsky contradicted both the erotics and the movement aesthetics at work in *Spectre*. No longer the leaping virtuoso, in *Faune* Nijinsky spends half the ballet seated and virtually motionless. No longer a figment of adolescent
female erotic fantasy, in *Faune* Nijinsky himself inhabits the dreaming, desiring role. And the
dramatic unfolding of that desire in *Faune* no longer so comfortably gratifies the spectatorial
appetite for “dance” that *Spectre* satisfied with such spectacular success. By eliminating the so-
called *sauce dynamique*, Nijinsky’s choreography gave the audience both less and more of the
sexualized spectacle he knew they wanted from him. He did so, most pointedly, by literalizing
the notion of the choreographic tableau, and by internalizing the repetition that sometimes
occurred in performances of *Spectre de la rose*. He designed *L’Après-midi d’un faune* not only to
simulate a flat and static picture, but also, as I will later insist, to be danced twice in a row.

As the designation of *Spectre* as a *tableau chorégraphique* makes clear, there was
nothing inherently new or radical in conceptualizing dance or theater in terms of pictures or,
more properly, in terms of *tableaux*, a word with both pictorial and well established theatrical
connotations in French.115 Under Fokine, the Ballets Russes worked to modernize a tradition of
dramatic ballet (or *ballet d’action*) initiated in the eighteenth-century by Jean-Georges Noverre,
whose widely influential treatise *Lettres sur la danse* (1760) commenced with the declaration “a
ballet is a *tableau*, the stage is the canvas, the movements of the dancers are the colors . . . the
choreographer is the painter.”116 Throughout, the *Lettres* advanced an understanding of dance
deeply influenced by the writings of Denis Diderot, specifically his notion that scenes performed
onstage must at every instant be disposed in a manner that could translate successfully as painted
pictures (*tableaux*).117

Somewhat paradoxically, for Noverre, as for Diderot, the static painted tableau was taken
to be the most effective model for the intensification of dramatic action in live theater.118
Noverre urged ballet masters to look to painting, and in particular to the compositions of the
“great painters,” as models for the proper disposition of staged dance movements within the
ballet d’action.\textsuperscript{119} But for Noverre, again as for Diderot, the stasis of the pictorial tableau was transcended in the theater by presenting the audience with a continually changing series of tableaux.\textsuperscript{120} As Noverre formulated it, the ballet’s singular tableau comprised a “continuity of actions” built up from the “single instants” portrayed by painters; the tableau was in fact “a multitude of tableaux” which were “lively and varied,” which “endure only an instant,” and which “succeed each other rapidly.”\textsuperscript{121} The ballet d’action might, as Noverre admitted, more appropriately be compared to a painted series rather than a singular tableau, something like an expanded version of the twenty-four-picture cycle Rubens painted for Catherine de Medici (fig. 4.34).\textsuperscript{122}

Set in contrast to the tableau chorégraphique of Fokine’s Spectre de la rose, the tableau chorégraphique of Faune betrays a radically altered comprehension of Noverre’s proposition that “a ballet is a tableau.” Performing what might be described as a kind of test of that proposition through its hyperbolic fulfillment, Nijinsky literalized ballet’s pictorial status, as if to suggest that if ballet really “is” a picture, it must appear as a singular unchanging object, both two-dimensional and static. Through this literalization, Nijinsky’s tableau chorégraphique enacted, as Simon Hecquet and Sabine Prokhoris have argued, the “dissolution of the ‘tableau chorégraphique’ as the tradition of the imitative ballet—the imitation of painting imitating beautiful nature—understood it.”\textsuperscript{123}

This dissolution must be understood in two not strictly separable senses. First, Faune oriented itself critically towards a prior dance tradition by problematizing the inherited device of the tableau, laying bare the contradiction inherent in conceptualizing a movement aesthetic favoring “continuity of actions” upon a model of static pictures. Second, Faune oriented itself positively towards a new pictorial aesthetic by reverting to an archaic conception of the tableau.
The tableau as *L’Après-midi d’un faune* presented it was no longer implicitly the tableau of oil paint on canvas, but rather the ancient stone tablet (fig. 4.35). Nijinsky’s *tableau chorégraphique* therefore modeled itself upon a type of tableau whose formal and expressive conventions were wholly different from those associated with the painted canvas. He turned to a type of tableau that, rather than offering up conventional illusions of perspectival depth or temporal instantaneity via a singular “pregnant moment,” instead privileged a mode of visualization that appeared both planar and timeless.\textsuperscript{124}

As a simulated stone tablet, *Faune*, rather than enduring before the viewer’s eyes for “only an instant,” played out onstage as something actually static. After the music began, the opening vignette of the faun seated motionless with the flute to his lips lingered onstage unchanging for almost a full minute—a period equivalent to roughly one-tenth of the ballet’s total duration. As the dance progressed, the performance repeatedly halted for extended intervals of total motionlessness.\textsuperscript{125} Because the “choreographic picture” in *Faune* manifested rather than dissimulated pictorial stasis, it made its audience aware of the essential disparity between animated performances and static images. While the designation of *Spectre* as a tableau seems to have passed unnoticed, reviewers of *Faune* often made a point of referring to Nijinsky’s “so called ‘choreographic tableau.’”\textsuperscript{126} The vast majority of critics who singled out this terminology did so to insist on the futility, or even impossibility, of modeling dance upon static visual media. Pierre Lalo went so far as to assert, “one does not make movement with immobility,” arguing that Nijinsky’s performance labored under the burden of “an initial error, an original contradiction.”\textsuperscript{127}

Viewers recognized this “contradiction” not because *Faune* presented itself *pictorially*, but rather because it took for its pictorial model what Lalo described as “a sort of representation
of the human figure whose essential character is to appear frozen in an absolute rigidity.”128 It was for this reason, primarily, that viewers complained that “the picture Nijinsky . . . presented” contradicted the “mental picture that the music calls up.”129 “The dream evoked of a primitive tenderness, the picture of love [le tableau d’amour] ‘in the state of nature,’” Albert Bazaillas wrote, was “what could have, and what should have been expressed with the delicate art of Nijinsky.”130 But, Bazaillas complained, instead of utilizing “his faculty for leaping, the rhythmic consternation of his movement” to paint for his audience the tableau d’amour evoked by Debussy’s music and Mallarmé’s poem, Nijinsky “saw in L’Après-midi d’un faune, not an eclogue of Virgil or Theocritus . . . but an archaic bas-relief.” Again, Bazaillas identified the problem in the model itself, arguing that because he took up this kind of picture, “one could say Nijinsky consecrates all his prodigious art as a dancer to create immobility, and all his movement to create stillness . . . He seeks the exact opposite of the dream of Pygmalion who wants to animate stone: he petrifies life.”131

Antiquity 1912

The substitution of statics for dynamics in L’Après-midi d’un faune was understood to inhere, as Bazaillas makes clear, in a particular interpretation (or misinterpretation) of its antique subject matter. Faune’s willful violation of certain received mythologies of classicism is made emblematic in Bazaillas’s opposition between Nijinsky and Pygmalion, the mythical Greek sculptor who carved a female statue with such skill that, as Ovid wrote, “you would think [it] living and desirous of being moved,” and whose ardent love for his creation inspired the goddess Aphrodite to endow the statue with life.132 If the “the dream of the moving statue,” as Kenneth Gross has termed it, was conceived and virtually achieved during the classical period through
astounding stylistic innovations such as the invention of contrapposto, Nijinsky’s choreography seemed to disavow that dream of animation, specifically by regressing to a mode of figuration that predated the postural innovations of classicism.  

Therefore despite Nijinsky’s claims that he “simply went back to classical attitudes” or “simply [presented] a fragment from a classic bas-relief,” Faune contradicted the familiar canons of antique statuary and mythological iconography to which previous generations of Europeans had been acculturated (fig. 4.36). As Hugo von Hofmannsthal noted, L’Après-midi d’un faune presented “a vision of the antique . . . very far from the antique of Winckelmann, the antique of Ingres, or the antique of Titian.” Henri Bidou took similar glee in describing how Nijinsky’s staging effectively effaced the inherited image of the classical faun as a figure of ecstatic erotic covetousness: “You must entirely forget the furry and joyful creature . . . the painters of the Renaissance have shown us: you will not see Jupiter discovering Antiope” (figs. 4.37, 4.38).

Advertising the production on the front page of Le Figaro with a language of novelty obviously borrowed from the marketing of automobiles and other commodities, Jacques-Émile Blanche praised Nijinsky for offering “the latest model, ‘the 1912 model’” of antiquity, describing it as “the antiquity of primitive times, our modern vision of the archaism of the sixth century [BC].”  

The stylistic reversion to Greek archaism, or more broadly to the origins (ἀρχή, arche) of figural representation in Faune signaled its self-conscious modernity, aligning the performance with modern archaeology’s recent orientation towards “the earliest form[s] . . . which can be discovered.” The ballet premiered at the tail end of a period (1870–1914) known now as the “age of the great excavations.” This period saw an extraordinary efflorescence of investigation into the past, as the “the Archaeology of the Dig” (Archäologie des Spatens) took its place “among the conquering sciences of the nineteenth century,” as Adolf Michaelis announced
triumphantly in 1906. The intellectual preoccupations of the discipline echoed those of the adjacent “conquering sciences” of the epoch; it was, as archaeologist Percy Gardner stated, “a Darwinian age, when the search for origins seem[ed] to fascinate men more than the search for what [was] good in itself.”

Théophile Homolle, who uncovered numerous archaic artifacts during excavations at Delphi and Delos (fig. 4.39), declared in 1895 that “primitive art [took] pride of place in archaeological research, and studies multiplied as least as quickly as discoveries.” As we shall see, certain of Homolle’s finds were cited explicitly in discussions of Nijinsky’s choreography.

Both admirers and critics emphasized that L’Après-midi d’un faune was a product of archaeology’s recent discoveries about artistic “origins,” and, just as crucially, of the popular diffusion of that knowledge through public museums and photographically illustrated publications. The words “museum” and “library” repeat throughout the criticism of the Faune like incantations. Critics deployed these terms to stress the essential historical paradox of the production, which relied upon modernity’s accumulation of sophisticated archaeological knowledge to enact its naïve posture of a return to archaic origins. Many reviewers perceived above all a cold, academic calculation camouflaged beneath the willful stylistic regression in Faune. Émile Vuillermoz referred to a “little faun escaped from the British Museum and hiding so much erudition under his horned forehead,” as well as “knowing nymphs” whose “attitudes from one to the next . . . are so many citations.”

Bakst, the set-designer for Faune, was an enthusiastic amateur of archaeology who had visited the dig sites of both Heinrich Schliemann and Arthur Evans. It seems likely he escorted Nijinsky to museums, or familiarized him with his general argument that modern taste was returning to a classicism of “rude, simple, rough, and primitive” forms, that modern art should
move towards a future in which “painting will be made of stone and feature the human body.”

Given Nijinsky’s travel itineraries between fall 1910 and summer 1912, we can assume he visited collections in Paris, London and Berlin while preparing *Faune.* Viewing a diverse selection of ancient Greek, Assyrian, and Egyptian antiquities in the Louvre, British Museum, and also, most likely, the Altes Museum in Berlin, Nijinsky arrived at the basic postural convention he used to govern the disposition of figures in his “painting made of stone:” a right-angle contortion along the body’s anteroposterior axis, torso facing directly outward, oriented frontally or dorsally towards the audience, with head, arms, and feet pointing sideward, in constant profile to the viewer.

Although this mode of corporeal presentation might best described as a generic distillation of archaism, many reviewers, both hostile and enthusiastic, were convinced that every posture assumed throughout the dance was a “precise, rigorous, minute reproduction of the poses one sees in the figures of primitive Greek art,” and that “specialists could indicate in passing the reference for each attitude and its provenance.” The ballet’s critical reception abounded with amateur exercises in archaeological attribution, producing a conflicting potpourri of art historical references, as Gauthier-Villars noted. Many reviewers invoked the “‘Aeginetan’ school of pre-classical sculpture,” referring to the first and best-known specimen of archaism to emerge in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the so-called Aegina marbles, pedimental sculptures from the Temple of Aphaia (ca. 500 BC) that had been displayed since 1828 as the centerpiece (fig. 4.40) of Prince Ludwig I of Bavaria’s newly constructed Glyptothek in Munich. Jean-Louis Vaudoyer pointed towards the famous series of female korai uncovered in 1886 during excavations of the Athenian Acropolis. These statues became extremely well known—one of them, the so-called *Peplos Kore* (fig. 4.41), is represented in Bakst’s painting
Terror Antiquus (1908). Others spotted influences ranging from “the earliest Ionian sculptures” to Etruscan art, or even to “Assyrian bas-reliefs” (fig. 4.42) and “Egyptian monuments” (fig. 4.43).¹⁵¹

Henri Bidou, who praised the ballet by saying that spectators “with a bit of culture” could experience the pleasurable sensation of witnessing “all of archaic Greek art reanimating itself,” supplied some of the most specific attributions.¹⁵² He compared the dancers’ peculiar carriage of arms and hands, which appeared to move with “disarticulated phalanxes” and “fused metacarpals,” to gestures found in the Altes Museum’s Chrysapha relief (fig. 4.44) and a bronze Apollo at the British Museum (fig. 4.45).¹⁵³ The nymphs fled the faun, he suggested, by replicating the “famous image” of the Nike of Delos (ca. 570–560 BC), attributed to Mikkiades and Achermos, discovered by Homolle in his excavations in the 1880s (figs. 4.46, 4.47).¹⁵⁴

Beyond indicating something about the scope of archaeological familiarity characteristic of a turn-of-the-century public “with a bit of culture,” these attributions suggest how concertedly Faune was seen to frame archaism as a specimen on display for the edification of its spectators. “Too much museality” was the flaw Tugendkhol’d identified in Nijinsky’s choreography, while Lalo described it as “servile archaeology . . . a display vitrine of archaism.”¹⁵⁵ Calmette’s condemnation of the ballet as an exhibition trop spéciale must be understood to allude simultaneously to the “offense known by the name of exhibitionism” as well as to a mode of exposition more closely associated with the decorous domain of the modern public art museum. More than any other critic, Calmette comprehended that the quasi-scientific, museological quality of Faune’s presentation of archaism was both the mask and precondition for its prurience. As in Wilhelm Jensen’s Gradiva (1903)—a novel tracking a young German archaeologist fixated on the figure of a walking maiden depicted in profile on an antique relief in
the Museo Chiaramonti—*Faune* also made explicit that there was, as Freud noted in the margins of his copy of Jensen’s novel, “sexual interest concealed behind the archaeological one.”

That Nijinsky had translated “the most vaporous of visions, the most fluid of sonic landscapes” by mimicking static archaic postures “unearthed . . . through miracles of erudition,” was, for many viewers, incomprehensible as anything other than a contrarian, and profoundly anti-erotic gesture. “There is nothing less archaeological than Mallarmé’s Eclogue or Debussy’s Prélude,” Lalo stated, “to translate them plastically through archaeology, is to provide a translation which is nothing but an antonym.” And yet the “archaeological” choreography performed by Nijinsky’s *satyre de la bibliothèque*, though perhaps motivated by an impulse to frustrate the desires and expectations of the spectator, can be seen nonetheless as an attempt to provide him or her a more profound experience of visual pleasure. In the distinctive formal conventions of archaism—conventions defined specifically as a mode of organizing the postures of human figures—Nijinsky recognized tools for highlighting and indulging the modern spectator’s most primordial scopophilic impulses. *Faune*’s choreography seems to suggest that such impulses could never be fully gratified within inherited and recent idioms of dance which privileged unconstrained corporeal motion, or the concealment of a dancer’s body in “liquid and continuous movement.”

**Archaeological Exhibitionism**

The need to account for the phenomenon of archaic art and for its distinctive stylistic qualities engaged many archaeologists of the turn of the century in broad speculation concerning theories of mind and developmental psychology. This theoretical strain in modern archaeology provides a vital intertext for understanding the performative recapitulation of archaism in *Faune.*
To be sure, Nijinsky’s preparations for *Faune* did not extend to perusing advanced texts in the sophisticated field of Germanic archaeology. Yet his choreography engages with the same aspects of archaic art central to one of the most influential psychological interpretations of archaism, Emanuel Löwy’s *The Rendering of Nature in Early Greek Art* (1900).¹⁵⁹

Löwy developed his theory of archaic art contemporaneously with the study of primitive figuration published by the Danish art historian Julius Lange in 1892. As discussed earlier, Lange produced the influential argument that a “Law of Frontality” governed the postures and movements of figures in the arts of all primitive cultures.¹⁶⁰ Löwy was preoccupied by many of the same constrictive, non-mimetic features of primitive figuration emphasized by Lange, asking, for example, “why does art, till the middle of the sixth century, scarcely ever venture upon a foreshortening, the expression of an emotion in the face, or a more active play of the fingers, than that of a merely extended palm or doubled fist?”¹⁶¹

While Lange sought primarily to establish the laws governing the external appearance of primitive figuration, Löwy attempted to “penetrate beyond the actual phenomenon of [archaic] art to the causes which gave them rise.”¹⁶² He argued that archaic art’s distinctive morphology resulted from mental processes universal to the earliest developmental phases of human psychology, both onto- and phylogenetically. All primitive artists, Löwy argued, whether modern children or current-day “savages” or archaic Greek sculptors, sought to represent external reality indirectly, not as it appeared before their eyes, but as it was remembered and pictured in their minds.¹⁶³ The “entire development of art,” in Löwy’s view, could be understood as a “morphological progress . . . from the psychological to the physiological, retinal picture” (*von dem psychologischen auf das physiologische, das Netzhautbild*).¹⁶⁴ He distinguished categorically between “the pictures that reality presents to the eye” and “another world of
images, living or coming to life in our minds alone, which even though suggested by reality, are essentially metamorphosed.”165 The central concern of The Rendering of Nature was to explain the psychical processes that transformed visual impressions in the primitive imagination, and to do so through the visual evidence of archaic art itself, which Löwy understood as a more or less “mechanically true transcription of psychical processes.”166

Löwy’s concept of the psychological character of primitive art built upon several key sources outside the field of archaeology. He drew on then recent literature on children’s art, in particular Corrado Ricci’s L’Arte dei bambini (1887) (fig. 4.48), the first significant publication in this rapidly expanding field of inquiry, which presented and analyzed specimens of infantile drawings to make the argument that “children describe man and things . . . in their absolute character, not as they appear optically.”167 Löwy drew as well on Adolf Hildebrand’s Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst (1893), a text by a practicing sculptor (fig. 4.49) that urged modern artists to create forms coinciding with the observer’s imaginative image (Vorstellungsbild) rather than a direct impression of nature (Natureindruck).168 And perhaps most significantly, Löwy drew on an essay by the physiologist Ernst Brücke from 1881 discussing the aesthetic function of what Brücke called memory pictures (Erinnerungsbilder).169

Brücke’s concept of the Erinnerungsbild, which also came to play an important role in the writings of his student Freud, was formulated in the context of an essay on motion in painting and sculpture, “Die Darstellung der Bewegung durch die Bildenden Künste,” an essay inspired by the recent invention of chronophotography.170 Like many nineteenth-century observers first encountering these objectively accurate transcriptions of the successive phases of corporeal motions, Brücke was struck by the fact that the camera recorded positions of moving bodies that did not correspond to common imaginative conceptions of movement or their typical depictions
by artists. This discrepancy, Brücke suggested, proved that the human subject could not apprehend the full spectrum of movements it witnessed or engaged in, and was only capable of preserving mnemonic images of relatively static moments within a motion sequence. Inviting his reader to imagine a ticking clock with a pendulum swinging back and forth beneath it, Brücke proposed that the pendulum’s motion would be recalled only in its position at twelve o’clock, and in reversal positions at either extreme of its parabolic swing. From this thought experiment, Brücke extrapolated a general rule that the moments that “impress themselves to memory most explicitly and durably” are ones of the longest duration and minimum velocity—start points, midpoints, and end points of movement, rather than intermediate phases.\footnote{171}

While Brücke began his essay from the premise that the simulation of motion in static media was one of the fundamental tasks of the fine arts, he concluded that artists were compelled to represent moments of relative stasis that would, if observed in reality, “impress the observer with the clearest memory picture.”\footnote{172} He conceived of artistic representation as dependent less on accurate transcriptions of mobile positions than on the canny use of memory pictures to solicit the “psychical activity of the spectator, which breathes life into pictures.”\footnote{173} The extent to which this general line of thinking gained currency in the wake of chronophotography’s diffusion is evident also in Hildebrand’s Problem der Form. Hildebrand similarly insisted that “we are not machines for capturing instantaneous recordings of nature” (Moment-Maschinen), “but beings who combine mental images and who use and interweave isolated perceptions.” He emphasized that spectators derived kinetic impressions from the “expressive capacity of non-moving nature.”\footnote{174}

Löwy applied and expanded on Brücke’s theory that artists reproduced those forms that impressed themselves most forcefully upon their memories, but he devoted far more attention to
theorizing the selective process determining the formation of such memory pictures. Using for his visual evidence children’s drawings and archaic Greek sculptures rather than Renaissance paintings, Löwy moved far beyond Brücke in insisting upon memory’s incapacity to retain images of movement. He attributed the absence of facial expressions and delicate hand gestures in archaic representation to the fact that primitive artists possessed no mnemonic traces of such subtle movements, which “lie outside the selection of the memory,” or were “not firmly retained” in memory because they are “seen in reality for too short a moment.”

Although Löwy took for granted that a childlike imagination would direct its attention to “the animated and active features of a scene,” explaining thereby the absence of environmental backgrounds surrounding human and animal figures in primitive representations, he nevertheless maintained that for a primitive subject most movements “do not suffice for an exact picture,” and are retained in the memory as “mere impressions of direction.” Thus he attributed the awkward “dissonance” of the earliest archaic attempts to represent bodies in motion to the fact that primitive artists constructed movements imaginatively by drawing on static Erinnerungsbilder of the body facing in different directions. Citing the famous Nike of Delos (figs. 4.50, 4.51) discovered by Homolle, considered to be the earliest known representation of flying in Greek sculpture, Löwy suggested that primitive artists first sought to “represent motion through a profile view of the legs,” because this view corresponded to the image of running as it was preserved in the earliest memory pictures.

The duration of the observer’s exposure to a visual impression, in Löwy’s understanding, was not the only factor determining the formation of Erinnerungsbilder. As his discussion of the Nike of Delos made clear, in his view primitive artists also favored certain directional views of the figure, or parts of the figure. In accordance with Lange’s “Law of Frontality,” stipulating the
rigorous avoidance of poses involving lateral torsions, Löwy noted that primitive figuration relied on “two canonical views, frontal and profile” (*kanonischen zwei Ansichten, Face und Profil*).\(^{178}\) He theorized that every individual form, including individual parts of an organically integrated body, would be preserved as a memory picture in the particular aspect in which each part appeared most “differentiated.” He held that these aspects would coincide in almost every case with an orientation directly frontal or in ninety-degree profile to the perceiver.

The generic orientations of front and back, right and left were the aspects Löwy believed we most “note in others, and which are most early and most deeply impressed in our memories, ever ready to neglect that which is unaccentuated or merely intermediate.”\(^{179}\) The imagination then assembles these aspects, these memory pictures, into figures and groups of figures “without concern as to how they would present themselves to the eye from a given standpoint,” so that, for instance, the pure mental conception of an upright human being would present “a body in front view with the legs in profile.”\(^{180}\) Such a presentation of the body, although deviating obviously from any posture that could be assumed by an actual human body, would be consistent with the primitive artist’s impulse to represent and view that body “in the greatest possible clearness and completeness of its constituent parts,” so that “not a detail is withdrawn from sight by being slanted away, foreshortened, or in shadow; each part lies before the physical eye full, entire, and clear, just as the unselfconscious mind would picture it.”\(^{181}\)

Archaic figuration recreated a quality of sheer conspicuousness Löwy described as “conceptual-pictorial visibility” (*gedankenbildlichen Sichtbarkeit*).\(^{182}\) For Löwy, memory was an active selective process, disregarding impressions that did not fulfill the condition of explicit discernibility. Ephemeral movements, and relatedly, impressions of the body perceived at oblique angles would appear as insufficiently visible, as a kind of “turning away” from the
“mental eye” (geistigen Auge). Crucially, he saw this psychic predilection for Sichtbarkeit as determining not only the existence of a “Law of Frontality,” but also more broadly what might be called a Law of Flatness or a Law of Planarity. In a remarkable passage, Löwy outlined how a psychical process of assimilating forms to an imaginary planar surface would determine the memory’s predilection for forms perceived at right angles:

the naive memory-picture. . . . has a repugnance to depth. An arm extended forward is intolerable to it, since the elementary imagination can apprehend a form, and retain it, only when seen in its fullest and most comprehensive aspect; and neither here nor elsewhere will it endure any surfaces that, by being turned away and foreshortened, partly escape apprehension. In the mind’s eye every form must be expanded and smoothed out: the naive mental image cannot be other than flat.

Planarity as a necessary precondition for imaginative cognition was a principle already central to Hildebrand’s Problem of Form. Hildebrand asserted that, “only when [a figure] works as a plane . . . does it acquire artistic form, that is, only then does it mean something to the visual imagination.” Löwy’s argument pressed this idea somewhat further. His theory of imagination implicitly presupposed the filtering presence of some pre-existing invisible plane in the mind, a “detached plane [which] offers in itself no hold on the imagination,” but against which “a form can be seized by consciousness.” Similarly, he implied that memory, in its most primitive stages of development, receives impressions by aligning, registering, and measuring figures against a flat surface, which fails to “apprehend and retain” forms when they “turn away” from it.

Löwy concluded his study by noting that his “historical conclusions” confirmed Hildebrand’s physiologically grounded argument in favor of Reliefauffassung. He singled out bas-relief (Flachrelief) as the “truest exponent” of the visual impulses “primordial in all art,” recognizing this medium as manifesting—more conspicuously and enduringly than either
painting or sculpture—a mode of presentation morphologically faithful to the formal character of psychological rather than retinal pictures, a mode of presentation in which figures are displayed “flat like a drawing, spread out in relief fashion . . . lacking in depth in every sense and spread out to fullest and most comprehensive visibility.”

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As Henri Bidou observed, Nijinsky recognized that “archaism is not simply an erudite curiosity: it is a draftman’s method.” Needless to say, the corporeal draftsmanship of Faune coincided closely with the formal characteristics Löwy identified as distinctive to primordial “psychological” pictures. In the view of Gauthier-Villars, Nijinsky had “stripped the figures of our dream of all animality and even humanity . . . bent their bodies to the naive anatomical conventions of primitive draftsmen.”

Nijinsky instructed his performers to behave “as though asleep with [their] eyes open,” maintaining blank, unchanging facial expressions throughout the dance. He eliminated all delicate hand gestures, choreographing his dancers so that “the arm, forearm, and hand [were] held as one piece, or hinge[d] in three pieces drawing angles so clear they could be measured with a protractor.” He made his dancers labor, against the visible constraints of nature, to present their bodies only in what can be referred to as Löwy’s two “canonical views,” “twisting their busts on their hips to superimpose on a frontal torso a face in perfect profile.” Nijinsky subsumed all of these formal strategies into the larger conceit of the tableau chorégraphique as an archaic bas-relief.

While many theatrical productions around 1910 began adopting the Reliefbühne scenography first established at the Münchner Künstlertheater—including stagings by Vsevelod Meyerhold certainly known to Nijinsky, Diaghilev, and Bakst—“the originality of Nijinsky’s
production,” as Nikolai Minskii asserted, “was that the bas-relief technique appeared not simply circumstantial, but developed to its fullest.” In part, Nijinsky’s “development” of the technique consisted simply in exaggerating the shallowness of the relief, making the stage appear “almost flat,” as his score stipulated. While the stage Füchs constructed in Munich was approximately eight meters deep (figs. 4.52, 4.53), Nijinsky and Bakst brought the backdrop so far forward in Faune that the stage was compressed to a depth of about two meters (fig. 4.54).

The emphasis Faune exerted on the “bas-relief technique” was not only formal, but thematic; Faune did not simply apply a technique, it pretended to be a bas-relief, and this pretension structured the ballet’s broader dynamic of regression—for both performer and spectator.

Nijinsky’s commitment to the formal and conceptual conceit of archaic bas-relief was motivated, I propose, by a recognition similar to Löwy’s—that the conventions of archaic bas-relief reflected primordial psychological tendencies, in particular one favoring certain conditions of visibility. The ballet’s emphasis on holding static poses, and the conformity of those static poses to “naive anatomical conventions,” can be seen as a self-conscious attempt to restore for the viewer the kind of Sichtbarkeit preferred in their own primitive, “psychological” pictures. Indeed, audience members stressed that the dancers in Faune appeared “extremely legible” (lisable), and capable of “impressing themselves starkly upon vision.”

The archaic posing of the body in Faune can thus be interpreted as a device for making a strong psychic “impression” on the viewer, as if by preemptively translating a living scene into the ideoplast ic form of a memory picture, that scene could be made to last more enduringly in the memory of the spectator. Yet much as Faune can be seen to orient itself towards a future in which it will be remembered, it can also be seen, more fundamentally, as the externalization of a picture already implanted within the memory of the spectator. The narrative content of Faune seems to demand
such a reading. The choreography exploited the formal structure of Löwy’s psychological
*Erinnerungsbilder* to dramatize “a simple incident from ordinary life which happens to every
human being,” as Nijinsky’s wife Romola put it, using the form of the memory picture to recall
the universal experience of infantile sexuality, “the initial awakening of . . . sexual instincts and
their reaction.”¹⁹⁷

The archaeological aspect of *Faune* was therefore both aesthetic and sexual—just as the
ballet looked deep into the past to uncover an archaic “classicism” largely overlooked (or
repressed) until archaeologists and art historians of the later nineteenth century began to study
and excavate for “the earliest forms,” it looked back towards dimensions of the sexual life of
childhood (masturbation, exhibitionism) recently highlighted in the public consciousness by
psychoanalysis, a science that claimed to have overcome the repressions of the “infantile
amnesia” that “turns everyone’s childhood into something like a prehistoric epoch.”¹⁹⁸ *Faune*
visually manifested this overlapping of archaeology and sexuality: Nijinsky pressed the formal
logic of archaism towards a specifically modern psychological extreme. Löwy’s
gedankenbildliche Sichtbarkeit—understood as a form of visibility allowing the psychic
apprehension of the body with all its “parts,” all at once, fully and clearly legible—was
embodied in *Faune* precisely as a form of “exhibitionism.”

Calmette’s memorable exclamation that the faun was *hideux de face, encore plus hideux de profil*
registered the degree to which Nijinsky exploited the “canonical view” of the profile to
showcase the “frontal” parts of the male body, which Nijinsky exaggerated in profile by
manually miming his erect genital (see fig. 4.15). The choreography deployed the formal devices
of archaism, connected to a psychic imperative that forms appear *visible*, as a formal
precondition for satisfying an “infantile impulse” to exhibit. Thus in *Faune* the archaic pose
formally and metaphorically actualizes the “pseudo-atavism” of the exhibitionist, whose open pride and interest in the genitals could be, as Havelock Ellis asserted in 1906, “placed on the same mental level as the man of a more primitive age.”

The sense of return to a primitive “mental level” dramatized in *Faune* was not confined to the poses assumed within the choreographic spectacle. It also structured the theatrical relationship. If in one sense the ballet addressed its “cultured” spectators as armchair archaeologists, its appeal to their erudition failed to mask an underlying infantilization of the audience, for the performance made obvious that this “pseudo-atavism” was taking place on their behalf. The little “child of two or three who lifts up his shirt in front of one,” Freud observed, does so “in one’s honor.”

“Among persons who have remained at the stage of perversion,” Freud added, “there is one class in which this infantile impulse has reached the pitch of a symptom—the class of ‘exhibitionists.’” Nijinsky’s choreography can be seen to foreground an analogous comprehension of exhibitionism as a “process of erotic symbolism” that, as Ellis argued, involves “a conscious or unconscious attitude of attention in the exhibitionist’s mind to the psychic reaction of the [person] toward whom his display is directed. He seeks to cause an emotion that, probably in most cases, he desires should be pleasurable.”

*Faune* made that other-directed “attitude of attention” palpable; the archaic contortions, the constant rotation of the dancers’ heads ninety degrees away from the auditorium, were attitudes assumed toward and *in relation to* the crowd of spectators facing the “choreographic picture.” This posturing therefore registers as a concession to a primitive psyche on the receiving end of the spectacle—a psyche which would, as Löwy postulated, “not endure any surfaces that, by being turned away and foreshortened, partly escape apprehension.” In *Faune* that formal concession to the psychological imperatives fulfilled by archaism goes hand in hand with
acknowledging and satisfying a desire for the genitalia also to remain visible. Here it is worth noting that the piebald protagonist of this archaically exhibitionistic spectacle appeared “disguised as a baby cow,” seemingly less the classical faun (*faune*) than a fawn (*faon*), in the sense simply of a juvenile animal. Nijinsky’s stylization of his *faune* as a *faon* not only emblematizes the ballet’s overarching engagement with the phenomenon of the infantile, it also seems to acknowledge that the decisive importance of animals in the imaginative life of children derives in large part from what Freud observed as “the openness with which they display their genitals and their sexual functions to the inquisitive little human child” (fig. 4.55).203

**Primitive Cinema**

In conceding to the audience’s primitive desire for *Sichtbarkeit* (with its overarching impulse towards exhibitionism), *Faune* both exposed and found a means to overcome a particular difficulty, namely that an ideal concession to the demands of *Sichtbarkeit* would seem to have precluded the possibility of any movement on stage whatsoever. Bronislava Nijinska, the original model on whom the archaic postures of *Faune* were “molded,” recalled that the protracted, contentious rehearsals leading up to the premiere were stalled primarily because of the difficulty, or near impossibility, of mobilizing the body while maintaining positions that adhered strictly to the “canonical views.”204 She explained:

> As long as [the nymphs] were standing still, holding the pose as shown them by Vaslav, the group was very effective and approached visually what Vaslav wanted. But as soon as the nymphs had to change their poses and move . . . they were not able to preserve the bas-relief form, to align their bodies so as to keep their feet, arms, hips, shoulders and heads in the same choreographic form inspired by archaic Greece.205

In “bas-relief form” the body was contorted into such a directionally conflicted, unstable position that it was almost impossible to actually move. In this sense, then, maintaining the “full and
comprehensive visibility” of the primitive psychological picture was the impulse that dictated the reversal of what Bazaillas identified as “the dream of Pygmalion,” that is, its “petrifi[ication of] life.” Despite this “petrification,” however, Faune did not disavow that “dream of the moving statue,” but rather found its own new and ingenious way to achieve its realization.

Although the application of “bas-relief form” to living, mobile bodies made palpable the degree to which archaic postures were functionally static, Nijinsky’s choreography also underlined how these functionally static postures were not necessarily representations of stasis. Most pointedly, it did so through synched oppositions between musical movement and physical stillness. As Fokine observed, “during a strong movement in the music,” Nijinsky’s dancers “resisted any movement despite the apparent demands of the agitated measures of music,” holding their archaic poses in absolute stillness. These oppositions recurred throughout the ballet, notably at moments of acute sexual excitement and tension—for instance, during the duet (measures 55–61), when the faun and nymph face off in frozen poses for the duration of a tremendous swell in the music.

The profile view of feet and legs maintained rigorously throughout Faune, and emphasized particularly in these moments of stillness, could of course be interpreted as Nijinsky’s effort to activate in his spectator a primitive “memory picture” of rapid movement. This, at least, was how Henri Bidou understood the performance. Referring to the famous “flying” Nike of Delos, he argued that Nijinsky had realized that the static, symbolic image of movement in archaic art generated a more forceful impression of motion than more dynamic renderings subsequently invented by modern art or technology:

Flight [in Faune] is not composed from a kinematographic series of movements. A single gesture for a single fact. Running is represented with a single pose, the one Mikkiades and Achermos chose for their design twenty-six
centuries ago. Mr. Nijinsky is persuaded that this pose, a synthesis of movement, suggests it better than could the successive efforts that actually constitute running, and, if I understand correctly, he has come to the difficult, but reasonable and beautiful conclusion, that immobility represents movement better than movement itself.\textsuperscript{208}

And yet, if Bidou established an opposition between the “stillness” of the archaic pose and the “kinematographic series” of movement, and cast \textit{Faune} emphatically on the side of archaic stillness, he nonetheless simultaneously praised the ballet for achieving a “reanimation” of archaism. As the dancers “glid[ed] in a plane parallel” to the backdrop, he observed, the stage appeared as “a living frieze . . . drawn full face or in profile, never in three quarters.”\textsuperscript{209}

This was the common refrain among enthusiasts of \textit{Faune}: that it produced the pleasurable impression of a mobilized but still static image, “show[ing] a bas-relief that move[d] so to speak in thrusts, in permutations.”\textsuperscript{210} As Cocteau described it, \textit{Faune} had unlocked a potential latent within the archaic bas relief’s stasis: “The Greeks fixed their games for the future in immobile bas-relief, and voilà, inverse route, the mobile bas-relief here reveals to us its initial \textit{raison d’être}.”\textsuperscript{211} But for these viewers in 1912, it must be stressed, the miraculous mobilization of the “immobile” bas-relief was apprehended far less in terms of an ancient “dream of Pygmalion” than as the achievement of specific modern mechanisms. Even as they enumerated the ballet’s obvious archaic aspects, the first commentators on \textit{Faune}, Bidou included, spoke about the dance in a language thick with references to technologies of projection and mechanically simulated movement.

Nijinsky’s bas-relief technique called up a range of associations. Vuillermoz compared watching \textit{Faune} in performance to seeing pages from an album of archaeological photographs being turned “mechanically,” thereby suggesting the degree to which \textit{Faune} was seen to activate its archaeological imagery as if by means of some mechanical process.\textsuperscript{212} Indeed, the
choreography called to mind above all one particular apparatus—the cinématographe, an “apparatus serving for the obtaining and viewing of chrono-photographic pictures.” This device took its name from two Greek words—graphein, to write, and kinema, movement. If contemporary viewers perceived Nijinsky’s tableau chorégraphique to be “an archaic bas-relief in which the characters never face the spectator,” they simultaneously saw it as, in the phrasing of one reviewer, a “kinematography of bas-relief” (cinématographie de bas-reliefs).

Even as L’Après-midi d’un faune simulated an archaic stasis, the ballet took certain conspicuous countermeasures to that stillness, as if to contradict or negate the very immobility it affected. Through a willfully contradictory condensation of archaic art with a new potential for mechanical mobilization of static images, Nijinsky’s choreography dramatized a switch from an organic to a mechanical order of motion, presenting itself to its audience as something like the projection and repetition of an archaic stone relief being projected in a looped kinematographic movement sequence.

The “staging of the flat surface” (Inszenierung der Fläche) in Faune, as Gabriele Brandstetter has defined it, constructed a viewing experience that felt at once archaic and kinematographic. Although Füchs conceived of the theatrical device of the Reliefbühne as one which would re-establish the ancient, or timeless, perceptual mode Hildebrand defined as Reliefauffassung, the Reliefbühne produced a viewing experience with an inescapably timely quality; as Juliet Koss has demonstrated, it “evoked the newly popular cinema screen.”

The first audiences of Faune likened the tableau chorégraphique not only to the shallowness of relief sculpture, but also to the literal flatness characteristic of a range of “screen entertainments” from which cinema descended. Vuillermoz’s description of mechanically “clicking through” (déclic) photographs of ancient artifacts invokes the specific screen
entertainment of the slide lecture, a popular fairground genre repurposed and fully
institutionalized by the turn of the century as the dominant teaching apparatus of academic art
genre repurposed and fully
history. Similarly, Bidou described how the nymphs “glided” across the surface of the
Châtelet stage “as in a shadow theater,” or “as if they were on the glass plate of a magic
lantern.” The perception of Faune as the “kinematography of bas-relief” was therefore closely
tied to the audience’s awareness of the stage’s conversion into surface, as if the stage were
functioning as a screen or receptor against which figural images were reflected back to the
spectator.

The identification of Faune as a “kinematography of bas-relief” depended even more
fundamentally on the internal structure of the figural imagery it placed against its shallow
backdrop. As many critics stressed, Nijinsky’s choreography could be conceptualized as
kinematographic because it was organized according to a “new principle: a succession of
immobile attitudes, attitudes from statues and bas-reliefs of archaic Greece.” Faune appeared
to Vuillermoz as an “erudite gymnastics” in which “numbered poses followed one another
mechanically.” Bodily movement was presented as if not actual but illusive, artificially
reconstituted after being broken down into individual static poses and then put back together
again. Réné Chavance observed that Nijinsky “decompose[d] gestures . . . fixe[d] a multitude of
attitudes, like the silhouettes of a gyroscope or the images in a kinematographic film to obtain, in
uniting them, a suite of, as it were, stylized movements.” Pierre Lalo concurred: “decompose
is the right word,” he wrote, “the nymphs and the faun ‘decompose movement’” (‘décomposent
le mouvement’) “exactly as in a military exercise; they make you think at the same time of the
gestures of an automaton, and the marching of a Prussian infantry parade.”
The word decomposition carries a specific meaning in this context, as Lalo indicates by demarcating it in quotations. It alluded to the well-known process employed in the chronophotographs produced by Étienne-Jules Marey in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. In the words of the physiologist, chronophotography was a type of imagery which “applie[d] instantaneous photography to the study of movement, permit[ted] the human eye to see phases of movement it could not perceive directly, and [led] also to the reconstitution of the movements it first decomposed” (la reconstitution du mouvement qu’elle a d’abord décomposé). As any educated French writer in 1912 would have known, Marey’s efforts to conceive new graphic methods for recording human and animal locomotion, intended among other things to aid in training the disgraced French military, had inadvertently laid the groundwork for kinematography as an industrial instrument of “divertissement pour enfants petits et grands,” as Marey dismissively described it.

Critics pointed to certain obvious visual parallels between Marey’s chronophotography and Nijinsky’s choreography. Faune not only adopted the technique of “decomposing” motion into sequences of static poses, it also adopted more generally the analytic attitude towards motion epitomized by Marey’s experimental physiology. Marey and Nijinsky shared an ambition to isolate the moving body as an object of visual scrutiny, and to stage motion in a way that was graphically legible—whether to render it available for scientific analysis, or to realize its pornographic potential.

By situating his performers directly in front of Bakst’s backdrop, posed in profile and moving along pathways perpendicular to the audience, Nijinsky seems to have exploited recent knowledge, both scientific and scenographic, about the visibility of lateral movement set off against a flat surface. The scenography of the Reliefbühne created a vantage for the theatrical
audience that closely mimicked the one Marey constructed at his *Station physiologique,* where he staged and produced chronophotographs with the assistance of the physical culture specialist Georges Demenÿ.\(^{227}\) Marey and Demenÿ realized that a regimented viewpoint, oriented perpendicular to the directional axis of motion, and clear figure/ground contrast were indispensable to achieving maximum clarity in their recordings of motion. To this end, Marey’s subjects (soldiers, acrobats, baby goats, and so on) were photographed moving in profile on narrow lateral runways in front of a kind of shallow makeshift stage hung with black or white backdrops (figs. 4.56, 4.57).

The theatrical reformers who advocated a similar scenographic setup were likewise motivated by the desire to clarify and isolate the audience’s view of the actor’s onstage movement. As the architect and designer Peter Behrens explained in 1910, the shallow stage and prominent painted backdrop of the *Reliefbühne* were designed to enforce a type of drama in which the “primary action takes place from side to side.”\(^{228}\) Behrens insisted that “to make a strong impression,” a director needed to make use of lateral movement, because “movement which occurs in the direction of the audience is, optically speaking, without effect.”\(^{229}\)

This emphasis on movement “from side to side” was the key to the temporal multivalence of Nijinsky’s choreography (fig. 4.58). It permitted the ballet’s strong visual analogies to both archaic relief as well as to Marey’s chronographic imagery (figs. 4.59, 4.60), characterized by its distinctive band-like format, its strong sense of directional movement, and its almost exclusive reliance on the profile view of moving figures. For several decades, scientists, classicists, and art historians had been noting the various formal similarities between ancient reliefs and chronophotography.\(^{230}\) *Faune* made this analogy emphatic, in part because its simulated frieze was so frequently and so thoroughly photographed.
Promotional photographs of *Faune* began to circulate immediately after its Châtelet premiere. Two months later, Nijinsky and his dancers restaged the entire performance in London for the camera of Baron Adolph de Meyer, who produced a suite of thirty photographs tracking the ballet’s narrative. This photographic album, published as a book in 1914, is evidence of something more than merely promotional or documentary intent—the photographs were integral to *Faune*’s underlying conceptual engagement with motion and stasis as a reciprocal, reversible pair of opposites.

*Faune* engaged deliberately with a technological possibility exposed by Marey’s chronophotography—the potential to oscillate, infinitely, between alternate states of stasis and mobility. One could argue that Nijinsky produced *L’Après-midi d’un faune* in two alternate versions: the mobile version of the live performance and the static version of the picture album. Considered as two complementary components of a single work, the performance and its photographic remediation suggest a potential to shift between “decomposed” movement sequences rendered in static images, and the mechanical “reconstitution” of those movements. Indeed, in 2009, Christian Compte completed that logical step, using the Meyer album to produce a two-minute animation of *Faune* that he briefly passed off on YouTube (fig. 4.61) as rediscovered film footage of the original performance.231

This potential to shift between decomposed stasis and recomposed movement, intrinsic to the choreographic conception of *Faune*, was obvious even before Nijinsky published the photographic album. Immediately after the premiere, the illustrated press deployed promotional photographs of *Faune* to create linear sequences of its movement. Both *Comœdia* and the *Sketch* (figs. 4.62–4.64 as well as fig. 4.9) framed their coverage of the performance with decorative bands created by repeating decoupaged photographs of the nymphs over narrow monochrome
backgrounds, plainly resembling chronophotographs. These decorative bands, particularly the version in *Comœdia* with its borders that approximate the regular perforation of film stock (fig. 4.64), appear as “decomposed” movement sequences that could potentially be “reconstituted” by a *cinématographe*. These simulated filmstrips, however, also acknowledged Nijinsky’s glaring deviations from chronophotography’s most fundamental structural premise, for the spacing in these “films” of *Faune* is irregular, the successive poses simply repeat again and again or abruptly shift, rather than differentiating gradually from one to the next. If run through an apparatus, these “films” would necessarily fail to produce a convincing illusion of continuous motion. They would produce a static figural image, or abrupt, broken postural shifts.

The decorative bands, then, translated *Faune* into the formal idiom of chronophotography or filmstrips, while still remaining faithful to the dance’s irregular, spasmodic rhythm—extended periods of slow motion or stasis, punctuated by abrupt postural alterations. As Bidou observed, the choreography of *Faune* was marked by the “suppression of all transitions,” such that “actions [become] clear and naked, separated without useless transitions, [with] sudden passages from immobility to movement.”²³² Bidou saw this elimination of the “hesitation of demi-gestures and useless steps” in favor of “abrupt and precise movements” as effectively conveying a type of instinctive motion characteristic of wild animals. The majority of critics, however, perceived this abrupt, jerky, and discontinuous movement as fundamentally inorganic. Describing how Nijinsky’s dancers “pass[ed] with an excessive velocity from one attitude to the next,” Lalo complained, “they never succeed at any moment in giving the image of living movement, only a mechanical agitation.”²³³

Similarly, in 1919 Émile Jacques-Dalcroze, inventor of Eurhythmics, looked back to *Faune* as the prototypical example of a wider tendency in contemporary dance to conceptualize
movement as something fundamentally lifeless. He argued that this tendency was epitomized by choreography constructed out of static “attitudes” rather than “movement itself.” Dalcroze’s critique of Faune borrowed its key terms from the philosopher Henri Bergson. As touched upon in Chapter 1 in my discussion of the essay “Laughter” (1900), Bergson argued against a materialist tendency in contemporary scientific thinking that reduced human life to mechanical, automatic processes. He upheld a categorical distinction between “truly living life” (la vie bien vivante) and “mere automatism,” a distinction that inhered, crucially, in his equation of life with dynamic movement—movement unceasing, ever-changing, and unrepeatable. Bergson developed this argument in Creative Evolution (1907), in which he singled out the kinematograph as a device that produced a “mechanistic illusion” of movement, antithetical to the dynamism he associated with “truly living life.” The kinematograph exposed what he argued was a fundamental error in human thinking—that “of becoming” (devenir) “we perceive only states, of “duration” (la durée) “only instants”—in short, we believe in “the absurd proposition, that movement is made of immobilities.” This failure to apprehend the indivisible continuity of movement by conceptualizing motion as a succession of static moments amounted to what Bergson described as the “mechanical” tendency in human thought processes.

It was this mechanical conceptualization of motion that Dalcroze objected to in Faune. “What shocked me,” he wrote, “was the absence of any linkage or sequencing of attitudes, the absence of that continuous movement which we note in every vital manifestation. . . . [the dancers] constituted a series of pictures, of the highest artistic effect, but deprived voluntarily of all the advantages afforded by time—duration” (la durée). To describe the essential error of Faune’s discontinuous, lifeless movement, Dalcroze compared the ballet to an adulterated or malfunctioning motion picture: “The dancers . . . [give] the choppy impression produced in a
kinematograph by a series of gestures in which someone has suppressed the essential frames of film.”

That continuity of motion that Dalcroze considered essentially “vital,” that same continuity of motion kinematographic technologies gradually perfected in convincing simulation, Faune willfully disrupted or withheld. This disruption is vividly conjured in Dalcroze’s image of someone (Nijinsky) removing crucial frames from a sequence of film. The montage-like intervention into the continuity of the filmstrip imagined by Dalcroze suggests how the simulation of kinematography in Faune could be interpreted as a laying bare of the apparatus—a sort of danced demonstration of the fact that “motion in the cinema cannot be divorced from the still images from which it is manufactured.”

The ballet seemed to insist upon the fact that, as François Albera, Marta Braun, and André Gaudreault have argued, “what since Deleuze has been commonly called the ‘image-mouvement’” is merely the secondary “perceptual effect” of a more fundamental, foundational “stop motion effect.” If Faune appeared as kinematography, it was a kind in which the image-mouvement was unmasked as the product of underlying discontinuity and stasis. This, certainly, was how the critic A. E. Johnson experienced the performance—not precisely as “kinematography of bas-relief,” but rather as a presentation of the static filmstrip itself, without the intervention of mechanical synthesis. Watching Faune, he wrote, was like being “asked to admire some of the individual pictures which in series make up the film of a kinematograph.”

The viewing experience, as Johnson described it, was one of frustration: “granted that it is interesting and amusing to be shown how the film is constituted, it is nevertheless the animated whole that we really want to see.”

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As Johnson’s comment reveals, Nijinsky’s apparent refusal to synthesize the static tableaux of Faune into a convincing “animated whole” effectively made the viewer aware of his or her own desire to witness motion. It brought that appetite to consciousness by failing to provide the kind of animation an audience “really wanted to see” when it came to watch “the film of a kinematograph,” or, we might add, when it came to watch a live performance of dance. While this refusal of animation suggests, as it did for Johnson, a deconstructive attitude towards the medium of film, a dismantling of the kinematograph’s “mechanistic illusion,” Nijinsky’s “kinematography of bas-relief” can also be read in the opposite sense. Faune can equally be understood as a crude attempt to realize by mechanical means “the dream of the moving statue,” an attempt not to frustrate, but rather to satisfy, a modern viewer for whom mechanized spectacles of motion were understood to exert a powerful attraction.

The abrupt and jerky style of movement in Faune that for Dalcroze evoked “a series of gestures in which someone has suppressed the essential frames of film” was also a feature that would have recalled the so-called cinéma des premiers temps, harkening back to that moment when multiple inventors across the Western world were still seeking to achieve or perfect the mechanical simulation of continuous motion. Indeed, the very concept of “kinematography of bas-relief” conjures up a kind of technological archaism. Most pointedly, it evokes what was in 1912 an already outmoded phase in kinematography’s progressive evolution, before it had become an exclusively photographic practice.

In 1892, twenty years before the premiere of Faune, the first public projections of moving images on perforated film took place at the Musée Grevin in Paris, where the inventor and artist Émile Reynaud used his Théâtre Optique to project hand-painted “flexible bands of indefinite length, carrying suites of successive poses” (fig. 4.65). In these so-called
Pantomimes lumineuses, Reynaud presented, in front of static projected backgrounds, the whimsical and bawdy actions of swimmers and clowns, dogs and Pierrots, depicted in series of between three and seven hundred sequential poses. However, as the earliest historians of film unfailingly stressed, his animations were soon surpassed, in both a formal and a commercial sense, by the chronophotographic technique associated with the Lumière brothers’ cinématographe.

In his *Origines du cinématographe* (1909), Demenÿ—Marey’s assistant—described Reynaud’s enterprise as doomed from the outset because of its “capital flaw” of relying on “figures drawn by hand, from the imagination of the artist.” This hand-painted imagery, Demenÿ said, produced a “false and strange” impression of movement. The “insufficiency of images” on the filmstrips as well as the continual recycling of the same figural postures within a filmic sequence meant that Reynaud’s animations could only ever achieve a partial illusion of movement, one sorely lacking in “continuous sensation.”

By 1912 Reynaud’s animations were already long-forgotten relics. The basic technological components of cinema had reached a level of international standardization, and certain representational and institutional factors had contributed to forming what historians have identified as a new paradigm for film. The time of so-called “primitive cinema” had passed, giving way to so-called “classical cinema.” Or, to use André Gaudreault’s more recent terms of periodization, the paradigm of kinematography or “kine-attractography” was displaced by the new paradigm cinema, as cinema established itself as an autonomous, institutional medium centered around the production of feature-length narrative films. During this period of shift, studios and nascent cinephiles became increasingly keen to appeal to more sophisticated
audience sensibilities, to “disabuse the public of the idea that the cinema is only a spectacle for children,” as one article in Ciné-Journal put it in 1912.249

This “epistemological rupture” in the history of cinema is typically dated to a historical moment just prior to the premiere of Faune, somewhere in the years spanning 1907 and 1911.250 That context is important, for if audiences described Faune as cinematic, the cinema it would have evoked would not have been the new, self-consciously adult, “classic” cinema being institutionalized in Paris at that current moment. The “false and strange” impression of movement Faune generated, its abbreviated and circular narrative, not to mention its animal protagonist, all would have appeared anachronistic, more reminiscent of a ten-minute animation by Reynaud than, for instance, the nearly three-hour adaptation of Les misérables Pathé released in 1912.

As a whole, Nijinsky’s L’Après-midi d’un faune evoked a dense patchwork of technologies and representational strategies that were either protocinematic, or paradigmatically kinematographic. It recalled “screen entertainments,” like the slide lecture or shadow theater, as well as the “crude toys,” like the zoetrope, praxinoscope, phonoscope, or tachyscope, in which “the kinematograph found its earliest conception.”251 Or it could have evoked things such as Marey’s animated chronophotographs, Reynaud’s hand-painted animations, or the earliest “kine-attractographic” films, which were, as Tom Gunning has argued, less invested in the development of complex dramatic narratives than in the “harnessing of visibility” through “act[s] of showing and exhibition.”252

In a manner that anticipated how teleological histories of Greek sculpture would come to provide the master terms of periodization (i.e. primitive, classic) that would eventually be mapped onto the history of film, the archaism of Faune was once again layered and redoubled.
Nijinsky’s “kinematography of bas-relief” not only looked back “twenty-six centuries” towards the primordial origins of figural depiction, it performed simultaneously an archaeology of the far more recent aesthetic past, looking back towards the prehistory or archaic origins of cinema. In this regard, it is not incidental that Nijinsky’s maturation coincided exactly with that of the new medium. His first professional appearances (in animal acts at the circus) took place at or around the age of six—in other words, right around 1895. A laconic statement in his diary of 1919—”I am familiar with cinema”—confirms his cognizance of the new medium. For a dancer, it would have been unavoidable: cinema emerged in cultural arenas, like the circus, that were adjacent to and frequently intersected with the realms of theatrical dance. At the height of his career (1909–14), Nijinsky often performed on stages that also offered screens for the projection of “animated pictures.” The Théâtre du Châtelet, where Faune premiered, had been hosting séances de cinématographe since 1907. When Nijinsky mounted an independent Saison Nijinsky at London’s Palace Theatre of Varieties in 1914, his company’s forty-five minutes of dancing were immediately followed by bioscope screenings.

While Nijinsky’s diary makes an intriguing mention of a desire to work in film, it also makes clear how the popularity of cinema might have been incompatible with his aesthetic vision, given his deep investment in the distinction between the art of dance and mere commercial entertainment. “I wanted to work with cinema,” he asserted, “but I realized its significance. Cinema serves to increase money. Money serves to increase the number of cinema theaters.” Animated pictures as they existed during the reign of “kine-attractography,” when Nijinsky began his training in dance, with their fairground associations, their predilection for featuring trained practitioners of movement (dancers, clowns, trained animals, and so on), their tendency to delight in the sheer spectacle of motion, likely embodied the kind of crass
entertainment the dancer regarded as beneath his rank, prone as he was to self-important pronouncements such as “Je ne suis pas un sauteur, je suis un artiste!” and “I refuse to be sandwiched between performing dogs and acrobats!”

Cinema’s rapid ascendance as a cultural phenomenon, however, must have revealed something fundamental about the degree to which audiences (of all ages) were “attracted” by the mobilizing capacities of the kinematograph, for these “animated pictures” gained immediate popularity and worldwide proliferation. In a letter to his family in 1907, Freud wrote about his own fascination with the new medium, describing how he regressed into a childlike state when confronted with the captivating appeal of moving images:

on the roof of a house at the other end of the piazza there is a screen on which a società Italiana projects lantern slides (fotoreclami). They are actually advertisements, but to beguile the public these are interspersed with pictures of landscapes, Negroes of the Congo, glacier ascents, and so on. But since these wouldn’t be enough, the boredom is interrupted by short cinematographic performances for the sake of which the old children (your father included) suffer quietly the advertisements and monotonous photographs.

Perhaps it was precisely because of the association of those early “animated pictures” with a kind of infantilizing spectatorial experience that Nijinsky’s first self-consciously “artistic” piece of choreography adopted certain representational strategies that kinematography, in its early, so-called “primitive” phase of development, deployed to spectacularize mechanically simulated movement.

Kine-Attractographic Procedures

Animated pictures in the kinematographic period were often structured and exhibited in ways designed to display “the novelty and fascination of the cinematograph,” to flaunt the new device’s capacity to activate and reanimate static images. Faune must be understood in
relation to the tendency in kine-attractography that Gunning has defined as the “aesthetic of 
astonishment.” Through its formal structure, its beginning and ending in particular, Nijinsky’s 
tableau chorégraphique simulated processes of activation and fixation analogous to those that 
might have “astonished” audiences in their earliest encounters with animated pictures.

*Faune* began by withholding the motion its audience had come to observe. It commenced 
by emphatically establishing a static tableau: the faun lying motionless with the flute to his lips, 
elevated on his rock against the midsection of the painted set, as if “inside” the backcloth’s 
tawny landscape. Contrary to theatrical norms, Nijinsky specified that the curtain should rise 
*before* the orchestra began to play Debussy’s *Prélude*, so that when the opening flute phrases 
commenced, the audience already sat staring at a static stage picture, and continued to do so for 
the full duration of the flute arabesque (measures 1–10), as Nijinsky held the instrument to his 
lips in virtually uninterrupted stillness.²⁶²

This prolonged stasis at the ballet’s opening closely recalls a screening practice deployed 
widely in the first demonstrations of the Lumière brothers and elsewhere. As Gunning has 
emphasized, these early screenings often commenced with the projection of a still photograph, 
“withholding briefly the illusion of motion which [was] the apparatus’s *raison d’être*” in order to 
give perceptual emphasis to “the astonishing moment of movement,” the moment when the 
spectator witnessed the “still projection take on motion, become endowed with animation.”²⁶³ 
Activation, in fact, might be a better term than animation to describe this astonishing process of 
mobilization, since it more vividly conjures a sense of movement generated through an external 
mechanism, lacking the evocations of an *anima*, an inner life or soul, an imbedded in the image 
that might produce movement. Somewhat incongruously, *Faune* absorbed that particular practice 
of initial stasis, designed to dramatize the astonishing illusion produced by the kinematograph,
but placed it in a context (live dance) where a capacity for “animation” would have been presumed to be gratuitous.

_Faune_ invoked this kinematographic screening practice in a context where, it must be stressed, the kinematograph was patently absent. But by deferring the ballet’s ignition moment, and detaching it from the commencement of musical movement, Nijinsky gave great dramatic emphasis to the felt presence of some external force, analogous to the kinematograph, which seemed to act upon the _tableau chorégraphique_ to animate it. This simulation of kinematographic activation in _Faune_ functions, I propose, as it did in the Gauthier-Villars passage with which this chapter began. That is, it operates as a metaphor for a psychological process: “As soon as the first sonic curl rises from the Debussyian flute like the intoxicating smoke from a pipe of opium, our little personal kinematograph starts itself up and unwinds its fairy-like film under our closed eyelids.” _Faune_’s opening interval of stillness “as the first sonic curl rises” can be read as a kind of mechanical lag as the psychological apparatus “starts itself up” before it can set in motion the “choreographic picture.”

The simulation of mechanical activation at the opening of _Faune_ was echoed in the ballet’s conclusion, which implied and realized the kinematographic potential for repetitive reactivation. Although all previous scholarship has universally ignored this fact, it is crucial that _Faune_, as advertised in the _Sketch Supplement_ (fig. 4.66), was conventionally “presented twice” to its audiences. This practice of dancing _Faune_ twice in a row, standard during Nijinsky’s tenure in the Ballets Russes, dates to the evening of its premiere, when a conspicuous paucity of applause met the falling of the curtain, probably for the first time in Nijinsky’s performing career. To quote the account of Prince Peter Lieven:
When the curtain came down there was an outburst of talk in the auditorium and protests and hisses were heard. Diaghilev gave the order to repeat the ballet. By this bold decision he scored a victory on the first evening of the performance. Whether the public’s indignation changed to astonishment, or it was simply Diaghilev’s obstinacy which prevailed, applause broke out when the curtain fell after the repetition of the ballet.\textsuperscript{264}

The repetition of \textit{Faune} was very different from the encores of \textit{Spectre de la rose} that occurred in certain special instances, for as Lieven stressed, the ballet was not repeated in response to an outburst of applause or calls of bis. Rather, the performance was inflicted for a second time on a vocally ambivalent audience, whose responses ranged from ecstatic to bored to shocked and disgusted. Strikingly, however, Lieven describes the act of repetition as one that effectively shifted the collective response to \textit{Faune}, replacing “indignation” with “astonishment.”

Nijinsky’s experience performing encores of \textit{Spectre} must have impressed upon him the degree to which spectators delighted in repetitions. \textit{Faune} self-consciously, perhaps sardonically, accommodated that appetite by simulating kinematography’s potential to enable a new kind of repetitive viewing. In 1907, Remy de Gourmont described in a tone of utter wonderment how a \textit{spectacle cinématographique} could “function day and night for a century . . . the actors perform once, and it is forever; their gestures are fixed” (\textit{fixes}), continuing, “they could all perish in a catastrophe and the spectacle would continue no less, always identical to itself.”\textsuperscript{265} Gourmont’s testimony bears out the assertion, recently posited by Gaudreault and Nicolas Dulac, that “attraction” in kine-attractography was “based above all on repetition . . . its model par excellence [was] the endless loop.”\textsuperscript{266} A crucial aspect of kinematography’s spectacular appeal for Gourmont was its capacity to “fix” movement, to enable “always identical” repetitions of the same movement sequences. His testimony suggests how animated pictures might have provided a model not only for an astonishing activation, but also an astonishing fixation.
Despite *Faune’s* brevity and small cast, in preparing the performance, Nijinsky demanded an unprecedented number of rehearsals (in French, *répétitions*, in Russian, Репетиция [repetitsiya]). In part, these rehearsals were necessary because of the extreme difficulty of teaching the nymphs how to move their bodies while contorted to maintain “bas-relief form.” More fundamentally, these *répétitions* suggest how deeply repetition was embedded in the conception of *Faune*, indeed, the degree to which the endless loop was its “model par excellence.” The inordinate number of rehearsals, not to mention the choreographer’s subsequent invention of a dance notation system to record a “score of movement” dictating every detail of *Faune* “down to the gesture of each finger,” betray Nijinsky’s investment in eradicating the irregularities and spontaneous variations inherent in live performance as much as humanly possible, his desire to render dance as something “always identical to itself” from one performance to the next.\(^{267}\)

While this ambition to rigorously “fix” performance into a static unchanging form, dictated by the authoritative aesthetic vision of the choreographer, had wide implications for the history of modernist performance, my concern here is to stress that Nijinsky’s virtual mechanization of choreographic process grew out of the specificity of the *Faune* project, and was inflected with special formal, thematic meanings in that context. Given Diaghilev’s counterintuitive decision to repeat an unpopular performance, and the centrality of repetition to the genesis and narrative of *Faune*, it seems possible Nijinsky might always have intended for his ballet to be danced in a double presentation. Regardless of whether the initial repetition was premeditated or spontaneous, the fact that the repetition was immediately adopted as a standard performance procedure suggests how well it served the ballet’s thematics and formal structure.
As several commentators have noted, the narrative progression of Nijinsky’s unusually brief ballet is circular. This circularity echoes Mallarmé’s poem, which “ends in a beginning that closes it into a circle,” commencing as the faun awakens and culminating with his announcement that he will fall back into dreamy sleep again. Preserving this looped structure, Nijinsky choreographed his dance to begin and end with the faun alone on his rock, at the same physical location on stage and in reclining poses that read as inverted versions of one another (compare figs. 4.13 and 4.18). There is also, as Jill Beck noted, an “elegant symmetry” between the faun’s opening and closing poses staged at the level of symbolism—the flute in hand at the ballet’s outset prefigures the final masturbatory gesture of reaching under the pelvis.

While the tableau chorégraphique preserved the basic circularity of Mallarmé’s eclogue, it did so in a manner that entailed significant thematic modification to the original poem. By recasting flute playing as “‘playing’” in the sense “used in the nursery to describe the activity of the hands upon the genitals,” Nijinsky replaces the aesthetic activity through which the soliloquizing faun sublimates his reproductive desires with a bodily discharge of this erotic energy. This ending achieves what Cocteau’s program identified as the “satisfaction” of the faun’s “dream” in the form of a symbolic ejaculation (arriving finally, we could say, at liquid movement), and it seems to go hand in hand with Nijinsky’s overarching mechanization of the eroticism Mallarmé’s faun expounded. The force of this mechanization in Nijinsky’s dance is such that it virtually overrides the original text, for when the curtain fell on Faune, so that, as the program notes proposed, the poem could “commence in everyone’s memories,” the curtain in fact opened onto the scene again, as if to commence a mechanical repetition.

The shock of the conclusion consisted not simply in its evocation of a masturbatory ejaculation, but also in its invocation, precisely in that moment, of a particular kinematographic
analogy, an analogy to the looped movement sequences characteristic of “animated pictures” before the format of linear film became dominant. Many early kinematographic apparatuses produced an illusion of movement by arranging successive chronophotographs around rotating disks (figs. 4.67, 4.68), following the example of earlier nineteenth-century optical toys such as the zoetrope, phenakistoscope and stroboscope. These kinematographic loops restricted possibilities for narrative development by eradicating “any hint of temporal progression,” presenting a type of movement Friedrich Tietjen has described as “kinetic stasis, a present progressive in permanence.”

Even after the linear format of film superseded these circular structures, Tietjen argues, early films often incorporated the loop as a “formal and narrative element.” He cites the Lumière brothers’s *Workers Leaving a Factory* (1895) as an example of a linear film that “ends with roughly the same scene as it started.” That film’s mirroring of beginning and ending, it must be added, both called out for and was reinforced by repetitive viewings. *Workers Leaving a Factory* was the first film the Lumières screened publicly, and after its initial projection it was screened again because the audience “demanded that the film showing be immediately repeated.” In this circumstance, then, as with the optical toys whose “kinetic stasis” the viewer’s physical manipulation set in motion, the screened repetition resulted from the spectator’s participation.

If, as Tietjen argues, the formal precondition for the loop’s kinetic stasis was the “seamless joining of the first and last images,” the faun’s return to his opening position at the ballet’s end creates just this type of seamlessness. This return can be seen both to anticipate and to announce the potential for the repetitive reactivation of a loop which begins with a static faun, as one reviewer put it, “fingering his flute,” and ends with his onanistic self-pleasure.
Needless to say, the specter of pseudomechanical reactivation underscores the obscenity of that final gesture, as it makes material and structural the common notion of masturbation as a paradigmatically compulsive, repetitive behavior—”the ‘primary addiction,’” as Freud put it. This sense of a perverse repetition cannot be confined to the actions played out within the choreographic picture, for like the ballet’s deferred moment of activation, this pseudomechanical reactivation of Faune implicates the spectator.

*Faune’s* repetition implicitly appealed to the theatrical convention of the encore. In the British press, in particular, the ballet’s double presentation often functioned rhetorically to attest to a wide public enthusiasm for *Faune* that probably did not actually exist. Indeed, for viewers such as Calmette, affronted by the ballet’s sexuality on the first go-round, this repeat performance must have been Nijinsky’s crowning offensive gesture, for it necessarily insinuated that the assembled spectators had taken great pleasure in this *exhibition trop spéciale*, projecting onto the audience a perverse desire to rewitness immediately, and perhaps infinitely, the scene just presented to them.

More than simply appearing as a concession to an avid, approving spectator, the offensiveness of *Faune’s* repeat performance had to do with the way it insinuated that the repetition was activated by, or perhaps occurring in the mind of, the spectator. Because the ballet’s prolonged static opening enforced a reading of the choreographic picture as externally activated rather than internally animated, the reactivation, like the initial deferred moment of mobilization, could be read again as the consequence of some apparatus acting from the exterior. Beyond acknowledging and indulging the viewer’s perverse appetite for repetition, *Faune’s* choreography alluded to the psychological mechanism for that appetite’s satisfaction—the “little
personal kinematograph” embedded within the mind of the spectator, which enabled or even indeed compelled the viewer to “fix” its sequence of movement into an endless loop.

The pseudomechanical reactivation of *Faune* thus functions as a powerful metaphor for a tendency toward fixation in psychological terms. Through its allusion to the kinematographic loop, the ballet can be seen to anticipate a theory—formulated by Freud during his 1910-1914 analysis of the Russian nobleman Sergei Pankejeff, now commonly known from Freud’s case study as the Wolf Man—that “early impressions of sexual life are characterized by an increased pertinacity or susceptibility to fixation,” particularly in “persons who are later to become neurotics or perverts.”

279 A full discussion of *Faune*’s many congruences with Freud’s case history of Pankejeff, “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis” (1918), is beyond the scope of this chapter. It is important to note, however, that the case—a crucial case in the history of psychoanalysis, in which Freud formulated new theories about both repetition compulsions and the potentially traumatic psychic effects of infantile sexuality—revolved around a psychic process Freud described as the “activation” (*Aktivierung*) of sexual memories from early childhood in the form of a static dream picture.

280 *Faune* can be seen to stage an argument analogous to Freud’s. Both in form and in narrative, the ballet insinuates that in dreams the subject is necessarily destined to repeat, or reactivate, certain kinds of sexual scenes remembered from childhood—scenes of viewing human or animal genitals, scenes of engagement in activities such as exhibitionism or masturbation, “simple incidents from ordinary life which happen to every human being,” to quote Romola Nijinsky again.

281 The dynamics of *Faune*’s reception (already anticipated, we can assume, in the choreographic plan) made vivid how the reactivation of such infantile scenes, or *épisodes paniques*, could produce profound anxiety, alongside pleasure.
Dissonance

Although Debussy and his many devotees savaged *Faune* for its musical obtuseness, in fact, as Edwin Denby argued, the “choreography of *Faune* proves that Nijinsky’s natural musical intelligence was of the highest order.”²⁸² While listeners in 1912 tended to praise Debussy’s *Prélude* for its “unprecedented fluidity,” perceiving in this fluidity an intense vivaciousness, akin to, as Vuillermoz put it, “the voluptuous suppleness of an amorous female cat,” by contrast Nijinsky seems to have responded to the “Debussyan inertia” that more recent musicologists have identified as the composer’s signature and most original achievement.²⁸³ Debussy abandoned conventions of musical progression in his compositions, Richard Taruskin has noted, favoring static harmonies that created an “absence of ‘progression’ or forward drive.”²⁸⁴ His *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* does not unfold in time according to any existing plot archetypes, such as sonata form. The opening flute motto repeats seven times over the course of the one hundred and ten measures of the composition, accompanied by different textures, without ever resolving or truly “developing.”²⁸⁵ The short piece seems to go nowhere, to simply hang in the air, indeed, as the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch aptly formulated it, “the prelude never finishes commencing.”²⁸⁶

Through the stasis of its postures, the circularity of its plot structure, the thematization of sexual tension that fails to be conventionally “consummated,” the choreography of *Faune* responded less to the surface “fluidity” praised by Debussy’s contemporaries than to the *Prélude’s* underlying kinetic stasis. The ballet materialized in visual form what Jankélévitch identifies as “the most Debussyan paradox,” that is, “the immobility of movement or, if one prefers, the movement of the immobile.”²⁸⁷ Nijinsky’s choreographic conceit of “kinematography of bas relief” was a device that made this paradox palpable, demonstrating that
“even when the music of Debussy seems animated by the genius of perpetual movement, this mobility assumes again an inexplicably stationary aspect: for the mobility of Debussy is more ‘cinematic’ than truly dynamic.”

For many historians of dance and theater, the most significant innovation of *Faune* was its emphatic departure from the Wagnerian paradigm of fusional accord between music and stage gesture—its initiation of a new, deliberately disjunctive intermedial aesthetic based upon the anti-Wagnerian conviction, later spelled out by Bertolt Brecht, that “words, music, and setting must become more independent of one another.” This notion directly conflicts, however, with Nijinsky’s public assertions that the “new choreographic formula” in *Faune* was specially designed to “combine closely” with Debussy’s music. Lydia Sokolova, who replaced one of the original nymphs in 1913, recalled that even the slightest movements were correlated to a “corresponding sound in the score.” These correlations were so “ingeniously thought out” that she mistakenly believed that Nijinsky had “had enormous help from the composer.”

The “close combination” of movement and music in *Faune* was key to the “cinematic” quality Jankélévitch identified in Debussy’s music; therefore the combination was deliberately disjunctive, or, to use composer’s word, “dissonant.” The correlations Nijinsky choreographed were deliberately offbeat and erratic, consisting of an unpredictable combination of “mismatches” and certain conspicuous “synch points.” To correctly execute their movements at the specified cues, the dancers had to listen to the score with a level of attention far surpassing anything they were used to. This new attentiveness, paradoxically, was marshaled to create the illusion of acoustic obliviousness, or even deafness. Lalo commented that it appeared as if Nijinsky never bothered to listen to the *Prélude* before choreographing his performance, while
Vuillermoz observed, “the dancers ignore . . . what is happening just beyond the ramp, in the dark valley of the orchestra.”

Rather than giving the impression of dancers “dancing to” Debussy’s music, Faune was structured so that it appeared as if the orchestra was “playing to” Nijinsky’s tableau chorégraphique. By bringing up the curtain before launching into the score, and by deferring physical activation for a full ten measures of music, Faune visibly subverted, or satirized, the long and deeply held assumption that music functions for dance as an engine or animating force. The impetus for movement in Faune seemed to come from somewhere other than the “intoxicating” sounds of music that, by appearances, only the audience could hear. The structure of Faune suggests instead a more convoluted, multi-step procedure: the “choreographic picture” is projected, the orchestra plays to it, the audience hears the music, and that sonic stimulus “starts up” in them a “little personal kinematograph” that mechanically activates the static picture.

In addition to shoring up the larger illusion that the performers onstage were not actually live dancers but rather insensate figures contained within an archaic bas-relief, the perceptible disconnect between the music and the visible actions of the performers in Faune enforced a powerful analogy to the audiovisual experience of cinema in the so-called “silent” era, when it was, in de Gourmont’s words, a species of “mute theater” in which “images pass[ed] carried along by light music” (fig. 4.69). Faune simulated the literal asynchrony of live music and mechanically activated static imagery characteristic of kinematography, perhaps most vividly in moments that signify as crude, awkward attempts to bridge a (fictive) chasm between a live orchestral accompaniment and the deaf, mute, self-enclosed world of the tableau chorégraphique. The “synch points” in Nijinsky’s choreography, Davinia Caddy has observed, are characterized by their “blatancy,” by their usage of banal audiovisual correlations that are
“not only literal . . . [but] too, too literal.” The most blatant example is once again the ballet’s opening, when, “as the first sonic curl rises from the Debussyian flute,” Nijinsky remains in an absolutely stationary pose, “fingering his flute . . . as though he had himself found Debussy’s lovely phrase for his musings—motionless, solitary, dream-rapt.”

Even as this opening sequence sets up the ballet’s overarching system of opposition between (musical) motion and (corporeal) stasis, it does so while also crudely gesturing towards their linkage: “by pretending to play, the faun locates Debussy’s music within the diegesis, creating the illusion of musical literalism or sound effect.” Caddy’s description of the opening flute sequence as a moment of “sound effect” is particularly apt, for this concept clearly recalls one of kinematography’s most characteristic forms of sonic enhancement, what in American parlance was referred to as “‘cue-music,’ i.e. music specifically corresponding to an on-screen cue such as a bugler blowing his bugle.” Because Nijinsky insisted that the curtain rise to reveal the tableau chorégraphique before the playing of the Prélude commenced, the static visual image of the faun onstage “fingering his flute” does appear as an “on-screen cue” or impetus for Debussy’s orchestral music. That is an aspect of both the humor and the strangeness of L’Après-midi d’un faune as a response to Debussy’s music. The Prélude, a composition of extraordinary tonic and rhythmic complexity, singled out by Pierre Boulez as the work that founded “modern music,” was introduced as if it were simply “light music” to accompany a screened entertainment, as if the orchestra was simply supplying the cue-music without which, as a Ciné-Journal commentator noted, the cinematic “dream ceases abruptly.”

That Faune thus evoked the audiovisual texture of the kinematographic screening had everything to do with its effort to replicate a mode of experience in which pictures were understood to take on powerful perceptual or psychological priority. Much of the distaste for
kinematography in the first decades of its existence revolved around the notion that it catered to an unsophisticated, even juvenile tendency to privilege visual images over less concrete forms of artistic expression (e.g., music, poetry). When Lalo diagnosed the Ballets Russes as a symptom of cultural “decadence,” arguing that its productions made music “secondary” to visual “spectacle,” he accused the company of providing “a pleasure that responds exactly . . . to the crowd’s invasive passion for the kinematograph.”

Numerous viewers described the experience of watching Faune in performance as one in which the visual tableau asserted its precedence, so that Debussy’s music retreated to the background of consciousness. Volkonskii described how “the lack of correspondence between the music and movement in this little piece” was at first disconcerting, but finally, “you forget about the music . . . and the visual side takes possession of you.” Hofmannsthal similarly observed after the Berlin premiere that “the music is certainly not the key to the ballet as, say, Schumann’s music is the key . . . to Carnaval. Carnaval seems at every moment like an improvisation welling up from its music. By contrast the strong inner power of Nijinsky’s short scene seems to me to make Debussy’s music recede, to become an accompanying element” (ein begleitendes Element zu werden). Repeating this sentiment almost exactly, Cyril Beaumont observed: “the melody served only as an accompaniment, the music counterpart to a scenic setting against which the panorama of movement was displayed.” If, as Siegfried Kracauer has argued, music fulfilled its proper function for silent film when it simply “remove[d] the need for sound” and was “not heard at all,” then Debussy’s music functioned for Faune just as “musical accompaniment” was intended to function for silent film; that is, it receded to the background of consciousness so that visual imagery became foregrounded, “gear[ing] our senses . . . completely to the film shots.”
I stress this audiovisual aspect of cinematic spectatorship because it was one of the distinctive qualities that made contemporary viewers recognize cinema as a particularly dreamlike medium. In 1912, an article in Ciné-Journal identified silence as “one of the most fascinating aspects of cinema-theater.” The fact that audiences perceived neither the accompanying music nor the muteness of the characters on screen demonstrated how animated pictures enabled “a particular form of psychism,” eliciting the imaginative identification of a spectator who “in some way . . . hears himself speak” when viewing interactions transpire on screen.307 “There is no popular spectacle in which the imagination of the spectator plays a greater role than in theater-cinema,” the journalist asserted, “art in the cinema-theater is an art of suggesting dreams.”308

Our Little Personal Kinematograph

I know what an eye is. An eye is the theater. The brain is the audience. I am the eye in the brain.309

Thus Nijinsky outlined, in the diary composed in the weeks leading up to his institutionalization with a diagnosis of dementia praecox, his emphatically observer-oriented conception of theater. Stage and auditorium, as he envisioned them, were two interdependent components of an integrally functioning psychic system. Within Nijinsky’s small body of choreographic work this conception of theater found its most succinct, emphatic manifestation in L’Après-midi d’un faune. Indeed, audiences in 1912 seem to have been highly attuned to the fact that, in the theatrical economy implied by L’Après-midi d’un faune, “the brain is the audience,” and “in” that brain was Nijinsky’s faun.

Because Mallarmé’s poem was widely known to be a poem about a dream, and because Debussy’s music was widely understood to be a sonic intoxicant capable of producing powerful
hallucinatory images ("fairy-like films under closed eyelids," as Gauthier-Villars put it), we can assume that Faune, like its counter model Spectre de la rose, was understood to dramatize, not only the specific "dream of the faun," but also dreaming itself, as a psychical process. The shock and discomfort the ballet elicited had to do with the specific ways it reflected back to its audience psychical processes understood to be occurring inside their own heads. The dance, which the Ballets Russes eventually performed in all the major theaters of Europe, as well as North and South America, can be seen as a spectacular public encounter (equal parts titillating and traumatic) with the nature of dreams as modern culture had come to understand them.

In the most superficial sense, Nijinsky’s tableau chorégraphique is dense with specific metaphors as well as formal procedures Freud associated with the products of dreamwork: a contradictory condensation of opposites through its paradoxical treatment of motion and stasis; a condensed, laconic format; the total absence of affect; phallic symbolism; the “composite” body of the faun himself, part animal and part human; and the pictogrammatic, rebus-like aspect of the ballet’s entire cast of characters. Far more significantly, Faune can be seen to replicate the psychic process of dreaming as Freud rhetorically defined and pictured it.

Dreamwork was Freud’s term for a process of translation, in which “the same subject matter” (dream thoughts) gets transposed between “different languages” or different “modes of expression.” The “most important and peculiar characteristic” of the dreamwork, in Freud’s estimation, was what he described variously as “the transformation of thoughts into situations (‘dramatization’) ['Dramatisierung’],” “modification into a pictorial form” (Die Umarbeitung aufs Anschauliche), or “regressions —that is, thoughts transformed into images” (in Bilder verwandelte Gedanken).
This last, the “recast[ing] . . . of ideational content into sensory images” (sinnliche Bilder) was the process Freud “characterized . . . with the word ‘regressive,’” and it has a direct analogue in the genesis of L’Après-midi d’un faune. Nijinsky’s ballet resulted from an intermedial translation through which the “dream-thoughts” of Mallarmé’s faun, first articulated in poetic text, moved from a “colorless and abstract expression” into a “pictorial and . . . concrete one,” from written language to musical composition and finally, quite literally, into Dramatisierung—dramatization in the form of static archaic Erinnerungsbilder, no less. In this sense, the dramatization of Faune was set up to exhibit to its audience, in formal terms, how translating thoughts into “sensory images” was a regressive process, in which “primitive methods of expression and representation take the place of the usual ones.”

In addition to performing the archaism of unconscious thought processes, Faune linked this archaic unconscious to a recognition of the mind itself as a kind of mechanical apparatus. To describe the process that produced the dream’s regression into images, the author of the Traumdeutung had introduced “the fiction of a primitive psychical apparatus” (die Fiktion eines primitiven psychischen Apparats), finding it expedient for his reader to “picture the instrument which carries out our mental functions as resembling a compound microscope or a photographic apparatus, or something of the kind.” It was an analogous “fiction” that Nijinsky’s “kinematography of bas-relief” invited its viewer to “picture.” The ballet confronted its spectators with a vision of their dreaming as a “primitive apparatus,” activating for them archaic, infantile memory pictures. And it made clear for them, as well, from where that “little personal kinematograph” derived its source of power. As Freud wrote in 1911, “repressed infantile sexual wishes provide the most frequent and strongest motive-forces.”
Notes

Unless otherwise noted, all translations from French and German are my own.

Translations from the Russian unless otherwise noted are unpublished translations by Elizabeth H. Stern, and use Library of Congress transliteration. For well-known Russian protagonists, I conform to conventional English transliterations.


Dès la première volute sonore qui monte de la flûte debussyste comme la fumée envirante s’élève d’une pipe d’opium, notre petite cinématographe personnel se met en marche et déroule son film féérique sous nos paupières closes. Avec des souvenirs inconscients de littérature, de peinture et de sculpture, chacun modèle un faune particulier et fait danser sur son corps souple la lumière d’un sous-bois ensoleillée: telle candide jeune femme le colorie avec la palette de Bouguereau, telle vierge ardente la silhouette avec le burin de Rops, M. Arthur Meyer lui essaie mentalement un caleçon armorié, un faux-col et des manchettes. M. Gaston Calmette, tenant à la main le rasoir de Figaro, s’approche sournoisement du pourchasseur de nymphes pour lui proposer un engagement dans les choeurs de la chapelle Sixtine, tandis que telle vieille veuve, multiplient à son gré les exploits de son chèvre-pied servant, se forge une félicité qui la fait pleurer de tendresse! Voilà tout ce que Nijinsky a prétendu remplacer d’un seul coup par sa propre vision. La tentative était presque impertinente: on sait de quelle façon imprévue il l’a réalisée.


3. Gauthier-Villars, “Deux ballets russes,” n.p.: “C’est pour cette œuvre que se posait plus que jamais la question de la supériorité du rêve intérieur sur les extériorisations théâtrales en présence d’une symphonie descriptive. Était-il possible, sans le décevoir, d’obliger l’imagination
de l’auditeur à l’abdication de tous ses droits nous forcer à admettre les postulats d’une danseur, même génial?"

4. Albert Thibaudet, La Poésie de Stéphane Mallarmé (Paris: M. Rivière, 1912), 394: “la motif de l’Après-midi d’un faune a été très probablement fourni à Mallarmé par un tableau de Boucher à la National Gallery.”

While this theory was subsequently discredited because Pan et Syrinx did not enter the National Gallery until 1880, I find convincing Eileen Souffrin-Le Breton’s argument that Mallarmé was somehow familiar with Boucher’s painting, either through a miniature or a print reproduction, see “The Young Mallarmé and the Boucher Revival,” in Baudelaire Mallarmé Valery: New Essays in Honor of Lloyd Austin, ed. Malcolm Bowie, Alison Fairlie, and Alison Finch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 283–313.


10. Following Nijinsky’s mental breakdown in 1919, he received extensive psychiatric treatment informed by psychoanalysis at Ludwig Binswanger’s Bellevue Sanatorium in Kreuzlingen, Switzerland. For a history of Nijinsky’s mental illness and its treatment, see Peter Ostwald, *Vaslav Nijinsky: A Leap into Madness* (New York: Carol Publishing, 1991).
11. [Jean Cocteau?], *Programme officiel des Ballets russes, Théâtre du Châtelet, mai-juin 1912, troisième spectacle, 29 et 31 mai, 1er et 3 juin 1912* (Paris: Comédia illustré, 1912), n.p.: “Un Faune sommeille; des Nymphes le dupent; un écharpe oubliée satisfait son rêve.”

Jean-Michel Nectoux convincingly proposed that Jean Cocteau wrote this program synopsis, and likely also discussed Mallarmé’s text with Nijinsky; see his “*L’Après-midi d’un faune*”: *Mallarmé, Debussy, Nijinsky*, exh. cat. (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1989).


15. To introduce this process of sublimation, Mallarmé begins the poem with the verb *perpétuer*, evoking both the action of prolonging, and the perpetuation of species through sexual reproduction. Mallarmé, “*L’Après-midi d’un Faune,*” in idem, *Oeuvres*, 163.
16. Bersani does not address the Ovidian text, but his argument is strengthened by the fact that the eclogue merely extends and deepens a preoccupation with art making as a sublimation of erotic energy already intrinsic to the ancient text it adapts. In the *Metamorphoses*, the story of Pan and Syrinx occurs in a particularly complex, self-reflexive passage, embedded within a larger narrative in which Mercury, while playing pipes to soothe Argus to sleep, plays the story of the pipe’s invention, which the Ovidian narrator then interjects to complete. The story describes how Pan pursued the beautiful nymph Syrinx to the banks of a river, until she changed her form into water. In the moment the goat-god believed he had finally caught his sexual prey, he was left clutching a bundle of reeds. Pan’s sighs of disappointment produced plaintive tones when his breath rustled in the reeds, and upon hearing this sound, he became charmed and delighted by his own sweet music. Pan then invented the mouth organ. Naming the instrument after Syrinx, he proclaimed, “This converse, at least, shall I have with thee” (*hoc mihi colloquium tecum* dixisse ‘manebit’), Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.682–712, 1.709; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vol. 1, *Books* 1–8, trans. Frank Justus Miller, ed. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 42 (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1916), 52.


20. [Cocteau?], *Programme officiel*, n.p. The English term panic comes from the French *panique*, coined in the sixteenth century, while this French word is associated with Pan.


22. Nijinsky was certainly one of the most photographed personalities of the early twentieth century. Between 1909 and 1912 he achieved a level of international celebrity that, as Hanna Järvinen has argued, anticipated the fame of certain film stars after the First World War; see her “Dancing without Space—on Nijinsky’s *L’après-midi d’un Faune* (1912)” *Dance Research* 27, no. 1 (2009): 28-64, 36.


For an overview of Diaghilev’s dealings with Nijinsky, see Sjeng Scheijen, *Diaghilev: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Nijinsky had made his debut at the Mariinsky Theatre at sixteen, and soon became its most popular male dancer. It was on the basis of his performances at the Mariinsky that Diaghilev recruited Nijinsky to dance in Paris in the first of his *Saisons Russes*. The following year, Diaghilev made Nijinsky his lover, poached him out of his contract with the Imperial Theater, and installed him as the star of his newly formed dance
troupe. Nijinsky’s full-time participation in the Ballets Russes was possible only because Nijinsky had been released from his contract at the Imperial Theater in 1909 on the grounds of “indecency,” after he danced the lead male part of Albrecht in Giselle in tights and a dramatically shortened tunic, designed for him by Diaghilev, see Lucy Moore, Nijinsky: A Life (London: Profile Books, 2014), 83.


27. Nikolai Minskii, “Sensatsionnyi Balet (Pis’mo iz Parizha)” (Sensational Ballet [Letter from Paris]), Utro Rossii, 24 May 1912: “Как! Они заплатили 400 франков за ложу, чтобы видеть летающего Нижинского и порхающую Карсавину—и вдруг им показывают скучные барельефы!”


29. See for instance Sally Sommer, “Reflections on an Afternoon,” Choreography and Dance 1, no. 3 (1991), special issue on the revival of Nijinsky’s original L’Après-midi d’un faune, 81–84, 82: “with Faune ballet entered the world of modernism once and for all;” Lincoln Kirstein, Four Centuries of Ballet: Fifty Masterworks, 2nd ed. (New York: Dover, 1984), 198: “[Faune] marks an absolute break with classic tradition, the first of such impact in four centuries. Nothing was retained from the academy save disciplined dancers.”

One thousand copies of the album were produced, but only six survive. I have consulted the edition conserved at the Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra National de Paris. For the details concerning the Meyer photographs and the subsequent Iribe album, see Philippe Néagu, “Nijinsky and De Meyer,” in *Afternoon of a Faun: Mallarme, Debussy, Nijinsky*, eds. Ann Hutchinson Guest, Philippe Néagu, and Jean-Michel Nectoux (New York: Vendome, 1989), 55–63, esp. 57. The studio sessions took place sometime in June or July of 1912, during the London season of the Ballets Russes, which did not include *Faune* because of the scandal it had created in Paris. *Faune* was therefore remounted in London at that time specifically to be photographed.

31. The original handwritten score is conserved at the British Library in London (MS 47215). Because Nijinsky’s notation system was idiosyncratic, the score was not decoded until 1991. This chapter relies extensively on that translation, published in Guest and Jeschke, *Nijinsky’s Faune Restored.* However, because I emphasize the testimony of contemporary viewers, my account will at times seem to deviate from their conviction that the “definitive” version of *Faune* was originally “smoother,” less jerky and angular than the memory-based versions, 18.

Russes to dance Faune twice, in immediate succession, on every occasion of its performance. See the list of performances in *Afternoon of a Faun: Mallarmé, Debussy, Nijinsky*, 126–30.

33. Nijinsky quoted in Guest and Jeschke, *Nijinsky’s Faune Restored*, 13: “[the stage should be] dimly lit from the sides so that the figures do not seem like out of a relief. The aim is for everything to be almost flat, more like a low-relief.”


35. [Cocteau?], *Programme officiel*, n.p.: “Tableau Chorégraphique de Nijinsky sur le Prélude à l’Après-midi d’un Faune de Claude Debussy dans le décor de Léon Bakst.”


38. [Cocteau?], *Programme officiel*, n.p.: “Un Faune sommeille; des Nymphes le dupent; un écharpe oubliée satisfait son rêve.”

39. Pierre Lalo, “La musique,” *Le Temps*, 11 June 1912: 1: “il apparaît enveloppé, des épaules jusqu’aux pieds, de la peau d’un animal, blanche et lisse avec de grandes taches brunes, qui sembles, non point de tout la toison de bouc dont on a coutume de voir les chèvre-pieds revêtus, mais le pelage d’un cheval pie. (Quelqu’un disait aussi: il s’est déguisé en petit veau.)”

40. I base my description of the ballet on the accounts of contemporary viewers, the Guest-Jeschke translation of Nijinsky’s original score, and the videocassette recording of the
Juilliard Dance Ensemble’s restaging of *Faune* in 1990 from the original notation, as directed by Jill Beck and assisted by Ann Hutchinson Guest.

41. A list of all original cast members and subsequent cast changes under Nijinsky’s direction can be found in the performance chronology provided in *Afternoon of a Faun: Mallarmé, Debussy, Nijinsky*, 125–30.

42. Nijinsky’s production notes from 1915 include a plot summary, translated in Guest and Jeschke, *Nijinsky’s Faune Restored*, 14: “The faun plays the panpipes and enjoys the grapes. The nymphs go bathing. One of the nymphs is undressing. The nymphs catch sight of the faun and scatter. The faun intercepts the half-undressed nymph. The nymphs return and help her. The faun remains alone with a frock which one of the nymphs has lost. The nymphs return repeatedly, sporadically in groups or alone, to jeer the faun. The faun carries the frock carefully to his bed on the hillock. He carries the frock there, has fun with it and lays it beside him.”

43. Significantly, final movements are left unspecified in Nijinsky’s score from 1915. There has been considerable debate about the precise nature of the final movements as they were performed at the premiere; I agree with Richard Buckle in reading the Meyer photographs as clear evidence that Nijinsky slid his hand under his body. The final gesture was altered for a few subsequent performances after the premiere, under threat of a police injunction; see Richard Buckle, *Nijinsky* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 285, 288.

44. “Souvenirs de Nijinsky,” 417–20: “je fus très étonné, choqué même, de voir une partie du public et quelques journalistes, découvrir dans mes gestes une intention malsaine. Ce que j’ai cherché seulement pour composer mon personnage, c’est d’allier aux attitudes classiques, de mouvements esthétiques en rapport avec son caractère.” See also the disavowal
quoted in Émile Deflin, “Le départ de Nijinsky, Convérsation en russe avec le faune,”

*L’Intransigent*, 13 June 1912: “M. Calmette a vu de la pornographie là ou jamais—jamais, je vous jure—je n’ai eu la moindre intention équivoque, la moindre pensée tendancieuse,” as well as that published in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 February 1913, reprised in Nesta MacDonald, *Diaghilev Observed, by Critics in England and the United States, 1911–1929* (London: Dance Books, 1975), 79: “it is a mistake to suggest that either the plot or the production of ‘l’Apres-midi d’un Faune’ has any suggestion that is incorrect or immodest.”


It seems likely that Diaghilev was more fearful of the public’s response than Nijinsky himself. Diaghilev had already postponed the debut, which was planned for 1911, because of anxiety about its potential reception. See Nijinska, *Early Memoirs*, 328:

[Diaghilev] was made uneasy by the unexpected and unusual severity of the composition and the lack of dance movements. Not long afterwards, I heard that *L’Après-midi d’un faune* was to be postponed until the next year, and so would not be presented in Paris until the spring. Sergei Pavlovitch [Diaghilev] now had some other plans: Wouldn’t it be better for Vaslav to start by mounting *Les Nuages* or *Les Fêtes*, also by Debussy? But Vaslav insisted that his first ballet must be *L’Après-midi d’un faune*; he refused to consider anything else.


Throughout this chapter I will quote numerous “interviews” with Nijinsky; it should be noted, however, that Nijinsky lacked command of any of the Western European languages, and
was also known as a decidedly taciturn personality. Therefore these interviews cannot be read as
direct transcriptions of his statements, but rather as filtered approximations of them as they were
fabricated or selectively translated to journalists by Diaghilev. This of course does not diminish
their historical interest, but only confirms their status as calculated, performative statements.

47. Jean Cocteau, “Une répétition du ‘Prélude à l’après-midi d’un Faune,’” Comœdia, 28


49. Kessler records visiting Rodin on 23 May 1912 to invite him to a rehearsal, and notes
that Rodin had only seen Nijinsky in a photograph. He escorted Rodin to the rehearsal on 27
May 1912, and on 28 May 1912 Roger Marx spent the entire day with Rodin trying to generate
quotations; see Kessler, Das Tagebuch, 4:826, 830, 835.

50. Harry Graf Kessler, diary entry for 29 May 1912, in Kessler, Das Tagebuch, 4:835:
es sei aber aus Rodin Nichts herauszubekommen gewesen als die Worte,
‘C’est de l’antique, c’est de l’antique’; er habe diese nur immerfort
wiederholt. Ich sagte, daraus würde sich wohl schwer ein Artikel spinnen
lassen. Cocteau beruhigte mich: ‘Marx s’en tirera.’

See also Nijinsky, The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky, 204: “Rodin wrote a good review, but he was
influenced in writing it. Rodin wrote it because Diaghilev asked him to. Rodin is a rich man and
therefore did not need money, but he was influenced.”

51. Auguste Rodin, “La rénovation de la danse: Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Nijinski,”
Le Matin, 30 May 1912: “nous n’aimons tant Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan et Nijinski que parce
qu’ils ont recouvré la liberté de l’instinct.”

52. Rodin, “Renovation de la danse”: 

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Vous diriez de Nijinski une statue, lorsqu’au lever du rideau, il est allongé tout de seul long sur le sol, une jambe repliée, le pipeau aux lèvres; et rien n’est plus saisissant que son élan lorsque, au dénouement, il s’étend, la face contre terre, sur le voile dérobé qu’il baise et qu’il étreint avec la ferveur d’une volupté passionnée.

It should be noted that “Rodin’s” rhetoric here is itself euphemistic—with kissing and embracing of the veil (which never actually occurs in the ballet) functioning as stand-ins for gestures of masturbation.


56. Gaston Calmette, “Un faux pas,” *Le Figaro*, 30 May 1912:
nos lecteurs ne trouveront pas, à la place habituelle des théâtres, le compte rendu de mon excellent collaborateur Robert Brussel sur la première représentation de l’Après-Midi d’un faune, tableau chorégraphique de Nijinsky, réglé et dansé par cet étonnant artiste. Ce compte rendu, je l’ai supprimé. . . Je suis persuadé que tous les lecteurs du Figaro qui étaient hier au Châtelet m’approuveront si je proteste contre l’exhibition trop spéciale qu’on prétendait nous servir comme une production profonde, parfumée d’art précieux et d’harmonieuse poésie! Ceux qui nous parlent d’art et de poésie à propos de ce spectacle se moquent de nous. C’est ni une églogue gracieuse ni une production profonde. Nous avons eu un faune inconvenant avec de vils mouvements de bestialité érotique et des gestes de lourde impudeur. Voilà tout. Et de justes sifflets ont accueilli la pantomime trop expressive de ce corps de bête mal construit, hideux de face, encore plus hideux de profil. / Ces réalités animales, le vrai public ne les acceptera jamais. M. Nijinsky, peu accoutumé à un tel accueil, ma préparé d’ailleurs pour un tel rôle, a pris sa revanche un quart d’heure après, avec l’exquise interprétation du Spectre de la rose . . . Voilà les spectacles qu’il faut donner au public.

57. Calmette, “Un faux pas”: “l’enthousiasme d’une salle conquise par la poésie, l’émotion, le rêve et la beauté.”


60. Diaghilev quoted in Calmette, “A propos d’un faune”: “offrir au public l’opinion du plus grand artiste de notre époque, M. Auguste Rodin, et celle du maître Odilon Redon, qui fut l’intime ami et le confident de Stéphane Mallarmé.” In this letter, Redon describes the “frise vivante” of Nijinsky’s production as “le propre rêve de son [Mallarmé’s] faune.”


Anne Wagner points to the fact that “tattle about [Rodin’s] goatlike behavior” was a fundamental aspect of his popular image as an artistic genius; see her “Rodin’s Reputation,” in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 191–242, 196.

63. Calmette, “A propos d’un faune”: “une série de crayons libidineux et de croquis cyniques précisant, avec plus de brutalité encore, les attitudes impudiques du faune.” The specific drawings to which Calmette alludes are unknown.


65. “Blush on the Face of Paris,” otherwise unidentified, undated press clipping, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library; “Wicked Paris Shocked At Last,” *Pittsburgh Gazette*, 5 June 1912, quoted in MacDonald, *Diaghilev Observed*, 78. The full headline for this last ran as:

WICKED PARIS SHOCKED AT LAST: HOW THE BALLET OF THE FAUN (MORE STUPID THAN WICKED) HAS SET THE FRENCH CAPITAL BY THE EARS, AND THREATENS TO COST THE GREAT SCULPTOR RODIN HIS PALACE FOR APPROVING IT.

66. “Nijinski,” *Le Cri de Paris*, 9 June 1912:

For the supervision by the police see Romola de Pulszky Nijinsky, Nijinsky, 177. See also Nijinsky, Pall Mall Gazette interview, 79: “in Berlin the Police Commissioner, having heard of the absurd cabal against [Faune] in Paris, came to the dress rehearsal, and after seeing it, expressed his satisfaction and pleasure at the strange spectacle.”


71. For the coinage of the term, see Charles Lasègue, “Les Exhibitionnistes,” *L’Union Medical* 23, no. 50 (1877): 709-714, 710: “la classe de ce que l’on me pardonnera d’appeler les exhibitionnistes. Il faisait montre de sa personne et n’allait pas au delà.” The word was introduced into English and German through Charles Gilbert Chaddock’s translation of Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*. According to Angus McLaren, “the last third of the nineteenth century witnessed, if one is to judge by the legal and medical writings of the time, an epidemic of male exhibitionism”; see his *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 184.


Nijinsky ayant entendu dire que le naturel était le sommet de l’Art, se voulut Faune jusqu’au bout de la queue et se livra, en scène, devant la foule empressée de ses spectateurs, à une mimique si imprévue et si singulière qu’une profonde stupeur, diversement manifestée, s’empara des spectateurs: un magistrat m’affirma que, chaque semaine, des individus qui ne sont ni Russes, ni danseurs, s’entendent condamner par le tribunal correctionnel pour un délit connu sous le nom d’exhibitionnisme.


78. Wagner, “Rodin’s Reputation,” 218–23. It was to such works Calmette referred, presumably, when he denounced Rodin’s “cynical sketches specifying . . . the impudic attitudes of the faun.”


80. As Naomi Schor noted, Rodin’s *Balzac* elicited more than one hundred articles in spring of 1898, consuming as much attention in the press as the Dreyfus Affair; see her “Pensive Texts and Thinking Statues: Balzac with Rodin,” *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (2001): 239–65, 244. For the *Balzac* monument and its reception see *1898: Le Balzac de Rodin*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée Rodin, 1998). The monument is also discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 of this work.


Balzac en bronze est une des causes de son obscénité qu’on retrouve dans le traitement chargé d’eau des dessins colorés,” 17.

83. Spyros Papapetros, *On the Animation of the Inorganic: Art, Architecture, and the Extension of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 12. Papapetros draws these terms from the nineteenth-century animal psychologist Tito Vignoli who, “unlike all previous authors . . . makes clear that animation is not necessarily associated with external movement, but can also be intensely present in inertia.”

84. Bazaillas, “Musique,” n.p.: “la plus plaisant est que, sous prétexte de retour à la nature, on va chercher des formes hiératiques, inflexiblement réglées.”


86. These complaints voiced by the original nymphs are paraphrased in Nijinska, *Early Memoirs*, 427–28.


89. Tugendkhol’d, “Pis’mo iz Parizha,” 52: “развертывается в крайне условных и размеренных рамках—в строгой, урезанной плоскости двух измерений.”


Où donc le directeur de Figaro avait-il passé le soir qu’il . . . dénonça la bestialité et l’impudeur qui l’avaient profondément troublé? Assurément pas au Châtelet . . . Entre nous, c’est Debussy qui seul, en l’occurrence, a commis un attentat à la pudeur . . . sa partition exhibitioniste . . . respire une lascivité qu’ignore l’érudit chèvre-pied du Châtelet.


Ce faune savant, ce satyre de bibliothèque oublie que le premier devoir de son état est d’avoir des sens et des muscles au lieu d’un cerveau d’helléniste. . . . c’est par insuffisance et non par l’excès de sensualité que pêche la réalisation trop littéraire de Nijinsky.

92. Lalo, “La musique,” 1: “il n’y a . . . aucune offense contre morale. N’y a-t-il aucune faute contre le goût et contre l’art? C’est une autre affaire; et c’est même la seule affaire.”

93. Lalo, “La musique,” 1: “ces figures d’hommes et de femmes qui ont l’aspect de figures de géométrie . . . il y a à peu près autant de sensualité à contempler ces silhouettes mécaniques de danseuses, ces schémas de nymphes, qu’à considérer les figures qui servent à la démonstration du carré de l’hypoténuse.”

Michel Fokine also used the language of “demonstration” to describe the ballet’s conclusion; see his Memoirs of a Ballet Master, trans. Anatole Chujoy, ed. Vitale Fokine (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1961), 204: “One of the forms of sexual deviation was to be demonstrated, in a few days, in front of thousands of people.”

94. “Échos,” L’Éclair, 1 June 1912, unsigned clipping, Archives Musée Rodin, Paris: “un ballet dont M. Nijinski a emprunté le sujet—tout au moins le titre—à Stéphane Mallarmé . . . a soulevé par son naturalisme, archaïque sans doute mais trop expressif tout de même.”
95. Cyril Beaumont, Bookseller at the Ballet: Memoirs 1891 to 1929, Incorporating the Diaghilev Ballet in London; A Record of Bookselling, Ballet Going, Publishing and Writing (London: C. W. Beaumont, 1975), 120. Describing the final movement, he also notes, “I well remember the gasp that went up from the audience at Nijinsky’s audacity.”

96. Nijinsky and Tenroc, “Un Essai de chorégraphie futuriste,” 62:

Longtemps la danse est restée immobile dans son style, immuable dans ses aspects, inexpressive des sentiments humains, stationnaire dans ses évolutions, en un mot, inapte à dessiner le mouvement et la vie autrement que par une fausse et banale agitation sur place.

97. Tugendkhol’d, “Pis’mo iz Parizha,” 54: “движение уступает место поз, танец—жесту, мимика—архаической улыбке, динамика—статике.”


100. For a discussion of Fokine’s technical innovations and the response of the Parisian public, see Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, 3–49; Bellow, Modernism on Stage, 27–50.

of 1912 (RO 12522), Département des Arts du spectacle, Bibliothèque National de France: “M. Fokine . . . aime avant toute chose le mouvement, la force, la passion. M. Nijinsky . . . préfère la ligne pure, presque immobilité.”

102. Jacques Rivière, “Des ballets russes et de Fokine,” *La Nouvelle revue française* 8, no. 43 (1912): 174–80, 179: “Non pas des attitudes, ce sont des mouvements que Fokine invente. Car, si vous vous trompez, si Rodin se trompe, lui ne se trompe pas. Il sait que la danse est l’art du mouvement, que la danseur n’a pas à s’inquiéter de plaire au peintre par ses attitudes, et qu’il faut qu’il se garde libre en ne cessant pas de tourner.”

This praise for Fokine, written just after the premiere of Faune, was obviously intended as a tacit critique of Nijinsky’s choreography, as the reference to Rodin makes clear. Today Rivière is remembered for his extraordinary endorsement of Nijinsky in his article on *Sacre du Printemps* in 1913. But it took a full year for Rivière to process Nijinsky’s innovation, as he admitted. After seeing Jeux and Sacre, Rivière took great pains to publicly amend his misunderstanding of Faune; see his “Le Sacre du Printemps, Ballet par Igor Stravinsky, Nicolas Roerich, et Vlaslav [sic] Nijinsky,” *La Nouvelle revue française* 10, no. 56 (1913): 309-13:

Nous avons été pour lui d’une injustice dont il faudra longtemps avoir honte. Nous n’avons rien compris à ses erreurs. Nous les pensions sans issue; elles nous paraissaient postérieures à la vérité, tandis qu’elles lui étaient antérieures; nous les prenions pour des déformations arbitraires d’un idéal déjà atteint, tandis qu’elles étaient les approximations maladroites d’un idéal nouveau. . . . Rarement un inventeur eut l’âme aussi pleinement et paisiblement occupée par son invention. Il lui suffisait de voir ça devant lui. A quelqu’un qui lui demandait, avant la première, ce que c’était que le Sacre du Printemps: Oh! répondit-il, vous n’aimerez pas ça non plus et, esquissant avec les bras ce geste latéral et ankylosé que nous avons appris à connaître par *Le Prélude à l’Après-midi d’un Faune*: ‘Il y aura encore du comme ça!’ En effet, il y avait encore du ‘comme ça.’ Mais de plus c’était un chef-d’œuvre.

104. Rivière, “Le Sacre du Printemps,” 718:

Le Spectre de la rose offre le meilleur exemple de cette transfiguration. Le corps de Nijinsky y disparaît littéralement dans sa propre danse. De cet être musclé, aux traits si forts, si marqués, on ne voit plus que des contours exquisément fuyants, que des formes sans cesse évanescentes. Au lieu qu’il soit plongé dans une atmosphère colorée, c’est dans une atmosphère dynamique.


... Diaghilev in effect dethroned the ballerina in his desire to create works that celebrated the masculine body beautiful. There was no precedent in European theatre dance history for a piece such as Fokine’s Spectre de la rose in which the male role (Nijinsky’s) is clearly the central one and the female dancer . . . plays a fantasizing spectator’s role.

106. Théophile Gautier, “Le spectre de la rose” in idem, La Comédie de la mort (Brussels: E. Laurent, 1838), 143.

107. See for instance Léon Daudet’s commentary on Spectre in 1911, quoted in Françoise Reiss, Nijinsky: A Biography (New York: Pitman, 1960), 90: “Nijinsky’s existence contradicts Newton and frightens the very spirits by his effortless proof that gravity does not exist, that air is heavy and bodies are light, that for him levitation cannot be a phenomenon because it is his normal state.”

108. It seems likely that this first occurred on the occasion of the performance of Spectre at a July 1911 gala benefit for victims of the Messina earthquake of 1908; see Reiss, Nijinsky, 91. Cyril Beaumont also recalls occasions when Spectre was repeated in London; see Beaumont,
Bookseller at the Ballet, 102: “I saw the Spectre many times and on one occasion the applause was so tremendous that Diaghilev ordered the whole ballet to be repeated, which, for him, was almost unprecedented.”

109. For the importance of the one-act format to the Ballets Russes, see my “Chic of the New,” Artforum, May 2009, 154–55. At circa eight minutes, Spectre was at the time the shortest of Diaghilev’s short pieces.

110. When Kessler took Rodin to the rehearsal of Faune on 27 May 1912, he made the same comparison in his journal; see Kessler, Das Tagebuch, 4:830: “der Eindruck einer Art von Wiederauferstehung antiken Heidentums, wie wenn ein Griech der Tyrannenzeit den dionysischen Faun mimte, nachdem er uns etwas verschleierter im Spectre de la Rose den antiken Eros gezeigt hat.”

111. Bazaillas, “Musique,” 441: “M. Nijinski a retrouvé dans le Spectre de la Rose son succès habituel. . . . Est-ce le goût des contrastes qui a conduit M. Nijinski à nous donner une impression toute contraire dans . . . l’Après-midi d’un Faune?”

112. Nijinsky had already been secretly working on Faune for a year when Spectre was developed, but I believe the scenario and experience of performing Spectre must have had a significant impact on Nijinsky’s thinking about Faune going forward. It should be noted also that Nijinsky actively collaborated with Fokine in creating the early aesthetic of the Ballets Russes, and that he was especially involved in developing the role of the rose, particularly in orchestrating the illusion of levitation during the final jump out the window; see Buckle, Nijinsky, 130.

114. *Programme officiel des Ballets russes, Théâtre du Châtelet, juin 1911: Premier spectacle, 6 et 8–10 juin 1911* (Paris: Comœdia illustré, 1911), n.p. Other ballets in the seasons of 1909, 1910, and 1911 were given program designations such as “drame chorégraphique,” “Rêverie romantique,” “Rêverie romantique en un tableau,” “mimodrame,” “suite de danses,” “ballet fantastique,” or “esquisses chorégraphiques.”

115. For a brief discussion of Nijinsky’s relationship to a previous theatrical convention of the tableau, see Hecquet and Prokhoris, “L’intrigue Graphique,” 110–16.


117. See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 208–9. The key texts for Noverre were Diderot’s *Entretiens sur le fils naturel* (1757) and *Discours sur la poésie dramatique* (1758).


120. Fried, *Absorption*, 78: “the spectator in the theater, [Diderot] maintained, ought to be thought of as before a canvas, on which a series of tableaux follow one another as if by magic.”


122. Noverre, *Lettres sur la danse*, 45:

Le Ballet est l’image du Tableau bien composé, s’il n’en est l’original; vous me direz peut-être qu’il ne faut qu’un seul trait au Peintre, & qu’un seul instant pour caractériser le Sujet de son Tableau, mais que le Ballet est une continuité d’actions, un enchaînement de circonstances qui doit en offrir une multitude; nous voilà d’accord, & pour que ma comparaison soit plus juste, je mettrai le Ballet en action, en parallèle avec la galerie du Luxembourg, peinte par Rubens; chaque Tableau présente une Scène, cette Scène conduit naturellement à une autre; de Scène en Scène on arrive au dénouement.


124. This modern concept of the instantaneity of the plastic arts was first and most programmatically articulated in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoon: oder, Über die Grenzen der Mahlerey und Poesie . . . mit beyläufigen erläuterungen verschiedener Punkte der alten Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin: C. F. Voss, 1766).

125. As pointed out in Järvinen, “Dancing without Space,” employing moments of stillness or “tableaux” within balletic performances was to a certain extent already “a normative manner of structuring the narrative,” but in *Faune* this device was exaggerated and made strange because “the dancers also stopped at the wrong moments,” so that “the tableaux no longer made
sense, no longer resolved the intensity of the moment or focused attention to a specific instant,” (46).

126. “Musical Gossip,” *Athenaeum*, 22 February 1913; Richard Capell, review of *L’Après-midi d’un faune* (Covent Garden Theatre), *Daily Mail*, 18 February 1913, quoted in MacDonald, *Diaghilev Observed*, 80: “’choreographic picture’ he calls it, for want of a terminology for this so new thing.”

127. Lalo, “La musique,” 1: “D’abord, il y a une erreur initiale, une contradiction originelle . . . on ne fait pas du mouvement avec de l’immobilité.”

128. Lalo, “La musique,” 1: “à prendre pour principe d’une pantomime musicale, d’une œuvre qui a pour moyen d’expression le mouvement des formes et des rythmes, une sorte de représentation de la figure humaine dont le caractère essentiel est de paraître figée dans une rigidité absolue.”

129. “Debussy’s Music and Nijinsky’s Faun, the Russian’s Novel Miming of the Frenchman’s Prélude,” *The Boston Evening Transcript*, 4 April 1913, unsigned clipping, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library: “Everyone who knows Debussy’s orchestral prelude to Mallarmé’s ‘L’Après-Midi d’un Faune’ has some mental picture that the music calls up, and probably everyone who saw the picture which Nijinsky and Mr. Bakst presented at Covent Garden, felt at once that this was not their picture.”

130. Bazaillas, “Musique,” 442: “Le rêve évoqué d’une sensibilité primitive, le tableau d’amour ‘à l’état de nature,’ en un radieux été, avec des sous-bois suggestifs, scintillants de rayons et de désirs, voilà ce qu’aurait pu, ce qu’aurait du exprimer l’art délicat de Nijinski.”
Bazaillas’s description of Faune as a tableau d’amour echoes the language of Noverre, who, as Hecquet and Prokhoris note, mentioned a scene of fauns in pursuit of nymphs as his first example of the type of “scène d’action” which would constitute a wealth of appropriate material for a “multitude de Tableaux,” see Noverre, Lettres sur la danse, 9–12. Nijinsky’s first great public success came performing in precisely such a scene. His breakout role at the Mariinsky in 1905, at the age of sixteen, was as a faun in Michel Fokine’s Hellenic-themed student production of Acis and Galatea.

131. Bazaillas, “Musique,” 442–43:

il voit dans l’Après-midi d’un Faune, non une églogue de Théocrite ou de Virgile, ni plus simplement l’éveil des désirs dans une nature fruste, mais un bas-relief archaïque . . . Au lieu de la scène d’ivresse que nous aurions pu imaginer, nous trouvons une plastique réduite à des attitudes élémentaires, très faciles à saisir, mais statiques. Ces attitudes nous présentent, en la découplant en phases successives, la marche de la passion; elles nous l’offrent immobilisée, j’allais dire pétrifiée en des poses concertées, simplifiées à l’excès. Des gestes rigides, des attitudes figées, je ne sais quoi de rituel et de hiératique, la gravité d’un visage sans sourire, volontairement inexpressif, remplacent sans avantage bien certain, l’image mobile et enivrante que la musique nous mise en tête. . . . Disons que Nijinski consacre son art prodigieux de danseur à créer l’immobilité et tout son mouvement à produire du repos. Il prend le contre-pied du rêve de Pygmalion qui voulait animer la pierre: il pétrifie la vie.


134. Ninjinsky, Pall Mall Gazette interview, 79.
135. Hofmannsthal, “Nijinsky’s ‘Nachmittag eines Fauns,’” 174:


143. For a discussion of the impact of public museums and photographic illustrations on the archaeological progress in the late nineteenth century see Michaelis, A Century of Archaeological Discoveries, 295–303.


146. For Bakst’s trip to Greece in 1907 see Charles Spencer, Bakst in Greece (Athens: GEMA, 2009), 13. Bakst first communicated his views on the new classicism in “Puti kassitzizma i iskusstve,” Apollon, 2 November 1909, translated as “Les formes nouvelles du classicisme dans l’art,” La grande revue 14, no. 12 (1910): 770-800. I quote here from the

There have been conflicting accounts regarding the degree of Bakst’s involvement in *Faune*’s development. It should be stressed that we do not know whether Bakst, Diaghilev, or Nijinsky himself was responsible for the “archaic” concept of *Faune*, nor whether the decision to take inspiration from preclassical art preceded or followed the decision to pair the ballet with Debussy’s *Prélude*. Contrary to many reminiscences subsequently published (e.g. Romola Nijinsky) it appears Debussy’s score was selected very early in the creative process. The first mention of *L’Après-midi d’un faune* occurs in Diaghilev’s black book around September 1910, in a list of ballets to be mounted in Paris in 1911. Since Diaghilev was already very eager to use music by Debussy, it is possible he selected the music after Nijinsky or Bakst proposed an “archaic” concept, recognizing in it a perfect opportunity to utilize this piece of music, given its ancient mythological subject. Alternatively, the archaic concept may have emerged because Diaghilev instructed Nijinsky to choreograph to the *Prélude*.

147. Mikhail Larionov recalled that when Bakst arranged to meet Nijinsky in the Louvre’s Greek galleries, Nijinsky never arrived because he lost himself in the Egyptian galleries; see Guest, Neagu, and Nectoux, *Afternoon of a Faun*, 20. Nijinska recalls Nijinsky saying he might “borrow . . . [more] from Assyria than Greece,” see her *Early Memoirs*, 315.

149. Francis Toye, “The Russians at the Lane” London Graphic, 19 July 1913: “He has discovered, or somebody has discovered for him, there is such a thing as the ‘Aeginetan’ school of pre-classical sculpture.”

The temple pediments from Aegina, discovered in 1811, were the first major archaic find in the nineteenth century. Ludwig I acquired the sculptures in 1812, commissioned Bertel Thorvaldsen to undertake a comprehensive restoration, and finally installed them in the Munich Glyptothek in 1828. There, they became the centerpiece of the first public museum in Europe devoted to classical archaeology, and the first to employ a chronological display of antiquities. See Elizabeth Prettejohn, “The Discovery of Greek Sculpture” in idem, The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture: Greek Sculpture and Modern Art from Winckelmann to Picasso (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 38–103. As the Glyptothek’s museum director, Adolf Furtwängler conducted further research around 1900 and revised the arrangement of the sculptures; see Adolf Furtwängler, Ernst Robert Fiechter, and Hermann Thiersch, Aegina: Das Heiligtum der Aphaia (Munich: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1906.)

150. Vaudoyer, “Après les ballets russes,” n.p.: “il s’est nettement inspiré de l’art archaïque du sixième siècle, celui d’Égine et d’Agrigente, celui aussi de certaines figures de l’Acropole.” Excavations took place on the Athenian Acropolis continuously between 1885 and 1900, and in February 1886 fourteen archaic korai were unearthed from the Erechtheum. For a list of these discoveries, see Guy Dickins, Catalogue of the Acropolis Museum, vol. 1, Archaic Sculpture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912).


152. Bidou, “La Semaine dramatique,” 1–2: “Parmi les spectateurs, ceux qui ont quelque culture (j’ignore quel est leur nombre) on d’abord le sentiment qu’ils voient s’animer tout l’art grec archaïque. Il n’est presque pas un mouvement qui n’évoque une oeuvre.”

153. Cocteau, “Une répétition,” 1: “mains aux phalanges jointes”; Bidou, “La Semaine dramatique,” 1, 2: “ses mains allongées et dont les droits sont joints, prolongent les bras . . . elles sont rigides, comme si les métacarpiens étaient soudés,” “si le faune tient les mains droites et longues, c’est qu’elles sont ainsi figurées sur le bas-relief de Chrysapha; s’il a les coudes collés au corps, c’est que l’Apollon de Canakhos se tient ainsi.”

154. Bidou, “La Semaine dramatique,” 2: “cette fuite étonnante de nymphes aux genoux ployés, un bras levé et un poing sur la hanche, c’est une image fameuse; c’est dans cette pose qu’à la fin du septième siècle, Mikkiades et Achermos, fils de Mélas, sculptèrent au moment où elle court, une Artemis ailée.”


158. Bidou, “La Semaine dramatique,” 1–2, see note 57 above; Lalo, “La Musique,” 1: “On ne voit dans la pantomime, a-t-on dit pour en faire éloge, ‘presque pas un mouvement qui n’évoque une oeuvre.’ C’est précisément qui est déplacé, faux et irritant. Rien n’est moins archéologique que l’Eclogue de Mallarmé, que le Prélude de M. Debussy; et les traduire plastiquement par de l’archéologie, c’est en donner une traduction qui n’est que contre-sens.”


    in some respects this essay is a sequel to a lecture published some years ago *Lysipp und seine Stellung in der griechischen Plastik* [Hamburg: Actien-Gesellschaft, 1891]). That lecture agreed in one cardinal point with a work published later, namely, Julius Lange’s “Billedkunstens Fremstilling af Menneskekikkelsen” [1892] and so in the present essay I have sometimes cited Lange for observations previously made by myself.

Throughout, I quote from this English edition, edited and translated under the author’s supervision. I have at times slightly modified translations from the German original. Where
relevant, I provide citations to *Die Naturwiedergabe in der älteren griechischen Kunst* (Rome: Loescher, 1900).


163. Löwy, *The Rendering of Nature*, 18: “Every primitive artist, when endeavoring to imitate nature, seeks with the spontaneity of a psychical function to reproduce merely these mental images.”


168. Adolf Hildebrand, “The Problem of Form” (1893) in *Empathy, Form and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*, ed. and trans. by Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center, 1994), 227–79, 236. I have at times
modified the translations in reference to the German first edition, *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* (Strassburg: Heitz und Mündel, 1893), 27.


173. Brücke, “Die Darstellung der Bewegung,” 54:

Er muß hier wie anderswo dem Beschauer gegenüber an die Erinnerungsbilder anknüpfen, die demselben von früheren Gesichtseindrücken zurückgeblieben sind. Ist einmal so der Anstoß gegeben und in richtiger Weise gegeben, so ist es die psychische Thätigkeit des Beschauers, welcher dem Bildwerke Leben einhaucht.


185. Hildebrand, “The Problem of Form,” 258. Hildebrand added forwards to the editions of 1906 and 1910 that explicitly critiqued the approach of “modern French sculpture.” For an interpretation of the work as a polemic directed against Rodin, see Erich G. Ranfft, “Adolf von
Hildebrand’s *Problem Der Form* and his ‘Front’ against Rodin” (master’s thesis, Queen’s University at Kingston, Canada, 1990).


189. Bidou, “La Semaine dramatique,” 2: “L’archaïsme des gestes n’est pas copié, mais reconstitué . . . archaïsme n’est pas seulement curiosité érudit; il est moyen de dessinateur.”


Dépouillant non seulement de toute animalité mais même humanité les figures de notre rêve, il a stylisé avec une charme inouïe mais aussi avec une extrême rigueur décorative les attitudes et les mouvements des personnages impalpables qui traversent les phrases irisées de Mallarmé et les accords ‘touffus’ de Debussy. Il a voulu animer une frise sans épaisseur, déplacer en ligne droite des silhouettes qui d’ordinaire ne savent tourner qu’aux flancs de vases grecs, enchaîner des gestes figés depuis des siècles, raidir les bras des danseuses pour leur prêter l’éternité de la pierre ou du marbre, plier leur corps à la naïve convention anatomique des dessinateurs primitifs, tordre leur buste sur leurs hanches pour pouvoir superposer à un torse vue de face un visage en profil parfait.

191. Marie Rambert, *Quicksilver: The Autobiography of Marie Rambert* (London: MacMillan, 1972), 62. Rampert also recalled that “once when a new girl had to learn Nijnsky’s sister’s part, in which the Nymph suddenly sees the Faun, turns away and walks off—he said to her: ‘Why do you look so frightened?’ She said she thought she was meant to be. Thereupon,
quite in a rage, he said that the movement he gave her was all that was required of her, he was not interested in her personal feelings.”


The plays Meyerhold produced in 1906–7 for Vera Komissarzhevskaya’s theater in Saint Petersburg relied heavily on Reliefbühne scenography, see Edward Braun, Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen Drama, 1998), 45–78. For Fuchs’s influence on Russian scenography, see Juliet Koss, “Empathy Abstracted: Georg Fuchs and the Munich Artists’ Theater” (PhD diss., MIT, 2000), 11: “Fuchs’s reputation in Russia was particularly high; that same year [1909], he published an essay titled ‘Myunkhenskii Khudozhestvennyi Teatr’ [Munich Artists’s Theater] in the newly founded journal Apollon and a Russian translation of Die Revolution des Theaters soon followed. Fuchs had already made a mark in Russia; the director Vsevolod Meyerhold had read The Theater of the Future soon after its publication and quoted the book both in his notebooks and his 1906 essay ‘The Naturalistic Theater and the Theater of Mood.’”

Scheijen proposes that Diaghilev’s 1911 trip to München was arranged in order to meet with Fuchs at the Künstlertheater; see Scheijen, Diaghilev, 241.


197. Romola Nijinsky, Nijinsky, 148.


200. Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, 243: “Children frequently manifest a desire to exhibit. One can scarcely pass through a country village in our part of the world without meeting some child of two or three who lifts up his little shirt in front of one—in one’s honour, perhaps.”

201. Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, 243.


204. Nijinska, Early Memoirs, 316:

   Vaslav is creating his Faune by using me as his model. I am like a piece of clay that he is molding, shaping into each pose and change of movement. . . . I can see clearly the delicate refinement, the precision, the jewel-like work, the finely wrought filigree of his choreography. I realize that the slightest deviation, any undue tension in the rhythm of the movements, any small mistake, could destroy the whole composition, leaving only a caricature of the choreographic movement. I can see all this very well, and even so, it is
often impossible for me to master the refinements of each detail of the movement.

During the choreographic process, Nijinska posed the roles of the nymphs, as well as the role of the faun himself. She danced the faun in the work’s revival by the Ballets Russes in 1922.


208. Bidou, “La Semaine dramatique,” 2:

fuite même n’est pas composée d’une série de mouvements cinématographiques. Un seul geste pour un seul fait. La course est représentée par une seule pose, celle que Mikkiades et Archermos ont choisi dans ce dessein, il y a vingt-six siècles. M. Nijinski est persuadé que que cette pose, synthèse du mouvement, le suggère mieux que ne le peuvent faire les efforts successifs qui constituent réellement la course, et, si je l’ai bien compris, il vient à cette conclusion hardie, mais raisonnable et belle, que l’immobilité représente le mouvement mieux que le mouvement même.


212. Vuillermoz, “La Grande Saison de Paris,” 66: “le déclic de leurs gestes secs tourne sans cesse pour nous les feuillets d’un album rempli d’artistiques reproductions; l’obscur ironie qui monte de l’orchestre pendant que se déroule l’érudite gymnastique et que se succèdent mécaniquement les poses numérotés suffit à rompre le charme!”


Gaudreault has recently proposed the term kine-attractography as a less problematic term; see his *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 47. In what follows I use the term kinematography in the sense outlined by André Gaudreault in order to connote practices relating to the production of animated pictures prior to the institutionalization of cinema around 1910.

216. Gabriele Brandstetter argues that *Faune* is merely an acute form of a preexisting aesthetic present in productions of the Ballets Russes, one oriented towards the “staging of the flat surface.” She argues this aesthetic was influenced equally by Japonisme, archaic relief, and

217. Koss, “Empathy Abstracted,” 12. Her conclusion also notes that the Münchner Künstler-Theater was converted into a movie theater after the First World War, 264.

218. I take this term from Charles Musser, The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990), 15 and passim.

219. For this concept see Heinrich Dilly, Kunstgeschichte als Institution: Studien zur Geschichte einer Disziplin (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 151–54.

The use of photographic slides and the Skioptikon, projector, or magic lantern for displaying reproductions of artistic artifacts began as early as the 1870s, taking off in Germany in particular in the late 1880s. Several scholars have singled out 1912, the year Aby Warburg showed a colored “Lumière-Lichtbild” at the International Congress on Art History in Rome, as a year in which the slide lecture became fully institutionalized in European and American pedagogy; see Trevor Fawcett, “Visual Facts and the Nineteenth-Century Art Lecture,” Art History 6, no. 4 (1983): 442–60, 457; Robert S. Nelson, “The Slide Lecture, or the Work of Art ‘History’ in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Critical Inquiry 26, no. 3 (2000): 414–34, 429.

For a discussion of the importance of lantern slides specifically in the context of archaeological pedagogy see Gardner, A Grammar of Greek Art, v–vi.

220. Bidou, “La Semaine dramatique,” 1, 2: “glissant de gauche à droit, comme dans les scènes d’ombres,” “en glissant, comme si elles étaient emportées sur la plaque de verre de la lanterne magique.”


Significantly, numerous viewers described the demeanor and jerky movements of Nijinsky’s dancers as militaristic; in addition to the passage by Volkonskii already quoted, see Vaudoyer, “Après les ballets russes,” n.p.: “les personnages changent d’attitude d’une façon brusque et saccadée, comme des militaires qui font l’exercice.”

225. Étienne-Jules Marey, La Chronophotographie (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1899), 5: “La Chronophotographie, c’est l’application de la Photographie instantanée à l’étude du mouvement; elle permet à l’œil human d’en voir les phases qu’il ne pouvait percevoir
directement; et elle conduit encore à opérer la reconstitution du mouvement qu’elle a d’abord décomposé.”


226. Marey, La Chronophotographie, 22. In 1888, Marey first transitioned from using individual photographic plates to producing series of images on long bands of moving sensitized film. In December 1891, he constructed his first projector, for the purposes of studying movements by speeding them up and slowing them down. As Marta Braun has emphasized, Marey was completely uninterested in reproducing movement as the human eye could see it unaided, and resisted his assistant Georges Demený’s desire to market the cinématographe, breaking with him over this matter in 1893. See Marta Braun, Picturing Time: The Work of Étienne-Jules Marey, 1830–1904 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 150–98.

227. For the Station physiologique see Mannoni, The Great Art of Light and Shadow, 333–46.


229. Behrens, “Über die Kunst auf der Bühne,” 140.

230. Chronophotography quickly infiltrated the study of ancient art and archaeology, where, as Mayer has observed, “leading scholars of antiquity” were preoccupied by “the quest for a scientific morphology of moving bodies”; see Mayer, “Gradiva’s Gait,” 566. For


232. Bidou, “La Semaine dramatique,” 1, 2: “dans cette élimination toutes les transitions sont supprimées,” “les actions sont nettes et nues. Le temps qui les sépare n’est pas occupé des transitions inutiles, et le passage de l’immobilité au mouvement est soudain.”

233. Lalo, “La musique,” 1:

On a beau, pour animer ces figures, les faire passer avec une vélocité excessive du’ une attitude à une autre, ou bien encore leur faire agiter frénétiquement les jambes, tandis que toute le reste du corps, tête, torse, bras et mains, garde rigoureusement l’attitude première, elles ne parviennent à aucun moment à donner l’image d’un mouvement vivant, mais seulement d’une agitation mécanique: on ne fait pas du mouvement avec de l’immobilité.


237. Dalcroze, “La rythmique et la plastique animée,” 131–51, 140:

ce qui me choquait était le manque de liaison et d’enchaînement entre les attitudes, l’absence de ce mouvement continu que nous devrions constater en toute manifestation vitale animée par une pensée suivie . . . Elles constituaient une série de tableaux du plus artistique effet mais qui se privaient volontairement de tous les avantages que procure le temps—la durée.

238. Dalcroze, “La rythmique et la plastique animée,” 139:

les danseuses continuant leur marche dans la dernière attitude prise, attaquaient l’attitude suivante, au moment du nouvel arrêt de marche, sans aucun mouvement de préparation, donnant ainsi l’impression hachée qui produirait au cinématographie une série des gestes dont on aurait supprimé les pellicules essentielles.


245. Demenÿ, *Les Origines du cinématographe*, 10, 11:

    ils donnaient fort mal la continuité du mouvement parce que, pour obtenir une sensation continu, il faut faire passer devant l’œil au moins 12 à 16 images par seconde; le mouvement représenté était forcément très court puisque les mêmes dessins revenaient constamment. . . . l’œil le moins exercé éprouvait une sensation de malaise devant ces mouvements faux et étranges, le scintillement produit par l’insuffisance des images venait compléter cette sensation en le fatiguant.


248. Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*, 4–7 and passim.


253. Of course, this conflation of preclassical art and early film pointedly emphasizes the asymmetry between the relatively slow pace of formal development of ancient art over centuries in contrast to the rapidly accelerated pace of the “perfection of the invention” of cinema, which rendered objects less than a decade old “archaic.” As Charles Francis Jenkins observed in 1898, “few inventions have been so quickly and generally exploited as that of animated pictures,” *Animated Pictures: An Exposition of the Historical Development of Chronophotography, Its Present Scientific Applications and Future Possibilities, and of the Methods and Apparatus Employed in the Entertainment of Large Audiences by Means of Projecting Lanterns to Give the Appearance of Objects in Motion* (Washington, D.C.: H. L. McQueen, 1898), 3.

254. See Nijinska’s descriptions of Nijinsky’s first leading roles in the Vilnius circus in 1896, *Early Memoirs*, 42. Nijinsky had already begun performing prior to 1896. The first cinematograph screenings in Russia took place in St. Petersburg in May of that year, and proliferated widely via traveling fairs in cities across Russia by 1897. It is tempting to speculate about the kinds of filmic entertainments Nijinsky might have encountered in the circus environments that defined his early childhood. For a discussion of film’s introduction in Russia, see Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1–12 and passim.


257. MacDonald, *Diaghilev Observed*, 109. Nijinsky performed from 10:05 p.m. until a bioscope screening began at 10:50 p.m. There has been much speculation about the existence of film footage of Nijinsky, but as far as we know he was never filmed; see Daniel Gesmer, “Nijinsky and Film,” *Ballet Review* 27, no. 1 (1999): 77–84. For an overview of Diaghilev’s nonexistent involvement with cinema see Lynn Garafola, “Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes,” *Dance Research* 16, no. 1 (1998): 3–25.

That the cinématographe was seen to be gaining ground in its initially competitive relationship with live performers right at the height of Nijinsky’s career is vividly articulated in a contemporaneous article, E.-L Fouquet, “Attraction,” *Echo du cinema*, June, 1912, quoted in Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*, 49:

> the kinematograph was long seen as an ‘attraction.’ It was used in café-concert, music hall, and vaudeville programs, just like a singer or acrobat. . . . Today that is no longer the case . . . now it is the kinematograph that makes use of certain attractions . . . what is seen as an attraction in music halls, vaudeville theaters, and circuses (tests of strength, balancing acts, magic shows, comic scenes, dances) can be kinematographed and in this way become an entertainment just as interesting as it would be in reality.

258. Nijinsky, *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*, 107. When the Ballets Russes performed in Los Angeles in 1916, *Faune* was specially added to the program when Diaghilev learned that the beloved Charlot would be in the audience. Charlie Chaplin reported that Nijinsky was eager to communicate with him, see Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964), 192. Nijinsky’s dancing, in particular his performance of *Faune*, left an enormous


> je m’efforce donc de créer une ‘partition de mouvement’ ou de dispose mes instruments—qui sont les corps humains—de manière qu’ils soient en accord absolu avec une tache blanche de Bakst ou un groupe de violons de Debussy. Ma composition est d’autan moins aisée que le corps humain ne possède pas seulement quatre cordes, mais une infinie multitude d’éléments sensibles et expressifs. Lorsque j’écrirai cette partition de mouvements, je n’y indiquerai pas uniquement les plies, les bonds ou les tours, mes aussi chaque inflexion de la tête, chaque courbure des droits, en un mot toutes les variations—infinie—de cette plastique trop souvent négligées.

268. Evlyn Gould, *Virtual Theater from Diderot to Mallarmé* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 166; Beck, “Recalled to Life,” 66: “[the opening is] symmetrical in space and time with the ballet’s ending.” Järvinen likewise emphasizes the ballet’s circular structure, which she argues creates “a sense of return—that when the work ended, it could begin
anew,” see “Dancing without Space,” 43. Neither Beck nor Järvinen mention that this circularity was dramatized and actualized through the convention of dancing Faune twice in a row.


273. Tietjen, “Loop and Life,” 22. He mentions additionally that when Max Sladanovsky first exhibited films at Berlin’s Wintergarten in November 1895, he glued the ends of the filmstrips together to create loops.

274. Gunning, “New Thresholds of Vision,” 94. The screening took place in March 1895 at the Société d’encouragement pour l’industrie nationale in Paris. As Gunning writes, “witnesses to the first Cinematographe projections were delighted to position themselves as spectators to be entertained and amazed, ready to demand a chance to view the spectacle again, rather than to get their hands on the device and use it.”

275. Tietjen, “Loop and Life,” 18. It is notable that in the Meyer album, Nijinsky switched the order of the photographs so that the opening pose appears at the end of the photographic sequence, just before the two final pictures of the closing masturbatory postures. In this configuration, the looped structure becomes even more obvious. For a facsimile of the Meyer album in sequence, see Guest, Neagu, and Nectoux, Afternoon of a Faun, 65–95.


278. A. Kalisch, “The Beecham Opera Season,” *Musical Times*, 1 March 1913, 164–65: “the fact that the scene had to be repeated seems to indicate that the majority is distinctly in its favor”; see also the review in the *Standard*, 18 February 1913, quoted in MacDonald, *Diaghilev Observed*, 81: “the audience received the novelty so cordially that it had to be given again.”

279. Freud, *Three Essays*, 241. This passage was added in 1915.


284. Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, 76. Taruskin interprets this stasis as fundamental to the visual, or “painterly” quality of Debussy’s music, his “effort to lessen the discrepancy between an art that unfolds in time and one that extends in space.”

285. For the score and an analysis, see William W. Austin, ed., *Claude Debussy: Prelude to ‘the Afternoon of a Faun’; Norton Critical Score* (London: Norton, 1970.)

286. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Debussy et le mystère de l’instant* (Paris: Plon, 1949), 284: “Le prélude n’en finit pas de commencer.” It should be noted that for Jankélévitch, the prelude form is the privileged mode of expression for “Debussyan anti-rhetoric,” presumably because it is a form that is intrinsically non-conclusive.


290. Nijinsky and Tenroc, “Un Essai de chorégraphie futuriste,” 261–62: “ce n’est pas, à proprement parler, un ballet, mais une conception originale où la formule chorégraphique nouvelle se combine étroitement avec la musique, où la suite des mouvements fixe l’atmosphère voulue par la musique.”


293. Sokolova, *Dancing for Diaghilev*, 40: “the dancers had to be musical as well as rhythmical and it was necessary to relax and hear the music as a whole; it had to trickle through your consciousness, and the sensation approached the divine. One walked and moved quite gently in a rhythm that crossed the beats given by the conductor. At every entrance made—and there were several—one began to count, taking the count from the other dancer who was coming off.”


The story circulated in the press, perhaps emphasized by Nijinsky in his communications with journalists, that the dance was composed before the music was selected for it, see for instance Volkonskii, “Russkii Balet v Parizhe.” This anecdote was repeated in Romola Nijinsky’s memoirs, which insisted, probably falsely, that Nijinsky was unsatisfied with the music, see Romola Nijinsky, *Nijinsky*, 148–49. Given Nijinsky’s own insistence in 1912 on the integral relation between his choreography for *Faune* and Debussy’s music, I remain skeptical of the accounts suggesting that Nijinsky was dissatisfied with the score.
295. This deferred activation forcefully asserts the autonomy of dance from music as well as the “authority” of the new figure of the choreographer as an artistic agent equal to the musical composer. For further discussion of Nijinsky’s “authorist” stance see Järvinen, “Dancing without Space,” passim. I want to add, and this seems key, that Nijinsky modeled the new choreographic “author” on the older authoritarian figure of the musical composer. For Nijinsky, the figure of the composer offered a model for exercising fuller artistic control over the performer, who becomes a human “instrument.” See for instance René Chavance, “Avant-première”:

> J’estime . . . qu’on doit composer un ballet comme on écrit une partition. De même que chaque note, chaque rythme, chaque intonation, chaque ensemble sont établis de façon définitive par le musicien, de même je veux déterminer le moindre geste, le moindre pas et le moindre attitude de mes personnages. Mes interprètes ajouteront naturellement à leur rôle l’élément précieux de leur personnalité, mais ils se conforment strictement à mes indications.

Also examine Cahusac, “Debussy and Nijinsky,” see note 274 above.


297. Caddy, The Ballets Russes and Beyond, 94.


299. Caddy, The Ballets Russes and Beyond, 75.

300. Rick Altman, Silent Film Sound (New York: Columbia University, 2004), 199.

Altman’s book, which gives to my knowledge the most comprehensive account of sound practices before synch sound, deals exclusively with American cinema.


Dans les ballets russes, la musique n’est que secondaire; c’est le spectacle qui est le principal. . . . Le public incline de plus en plus à ne chercher au théâtre que le plaisir des yeux, plaisir facile, plaisir paresseux, plaisir un peu puéril, plaisir où l’esprit n’a rien à faire . . . plaisir qui répond exactement, avec des apparences, de plus grande délicatesse, à la passion envahissante de la foule pour la cinématographe: ici et là, c’est une décadence de l’intelligence et du goût.


304. Hofmannsthal, “Nijinskys ‘Nachmittag eines Fauns,’” 173:


This text was republished in translation in the London Standard, 15 February 1913, and quoted in MacDonald, Diaghilev Observed, 80: “Debussy’s music becomes . . . merely the accompanying element, a something in the atmosphere.”


313. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 546; Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, 552


317. Freud, “On Dreams,” 681. Section XII of this essay was added in 1911, and refers back to Freud’s *Three Essays*. 
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Fig. 1.1. Georges Seurat, *Poseuses*, 1886–88, oil on canvas, 200 x 249.9 cm, Philadelphia, Barnes Foundation
Fig. 1.2. Gustav Klimt, *Beethovenfries*, 1901-1902, casein, charcoal, graphite, pastel, colored pencil, gold leaf, aluminum foil, and applied materials on plaster panels, overall length 34.14 m (long first and third walls 13.92 m each, short middle wall 6.30 m), height 2 m, Vienna, Secession
Fig. 1.3. *L’Après-midi d’un faune* in performance at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris. Photo: Studio Walery, published in *Comedia illustré*, 15 June 1912
Fig. 1.4. Édouard Manet, *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*, 1862-63, oil on canvas, 208 × 265.5 cm, Paris, Musée d’Orsay
Fig. 1.6. Spread from Julius Lange, *Billedkunstens Fremstilling af Menneskeskikkelsen i dens ældste Periode indtil Højdepunktet af den græske Kunst* (Copenhagen: F. Dreyer, 1892)
Fig. 1.7. Postcard of the Doryphoros in the Chiaramonti Museum, Braccio Nuovo Gallery, Roman copy after the original by Polykleitos, ca. 450-40 BC
Fig. 1.8. Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation No. 30 (cannons)*, oil on canvas, 111 x 111.3 cm, Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago
Fig. 1.9. Kenneth Noland, *Trans Shift*, 1964, acrylic on canvas, 254 x 288.3 cm, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation
Fig. 1.10. Roman copy after Myron, *Diskobolos*, bronze original c. 450 BC, marble copy probably 2nd century AD, h. 155 cm, Rome, Palazzo Massimo
Fig. 1.11. Kouros of Tenea, ca. 560 BC, marble, h. 153 cm, Munich, Glyptothek
Fig. 2.1. Georges Seurat (1859–91)

*Un dimanche à la Grande-Jatte*—1884, 1884–86, oil on canvas, 207.5 x 308.1 cm, Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago
Fig. 2.2. Seurat sixth from left in a group of students of Henri Lehmann in front of the Palais des Études at the École des beaux-arts, Paris, circa 1878, photographer unknown
Fig. 2.3. Georges Seurat (1859–91)
Drawing after the antique, ca. 1877, pencil on paper, 64 x 49 cm, private collection

Fig. 2.4. Georges Seurat (1859–91)
Académie, 1877, charcoal and graphite on paper, 63.5 x 48.2 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, Fonds Musée d’Orsay
Fig. 2.5. Georges Seurat (1859–91)

*Poseuses*, 1886–88, oil on canvas, 200 x 249.9 cm, Philadelphia, Barnes Foundation
Fig. 2.6. Georges Seurat (1859–91)

*Poseuses, petite esquisse*, 1888, oil on canvas, 39.4 x 48.7 cm, Seattle, Paul Allen Collection
Fig. 2.7. Selection of Seurat’s press clippings on *Grande Jatte*, Fonds César M. de Hauke, Bibliothèque de l’Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art, Paris

Fig. 2.8. Selection of hand copied reviews on *Grande Jatte*, Fonds César M. de Hauke, Bibliothèque de l’Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art, Paris
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Fig. 2.10. Georges Seurat (1859–91)

*Parade de cirque*, 1887–88, oil on canvas, 99.7 x 149.9 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum
Fig. 2.11. Charles-Joseph Natoire (1700–77)

*L’École de dessin à l’Académie royale*, 1746, ink, chalk and watercolor on paper, London, Courtauld Gallery
Fig. 2.12. “À l’antique,” from Alexis Lemaistre, *L’École des Beaux-Arts dessinée et racontée par un élève* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1889)
Fig. 2.13. Étienne Roc (active 1880s)
“Le Professeur Mathias Duval,” *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui* 6, no. 273 (1886), cover
**Fig. 2.14.** Adrien Alban Tournachon (1825–1903)

Duchenne de Boulogne applying electrical probes to induce a facial expression in a test subject, from Duchenne de Boulogne, *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine; ou, Analyse électrophysiologique de l’expression des passions* (Paris, J. Renouard, 1862)

**Fig. 2.15.** T. W. Wood (1839–1910)

**Fig. 2.16.** Reconstruction of the original hanging configuration of *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte*—1884 between seascapes at the Impressionist exhibition in 1886

**Left:** Georges Seurat (1859–91)

*Le Bec du Hoc, Grandcamp,* 1885, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 81.6 cm, London, National Gallery

**Right:** Georges Seurat (1859–91)

*La Rade de Grandcamp,* 1885, oil on canvas, 65 x 80 cm, private collection
Fig. 2.17. Georges Seurat (1859–91)

Georges Seurat, *Le Bec du Hoc, Grandcamp*, 1885, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 81.6 cm, London, National Gallery
Fig. 2.18. Georges Seurat (1859–91)

*La Rade de Grandcamp*, 1885, oil on canvas, 65 x 80 cm, private collection
Fig. 2.19. Georges Seurat (1859–91)

*Le Fort-Samson, Grandcamp*, 1885, oil on canvas, 65 x 81.5 cm, St. Petersburg, Hermitage Museum
Fig. 2.20. Georges Seurat (1859–91)

Page from Sketchbook 1, ca. 1877-78, graphite on paper, 11.8 x 20 cm, New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery (long-term loan)
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Page from Sketchbook 1 (detail), ca. 1877-78, graphite on paper, 11.8 x 20 cm, New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery (long-term loan)
Fig. 2.22. *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte*—1884 (details of hands and feet)
Fig. 2.23. Children playing soldiers, from Henry René d’Allemagne, *Histoire des Jouets* (Paris: Henry René d’Allemagne, 1902)

Fig. 2.24. *Zinn-Compositions-Figuren* (Heinrichsen brand), ca. 1850–70, private collection
Fig. 2.25. Toy metal soldiers, from Henry René d’Allemagne, *Histoire des Jouets* (Paris: Henry René d’Allemagne, 1902)
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Fig. 2.29. Frédéric Front (active 1900s)

Fig. 2.30. Buste-mannequin produced in 1885, from Léon Riotor, *Le Mannequin* (Paris: Bibliothèque Artistique et Littéraire, 1900)

Fig. 2.31. Georges Seurat (1859–91)
Study for the *Grande Jatte*, ca. 1884, conté crayon on laid paper, 23.5 x 30.5 cm, Northampton, Massachusetts, Smith College Museum of Art
Fig. 2.32. *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte*—1884 (detail of woman with monkey)
Fig. 2.33. “Imitation,” from Cesare Ripa, Iconologia; or, Moral Emblems (London: B. Motte, 1709)
Fig. 2.34. James Tissot (1836–1902)

*La Demoiselle de Magasin*, 1883–85, oil on canvas, 146.1 x 101.6 cm, Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario

Fig. 2.35. Émile Levy (1826–90)

Advertisement poster for Émile Zola’s *Bonheur des dames*, 1883, color lithograph, 80 x 63 cm, Paris, Maison Émile Zola
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*Shop window and two figures*, ca. 1882, conté crayon on laid paper, 23 x 31 cm, current location unknown
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Attributed to J. Gordon Thomson, “That Troubles Our Monkey Again,” from *Fun*, 16 November 1872

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Fig. 4.41. So-called “Peplos Kore,” ca. 530 BC, marble, Athens, Acropolis Museum
Fig. 4.42. Stone panel from the North-West Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, Iraq, 883–859 BC, London, British Museum
Fig. 4.43. Bas-relief of Prince Khaemwaset, ca. 1550 to ca. 1069 BC, Paris, Musée du Louvre
Fig. 4.44. Hero relief from Sparta, ca. 550–540 BC, Berlin, Altes Museum, from Emanuel Löwy, *Die Naturwiedergabe in der älteren griechischen Kunst* (Rome: Loescher, 1900)
Fig. 4.45. Bronze figure of Apollo, possibly a copy of the Apollo Philesios by the sculptor Kanachos of Sikyon, ca. 700–600 BC, London, British Museum
Fig. 4.46. Mikkiades of Chios (active sixth century BC) and Archermos of Chios (active sixth century BC)

Nike of Delos (reconstructed state), ca. 570–560 BC, h. 90 cm, Athens, National Archaeological Museum, from Edmund von Mach, *A Handbook of Greek and Roman Sculpture* (Boston: Bureau of University Travel, 1905)

Fig. 4.47. Vaslav Nijinsky and Lydia Nelidova performing the *pas de deux* in *Faune*, from *Le Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* (Paris: Paul Iribe, 1914)
Fig. 4.48. Corrado Ricci, *L’arte dei bambini* (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1887), frontispiece
Fig. 4.49. Adolf von Hildebrand (1847–1921)

_Dionysus-Relief_, 1890, terracotta, 144.5 x 144.5 x 16.5 cm, Berlin, Alte Nationalgalerie
Fig. 4.50. Nike of Delos, from Maxime Collignon, *Histoire de la sculpture grec* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1892-97)

Fig. 4.51. Nike of Delos, from Emanuel Löwy, *Die Naturwiedergabe in der älteren griechischen Kunst* (Rome: Loescher, 1900)
Fig. 4.52. München Künstler-Theater, performance of William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, 1908, from Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010)

Fig. 4.53. München Künstler-Theater, performance of Aristophanes *The Birds*, 1908, from Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010)
Fig. 4.54. *Faune* in performance at the Théâtre du Châtelet, from *Comédia illustré* 4, no. 18 (1912), special issue on *L’Après-midi d’un faune*
Der Vater hat zum Glück mancherlei notiert, was später zu ungesahntem Werte kommen sollte. „Ich zeichne Hans, der in letzter Zeit öfter in Schönbrunn war, eine Giraffe. Er sagt mir: „Zeichne doch auch den Wiwimacher.“ Ich darauf: „Zeichne du ihn selbst dazu.“ Hierauf fügt er an das Bild der Giraffe folgenden Strich [die Zeichnung liegt bei], den er zuerst kurz zieht und dem er dann ein Stück hinzufügt, indem er bemerkt: „Der Wiwimacher ist länger.“

Fig. 4.55. Illustration from Sigmund Freud, “Analyse der Phobie eines fünfjährigen Knaben,” in Jahrbuch für Psychoanalytische und Psychopathologische Forschungen 1 (1909)
Fig. 4.56. Albert Llonde operating a twelve lens camera at the Station Physiologique in the Bois de Boulogne, circa 1894, from Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Étienne-Jules Marey, 1830–1904* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)

Fig. 4.57. Étienne-Jules Marey and Georges Demeny with a kid goat at the Station Physiologique in the Bois de Boulogne, 5 May 1887, from Michel Frizot, *Étienne-Jules Marey: Chronophotographe* (Paris: Nathan/Delpire, 2001)
Fig. 4.58. Nijinsky leading a rehearsal of *Faune*, from *Tatler*, 1 January 1913
Fig. 4.59. Étienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904)

Fig. 4.60. Étienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904)
Fig. 4.61. Christian Comte, animation of *Faune* from the Meyer photographs, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0aNjMRGL_E
Fig. 4.62. Feature on *Faune* published in *the Sketch Supplement*, 26 June 1912

Fig. 4.63. Detail of decorative band from *Sketch Supplement*
**Fig. 4.64.** Detail of decorative band from *Comédia illustré*, from *Comédia illustré* 4, no. 18 (1912), special issue on *L’Après-midi d’un faune*
Fig. 4.65. Émile Reynaud (1844–1918)

*Autour d’une cabine* (poses 25–27 out of 636), 1894, hand-painted filmstrip from fifteen-minute animation for the *Théâtre Optique*, from *Émile Reynaud, peintre de films* (Paris: Cinématheque Francaise, 1945)
Fig. 4.66. Cover of the Sketch Supplement, 26 February 1913, with Baron de Meyer photographs
Fig. 4.67. Ottomar Anschütz demonstrating his electrical tachyscope, from *Scientific American* 61, no. 20 (16 November, 1889)

Fig. 4.68. Georges Demenÿ, phonoscope disk, 1892, from Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey, 1830–1904* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)
Fig. 4.69. Orchestra playing to ballet film, advertisement for the Edison Vitascope, lithograph, 1896, Washington, D.C., Library of Congress