CRIMINAL INGENUITY

Moore, Cornell, Ashbery, and the Struggle Between the Arts

ELLEN LEVY

Criminal Ingenuity

Modernist Literature and Culture

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Strictly speaking, my mother Julie and sister Barbie are not here either, and my father Ed and sister Carol are, yet they are all together here in these pages,

somewhere. To borrow a few last words from John Ashbery, this book is "cross-hatched with / Backward and forward glances, backward into light, / Forward into unfamiliar light." It is dedicated to those who are absent. But it is animated throughout by the presence of Gregg Horowitz, who sees the shine of loss in presence, and of presence in loss. Of all the things I cannot begin to thank him for, I thank him most for teaching me how to live in this unfamiliar light, which, as we go forward together, seems not so unfamiliar after all.

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Credits

Series Editors' Foreword

With Ellen Levy's *Criminal Ingenuity: Moore, Cornell, Ashbery, and the Struggle Between the Arts,* the Modernist Literature and Culture series adds its first genuinely inter-arts study: an exploration of the dynamic struggle between literature and the visual arts in "high" and mid-century modernism. Each of the previous volumes in the series is clearly organized around an investment in literary studies and literary theory, no matter how broad its sympathies in film, advertising, the law, and other realms of cultural production; it would take a truly criminal ingenuity, however—and a misplaced ingenuity, at that—to ascertain where Levy's real sympathies lie. For her subject, ultimately, is the aesthetics of American art, as contested in the separate spheres of the expert and the popular audience, in the period 1915–75. And to investigate this aesthetics is necessarily, as Levy argues, to enter into—as an observer, if not necessarily a referee—the prizefight between, in this corner, Poetry, and in this corner, Painting.

Levy cunningly introduces us to the contenders by first introducing their PR men, T. S. Eliot and Clement Greenberg, respectively. Although Greenberg is best known today for his highly influential art criticism, Levy points out that he started his writing life as a poet, only to denounce the influence of literature in the art world as he championed the style of painting that seemed most completely to have rejected literature's model and influence, Abstract Expressionism. How literary modernism came to cede the power it had enjoyed in the early decades of the century to the insurgent cultural authority of the art world is an important part of the story Levy has to tell: the uneasy transition from "the Age of Eliot" to "the Age of Pollock." And she does it by exploring in detail the somewhat surprising triad of modernist artists Marianne Moore, Joseph Cornell, and John Ashbery—artists whose works, she writes, "reveal a necessary connection between his or her sexual, social, and

aesthetic ideals" and which, when studied together, "yield insights about what links these three figures together in one of modernism's many 'other traditions.' "

Levy's braided case studies, both individually and as woven together here, shed new light on these very different modernist artists. Using the term "modernist" across the literature/visual art divide, though, requires some recalibration, since modernism and postmodernism are articulated and periodized rather differently in the worlds of literature and of art. And no small part of the power of Levy's argument here is precisely her ability to see through and across idiosyncratic, private critical vocabularies. In writing about Moore by way of Theodor Adorno, for instance, Levy performs a quick, on-the-fly calibration of their lexicons, allowing us to see commonalities otherwise occluded by their distinctive terminologies: "It is not that I want to leave [Adorno's] dialectics behind," Levy writes; "I want to suggest, rather, that [Moore's] ambivalence is what dialectics feels like from the inside. Or conversely, we might say that the practice of dialectics is ambivalence in action."

These breakthroughs—forging ties across institutionally distinct (one wants, after reading Levy on Moore's "Marriage," to say "divorced") realms of the art world—are made possible by Levy's admirable skills as a careful, sensitive, and at times simply ingenious close reader. As the scope of her argument suggests, however, Levy is no mere explicator; she tacks brilliantly between close reading, literary history, and institutional critique, in a recursive manner that insures that each informs the other.

For readers schooled, like so many of us, on the literary side of the great divide that Levy evokes, *Criminal Ingenuity* provokes disciplinary questions that make the mind reel. How many of our own prejudices have been absorbed, unaware, from the polemics that poetry produced in order to defend itself from the incursions of painting? Can we ever get sufficiently "outside ourselves" to hazard a confident answer? And how different might high modernism and mid-century modernism look if we were able, as Levy seems effortlessly able, to read across and through the mutually suspicious boundaries erected by the literary and artistic institutions of modernism?

Probably we will never know—apart from the elegant demonstrations Levy adduces here of what such a synthetic, even synaesthetic, style of reading might look like. Part of the institutional triumph of modernism, in its quest for professionalization, was its careful segregation of media; Ellen Levy's *Criminal Ingenuity* functions as a salutary piece of artistic and aesthetic desegregation. We hope that by bringing it to you, we might advance the cause of a nuanced understanding of modernism more sensitive to its "other traditions." For as Levy writes at the close of her introduction, this is a book "about fissures, which are either margins or centers. It all depends on your perspective, or perhaps on whether the structure so divided falls apart, or holds together."

Kevin J. H. Dettmar and Mark Wollaeger

Introduction

> What are phenomena rescued from? Not only, and not in the main, from the discredit and neglect into which they have fallen, but from the catastrophe represented very often by a certain strain in their dissemination, their "enshrinement as heritage."—They are saved through the exhibition of the fissure within them.—There is a tradition which is catastrophe.[1]
>
> —Walter Benjamin

In this fragmentary passage, taken from the monumental heap of fragments now permanently filed under the label of *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin implicitly registers his resistance to two temptations. He is tempted both to indulge in the pathos that attaches to such cultural phenomena as have suffered "discredit and neglect," a feeling that involves an element of self-pity insofar as he thinks of himself as similarly abject, and to cast himself as the rescuer of these lost ones. But if he were to rescue them, what then? A certain degree and kind of credit and attention might win the formerly discounted figure, event, or artifact a place in a "tradition," which as Benjamin writes elsewhere, is always in "danger . . . of becoming a tool of the ruling classes."[2] In that case, the would-be rescuer may become a collaborator, however unwitting or unwilling, in the reduction of culture to ideology, and this is a "catastrophe" that must be avoided at all costs. But how? If Benjamin's statement of the cultural critic's dilemma thus far is clear, his phrasing of the solution—"the exhibition of the fissure within them"—remains enigmatic. While, literally speaking, this phrase may mean "to view cultural phenomena as sites of social conflict," it also conjures up the image of saints displaying their stigmata. In Benjamin's ideal form of criticism, then, while a degree of pathos would still cling to phenomena that have suffered "discredit and neglect" they would no longer be

seen only as abject, as cast-offs from history. For "through the exhibition of the fissure within them," such phenomena remind us of the link between internal wounds and external conflicts, and are thereby implicated, although again perhaps unwittingly or unwillingly, in a struggle for power.

The figures, events, and artifacts that I will be examining here are all situated on (or scored by) a particular cultural fault line, the "fissure" within the world of high art that divides the territory of literature from that of the visual arts. At the center of this project are two poets, Marianne Moore and John Ashbery, and one visual artist, Joseph Cornell, all of whom work this terrain between the arts, more particularly, that slice of it located in and around New York City, during a period roughly bounded by the years 1915–1975. Other critics have noted that Cornell is a peculiarly "literary" artist and have discussed the central role that works of visual art play in both Moore's and Ashbery's writing. Few, though, have gone beyond discussing the interartistic relation in terms of sources and shared themes to ask why each of these artists—whose work is closely linked through lines of acquaintance and influence—keeps returning to this interstitial space. Thus, I ask not only, what is it about these three artists in particular that drives them to situate themselves between word and image? But also, what is it about the relation between literature and the visual arts that has exercised such magnetic force on so many makers and critics of modern art? In addressing the first version of this question, I consider the relationship among each artist's sexuality, class position, and artistic strengths and weaknesses. But my readings of particular works of art by Moore, Ashbery, and Cornell also generate an interlocking set of questions about art forms, art institutions, and art's place in society as these change shape over the course of the first three-quarters of the twentieth century.

In confronting these broader questions, I focus on three aspects of modernist art's situation in the space "between":

1. *Between "poetry" and "painting."* My discussion takes as its point of departure Clement Greenberg's claim, in his seminal essay of 1940 "Towards a Newer Laocoon," that "there can be such a thing . . . as a dominant art form" (*CE* 1, 24). Greenberg's declaration is intended to mark the ascent of the art form he terms "plastic art" or "painting" to a position of dominance over the formerly dominant form of "literature" or "poetry." This essay is generally read as an expression of Greenberg's championing of one style of painting, abstraction, over another, figurative realism. Perhaps because Greenberg's readers come largely from within the art world, none has chosen to linger on Greenberg's claim about art forms: that the dynamic of

modern art is driven by the relationship between literature and visual art, and that this relationship is essentially agonistic. However, for partisans of the "defeated" art form, literature, the story of how visual art came to win the battle for cultural dominance is of abiding interest. It is from this (modern, literary) perspective that I want to ask, what is at stake in the struggle for dominance between art forms?

2. *Between the academy and the art world*. In a 1927 essay, Marianne Moore sketches a cultural world defined by the opposition between the adherents of what she calls "academic feeling, or prejudice" and those of "the museum," which relative to the academy is "sometimes disparaged," but also "most powerful." In other words, she shows us the state of the agon between poetry and painting in the moment preceding Greenberg's declaration; but unlike Greenberg, Moore speaks of this agon in terms of art institutions rather than art forms. During the era of high modernism, the relative openness of the institutions of the New York art world attracted poets like Moore and William Carlos Williams, who felt themselves excluded by that portion of the literary world dominated by what Williams called (in speaking of T. S. Eliot) "the academics." The worlds of literature and visual art became still more polarized in the postwar era, when the adherents of poetic modernism of the Eliotic type moved en masse into the universities, which were then undergoing a historic expansion. Ashbery and his closest poetic colleagues, however, turned instead for support to a set of more and less official art world institutions—the studio, the artists' bar, the magazine, the gallery, the museum—in the process coming to be called, in imitation of the painters who provided these writers with both models and an audience, the "New York School of poets." The New York School poets' turn toward the art world may be read, on one hand, as a reflexive turn away from the literary academy, or, on the other, as testimony to the increasing dynamism of the art world, for which the end of the war also marked the beginning of period of expansion. In sum, the struggle for dominance between poetry and painting can be seen as a struggle for power both within and between artistic institutions, institutions that cast ever-longer shadows across the terrain of the arts as the twentieth century unfolds.

3. *Between professionalism and the market*. The struggle for dominance between the literary academy and the art world is a battle over resources and prestige, but it is not only that. As Benjamin implies, the conflicts internal to an artistic tradition may be linked, albeit in enigmatic form, to wider social struggles. In chapter 1, I begin to forge such links in my readings of recent

critics who have situated the literary academy in a wider social context by discussing the role this institution plays in the "culture of professionalism." I then consider the work of art historians of a materialist bent who, from the Frankfurt School on, have traced what Greenberg describes as "the umbilical cord of gold" that links the art world to what we may call the culture of the market. Professionals pride themselves on their disinterestedness, their embrace of objective standards by which to judge expertise, in explicit contradistinction to the reduction of all values to matters of pecuniary interest by the proponents of the market, who for their part view the culture of professionalism as insufficiently flexible and dynamic. If we juxtapose the viewpoints of these two sets of competitors for the soul of late capitalism, we may see the struggle between poetry and painting in terms of the conflict between a disinterested but also relatively exclusive professionalism and a relatively open, but also reductively materialistic, market. In fact, as I will show, these two value-systems do come into confrontation, repeatedly, in the work of the artists who concern me here. At the same time, like Benjamin, these artists at once do and do not want us to view cultural phenomena as sites of social conflict, since to embrace either perspective is to risk reducing culture to ideology, whether in the form of propaganda or of "heritage."

That said, I should stress that this project originated not in a desire to explain broad trends in art and society, but in an impulse, to borrow Benjamin's language again, to "rescue" a specific set of cultural phenomena. The impulse is to locate a strain that runs through the phenomena one loves, not only to show the connections between these events, figures, and artifacts, to paint a historical picture but also to render these elements of culture transmissible, to carry them into the future. To "rescue," in short, is to situate the things one loves in a line or tradition. As Benjamin reminds us, this is a dangerous game, and as the twentieth century unfolds, increasingly, it would seem, a losing one. Thus, in 1968 we find John Ashbery asking, in a half-joking, half-plaintive tone, "has tradition finally managed to absorb the individual talent?" (*RS* 393). In phrasing the question this way, Ashbery channels the antiacademic side of Eliot, the Eliot whose sympathies lie at least as much with the upstart he once dubbed "the new, the really new work of art" as with the kind of tradition that would dispel the new work's air of strangeness and contingency, the better to effect its enshrinement as heritage.[3] Ashbery's fear, however, is that the balance has tipped in favor of a monumentalizing tradition once and for all, that by 1968 the would-be avant-garde had lost its capacity to challenge the artistic status quo.

Ashbery has consistently manifested a Benjaminian wariness of the "tradition that is catastrophe," even as he has emerged, since the end of the period that concerns us here, as a major poet of his time. In fact, the more he is urged to assume the mantle of the major poet, the more Ashbery tries to shrug it off, as when, called on to deliver the prestigious Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard in 1989, he chose to give a series of talks on markedly minor poets, subsequently published under the title *Other Traditions*.[4] At the outset of that book, Ashbery ponders the reasons for his taste for minor poets.

> Is it inherent sympathy for the underdog, which one so often feels oneself to be when one embarks on the risky business of writing? Is it desire for one-upmanship, the urge to parade one's esoteric discoveries before others? Or is there something inherently stimulating in the poetry called "minor," something it can do for us when major poetry can merely wring its hands? And what exactly is minor poetry? (6)

While Ashbery was clearly alluding to Eliot's best-known essay when he made his remark about tradition and the individual talent, here it is harder to tell whether he knows he is once again echoing the elder poet, who in 1944 gave a lecture titled "What is Minor Poetry?"[5] In any case, the later of these lectures bears some striking similarities to the earlier one. Eliot's talk, like Ashbery's, was delivered relatively late in his career, at a moment when academic critics were laboring to secure his poetic majority. Yet the figure with whom Eliot identifies in his essay is someone he calls the "real poetry lover," who, he says, is neither an amateur nor an academic, but one who combines the passion of the former with the precision of the latter, and who is marked above all by his taste for minor poets, by his sense that he is "peculiarly qualified to appreciate a poet whom very few other people are able to enjoy."[6] Speaking, then, as a "real poetry lover," an amateur in the old sense, Eliot champions the kind of poet Ashbery refers to as an "underdog," as an esoteric taste not yet, and perhaps never to be, enshrined as heritage.

Eliot has often been portrayed as a blocking figure in the modernist line, a powerful proponent of "the" tradition, the one that excludes all those "other traditions" that Ashbery finds so stimulating. But when Eliot assumes the role of the "real poetry lover," he places himself in the vulnerable position of one who can lay claim neither to the pity granted to the outsider nor to the respect accorded to the insider. And as long as the critic in Eliot occupies this position, suspended between the amateur and the professional, the poems he loves—which double as figures for the poems he himself writes—may be thought to occupy a similarly liminal position vis-à-vis "the" tradition. At such moments, the poet in Eliot may glimpse

a way to evade the "catastrophe" represented by his work's "enshrinement as heritage," but only at the cost of feeling torn, "throbbing / between two lives," like the *Waste Land*'s agonized Tiresias. In the narrative that follows, I portray Eliot alternately as a blocking figure and as an enabling one, as both a defender and an opponent of that "tradition that is catastrophe." To some extent, I take a similar view of his acolyte, the failed poet and influential art critic Greenberg. Neither of these two poet-critics, however, is exactly in need of what Benjamin would call "rescue." The chief burden that Eliot and Greenberg have to bear is not pathos, but the excessive authority that has accrued to them, which has kept them continuously at the center of cultural debates, even as it has threatened to occlude the originality and force of their work.

Since this, however, is a story not of centers but of margins, of the "fissures" produced under the pressure of conflict, Eliot and Greenberg perforce remain peripheral characters here. It might be argued, of course, that the three protagonists of the story, Ashbery, Moore, and Cornell, are not marginal figures either in that, whatever the vicissitudes of their reputations, none of them can be said ever to have fallen entirely into discredit and neglect. And yet these three do show a peculiar talent for "exhibiting the fissure within them," or to put it another way, for rendering problematic the distinction between inside and outside. Thus, like Eliot at his most Tiresian, each of these three figures in his or her turn manages to maneuver him or herself into a precarious position, neither inside "the tradition," nor outside, in the limbo of "discredit and neglect." But by contrast with Eliot, who palpably longs to resolve the sort of ambivalence that a figure like Tiresias provokes, to find "the still point of the turning world" and rest there, Moore, Cornell, and Ashbery all strive to remain as long as possible in a state of uncertainty, to practice what Ashbery calls "a kind of fence-sitting / Raised to the level of an esthetic ideal."[7] As the book's title would suggest, the name I give here to the capacity for dwelling in, and on, such states of aesthetic ambivalence is "criminal ingenuity," a phrase borrowed from Moore.

This is not, to be sure, exactly what Moore means by "criminal ingenuity" when she uses the phrase near the beginning of her great poem, "Marriage." Marriage, says the poet, is a set of "'circular traditions and impostures . . .' / requiring all one's criminal ingenuity / to avoid!" (*BMM* 73). In context, then, "criminal ingenuity" is associated primarily not with an aesthetic ideal but with a sexual one, the dream of avoiding "marriage," or as Moore also calls it, "this institution"—the implication being that marriage is "the" institution, the one on which all others are founded. Marriage at once confers legitimacy on our sexual desires and confirms us as members of the polity; the wish to avoid it implies a rejection of both the

sexual and social orders. And yet, if marriage is indeed "the" institution, no one can avoid it entirely: to be a member of society is to be a constituent of "this institution." Nonetheless, the practitioner of criminal ingenuity is a peculiar kind of insider, one who keeps calling into question the legitimacy of "this institution," and by implication, other institutions as well.

Moore herself was notably unmarried, not only professedly and proudly chaste (her motto, she writes in a late poem, is " 'rather dead than spotted' " [*MMCP* 160]), but of completely indeterminate sexual preference. As I discuss in chapter 2, this radical negation of her sexuality has long fascinated and irritated Moore's closest readers, and has played a major part in shaping her poetic reputation. Critics have similarly puzzled over the enigmatic role played by sexuality in the work of both Cornell and Ashbery, who also may be said, each in his own way, to have avoided marriage. Cornell, who like Moore lived with his mother through his sixties, remained chaste almost to the end of his life, but although he (again like Moore) professed to believe in the moral force of chastity, his life and art were visibly marked by his struggle with a complex set of perverse desires, desires that for him, as I say in chapter 3, were at once a source of pain and of artistic energy. Ashbery, for his part, differs from both Moore and Cornell in that whereas they were unmarriageable, as it were, by nature, he was so only by law, the law that until quite recently absolutely prohibited homosexuals from entering into "this institution." And yet it seems to me—and this is the crux of my argument—that Ashbery is like Moore and Cornell, both of whom he has acknowledged as artistic forebears, in that his position in relation to marriage is connected at crucial points in his work with his position in relation to tradition. This is at once perhaps the strongest claim I advance in this book, and the most difficult to make pay: that readings of the works of each of these artists will reveal a necessary connection between his or her sexual, social, and aesthetic ideals; and that an examination of the way that this connection is structured in each case will yield insights about what links these three figures together in one of modernism's many "other traditions."

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "position," which brings sociological rigor to the notion of an artistic calling, is crucial to my thinking here. To put it in Bourdieu's terms, a central argument of this book is that there are cognate elements in the dispositions of Moore, Cornell, and Ashbery that have driven each of them successively to occupy the same position in the field of art. Or perhaps I should say, roughly the same, since this position is not fixed, over time changing its shape and its relation to other positions in what Bourdieu calls "the space of possibles," the array of opportunities that presents itself to the person seeking entry into the field of art.[8] Nonetheless, as one retraces the web of affinities and direct connections

that bind these artists one to the other, one comes to recognize the repeated motifs and gestures that inscribe their shared cultural space. Sometimes this space takes on a literal, physical character, as when Moore, Cornell, and the New York School poets all repeatedly attend performances of the New York City Ballet at City Center; I consider what this unique institution of modernism means to these artists in chapters 3 and 4. Sometimes it is embodied in a practice: hence as I discuss in chapters 3 and 5, Moore, Cornell, and Ashbery all conceive of themselves as collectors and link the practice of collecting in cognate ways to the practice of their respective arts. Or it may be encoded in a name. The example I adduce below (and will return to at greater length in chapter 4) is "surrealism."

In his foreword to a collection of Cornell's writings, Ashbery recalls being introduced as a child to Cornell's work through a *Life* magazine article on the 1937 "Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism" show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and at that moment "discovering that I was a surrealist."[9] In a letter reprinted in that same collection, Moore responds to a collage-letter and package of rare books received from Cornell, the first of a series of mailings through which the artist elaborately courted the poet's attention and approval, by expressing the "pleasure given me by work of yours at the Museum of Modern Art," having seen in life the same exhibition that Ashbery had glimpsed in *Life*. For the fifty-year-old Moore as for the ten-year-old Ashbery, the show in which Cornell's work appeared was a transformative experience, as we know from an unpublished essay, "Concerning the Marvelous," in which Moore, too, implies that her encounter with the show led her to discover that she was a surrealist. Moore revised this essay many times and saw it rejected by two publications in turn before consigning it to her files, facts that underscore both the special significance the show held for the poet and the deeply encoded nature of that significance.

For both Ashbery and Moore, "surrealism" seems to have been a label for a tradition to which they felt themselves to belong, but to which they could belong only if they could redefine the tradition. Thus, in her essay, Moore presents surrealism not so much as a historical school of art as a set of affinities that "cannot be disguised by media, or broken into by altering intentions of period. The separate examples corroborate one another as nodules of quicksilver keep coming together."[10] Several decades later, Ashbery would make a similar distinction between surrealism "in the parochial 1920's sense of the term," and surrealism "in the second, open sense in which it can still be said to animate the most advanced art being done today" (*RS* 27). At the moment when Ashbery wrote those words, the surrealist tendency in modern visual art had been pushed to the side by Greenberg and his followers, to whom it represented a retrograde reaction "against abstract

purity" and consequent "confusion of literature with painting," as Greenberg put it (*CE* 1:36). Moore's remark that the surrealist impulse is that which "cannot be disguised by media" suggests, though, that it was precisely the "impure," intermedial character of surrealism that formed part of its attraction for her and those like her. In Moore and Ashbery's shared lexicon, then, "surrealism" is one name for the place where the fissure that divides literature and painting maps onto that which divides "a tradition which is catastrophe" from the artistic no-man's-land of "discredit and neglect."

The figure who comes to embody surrealism in its "second, open sense" for both of these poets is Cornell, an artist associated with the surrealists yet not, both by his own and others' accounts, a surrealist proper. The self-taught, intransigently antisocial Cornell was, moreover, much closer to being a genuine artistic outsider than either Moore or Ashbery, a status that granted him an extra degree of immunity against what some might call the danger, and others the hope, of seeing his work enshrined as heritage. For Moore, who was befriended by Cornell when she was at the height of her career and he was at the beginning of his, Cornell's outsider aura may have had a certain attraction, but it also served at times as an uncomfortable reminder that her own persistently marginal relationship to artistic and social institutions might be seen as a matter not of conscious avoidance but of helpless exclusion. Ashbery has shown less ambivalence about this aspect of Cornell's character, in part simply because he first approached Cornell's work, as Cornell approached Moore's, as a younger admirer of a relatively established artist. But Ashbery also values Cornell's unclubbable quality perhaps more than Moore did because, as he has written, he came of age in era when instead of "fighting against general neglect, even hostility," as did the members of an earlier avant-garde, the would-be avant-gardist "must fight acceptance," which in Ashbery's view "is much harder because it seems that one is fighting oneself" (*RS* 393). For Ashbery, that is, the threat of inclusion in the tradition may have been more potent than the threat of exclusion from it.

From the early poem "Pantoum," in which Ashbery speaks of the occupants of Cornell's dreamworld as "connoisseurs of oblivion," to the recent exhibition of his own Cornell-ish collages of outmoded odds and ends, Ashbery's repeated gestures of affinity with Cornell seem designed to ward off the "acceptance," which the poet has compared to Midas's deadly touch.[11] And while Moore is not quite as central to Ashbery's thinking as Cornell is, certain remarks he makes about her work still point to the ways in which, as Moore puts it, the "separate examples" of these three artists "corroborate one another as nodules of quicksilver keep coming together." Hence, in his reviews of Moore's last two volumes of poems (both published in the

mid-1960s), Ashbery expresses admiration for what he terms Moore's "kaleidoscopic collage effects" (*SP* 87). Like Cornell, she achieves these effects through her dynamic assemblage of materials in themselves often ephemeral or moribund, "tacking imperturbably," Ashbery writes, "among excerpts from Ruskin, the *Illustrated London News*, the *London Graphic*, *The National Parks Portfolio* and a remark overheard at the circus, switching landscapes, language and levels with breathtaking abruptness, rising from botanical note-taking to pinpoint emblems of supernatural clarity that could be out of Shelley" (*SP* 111). It is not a long way from the poem Ashbery describes here, "An Octopus," to a poem like his own "Grand Galop," whose first lines juxtapose botanical note-taking ("The weigela does its dusty thing / In fire-hammered air") with school lunch menus ("'Today's lunch is: Spanish omelet, lettuce and tomato salad, / Jello, milk and cookies") and whose final lines—"now we are at Cape Fear and the overland trail / Is impassable, and a dense curtain of mist hangs over the sea"—echo the Shelleyan ending of "An Octopus" itself (*JACP* 436, 442). At the close of Moore's poem, as of Ashbery's, we have reached not just an end but an absolute impasse, all further progress "cut by the avalanche / 'with a sound like the crack of a rifle, / in a curtain of powdered snow launched like a waterfall'" (*BMM* 132).[12] Moore's curtain, like Ashbery's, rings down not just on a scene, but on a whole culture: as the Cornellian speaker of "Pantoum" puts it, "the court, trapped in a silver storm, is dying" (*JACP* 15).

In chapter 3, I offer an extended comparison between Cornell's reanimations of ephemeral and moribund materials through the art of collage and Benjamin's efforts "to articulate the past historically" by collecting together similarly neglected and discredited fragments. In a famous passage from his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin's ideal historian assumes the apocalyptic form of "the angel of history" who, contemplating the "wreckage upon wreckage" of the past, is tempted "to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed."[13] But this, it turns out, is impossible, for to try to reintegrate the smashed fragments of past cultures would be to traduce their character as reminders of the acts of violence on which civilizations are founded and by which they are sustained; it would be to forget, to cite Benjamin's classic formulation, that "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."[14] How, then, having reached this impasse, this standoff between "the angel of history" and its nemesis, which Benjamin calls "progress," can one go on writing history or making art? This is the question that Ashbery poses at the end of "Grand Galop," and that Moore poses at the end of "An Octopus," as their curtains of mist or snow descend. It is also, implicitly, the question posed by the "connoisseurs of oblivion" who populate Cornell's glass-fronted boxes.

To some extent, the answer all of these artists give is "collage," the practice of making art out of fragments without denying their fragmentary character, of reanimating bits of the past without asserting that such signs of life constitute a veritable resurrection. Thus, just as Moore's poems give new currency to yellowing clippings from the *Illustrated London News* and fugitive remarks made at a circus, so Cornell's exquisite arrangements of broken watches, clay pipes, old dolls, glamour shots of forgotten starlets and pages from outdated books of astronomy make these dead things seem strangely lifelike. However, behind the tensely poised scenes staged in the boxes lay an archive of materials in various states of inertia: from scrapbook-like "book objects," bulging with "collages, inserts, inked designs, cutouts, overlays, and sequential effects," to slipcase "dossiers" full of loose sheets grouped around a particular obsession, such as the nineteenth-century ballerina Fanny Cerrito or the garden center in Queens where the artist once worked, to the massive collection of artistic source materials that astonished visitors to his house on Utopia Parkway. "At Cornell's death in 1972," Lynda Roscoe Hartigan reports, these latter items amounted to "some three thousand books and magazines, hundreds of record albums, thousands of pieces of paper comprising his diaries and correspondence, and truly uncountable numbers of two- and three-dimensional ephemera," stacked "from cellar studio to attic, on shelves and table tops, along the floors and stairs."[15] In a 1999 essay on Cornell's dossiers, and again in her work as the curator of the comprehensive 2007 exhibition "Joseph Cornell: Navigating the Imagination," Hartigan has emphasized the significance of Cornell's archives within his oeuvre as a whole. Seen in the context of these collections, the boxes mark just one of a number of possible positions on what Hartigan describes as "Cornell's sliding scale between minutiae and art and between public and private intention."[16] And, one might add, between the living and the dead, since Cornell's animations are always haunted by the piles of inert matter from which they arise.

Jodi Hauptman fruitfully compares Cornell's archives, and more particularly *GC 44*, the garden center dossier, to Benjamin's unfinished *Arcades Project*. Both, she writes, evidence "an impulse to collect," a "logic of the archive," that is at once "surrealist" and "historical." Thus far, Hauptman's view of these two figures coincides with mine. However, against those critics who emphasize the inertial quality of the *Arcades Project*, Hauptman counters that rather than see it as a "void," "we might see it the way Cornell saw his own 'abundant traces,' as a labyrinth."[17] This, I think, places too much emphasis on the "logical" aspect of Cornell's practice, which he himself characterizes as a sliding scale between more and less intentional forms of expression. On a page of working notes for *GC44* that Hartigan reproduces

in her essay on the dossiers, the artist's names for his practice are typed in a column, with written-in emendations, as follows:

> journey album
> journal album
> esperanto of imagery
> keepsake
> repository
> romantic museum
> childhood regained
> tower of visions
> heritage [crossed-out typed letters: of dreams]
> center of a labyrinth
> sanctuary
> diary
> [handwritten in margin: a] "method" [crossed out typed letters: for the reader][18]

The nervous corrections appended to them suggest that "heritage" and "'method'" are the two terms in this list about which Cornell felt most ambivalent. Both invoke what Hartigan refers to as Cornell's "public intention," his desire that his work be intelligible to others, and that it be transmitted and circulated in places and times beyond the artist's immediate reach. Again, though, the emendations complicate these desires. Is this work "for the reader," or is it not? Does he mean "heritage" in the usual sense or, as in the case of his "museum," in some dreamy, private, "romantic" sense?

Benjamin, too, had doubts about the intelligibility and transmissibility of the articulations of the past produced according to the "method" of his ideal historian, who claims that "[t]he past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again."[19] Even had Benjamin lived to continue his struggle to bring some sort of logical order out the chaos of the *Arcades* files, it seems quite possible that these materials, like those now filed in the box marked *GC44*, might never have attained the form of a finished work. But just as the angel of history's failure to "make whole what has been smashed" is not just a failure but a critique of those for whom history is a narrative of inexorable progress, so Benjamin's and Cornell's failures to make their fragments cohere may also be read as critiques of the demand that the historian or artist fashion works fit to be enshrined as heritage. For (as I will later argue at length) the practice of

"criminal ingenuity" is not just a means of avoiding taking part in institutions one deems oppressive, but of voiding them, emptying out the space they occupy in imagination, in order to imagine them otherwise. Thus, insofar as *GC44* may be seen as an expression of the inertia that works against the desire to make the kind of art or history that will prove susceptible to resolution into a "method" or absorption by a "tradition," it is indeed a "void," a negative space produced by conflict between contestants for the right to define what counts as art or history. In his notes to *GC44*, Cornell describes this project not as a labyrinth, but as the "center of a labyrinth," a place, like Benjamin's "fissure," which contains the seeds of the undoing of the surrounding structure.

Strictly speaking, it is impossible to situate oneself within this kind of "fissure," which is an imaginary outside produced from within an enclosed social space. And yet, in the view of theorists of modern art like Greenberg and Theodor Adorno, this is precisely the position that art has come to occupy in our society: artists appear to inhabit a privileged space outside social and political life, which may equally enable them to "avoid" social realities, as they retreat to a realm of pure fantasy, or to "void" them, which is to say, to subject them to critique. Society appears to the more critically minded sort of artist, as Moore says in her poem "New York," as a "wilderness / to combat which one must stand outside and laugh / since to go in is to be lost."[20] Nonetheless, as Moore knows, the artist can no more stand absolutely apart from society than the unmarried and unmarriageable can entirely exempt themselves from the defining force of "this institution." In chapter 1, retracing paths laid out by critics such as Greenberg and Adorno and their followers, I consider the paradoxical position of the artist in modernity, who can stand neither inside nor outside society. It is the need to sustain this seemingly impossible stance, I will say, that ultimately lies behind the compulsion to shuttle between the worlds of literature and visual art. In the work of many twentieth-century artists and critics, that is, including but certainly not limited to those I discuss here, the division between the worlds of verbal and visual art maps onto that between art and society, such that one art or another comes to represent that which stands outside art as such. Thus, for example, as we will see, Greenberg comes to equate "literature" with "the ideological struggles of society," an equation he will use to justify painting's drive to extirpate all traces of the literary from its precincts. At the same time, the politically charged language in which Greenberg couches his tale of painting's rise to dominance keeps pointing back toward the social struggles from which art purports to be in retreat; like Benjamin's account of the "tradition which is catastrophe," such language reminds us of the link between external conflicts and internal wounds.

By the end of chapter 1, I will have specified one more such link, one that connects the division between "poetry" and "painting," a conflict internal to the world of art, to a social conflict, the struggle for dominance between two fractions of the ruling class, one market-oriented, the other invested in the protocols of professionalism. And yet, this struggle, too, may be said to be "internal," insofar as it is endemic to a particular class, even as, in its character as a struggle for dominance, it may mimic the features of the conflict between classes—that epic war on which the erstwhile Marxist Greenberg modeled his story of the struggle between poetry and painting. As Benjamin suggests in the passage with which I began, some works of art, or of history, complicate our sense of what constitutes the inside and outside of any given cultural or social territory. My aim, therefore, may not in fact be to rescue the "other tradition" represented by the line I trace between Moore, Cornell, and Ashbery, if by "rescue" one means to move these figures from the margins to the center of "the" modernist tradition. It is not just, as I have remarked, that none of them need rescuing in this sense, but that such an effort would run against the grain of their work. "*The* book? Titles are chaff," says Moore, in response to the claim enunciated by the speaker quoted in the title of her poem, "'He Wrote the History Book'" (*BMM* 76). *A* book, then, about fissures, which are either margins or centers. It all depends on your perspective, or perhaps on whether the structure so divided falls apart, or holds together.

Abbreviations

Citations for frequently cited works will appear in the body of the text, in parentheses, using the following abbreviations.

WORKS BY JOHN ASHBERY

JACP *Collected Poems, 1956–1987*. Ed. Mark Ford. New York: Library of America, 2008.

RS *Reported Sightings: Art Chronicles, 1957–1987*. Ed. David Bergman. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991.

SP *Selected Prose*. Ed. Eugene Richie. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.

WORKS BY CLEMENT GREENBERG

CE 1 *The Collected Essays and Criticism*. Vol. 1, *Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*. Ed. John O'Brian. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

CE 2 *The Collected Essays and Criticism*. Vol. 2, *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*.

CE 3 *The Collected Essays and Criticism*. Vol. 3, *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–1956*.

CE 4 *The Collected Essays and Criticism*. Vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*.

WORKS BY MARIANNE MOORE

BMM *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907–1924*. Ed. Robin G. Schulze. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

MMCP *Complete Poems*. New York: Macmillan, 1981.

CPr *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*. Ed. Patricia C. Willis. New York: Viking, 1987.

WORKS BY FRANK O'HARA

FOHCP *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*. Ed. Donald Allen. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

SS *Standing Still and Walking in New York*. Ed. Donald Allen. Bolinas: Grey Fox Press, 1975.

1. Borrowing Paints from a Girl: Greenberg, Eliot, Moore, and the Struggle Between the Arts

"There can be, I believe, such a thing as a dominant art form," Clement Greenberg declares, in his 1940 manifesto, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," and "this," he adds, "was what literature had become in Europe by the 17th century" (*CE* 1:24). His declaration itself purports to herald the moment when, after a struggle, recent enough that its violence can still be sensed, "the arts lie safe now, each within its 'legitimate' boundaries" and the visual arts can be seen to have displaced literature from the dominant position. The tone of confidence in which Greenberg pronounces "painting" the victor in this long cultural war suggests that he himself is an old campaigner, although in fact this was not at all the case. The authority of the writing in "Laocoon" and its companion piece of the previous year, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," tends to make one forget that before these essays instantly established the thirty-year-old Greenberg as a force to be reckoned with in the American art world, he had published only one review and a couple of short stories. Moreover, while he had a certain talent for sketching and a belief that an interest in the visual arts was part of the equipment of a person of culture, Greenberg's ambitions up to that point had been focused on the world of literature. Above all, he wanted to be known as a poet. The prospect of the publication of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" "irks me," he writes to a friend in early 1939, the worry being "that if once they get the idea into their heads that I'm a critic, they'll decide—they're like that—that I'm not

a poet no matter how good my poetry may be."[1] And yet, although he repeats this worry in subsequent letters over the course of the next year, by year's end this never-to-be-published poet and soon-to-be-famous art critic will have declared literature a thing of the past.

From the point of view of the present cultural moment, when the dominance of the image over the word goes virtually without question, Greenberg's rapid shift of allegiance from poetry to painting may seem hardly worth remarking on. In 1939, however, the choice required a breathtaking leap of imagination. "I'm trying to contain an excitement," Greenberg confessed to his friend shortly after expressing the worry that his criticism might overshadow his poetry. Having "borrowed paints from a girl," he has tried painting for the first time, and "the colors came just right, flowed smooth from my conceiving eye." The quasi-sexual pleasure Greenberg derives from this experience has peculiar implications for his sense of vocation. "[T]he instinct to draw is as deep in me as the instinct to fuck," he concludes, and "[w]hen I believe that, I believe I'm important and look at myself in the mirror with respect. Whereas with poetry—there's no instinct involved. . . . It's all ambition and the need to create something detached and objective. Poetry is public. Drawing and fucking are private."[2] Heretofore Greenberg has associated "ambition," the urge to dominate, with "poetry," while "drawing," which we may take as shorthand for his investment in visual art in general, has seemed to him a merely "private" indulgence. Suddenly, however, he sees in "drawing" a means of establishing his importance; in other words, the impending publication of his first significant piece of writing suggests to him that he may dominate in the world of visual art as he could not in the world of poetry. Nonetheless, until the very moment when this career path opened up to him, Greenberg saw the way of poetry as the way of power.

"There can be such a thing as a dominant art form." In this chapter, I will try to unpack this seemingly self-evident, yet in some ways mysterious claim, to ask what significance the question of the relative order of dominance among the arts may have held for Greenberg and his readers in 1940, and what significance it might still hold for us now. To address these questions, however, we must not only look forward from 1940 but also back, toward a moment when poetry could seem more "public," more culturally central, than "drawing" to a young man driven to succeed. Born in 1909, Greenberg came of age in the United States during the period of "high modernism"—a designation used largely by literary historians, for whom modernism proper ends with the 1929 stock market crash, or at the latest, with the onset of World War II. The era of "mid-century modernism" (a phrase originally coined by furniture dealers) that followed was dominated, as Greenberg

predicted, by the visual arts; in this period, the modernist aesthetic that had become a thing of the past where poetry was concerned continued to refine itself in painting. Put in terms of the American context, then, before 1940 we have the Age of Eliot, and after, the Age of Pollock. I discuss below the crucial influence of Eliot on Greenberg, and to a degree my argument, both here and in this book as a whole, is framed by these paired figures, at once polar opposites, as different as poetry and painting, and mirror images, America's reigning critical mandarins during the two eras of modernism. In Eliot's voice we may hear the dying fall of the retreating dynast, while Greenberg's prose has the upstart's jump and snap, but each view the war between the arts from the perspective of the victors. To a certain extent, I will be taking the opposite tack, narrating that struggle from the perspective of literature, precisely because it is now the relatively dominated art. And yet the artists on whom this discussion centers, while deeply invested in literature, are also deeply ambivalent about it. Each, in his or her own way, repeatedly alternates between the perspectives represented by poetry and painting, and so keeps alive the conflict between them that Greenberg had hoped to settle once and for all.

The figure who I introduce here as a counterweight to both Eliot and Greenberg is also the one among these artists whose perspective I come closest to adopting as my own over the course of the book: the "miraculous poet," as Greenberg called her, Marianne Moore (*CE* 2:269). Moore had many virtues, but for the purposes of this argument, her usefulness lies first and foremost in her talent for placing herself neither in a determinate position of weakness or one of strength, but at the point where power can be seen to shift from one side to another. While this talent for grasping the dialectical moment was in part a matter of temperament, it was sharpened by Moore's response to facts on the ground. Lisa Steinman, in a suggestive essay, contrasts "the more open group conversation" that Moore encountered in the art world when she moved to New York in 1918, with the relatively closed literary establishment represented for the ambitious young poet by Eliot and Pound.[3] In the United States, where the study and practice of the fine arts had been slow to develop, the institutions of visual art were especially weak by comparison with those of literature; the art world's openness thus could be seen as a sign of its weakness. Still, the friendly reception Moore found there helped to shore up her faith, which had been battered by a series of rejections by the leading literary journals of the day just prior to her move to the city, that she would eventually find a place among the New York moderns.[4]

In fact, within a few years of her arrival on the scene, Moore's work did begin to attract influential publishers and readers, and by the mid-1920s was well on its way to attaining canonical status. However, even the universal endorsement of her

poetic peers—she was the only one of their contemporaries equally admired by Eliot, Pound, Stevens, and Williams—could not dispel the stigma of gender. Insofar as a woman was always by definition the weaker party, Moore would hold her place among the dominant practitioners of the dominant art form on sufferance. As Eliot put it in a 1923 review, Moore's poetry "is as 'feminine' as Christina Rossetti's, one never forgets that it is written by a woman; but with both one never thinks of this particularity as anything but a positive virtue."[5] To be "feminine" is a liability, except when those in authority decree that it is not; yet to do so is as much as to declare the value of femininity to be not fixed but labile. The ambiguity of Moore's situation vis-à-vis her male peers was for her at once a source of pain, and of creative energy, since the fulcrum of gender served as her primary model of the contingent and unstable character of hierarchical structures. As a woman, Moore had a particular interest in exploiting the weak points of such structures, beginning with "this institution," as she called marriage, the ritual that sets the seal on the inequality between men and women, but extending beyond it to other forms of institutionalized inequality, with a special emphasis (for reasons that I will examine in the following chapter) on structural instabilities within the institution of art. Of course, men may also find it hard to avoid the subject of gender when relations of dominance are called into question, but insofar as they aim to restore a status quo that benefits them, they must recast instability as opportunity and contingency as fate. Greenberg may have "borrowed paints from a girl," but in his hands what up to that point had seemed a relatively weak medium would become an instrument of power.

i. "Academic Feeling" vs. "the Museum"

The unstable balance of power between relatively weak and relatively strong media is the topic of a 1927 "Comment" written by Moore for the *Dial* magazine, of which she was then editor. Like Greenberg in his "Laocoon," Moore here depicts the relationship between the world of literature and the world of visual art as tense and competitive. However, from the perspective of 1927, it is the literary, or as Moore terms it, "academic" side that is in a position to set the terms of the debate with the opposite camp, whose somewhat ragtag forces are led by "that sometimes disparaged, most powerful" entity, "the museum."

> Academic feeling, or prejudice possibly, in favor of continuity and completeness is opposed to miscellany—to music programs, composite

> picture exhibitions, newspapers, magazines and anthologies. Any zoo, aquarium, library, garden or volume of letters, however, is an anthology and certain of these selected findings are highly satisfactory. The science of assorting and the art of investing an assortment with dignity are obviously not being neglected, as is manifest in "exhibitions and sales of artistic property," and in that sometimes disparaged, most powerful phase of the anthology, the museum. (*CPr* 182)

Through tone and emphasis the poet makes it clear that her sympathy is with the "disparaged" as against that "academic feeling" that lords it over other arts both high and low. With characteristic indirectness, though, she leaves us to wonder from what cultural quarter this apparently disembodied "feeling" might emanate.

An obvious place to turn for an answer to this question would be Eliot's 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," the source of the most influential expression of a "feeling . . . in favor of continuity and completeness" in the literature of Anglo-American modernism.[6] In Eliot's words, the modern writer who possesses "the historical sense" must have "a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order." Although "the supervention of novelty" will necessarily change this ideal order, it cannot seriously breach it; rather, things are "ever so slightly, altered," "readjusted," "modified," until "conformity between the old and the new" is restored.[7] Eliot was not an academic by profession when he stressed the essential continuity between literary modernism and literary tradition. Nevertheless, the "traditionalist" Eliot is often given the lion's share of the credit, or blame, both for academicizing literary modernism and for modernizing the literary academy. Hence, William Carlos Williams could view the advent of *The Waste Land* (1922) as "the great catastrophe to our letters" because it "gave the poem back to the academics."[8] More recently, such critics as John Guillory, Langdon Hammer, and Gail McDonald have portrayed an Eliot singularly endowed with the power to conjure that aspect of the modern American university that its constituents have come to call "the academy" into being.[9] "That is," explains Hammer, "Eliot's power to project 'tradition' *as an imaginary institution* made it an important tool for those engaged in the construction of a real one."[10]

In the years just before Eliot "gave the poem back to the academics," however, Williams had imagined a different future for literary modernism in the United States, one whose agenda was set by painters rather than poets. "Painting took the lead," according to Williams, around the time of the 1913 Armory Show in New

York, and those who followed that lead had the sense that the traditional order of things had indeed been breached. "Here was my chance," Williams later recalled, "that was all I knew. There had been a break somewhere, we were streaming through."[11] In Williams's story, the "conformity between old and new" is violently ruptured and through the "break" streams a "we" previously excluded from a tradition that had been presumed complete and continuous. Like Moore, Williams sets the force of the visual arts against a powerfully resistant "academic feeling," but whereas for him, painting represents an anti-institutional impulse, full stop, for her, the impulsive turn away from the literary academy is a moment in a dialectic. Where Williams sees a rebellion of the oppressed against a monolithic authority, Moore sees a struggle for power between two institutions, one of which is in a position to exercise prejudice while the other must suffer disparagement. Or to be more precise, one is "possibly" prejudiced while the other is "sometimes" disparaged; Moore's modifiers suggest that the relative positions of the academy and the museum may be subject to change. It is just such a reversal in the relative positions of the prejudiced and the disparaged that Greenberg marks in "Towards a Newer Laocoon," the essay on the fate of visual modernism that is perhaps most comparable in influence to "Traditional and the Individual Talent" in its situating of literary modernism. We may recall, in fact, that Greenberg is writing just twenty years after "Tradition and the Individual Talent" when he remarks that "We ourselves, even today, are too close to literature to appreciate its status as a dominant art" (*CE* 1:25). The very thought of literature's too recent dominance presses so close on Greenberg that it produces a kind of blind spot in his writing. He is blind, that is, to the possibility that his manifesto may (like Moore's *Comment*) reflect a moment of transition rather than one of retrospect. By 1940, in other words, the question of which art is to be dominant may not yet have been settled.

We may trace Greenberg's struggle to put this troublesome question to rest through the shifts in terminology that occur over the course of his story of artistic agon. Initially, he alternates between the phrases "plastic art" and "painting and sculpture" when speaking of visual art, thereby acknowledging the fact that through much of the history of art in the West, two- and three-dimensional media were considered of relatively equal importance. Meanwhile, the dominant art form in the period leading up to the pivotal moment of which Greenberg casts himself as avatar goes at first by the unitary name of "literature." Then, in section 3, Greenberg marks the point in his historical narrative when literature's dominance is challenged with a crucial shift in terms: the rise of visual art to a position of cultural dominance, he says, "can be best traced in *painting*" (*CE* 1:28; my emphasis). Painting's advantage over literature, on one hand, and sculpture, on the other,

derives from its greater potential for realizing what Greenberg will call, in section 5, "the opacity of its medium" (*CE* 1:32). I will return shortly to the question of why a "progressive surrender to the resistance of [a given] medium" (*CE* 1:34), of which painting offers, in his view, the most successful example, is so central to Greenberg's conception of artistic modernism. The main point to note here is that painting's gain is literature's loss. For literature, as Greenberg tells us, is inextricably linked to "ideas" or "subject matter," that is, those elements of art that must be excluded in order to attain to the pure presentation of medium in and for itself that is the sine qua non of modernist art. Hence, from section 4 onward, literature is placed in stigmatizing scare quotes. As an art form, painting has eclipsed it; from now on, Greenberg implies, "literature" will refer only to that aspect of art that is not, properly speaking, artistic.

However, just as the press toward greater medium-specificity exacerbates the division between the visual and verbal arts, so it also underscores divisions within each art. Thus, in much the same way that modernist painting, as Greenberg will later write, "has to divest itself of everything it might share with sculpture" (*CE* 4:88), so poetry, as he remarks somewhat paradoxically in "Laocoon," "had to escape from 'literature'" (*CE* 1:30) in order to become modern. "It would be well" therefore, Greenberg cautions in section 5, having just arrived at the definitive formulation of his thesis regarding the paramount importance of the emphasis on artistic medium, "to consider 'pure' poetry for a moment, before going on to painting" (*CE* 1:33). "The medium of poetry," he goes on to explain, may be rendered opaque insofar as it "is isolated in the power of the word to evoke associations and to connote." "Poetry," then, is Greenberg's name for that aspect of literature that, because it works to foreground its medium, retains a claim on the recognition of those who may say what counts as art. And yet ultimately, he concludes, even the most freely associative poetry must prove less pure than visual art at its purest, in which "there is nothing to identify, connect or think about, but everything to feel" (*CE* 1:34). By the end of the essay, Greenberg has begun to refer to this radically emptied-out medium simply as "abstract art." There is no longer any need to say which art, since there is now, he implies, only one art that counts.

I have tracked these terminological shifts in such detail in part because, as I suggest above, they show Greenberg shaping the history he purports merely to narrate: weakening a still-powerful literary culture by stigmatizing it, concentrating the force of the visual arts as a whole on the medium of painting, and, in a particularly willful gesture, rescuing poetry from the degraded category of literature, only to clear the way for painting's ultimate triumph. But I have also lingered over Greenberg's effort to make "art" mean simply, visual art, because, as I will

show later in this chapter, this effort has proven so successful among later proponents of the visual arts, who read literature out of the history of modernism altogether. While Greenberg had to struggle to turn literature into "literature," his successors may take its demotion for granted. My aim here, by contrast, is to keep the struggle to establish the dominance of one art over another present in the mind, as I inquire into the stakes of this enterprise. As I do so, I will shift, as Greenberg does, between terms to refer to the verbal and visual arts, borrowing from him in particular the use of "poetry" and "painting" to refer to the purist tendencies within those arts. Again, though, my aim, unlike Greenberg's, is not to stabilize my terms as part of an effort to establish a new status quo regarding the power relations among the arts, but to keep the sense of struggle that animates Greenberg's own best work alive, an effort that will necessarily leave my terms in flux to the end.

That Greenberg himself was not entirely done with literature by the end of "Towards a Newer Laocoon" may be seen from his publication record in the years immediately following the writing of that essay. In 1941 and 1942, as his career began to take off, the critic seemed to be hedging his bets: of the twenty-nine pieces he published, twelve are on literature (nine of them focused on poetry), three on politics, and fourteen on visual art. And while after that the balance tipped decisively in favor of art writing, there are signs that Greenberg remained conscious for a time of living in a world in which "we are still too close to literature." Indeed, as late as 1950, he was still presenting Eliot's early essays as his model for the sort of criticism that aims to demonstrate "that the prime fact about a work of . . . art is not what it *means* but what it *does*—how it works, how successfully it works, as art."[12] It is a short step from this Eliotic credo to Greenberg's famous description of the modernist artist's proper task as "the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself—not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence" (*CE* 4:85).

T. J. Clark was therefore being precise, as well as witty, when he labeled Greenberg an "Eliotic Trotskyist"; the man whom Greenberg called "a 'pure' literary critic" may be said to have laid the groundwork for the later writer's purist critique of modern art.[13] Just as Greenberg's "Laocoon" may be read, as he says, as "an historical apology for abstract art," so Eliot's "Tradition" may be read as an historical apology for modernist poetry. Moreover, like Eliot, and unlike most postwar American art critics of comparable stature, Greenberg never sought long-term employment in the academy, nor did he produce large-scale synthetic works of scholarship or theory—again like Eliot, his critical reputation rests on a handful of essays. Each of these critics in his turn, then, placed stringent limits on his relations

with the "most powerful phases" of the institution of art. And yet despite these self-imposed limitations, both Greenberg's version of the history of visual modernism and Eliot's version of the history of literary modernism have become in some sense the "official" versions with which one must reckon. If Greenberg is right that "there can be such a thing as a dominant art form," then the similarities between these two simultaneously marginal and authoritative figures may be not a matter of coincidence; not entirely a matter, even, of influence. Rather, Eliot and Greenberg may be said to occupy virtually the same position vis-à-vis the dominant institution of art, exchanging places as the visual arts (eventually) gain ascendance over literature in the course of the twentieth century.[14]

Although this position is manifestly one of authority, it is always latently unstable; even as Eliot asserts that the "ideal order of existing monuments" has been re-established, or Greenberg assures us that "the arts lie safe now," we can feel the ground shaking under their feet. Outsiders posing as insiders, radicals in conservatives' clothing, the source of Eliot's and Greenberg's authority is their ambivalence about that authority, an ambivalence that is all the more powerful for being held in check. Moore, by contrast, is openly wary of the kind of cultural authority that wears the face of "prejudice." When she declines to identify fully with either the academy or the museum, instead casting her lot with the originally literary but now institutionally homeless art form that she calls "the anthology," she betrays her ambivalence about the will to dominate that Greenberg attributes to art forms, and that she discovers in art institutions. The cultural place that Moore imagines herself occupying is not, however, so much extra-institutional as it is inter-institutional: it is a position that marks a point of tension between the two dominant institutions of modernism.

The position occupied successively by Eliot and Greenberg enables them to serve as guarantors, however ambivalent, of what they would call the order or safety of their chosen arts. It is less clear what power, if any, might accrue to Moore in virtue of her situation in a place of open conflict between poetry and painting. Before I can approach this question, though, I must ask again: what are the stakes of this inter-institutional conflict? Why should it matter that there can be such a thing as a dominant art form? One critic who might say that the Greenbergian question of dominance does not matter is Peter Bürger, whose use of the phrase "art as an institution" in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* has provided an impetus toward what we may call the "institutional turn" in the recent discourse of the arts.[15] That is, the word "institution" lately has come to signal an author's interest in a certain sort of materialist analysis of art—an interest that I avow and about which I will say more later. However, while Bürger himself claims in *Theory* that "the concept of 'art as an institution' as used here refers to the productive and

distributive apparatus and also to the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works," his focus is less on material apparatus than on ideology. Thus, *Theory* is largely devoted to a discussion of what Bürger identifies as the dominant aesthetic ideology of our time, which asserts "the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy";[16] in other words, it is a version of the argument about the role of art in modernity known as the "autonomy critique." This argument, whose *locus classicus* is the writing of Theodor Adorno, is itself ambivalent.[17] On one hand, it is a critique *of* art for its retreat to a sphere apart from the wider social world, with a consequent loss of social effectivity; on the other, it guards the ground thus gained *by* art from which to launch a disinterested critique of a social world otherwise ruled by instrumental rationality. Bürger notes the Janus-faced character of the critique, but ultimately lays emphasis on its binding force; since all art in modernity is autonomous in Adorno's sense, there can be only a single institution of art.

When Greenberg puts forward his own version of the autonomy critique in "Towards a Newer Laocoon," he initially does so in the name of a unitary institution of art, "the avant-garde," which for him is merely another term for modernism. "The task of the avant-garde," in Greenberg's formulation, "is to perform in opposition to bourgeois society the function of finding new and adequate cultural forms for the expression of the same society, without at the same time succumbing to its ideological divisions and its refusal to permit the arts to be their own justification" (*CE* 1:28). Yet no sooner has he offered this general prescription for avant-garde art practice, than Greenberg departs from the Adornian version of autonomy critique, proceeding to identify art's struggle against society with the interartistic struggle between literature and painting. As Greenberg tells it, this identification was effected when "[a]s the first and most important item upon its agenda, the avant-garde saw the necessity of an escape from ideas, which were infecting the arts with the ideological struggles of society. Ideas came to mean subject matter in general." At this point, then, painting, which had been "the chief victim of literature," emerged as the prime candidate to lead "a revolt against the dominance of literature, which was subject matter at its most oppressive" (*CE* 1:28). Thus, in Greenberg's account, modern art's ambivalence about its separation from society at large takes the allegorical form of a conflict between literature and painting, between a critique that cannot help but enter into the lists of "ideological struggle" and an apparently self-justifying practice whose "opposition to bourgeois society" can never announce itself as such.

Greenberg's own ambivalence about modernist art's autonomous character is evident in essays such as the early "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939) and the later

"Plight of Culture" (1953). In the former, he takes an explicitly Marxist stance, stressing the paradoxical relation of the avant-garde to "the ruling class of that society from which it assumed itself to be cut off but to which it has always remained attached by an umbilical cord of gold" (*CE* 1:10–11). In the latter, a review of Eliot's *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture*, postwar prosperity tempts Greenberg to imagine a capitalist utopia in which, "as Marx predicted, though not quite in the way he hoped," it might be possible "to repair the estrangement between work and culture, or rather between interested and disinterested ends."[18] However, the overarching narrative of Greenberg's criticism tells of his commitment to Kantian disinterestedness in place of politically "interested" critique. Greenberg presents such commitment as a heroic sacrifice in his memoir of "The Late Thirties in New York," vowing that "some day it will have to be told how 'anti-Stalinism,' which started out more or less as 'Trotskyism,' turned into art for art's sake, and thereby cleared the way, heroically, for what was to come."[19] What was to come, of course, was the rigorous Greenbergian version of art for art's sake, in which the arts "have been hunted back to their mediums, and there . . . have been isolated, concentrated and refined" (*CE* 1:32). That medium-focused artistic purism would serve as the prevailing orthodoxy in the field of the visual arts throughout the period of the mid-century: in her monumental study of the critic's "transformation from a proper name to a dispersed critical function," Caroline Jones terms this state of affairs "the Greenberg effect."[20]

The exorcism of "literature" as a threat to art's autonomy makes sense, then, in the context of the Eliotic Trotskyist's career-long struggle to frame art criticism as a self-justifying enterprise. The Eliotic acolyte's choice to forego literature's established prestige for a riskier investment in a rising art form is conflated with the Trotskyist apostate's choice to forego political subversion for an aesthetic entrenchment that is part alienated withdrawal, part strategic retreat. The consequences of these choices were not merely personal: for the field of art history as a whole, a relative latecomer to the fold of the humanistic disciplines, Greenberg's equation of painting with artistic autonomy *tout court* offered much-needed legitimacy. Jones brings out the paradoxical twists of the process by which Greenberg, the erstwhile literary amateur, contributed to his new field's professionalization. By grafting the formalist approach he found in literary criticism onto the analysis of visual art, Greenberg brought new rigor to the latter, yet "the primary goal of the formalist criticism he crafted would be precisely and obsessively to eradicate the literary from visual art."[21] Jones also suggests that Greenberg's retreat from politics, like his repudiation of "the literary," was hastened by "the pressure of art-world critics" eager to claim his achievement for their field, and their field alone.[22]

As "the Greenberg effect" has waned, politics have made their way back into art-historical discourse, but "the literary" remains there an unexamined category. For the victors in the struggle between the arts, this omission may seem natural, yet it only takes a slight shift of perspective to make it strange. For anyone outside the field of the visual arts, then, the question remains: what are the stakes of the conflict between "literature" and "painting"?

Yet another way to pose this question might be to ask: if "literature" and "painting" are indeed allegorical figures, what are they figures for? In Greenberg's "Laocoon," the two terms stand for two artistic styles, one explicit and one hermetic relative to modernist art's "function of finding new and adequate forms for the expression of [bourgeois] society." In Eliot's "Tradition," literature stands alone as the representative of modernism's "ideal order," that is, its ideology, internally consistent and self-reproducing. In Moore's *Comment*, the opposed terms tend to take the form of institutions, although her "academic feeling" and "museum" may also be said to function as what Hammer calls "imaginary institutions." That is, "the academy" and "the museum," on one hand, designate actually existing physical plants and the social groups assembled there, and on the other, the ideologies that simultaneously reflect and shape these social formations. Insofar as such formations both require and reproduce their proper ideological justifications, they are all "imaginary institutions," junctions of the real and the ideal. However, insofar as artistic institutions seem to be not merely relatively autonomous, like other institutions—like "any zoo, aquarium, library, garden or volume of letters," as Moore says—but absolutely autonomous, they may be said to be imaginary institutions par excellence, symbols of the possibility of the detachment of disinterested from interested ends. Bürger claims just such a status for "art as an institution" in an essay written after *Theory of the Avant-Garde* that revisits and partly revises that book's theme. "Autonomous art in bourgeois society," he writes, "can relate *only negatively* to the material conditions of its production, since the autonomy of art was constituted initially in opposition to the realm of instrumental reason."[23]

As Greenberg's "umbilical cord of gold" reminds us, though, opposition in theory does not rule out connection in practice. Moreover, even without reference to the golden last instance of art's material base, we can hardly fail to see how the material conditions of production shape artworks and artistic careers. William Carlos Williams and a contemporary MFA student may both produce autonomous art in bourgeois society, yet they inhabit significantly different imaginary institutions, and these institutional differences have consequences for the texture of their poetry. Style, ideology, and material apparatus cannot be completely

detached from one another, any more than art as such can "relate only negatively" to society in performing "the function of finding new and adequate cultural forms for the expression of the same society." If art performs a function for society, then it must relate positively to that society in some sense. The paradox of modernist art, of course, is that society needs this art to seem to have no social function; something, a voice within our heads insists, must escape determination by material conditions of production that have become synonymous with "the realm of instrumental reason." However, the compulsion Greenberg feels to purge modernist art of "literature," an art that looked pure enough for Eliot, suggests that modernism may never be autonomous enough, and thus may never be secure in the position to which it has been relegated. While modernist art as such may symbolize the possibility of disinterestedness, one art or another may have to represent art's failure to be sufficiently disinterested.

ii. Moore Between Poetry and Painting

The purist may simply disregard the art that fails to meet his standards—Eliot was the only major American modernist poet not to register the challenge to his chosen art presented by painting—although to do so requires a sense of aristocratic privilege. The arriviste cannot help but acknowledge the holders of that power he hopes to usurp; thus, Greenberg had, first, to delegitimize the claims to cultural preeminence of "literature" as such, and then, work "precisely and obsessively to eradicate the literary from visual art." Finally, twenty years after "Towards a Newer Laocoon," we find Greenberg denying that "literature" had ever played a significant role in his argument about art's autonomy. Rather, he writes in "Modernist Painting," "[t]o achieve autonomy, painting has had above all to divest itself of everything it might share with sculpture, and it is in its effort to do this, and not so much—I repeat—to exclude the representational or literary, that painting has made itself abstract" (*CE* 4:88). That strangely emphatic "I repeat" at once suggests that Greenberg himself is not yet fully convinced that he has put "the literary" behind him and has the force of a vow. "Modernist Painting" was first published the year before *Art and Culture* (1961), the collection of essays whose appearance marks the beginning of the era of Greenberg's greatest influence. Yet that volume includes neither "Modernist Painting" nor "Towards a Newer Laocoon," both of which were crucial to the development of Greenberg's theory of art, and which remain, together with "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," perhaps his best-known essays. It seems that in order for "the Greenberg effect" to take hold, the critic had to efface

the traces of the struggle through which he secured his authority. Only then, could he affect a properly Eliotic hauteur.

Moore is no purist, as her defense of the mongrel forms she calls "miscellanies" or "anthologies" shows. Moreover, as she moves, in the *Comment*, from her critique of "academic feeling" through a series of brief reviews, first, of exhibitions of *objets d'art*, then of books of poetry and history, she implicitly associates her interest in formal impurity with her situation between word and image. One might get the impression from Moore's ease here in moving from image to word that she makes no distinction between them; yet Moore is also, like Greenberg, not only highly conscious of the competition between artistic media but also of the possible moral implications of this conflict. Steinman observes, for example, that with Moore's entry into the "extraliterary culture" she found in New York art circles came the risk of acceding to the "possessiveness" that was the by-product of the art world's close association with "commercial culture."[24] We get a hint of this in the *Comment*, when Moore brackets "the museum" with "exhibitions and sales of artistic property," implying, perhaps, that even this loftiest of institutions may bear the taint of extra-aesthetic interests. And we get more than a hint of it in the poems, where Moore repeatedly enacts an ambivalent movement first toward and then away from the twin spheres of "commerce" and the visual arts, which are connected in her mind not only, as Greenberg put it, "by an umbilical cord of gold," but also inasmuch as both of these "extraliterary cultures" are centered in New York. Thus, in the first lines of "New York," she speaks excitedly of the city as "the savage's romance / accreted where we need the space for commerce," but by poem's end she is at pains to detach romance from commerce, insisting that what she loves about New York after all "is not the plunder / but 'accessibility to experience'" (*BMM* 107).

In the title of "When I Buy Pictures" Moore draws the connection between the visual arts and "commerce" with unaccustomed clarity. Then, as if frightened by her own explicitness, she immediately complicates matters: the poem's first lines, which, as so often in Moore's work, complete the thought begun by the title, read, "or what is closer to the truth, / when I look at that of which I may regard myself as the imaginary possessor" (*BMM* 101). Interested and disinterested attitudes here are uneasily juxtaposed; the disinterested position may be "closer to the truth" as Moore conceives it, yet in the gap between the title and the caveat of the poem's first lines, she remains suspended between actual and imaginary possession. This morally ambiguous stance finds its objective correlative in certain of the artworks on the imaginary shopping list that takes up the center of the poem, where, along with such Mooreish curiosities as "the medieval decorated hat-box" and "an artichoke in six varieties of blue" we find strange hybrids of word and image, such

as "the literal biography perhaps, in letters standing well apart upon a parchment-like expanse" and "the snipe-legged hieroglyph in three parts."[25] These latter items at once are and are not "pictures," much as the poem's speaker at once is and is not a participant in the market in pictures. The poem's closing lines, though, undo these ambiguities, once again enacting the poet's withdrawal from material concerns. "It comes to this," she says, summing up her philosophy of "pictures," "of whatever sort it is, / it must be 'lit with piercing glances into the life of things'; / it must acknowledge the spiritual forces which have made it."

This, at least, is the ending of the poem as it appears in Moore's first collection, *Observations*, as well as in all subsequent editions of her collected poems. However, in the first published version of the poem, the final line, following those cited above, reads, "then I 'take it in hand as a savage would a looking-glass'" (*BMM* 255). Here, as in "the savage's romance" of "New York," the "savage" represents both unrestrained American capitalism and the pre-commercial culture it displaced. When Moore's aboriginal American takes an object in hand, she may not conceive of herself as participating in the process by which things become commodities, even if her desire for the bright bit of glass is more sensual than "spiritual." Nonetheless, once she trades with the invaders, as John Slatin trenchantly remarks, "her worldly goods are hers now in imagination only; they are henceforth the white man's real estate."[26] To the extent, then, that Moore depicts the desire for possession as alien—as alien as her reflection in the glass must seem to the "savage"—she may be said to detach it from its roots in "commercial culture." Yet her deletion of this beautifully equivocal line from the subsequent published versions of this poem suggests that Moore feared that in a world ruled by market forces, her desire for possession could never be fully purified of its commercial associations. And so, the poem must end by acknowledging the otherworldly authority of "spiritual forces."

However, I prefer the Moore who has the courage of her ambivalence to the one who makes the best of her fears—the one who identifies with a "savage" who is at once prelapsarian and postlapsarian, rather than the one who defers to her maker. This is the Moore whose sympathy for the weaker party is not muddied by the sentimental equation of weakness with moral superiority. She is drawn to "the museum" and to "pictures" both because they are weak relative to their literary counterparts and because they are in their way "most powerful" and so have the potential to oppose the repressive elements in literary culture. Yet she sees that this is a dangerous game, that to draw on the power of "pictures" also may be to open the gate to the forces of "savage" capitalism. Literature's relative detachment from economic interests may bring it "closer to the truth," which is to say, to the sort of disinterested stance that would enable one to resist the desire for actual, as opposed

to merely imaginary, possession. However, as with Moore's "academic feeling," this stance also has an element of hauteur. "Picking and Choosing," for example, begins, "Literature is a phase of life. If one is afraid of it, / the situation is irremediable; if one approaches it familiarly, / what one says of it is worthless" (*BMM* 97). For the would-be adept, literature's pose of detachment also carries with it the potent threat of exclusion, just as the art world's "'accessibility to experience'" cannot be detached from its taste for "plunder."

For Moore, "pictures" and "literature" are each simultaneously pure and impure. In her life and work, we may say, the allegorical figure of visual art stands for openness and commerce, and that of literature for detachment and exclusion. And as her *Comment* suggests, the relationship between these art forms and their associated ideologies, on one hand, and society, on the other, is mediated by art institutions, which for now we will call, with Moore, the museum and the academy. The opposed pairs of commerce and disinterestedness, openness and exclusion, may give us the beginnings of a sense of what is at stake in the struggle for dominance between literature and visual art; but to grasp why this struggle should matter to anyone outside the institution of art we must zero in on those points at which the museum and the academy are most closely linked to the wider society from which they seem to stand aloof. As Moore's unease about buying pictures and Greenberg's remark about the umbilical cord of gold indicate, the museum's most vulnerable point is its connection to what Steinman calls commercial culture. Indeed, the relationship in modernity between painting and the market has come to seem, if anything, too immediate, while poetry's pose of detachment has made its worldly ties comparatively hard to discern. However, there is a critical literature, to which I have referred briefly in discussing Eliot and "academic feeling," which connects literary modernism to the development of the modern academy, and through that institution, to what has been termed "the culture of professionalism." In the remainder of this chapter, I will retrace this connection, then return to the subject of the relationship between the visual artwork and the commodity, before trying, finally, more precisely to map the point of tension between the two cultures of modernism at which Moore found herself so uneasily placed.[27]

iii. The Professional, the Academic, and "the Real Poetry Lover"

We have seen how, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot manages simultaneously to expose the difficulties the modern poet encounters in establishing

"conformity between the old and the new" and to assure us that they are being resolved even as we read. In a study of Eliot's career-shaping strategies, Louis Menand connects Eliot's successful handling of this artistic problem—how to deny even as you acknowledge that modernity represents a traumatic break with the past—with the success of the professionalist ideology that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and came into its own in the twentieth.[28] Menand emphasizes the paradoxical character of professionalism: that it is an outgrowth of late capitalism yet seems to go against its grain. At first glance, the professional has the look of a survivor from an earlier era; he arrives on the modern scene bearing "the seal of traditional intellectuality," in the phrase of sociologist Magali Sarfatti Larson.[29] Thus, to the extent that professionalism seeks to promote "traditional" values, or in Larson's words, "to the extent that it does not obey first to the profit motive, but seeks first to improve the *quality* of life," its trend seems to run counter to the most disruptive tendencies of a capitalism that Sarfatti Larson, like Moore, terms "savage."[30] However, Sarfatti Larson also emphasizes the paradox of professionalism; that is, as she writes, although "[t]he regulation and organization of market-oriented practice in the professions that consolidated toward the turn of the century stood in contrast to the anarchy of commodity markets and of capitalist production,"[31] nonetheless, "the professions' 'civilizing function' coexists, by definition, with a market orientation and is fused with it."[32] From one angle, the professions look like an anachronistic preserve of quality and communalism; from another, they appear as the cutting edge of standardization and corporatization. Menand describes the ways in which Eliot exploited this ambiguity to specifically literary ends, such that the poet acquired the newfound prestige of the professional (epitomized by Eliot himself, in his perennial banker's suit), while modernism took on the patina of "tradition."

The chief end of the professional and the poet alike is not to be left behind by the onrush of modernity, to establish a functional relation to a market-oriented society. The professional resembles the modernist artist in that the negative aspect of this relation, the "side that is turned away from the anarchy of open competition," which "fosters the values of continuity, autonomy and disinterestedness,"[33] appears foremost: professionalism, like modernist art, seems to be most valuable to bourgeois society as a kind of utopian preserve of values otherwise threatened with extinction. Put somewhat more positively, by exercising a prejudice in favor of (historical) completeness and continuity, the professional and the Eliotic modernist may be said to provide a society still reeling from the shock of the new with an ideological bridge between one era and the next. Thus, just as all professionals, as Menand writes, could only "win a competitive advantage in the marketplace . . . by

identifying [themselves] with a higher standard than self-interest,"[34] so professionalizing modernists tended to conflate interested with disinterested ends.[35] As Gail McDonald puts it in *Learning to be Modern: Pound, Eliot and the American University*, Eliot and Pound "wanted . . . to reform poetry so as to re-establish its authority and to re-authorize poetry so as to reform civilization."[36] In theory, then, modernist poetry was to have a broadly "civilizing function." In practice, however—as the title of McDonald's study indicates—the "civilization" to be reformed by newly authoritative poet-critics in the mold of Pound and Eliot was increasingly confined to what David Lodge has jokingly but incisively called the "small world" of modern academia.[37]

As Lodge's phrase suggests, the "small world" of the postwar university is at once an autonomous enclave and a significant microcosm. It is significant insofar as the university, as an establisher of standards and provider of credentials, may be said to be the key institution in the culture of professionalism, "the hinge of the professional project" as Sarfatti Larson calls it;[38] and it is autonomous insofar as it maintains its claim to be what I have called an imaginary institution par excellence, a last bastion of genuine disinterestedness. Of course, the unworldly autonomy of the institution serves, to some degree at least, as the guarantee of its worldly significance; standards lose their authority if they are perceived to be entirely subservient to interested ends. The institution's need to affirm its autonomy thus came to converge with the literary modernist's need for an institutional base from which to reestablish his authority. Like Hammer, who invokes the special power of Eliot's "tradition," McDonald portrays this convergence as almost uncanny. "At the moment it was called for," she marvels, "Eliot materialized to explain why the humanistically educated were in an ideal position to make the study of literature a serious business and why that enterprise had important consequences for civilization."[39] In other words, much as the university served as the practical guarantee of the professions' autonomy, so the humanities might serve as the ideological guarantee of the university's autonomy.

In the real institution built on Eliot's imaginary one, poetry became the privileged exemplum of the humanities' purity. As the well-known story goes, the appointed guardians of this purity were the New Critics, through whose reading practices the poem, or at least a certain type of lyric poem, was recast as an inward-turning, tightly bounded object. In *Cultural Capital*, his indispensable anatomy of the modern literary academy, John Guillory describes the relationship between this purified lyric and the institutional matrix out of which it emerged as a mystical (or rather, mystified) symbiosis in which "every poem becomes an image of the very institutional space in which it is read, a perfect mirror in the imaginary of that space, alerting the company of professional readers that the retreat of literary culture

into the university can be understood as a kind of transcendence of the cultural conditions of modernity."[40] Such a backward-looking, quasi-religious conception of the professional's role in modernity is, again, highly partial. But to the degree that, as sociologist Laurence Veysey writes, "the humanistic fields turn out, on close inspection, to violate the usual historical descriptions of professionalization . . . they forcefully call attention to the ambiguities of this very concept."[41] In other words, because humanist academics operate at a greater distance from the marketplace than do other professionals, they may help us to distinguish between the dual imperatives that drive the culture of professionalism, the better to map the points of conflict between them. On this view, the intensity of the professors' quixotic effort to "transcend the cultural conditions of modernity" may be seen as a measure of the force of the command to "obey first to the profit motive," which bedevils all professionals who think of themselves as committed to "improving the quality of life."

Although the placement of poetry, and of the poet-critic, at the heart of what Hammer, citing John Crowe Ransom, calls "the Institute of Literary Autonomy and Tradition"[42] has been repeatedly traced back to Eliot, it should be remembered that Eliot's actual relations with academic institutions were marked by an ambivalent push-and-pull. This ambivalence is clearly expressed in "What is Minor Poetry?" (an essay written in 1944, when the New Critical project was well underway). Here Eliot maps three possible positions one might occupy in relation to the professionalized institutions of literature, each of which is defined by the position-holder's attitude toward that impure form, the anthology. At one end of the spectrum are the hopeless amateurs, or "anthology-addicts," who lack the "curiosity and appetite" to read any poet in depth, and at the other, is someone Eliot addresses as "you," who ignores the anthologies and dutifully plows through *The Faerie Queene* and *The Prelude* (both works for which Eliot himself evinces dislike) "because you are going to set up as a teacher of literature or a literary critic, and have *got* to know these poems."[43] Somewhere between amateur and professional lies Eliot's beau ideal, "the real poetry lover," an amateur in the old sense, who values anthologies not as ends in themselves, but as an introduction to the kind of minor poet "whose work is not necessary for any abstract scheme of literary education, but who may have a strong *personal* appeal to certain readers."[44] Guillory interprets Eliot's brief for such extra-canonical figures as an expression of the poet's sense that "both the situation of literary culture in his own time and the situation of his coterie within that culture" were irrevocably marginal.[45] Even at the height of his influence, it seems, Eliot thought of himself as occupying a position on the border that divides inside from outside, amateur from professional. The enshrinement, or entombment, of poetry in the academy thus was left to

Eliot's followers to accomplish, as a reformed and expanded university system became newly central to the culture as a whole.

Perhaps it is because literary history so closely converges on institutional history in the postwar period that mid-century poetry, unlike mid-century painting, is not generally spoken of as "modernist," but rather is defined in terms of its practitioners' relation to the academy, whether they were poet-professors like Allen Tate and John Berryman or self-declared outsiders like the Beats.[46] Ransom registers poetry's shift away from modernism proper in a 1965 tribute to Randall Jarrell, when he describes Jarrell as "a 'modern' poet, if we mean one that comes soon after Pound and Eliot."[47] Why the quotation marks around "modern"? An indirect explanation may be found in Ransom's claim that "Randall was professional both as a poet and as a teacher of poetry." Although Ransom himself intends "professional" as a term of high praise, he does so, he says, despite those "[c]ritics out in the world" who "tell us when the poet takes employment in the Academy he compromises his own poetic integrity."[48] And, of course, it is poetic integrity—a purist devotion to maintaining what Ransom calls "that distinction which is peculiar and proper to poetry"—that is the mark of the true modern.[49] "The opposite of the professional, the enemy, is the man of mixed motives," wrote Eliot in 1918, adding as a corollary that "professionalism is hard work on style with singleness of purpose."[50] However, the "moderns" who followed in Eliot's wake experienced a tension between their poetic purism and their professional commitments; they were nothing if not "men of mixed motives."[51] At the same time, the institution that defined their careers and their oeuvres alike appeared increasingly self-contained, ever more a "small world" complete in itself. The clarity of the academy's outlines, and the forcefulness of its claims to autonomy, are reflected in both the number and the character of the institutional critiques it has spawned. Career studies like Menand's and Hammer's, broader analyses like McDonald's and Guillory's, historical overviews like Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature*, and the still-flourishing genre of the "academic novel" are all bound together by the assumption that "the academy," like the New Critical poem, is a more or less stable and self-reflexive object, conducive to endless interpretation.[52]

iv. What's in a Name? Museum, Market, Art World

The museum, like the academy, is self-enclosed and self-referential, and radiates an authority that derives at once from its huge accumulations of cultural capital

and from its claim to be a uniquely disinterested custodian of these spoils. Many artists and art theorists have been drawn, like Moore, to this authority and have made "the museum" shorthand for the institution of visual art.[53] However, while museums may be, as Carol Duncan writes, "the supreme spaces of the high-art world," they do not define that world's limits. Duncan herself offers this definition of visual art as an institution:

> That world can be described in many ways—as a magnet for creative talent, an elitist enclave, a zone of personal freedom, a community of the alienated. Whatever else it is, however, the modern world of high art is an international market centered in New York City and emanating out to rival centers in London, Milan, Tokyo and the other great centers of capitalism. Like any market, it is organized around the production and use of commodities, in this case luxury objects produced by small manufacturers.[54]

The museum is enmeshed in a network of more commercial enterprises which, if less authoritative than this "most powerful" of institutions taken one by one, taken all together may tip the balance of the institution of visual art toward economically interested ends. This network is the elaboration of what Cynthia and Harrison White (an art historian and sociologist, respectively) have termed "the dealer-critic system," which came into existence in late nineteenth-century France to replace the state-sponsored academic system that previously had ruled the world of the visual arts. According to the Whites, this shift occurred when the rise of the bourgeoisie led to a "[d]ispersion of buying power . . . to which the dealer-critic system could adapt much more effectively than the centralized official machine."[55] This dispersion of economic resources in its turn produced an ever more decentered and diversified institution of art that today encompasses galleries, the art press, art fairs, auction houses, and private and corporate collections, as well as museums and universities and government agencies, the constituents of which often move fluidly from position to position within the system, a professor one day, a collector's cicerone the next. While the Whites' description of this system in its emergence is exceptionally lucid and useful, nevertheless I prefer to their term for the institution of visual art the one that is most frequently used in practice, although not in theory. That term is "the art world."

When I say that there is no theory of "the art world," I mean that there is no full-length systematic study that seeks to bind together all the diverse components of the modern institution of visual art under a single rubric.[56] This institution is called "the art world" by all of its constituents, from scholars to dealers to street-fair artists, and yet the phrase is not in any dictionary of visual art terms.

One explanation for this significant absence might be that the art world, unlike the academy, is unstable and amorphous; there is no genre of the "art world" novel because this world lacks the compactness and clearly defined hierarchical order that links the world of academia to that of Jane Austen. However, the air of scandal that attends Duncan's claim that the institution of modern visual art is above all a market is a sign of the deeper reason for the art world's reluctance to speak its name. As per the Whites' account of the dealer-critic system's emergence, the moving parts of the art world are closely fitted to the movements of capital: this institution is less autonomous relative to the market than is the academy. The "market" on which academics sell themselves is still highly regulated, centralized, and driven by the desire more for prestige than for profit.[57] The market on which artists and their agents sell their things is a barely regulated, high stakes business.

Of course, certain parts of the art world, such as public art projects, academic art history and art training, and above all, museums, have always been more autonomous than others.[58] Yet paradoxically, the literature of the museum has long been one of the richest sources of references to the "scandalous" open secret of the art world's relation to the market. Adorno, for instance, calls the museum "a metaphor . . . for the anarchical production of commodities in fully developed bourgeois society."[59] Similarly, Walter Benjamin observes that "[t]he concentration of works of art in the museum approximates them to commodities, which—where they offer themselves in masses to the passer-by—rouse the idea that he also must receive a share." Christoph Grunenberg cites this aperçu of Benjamin's in an essay on New York's Museum of Modern Art, apropos of a discussion of "the affinity of the museum and the department store."[60] Grunenberg's account of how this affinity manifests itself in the museum's architecture, as well as its displays, is part of an extensive literature on the symbiotic relationship that has existed between the modern museum and the department store since their simultaneous emergence in the second half of the nineteenth century.[61] Nonetheless, a century of such exposés could not quite manage to break the spell that enabled the museum to serve as, in Thomas Crow's words, "that special preserve where the commodity character of modern cultural production is sealed off from apprehension."[62] The reason "the museum" has looked at times like *the* "imaginary institution" of visual art, the reason it has received so much institutional analysis as compared with the grimy world of galleries and auction houses and art fairs, which has gone almost untouched by the better sort of art historian, is that the museum alone among the fragmented parts of the institution of modern art has appeared to have the authority to sustain the paradox that inheres in Crow's description.[63]

As the twentieth century recedes, however, that paradox has come to seem increasingly unsustainable. The coincidence of rapidly growing economic inequality in the developed world with a speculative climate in which monetary values keep coming unmoored from material realities has had a strangely aggrandizing effect on visual art: when all possessions aspire to become imaginary, the visual artwork, long seen as an exception among commodities, begins to look like the model for all commodities. The resulting hyper-valuation of visual art may be seen everywhere from ballooning auction prices to the proliferation of art fairs to the hunger for new talent that makes stars of second-year MFA students. Thus, we find art historian Isabelle Graw speaking, in 2005, of "the new definitional power of the art market, which has taken over from the museum as the chief administrator of value" in the art world, or rather, as she refers to it, "what was formerly called the 'art world.'" In the same spirit, Graw suggests that "[m]aybe we should stop calling them 'museums' altogether," given the extent to which market considerations have begun to shape even these former bastions of "scholarly activity."[64] We can see the definitional slippage Graw confronts here at work again in an otherwise very precise discussion (from 2004) of the autonomy critique by Boris Groys, when, in trying to name the object of this critique, he refers to "the existing art institutions, art system, art world or art market."[65] (Being less cynical than Graw, Groys seems to prefer "art system" to "art market," although he also reverts elsewhere to the old shorthand of "the museum.")

The problem of defining the institution of visual art is central to both Graw's and Groys's writings, inasmuch as they fall under the rubric of what has come to be called "institutional critique." This phrase was coined in art-theoretical circles in New York in the 1980s to identify a genre of conceptual art that reflects on the institutional conditions of its production, presentation, and reception. In other words, this art transfers the self-reflexive gesture characteristic of modernism from the formal register to the social one, with the aim, if not always the effect, of drawing connections between the power relations that hold within art institutions and the workings of power in other social spheres. In his seminal essay "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," Benjamin Buchloh traces the emergence of such art to the late 1960s, but the timing of his own piece, which first appeared in 1990, reflects a resurgence of institutional consciousness in the art world.[66] The first wave of what was not yet called "institutional critique" was largely an artistic phenomenon, but in this second phase the art came accompanied by a body of theory, by critics like Buchloh, Duncan, Crow, and Douglas Crimp, which one might also label "institutional critique." This theory remains closely tied to artistic practice in respect to content,

and even, sometimes, to form—Crimp's *On the Museum's Ruins* (1993), for example, not only contains an essay on the imaginary museums of first-wave artist Marcel Broodthaers but is also interleaved with photographs by second-wave institutionalist Louise Lawler.[67] At the same time, since to describe an art that reflects its institutional context also involves one in reflections on the nature of the institution(s) concerned, these critics have begun to construct, albeit still in piecemeal fashion, what I have called a theory of the art world.

However, as I suggest above, this gain in critical consciousness may have been won at the cost of a loss in the relative autonomy of the institution; it may be that it is only once the market displaces the museum as the dominant model within the art world that its critics feel compelled to distance themselves from it, to see it as if from outside. Even so, to gain such distance is always a difficult task. For as Andrea Fraser argues, in her 2005 survey of the institutionalist movement's history and accomplishments, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," "if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a 'totally administered society,' or has grown all-encompassing in size and scope. It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can't get outside ourselves."[68] Fraser, who is a significant second-wave practitioner of institutional critique, as well as one of its canniest critical exponents, has instantiated the itchy sense that "the institution is inside of us, and we can't get outside ourselves" in a series of increasingly discomfiting performances. The two best known of these, *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*, from 1989, and *Untitled*, from 2003, neatly bookend the period during which the emphasis within the art world shifted from museum to market.

In *Museum Highlights*, Fraser impersonated a docent at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, leading visitors on a "tour" whose text was a ragged patchwork of quotations from fulsome catalogue copy, twentieth-century museum theory, sociological studies of class relations, art-world memoirs and newspapers, which sometimes matched, but more often clashed with, the artworks and spaces they purported to "describe."[69] The effect was one of Brechtian distantiation: Fraser was clearly playing a character, mouthing words that were palpably not her own, with the aim of making the museum visitors conscious of, and estranged from, the roles they themselves had assumed upon entering the institution. Photographs of the event, with Fraser as "Jane Castleton" (a persona she assumed on a number of subsequent occasions) surrounded by laughing faces, indicate that at least some of the audience was in on the joke, providing a further element of distance from the embarrassment attendant on Fraser's exposure of the ideological skeletons in the museum's closet. In the case of *Untitled*, however, the sense of guilty implication was much more difficult to escape, for artist and audience members alike. With

one crucial exception, the latter experienced Fraser's performance only via a video recording, which showed the artist having sex with a collector who had paid for the privilege. In this instance, Fraser was not playing a character, nor was the encounter scripted, although its parameters had been defined by the terms of the contract the artist had drawn up beforehand with her client. Spectators who flocked to the gallery drawn by the work's pornographic premise (and by its copious press coverage) came out disappointed, the consensus being that this meeting of artist and art lover was, in the words of one critic, "stilted and rote and detached and strained."[70] Still, despite the "detached" tone of the performance, which was determined at least in part by the limits imposed by the contract, and was augmented by the video's lack of a soundtrack, *Untitled* gave many the sense that a line had been crossed, a necessary distance collapsed. If the art world *just is* a market, then there can be no exit from the airless room in which the buyer and seller of "pictures" enact their joyless dance.

v. The End of Modernism As We Know It: Poetry in the Age of Pollock

Fraser herself makes it clear in her criticism that she does not think it has quite come to that, that she still finds in institutional critique's "enactment of the splitting that produced the institution of art as we know it"[71] a means of sustaining the kind of internal distance that enables us to reflect on "what kind of institution we are, what kind of practice we reward, and what kinds of rewards we aspire to."[72] Up to a point, this is a version of the argument I take myself to be making here. Not surprisingly, though, Fraser does not insist, as I do, on the significance of that version of "the splitting that produced the institution of art as we know it" in which one of the sundered parts is called "literature." For Fraser, as for her fellow theorists of institutional critique, the phrase "institution of art" (which they take from Bürger, himself a literary critic) is simply another name for the institution of visual art. They share this monocular view with virtually all other critics, theorists, and historians of twentieth-century visual art, for whom the history of modernism just is the history of "painting." Jones, for example, in theory counts herself a critic of the Greenbergian regime under which "Literature was . . . banished to the unthought,"[73] but in practice tends to exclude literature from her story of painting's rise to dominance. Repeating Greenberg's dismissive gesture in "Modernist Painting," she mentions "[t]he *paragone* underlying the history of the Laocöonic trope—namely, the Renaissance conceit that representational painting, not poetry,

is master of the arts," only to conclude that "[t]he shifting fortunes of visual art in the *paragone* have only limited interest for us."[74] The only chapter of her book in which she discusses any other medium at length deals with music—not avant-garde classical music, which in our era occupies an even weaker position than poetry, but popular music, which now dominates in the realm of what Greenberg called "kitsch" as the visual arts do in the realm of the high arts. However much Jones may sympathize with the losers in the struggle for dominance, her institutional investments keep her attached to the perspective of the victors.

This is not to say, of course, that the word plays no role in the history of modernist visual art—quite to the contrary. From the moment when the cubists introduced bits of mechanically reproduced language in painted, and then, collaged form into their images, the presence of words in pictures has signaled the heightening of the formal and ideological tensions that constitute the modern visual field. While I cannot explore this history at any length here, I would like briefly to adduce one episode. The advent of conceptual art in the 1960s marked a crisis point in the field: at that moment, some art lovers feared, as Charles Harrison puts it, "that art had 'disappeared' into discourse."[75] The conceptualists' displacement of pictures by words implied a critique of a Greenbergian orthodoxy which "had become dogmatic and decadent," according to Harrison, whose own critical practice was strongly influenced by his work as an adjunct of the British conceptual art group known as Art & Language. Harrison nevertheless conceived of his own and his colleagues' work as carrying forward the tradition of autonomy critique in the spirit of Greenberg at his best. However, this effort required them to remember what Greenberg too soon forgot, that "autonomy must always and ever be a *relative* matter in the practice of art, or it must be so long as the prospects of critical function, of realism and of significant change are maintained."[76] Harrison's radically relativistic sense of the autonomy of art represents my critical ideal. Moreover, I clearly agree with him, at least in part, when he suggests that to restore our sense of relativity we should reconsider the necessity of "a divorce between art and literature; or, rather . . . a withdrawal of art from the power of language to describe its content."[77] "Language," that is, may, indeed must, return to the sphere of "painting" if art is to retain its critical function; yet it may not return in the form of "literature," a word that, here as elsewhere in Harrison's writing, retains its Greenbergian stigma. Even at its most rigorously relativistic, that is, Harrison's sense of painting's place in the history of modernism cannot be extended to include a sense of the relation between the arts.

As one would expect, the situation in the field of literary studies is precisely the reverse of that in art history. That is, the more visual art predominates in the

realm of high culture, the more attention it attracts from the remaining adherents of literature. It might seem to a latecomer like Jones that while "[e]arlier epochs had asked whether painting or poetry was the better art. . . . [i]n mid-century Manhattan such interarts questions waned."[78] However, this art-historical hindsight rules out such phenomena as the work of the poets of the New York School, mid-century Manhattanites for whom the question of the relation between painting and poetry took on an unprecedented urgency: to them it seemed, as Frank O'Hara put it in one of his best-known poems, that in order to become a poet one first had to explain "Why I Am Not a Painter." As I discuss in this book's final chapters, O'Hara and his friends' turn toward the art world was motivated in part by their acute awareness that "Poetry was declining / Painting advancing," and in part by their distaste for the academy, where a slightly older generation of poet-critics had begun to establish new bases of power away from the traditional centers of culture. There, among the purists in search of "that distinction that is peculiar and proper to poetry," it may have sometimes looked, as it did to the Greenberg of "Laocoon," like the struggle was already over. "It is The End of the Line," Randall Jarrell announced in 1942, which is to say that "Modernism As We Know It—the most successful and influential body of poetry in this century—is dead."[79]

Yet a decade and a half later, assessing "The Taste of the Age" for the *Saturday Evening Post*, Jarrell cannot help but notice that in the wake of the death of literary modernism, "the visual arts are—but I don't whether to borrow my simile from the Bible and say *flourishing like the green bay tree*, or to borrow it from Shakespeare and say *growing like a weed*."[80] That Jarrell was in fact unambivalent about the phenomenon of mid-century modernism may be seen from the title of another essay of the late 1950s, "Against Abstract Expressionism." While in that piece he ultimately acknowledges the "elegance, force and command of Pollock's best paintings," Jarrell still sees the painter and his peers as "neurotically restricted" compared to a high modernist like Picasso; the latter, he says, resembles his realist predecessors more than his abstractionist heirs in that he is "still interested in the world."[81] The critic also takes a jab at Greenberg (whose work often appeared side-by-side with Jarrell's in the *Partisan Review* and the *Nation*) when he notes disapprovingly that "such painting—a specialized puritanical reduction of earlier painting—is presented to us as its final evolution, what it always ought to have been and therefore 'really' was."[82] In short, Jarrell's objection to the painting of his contemporaries would seem to be that it is too pure, a strangely antimodernist sentiment for one of the great exponents of Modernism As We Know It. In "The Taste of the Age," however, the poet-critic takes a different tack. "Our society, it turns out, can use modern art," most of all, he decides, because it goes with the

flow of commodity culture. "If we have the patience (or are given the opportunity) to wait until the West has declined a little longer," he mournfully prophecies, "we shall all see the advertisements of Merrill, Lynch, Pierce, Fenner, and Smith illustrated by Jean Dubuffet."[83]

He was right, of course, if a little late. A photo spread of fashion models posing in front of Pollocks, to take just one infamous example, which art historians like Crow and Clark would later cite as a turning point in the convergence of art and commerce, had appeared in *Vogue* seven years earlier.[84] But on some level, I think, Jarrell knew this. That is, he saw the connection between the death of poetic modernism and the renewed vitality of its painterly counterpart, and sensed, even if he could not quite accept, that henceforward the adherent of literature would always be a little late. He saw also that poetry's demotion to the second rank had advantages, as well as disadvantages. Hence, both his arm's length acknowledgment that painting might now be the purest expression of the avant-garde impulse, and his suggestion that by the same token, it was complicit, in ways that poetry could not be, in "the decline of the West." Jarrell's attacks on mid-century modernism do not show him at his best; in them this usually pitch-perfect writer often seems oddly tone-deaf, even resorting, at a particularly low moment, to the tired cliché of comparing the Abstract Expressionists to painting monkeys. But they continue to merit our attention as evidence that the *paragone* was still a live issue at mid-century, even among those who remained attached to "Modernism As We Know It," and for whom therefore the "taste of the age" was necessarily, as Jarrell wrote, "a bitter one."[85]

Interest in "interarts questions" did wane somewhat among literary academics during the 1960s and 1970s, as the New Critics and their deconstructive successors focused on isolating "that distinction that is peculiar and proper to poetry" and on consolidating institutional power—projects that, as Guillory shows, were closely linked to one another. However, beginning in the 1980s, and continuing to the present day, increasing numbers of English professors have turned their attention to the subject of the relationship between literature and the visual arts.[86] For them (I should say, "for us," insofar as the present discussion is an example of, as well as a reflection on, this trend), the driving question is, as W. J. T. Mitchell put it, "How do we teach literature and textual analysis in the era of the 'pictorial turn' and the dominance of visuality?"[87] The "taste of the age" may not have changed much since Jarrell's time, but the tone has: where Jarrell was angry, Mitchell is merely rueful. For Jarrell, like Greenberg, came of age at a moment when, as the latter noted, the arbiters of culture were still "too close to literature"; and just as Greenberg felt he needed to take a combative stance in order efface the last traces of literature's dominance, so Jarrell felt compelled to make a last stand

against the rise of painting. But by the time Mitchell, whose original field was the English Romantic poets, began writing the series of books that made his reputation as a leading specialist in "interarts questions," the evidence of the "dominance of visuality" was so overwhelming as to make resistance seem useless.[88] In recent interarts studies by adherents of literature, one seldom finds expressions of animus against the visual arts, only of feelings of admiration and envy.

Such studies often stress the "reality" or "presence" of the visual arts, the implication being that literature is comparatively insubstantial. Wendy Steiner offers an especially pure example of this tendency in her influential inquiry into the fate of the "interartistic analogy" in the modernist era, *The Colors of Rhetoric* (1982).[89] For Steiner, "the why of the poetry–painting comparison" may be wholly explained by "the desire of Western art to incorporate life and presence into the work." That poetry lacks "presence" compared to painting has been a given in explications of the *Ut Pictura Poesis* since its classical beginnings, but in Steiner's reading, as in Greenberg's, modernism witnesses an historical coming to consciousness of the implications of this weakness. However, whereas for Greenberg the story of poetry under modernism is one of ineluctable decline, in Steiner's version, certain writers rise to the challenge presented by this crisis, learning, by following the example of modern painters, to perform "the feat of returning semiotic motivation to language, of rescuing the word from its failed merging with the world."[90] On this view, the more picture-like the poem, the more successful it is; thus, for Steiner, the apogee of poetic modernism is that "most literal realization" of the word's longing to become as "real" as the image, concrete poetry.[91] Mitchell places a similar emphasis on the power of the literal when he presents his solution to the problem of "the dominance of visuality" in the late-modern classroom: teach what he calls "the image/text," works that combine words and pictures, "as a literal, material necessity dictated by the concrete forms of actual representational practices."[92] Whereas Greenberg and his followers depict the relationship between word and image as a fight to the death, in their championing of hybrid forms like the concrete poem and the image/text, Steiner and Mitchell hold out the possibility of a merger. Yet the more these critics insist on the "literal" reality of such hybrid forms, the more one suspects that they offer a merely fantastic solution to the real problems represented by the struggle between the arts. This is not to say that fantasies do not have real power, but to harness that power we must first recognize them as fantasies. Moore's "literal biography" and "snipe-legged hieroglyph" may be kin to Steiner's and Mitchell's hybrids, but the poet's image/texts have more force than the professors' because she is conscious, and makes us conscious, of their metaphorical nature.

Again, though, to gain such critical distance on one's institutional situation was and remains a difficult task. As his book's title suggests, Lawrence Rainey evinces an acute consciousness of this difficulty in *Institutions of Modernism* (1998), a pathbreaking collection of case studies that illustrate the "remarkable degree [to which] modernist literature was an experiment in adopting exchange and market structures typical of the visual arts."[93] Rainey is the first critic to take a materialist approach to the interartistic analogy, and he prides himself on his rigor, even going so far as to claim that "[t]he best reading of a work may, on some occasions, be one that does not read it at all."[94] Having excluded the aesthetic from consideration, then, Rainey has no truck with the argument that "painting" has come to dominate in the realm of high culture because it is an inherently superior medium to that of the written word. Instead, he focuses on the superiority of the art world's business model, which, he says, was apparent to certain members of the literary avant-garde even in the first era of modernism. This emphasis on the art-world-as-market leads Rainey to argue for the singular importance to the development of literary modernism of the special edition, by means of which a text like *The Waste Land* or *Ulysses* could become, like a work of visual art, "a special kind of commodity, a rarity capable of sustaining investment value."[95] While the special edition might seem to be a somewhat narrow exception to the rule that avant-garde literature is not a paying proposition, Rainey offers it as a key piece of evidence that in the era of the pictorial turn, all literature aspires to the condition of the art object. In Steiner's argument, that condition may be called "presence," while in Rainey's it is called "commodification," but I would argue that the special edition plays the same role in Rainey's argument that the concrete poem does in Steiner's, and the image/text in Mitchell's. That is to say, in each of these cases, a seeming exception assumes a central significance insofar as it stands as "the most literal realization" of the relationship between verbal and visual modernism. In the end, for all his hardheadedness, Rainey, too, is in thrall to the fantasy that literature might regain its prestige by imitating painting.

His version of this fantasy is, moreover, as much a product of hindsight as is the version of art history that reads literature out of the story of modernism altogether. For while Rainey's portrait of an institution of literature under pressure to conform to the norms of an increasingly market-oriented culture may be set in the period of high modernism, it (together with similarly "institutionalist" studies in English, such as those by Guillory, Hammer, and McDonald) was published in the same period that saw a rise in institutional theory in the art world. By that time, works of avant-garde literature had become, if anything, even less marketable than they had been when the publishers of *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* produced their

luxury editions. But the institution on which the survival of such works now almost wholly depends was, like the art world, being reshaped by a free-market capitalism that seemed finally to have vanquished its historic competitors. We are still witnessing this process through which "[p]iece by piece," as Richard Ohmann writes, in *Politics of Knowledge: The Commercialization of the University, the Professions and Print Culture*, "the market haven of the academic profession is being disassembled and higher education removed from its charge."[96] Our growing sense of alienation from universities which are becoming, to cite Ohmann again, "not just more like corporations . . . but like the agile corporations that have emerged from the ruins of Fordist capitalism"[97] may give us the distance we need to reflect on the institution's history and character, but as in the case of art world, this distance may come at the cost of what drew us to the institution in the first place.

vi. Self-Critique and the Struggle for Dominance

However, this book is not intended as a brief for the continued viability of any particular institution of art. It is premised, though, on the belief that "the institution of art as defined by the concept of autonomy" continues to be defensible, so long as it promotes the cultivation of the kind of internal distance that enables us to gain the richest possible sense of our implication in certain social structures, the better to reflect on—to rephrase Fraser slightly—"what kind of society we are, what kind of practices we reward, what kind of rewards we aspire to." As Fraser tells us in her essays and shows us in her art, this kind of self-reflection at its best tends to make us want to crawl out of our own skins, to get outside and beyond the conflicts that constitute our societies and our selves. "Then I take it in hand as I would a looking-glass": Moore, too, pursues the kind of self-knowledge that is also self-estrangement through the making and contemplation of art. Yet when she takes back her "looking-glass"—or when Greenberg recants his "Laocoon" thesis—we may see how hard it is to dwell in the moment of conflict. The struggle between "poetry" and "painting" that has been one of the driving forces in the development of artistic modernism may be drawing to an end, but the need to dwell in and on the conflicted nature of the artistic enterprise remains.

In this study, therefore, I look backward to look forward, trying to reanimate an element of conflict in the institution of art as it was, in the hope of heightening my own, and perhaps others', sensitivity to the conflicts that constitute the institution of art as it is. This hope, however, keeps coming up against the difficulty of gaining the necessary distance, of setting aside one's particular institutional investments long

enough to glimpse what it looks like on the other side of one of those "'legitimate' boundaries" that, as Greenberg predicted, came to serve as an all-too-effective means of keeping the peace within art under modernism. And ultimately, as Greenberg also thought—at least until his growing investment in "painting" forced him to unthink it—this problem of gaining internal distance within the artistic context derives from the contradictory character of the institution of art as such, the conflict between its apparently negative relation to bourgeois society, and that same society's demand that it serve an affirmative function, as the guarantee of its most cherished values. Adorno's own formulation of this thought is that "[w]hile art is driven into a position of absolute negativity, it is never absolutely negative precisely because of that negativity. It always has an affirmative residue." In other words, art is a preserve of the utopian hopes of a society in which actual social change seems impossible. Adorno cautions that art's intimations of such change are only "an illusion," but adds that "what has no being none the less represents a promise, if it has the ability to appear."[98]

The final question I want to pose, then, is this: how can a modernist art committed to a stance of "absolute negativity" represent positively conceived social goods? Adorno's answer is "only in dimmed form, as though it were a dream."[99] Keeping this caveat in mind, we may still try to interpret the dream, which is the collective dream of the adherents of modernism. The tenets of these adherents' faith have required them to agree with Adorno that no value may be affirmed from within the institution of art; such affirmation may only appear as a "residue," that which is extrinsic to art as such. Those who try to generate affirmation from within art fall prey to a vulgar idealism, as when Greenberg comes to believe, as Clark says in his mordant critique of his precursor, that "art can substitute *itself* for the values that capitalism has made valueless."[100] However, this is not to say that society's utopian claims may be pressed on art from outside its institutional bounds. To believe this places one in the camp of the vulgar materialists, who see in artistic illusion not a "promise" but a lie that may be exposed, in Adorno's words, by "calling culture as a whole into question from outside under the general notion of ideology."[101] Adorno himself rejects both of these critical positions in favor of close reading, or as he terms it, "immanent criticism." Like the art he favors, Adorno's preferred form of critique is "not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony," as the New Critics have been accused of doing, "but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions . . . in its innermost structure."[102]

I have tried to "read" the institution of art under modernism as if it were a work of modernist art, one that generated its own critique out of its structural

contradictions. Central to my argument is the contradiction between the notion of the institution of art as unified under the rubric of autonomy, and the notion of that institution as divided by the antagonism between two claimants to the right to represent the autonomous ideal, antagonists that sometimes go by the names of "poetry" and "painting." While the autonomous, or negative, character of modern art may be the condition of its continued existence in bourgeois society, the possibility of its immanent critique depends on the fracture that runs through it, creating the illusion that the two cultures of modernism are external to one another. Each of these two cultures, in its respective imaginary institution, has been designated as the bearer of a particular utopian claim of society as a whole: literary academia, of that impulse that "does not obey first to the profit motive, but seeks first to improve the *quality* of life," and the art world of an openness, an "accessibility to experience," which is of particular value to those previously excluded by more "traditional," hierarchical power structures. Again, these claims cannot be pressed from within the institutions supposed to preserve them. However, the ambiguous stance adopted by both Eliot and Greenberg vis-à-vis their chosen institutions—the outsider-as-insider—gave them the authority to affirm utopian values as if from within. In fact, though, each of these two critics wielded his authority in the name of the characteristic value of the institution opposed to his own: Eliot was primarily concerned to find, or make, an opening in an always already complete and continuous tradition for that arriviste, "the new (the really new) work of art";[103] while Greenberg made the Eliotic credo, "professionalism is hard work on style with singleness of purpose," the watchword of the art world.

Both Eliot's demand that his "ideal order" exhibit greater openness and Greenberg's late-blooming conviction that the imperative driving modern art history is stylistic rather than economic, then, do not arise from within each critic's chosen institution, but from outside it, or rather, from the illusion that there is an outside produced by the division within the autonomous institution of art. "In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo," messengers from the imaginary institution beyond; but like Greenberg's "literature," Prufrock's visitors from the art world ultimately represent a threat to his sense of autonomy.[104] Like Eliot and Greenberg, Moore demarcates with great precision such points of conflict between the academy and the art world, but unlike them, she cannot speak "as if from within" either one of these institutions. The position to which she understands herself to have been relegated is that of one of the women who come and go between the rooms, but in taking up this position she transforms it. What looks like dilettantism to Eliot is turned to dialectics by Moore, who locates in the anthology-lover's amateurism a powerful critique of arguments "in favor of continuity and

completeness," whether they emanate from the academy or the museum. The Eliotic or Greenbergian modernist sees the (feminine or feminized) visitor from another room as violating the "sealed off" space of autonomous art, but seen in light of that art's immanent critique, the wandering woman appears possessed of the unique power to press the utopian claims of each imaginary institution against the other, as if from outside.

In the next chapter, I will consider in more depth why it should be not just a woman, but a woman like Moore, who would prove peculiarly suited to occupy this simultaneously powerful and disparaged position. I would like to close here, though, with an example of her writing, which vividly evokes the painful, even disastrous, cost of situating oneself at the point of conflict between warring parties. The lines in question come from "To Statecraft Embalmed" (1915), one of several poems Moore wrote in response to the events of World War I. The poem's speaker addresses a figure that Moore's editor Robin Schulze identifies as the Egyptian god Thoth, "the lord of writing and the keeper of divine and powerful words" (*BMM* 202). As Schulze's tag suggests, this figure represents an aesthetic attitude, as well as a political one: it is, as Moore says, "the incarnation of dead grace," at once an upholder of a moribund artistic tradition, and in its role as a defender of the political status quo, the cause of actual death in war. The opposite, or enemy, of "dead grace" is "Life's faulty excellence," which shares both the piecemeal quality and the upstart's vitality that Moore would later attribute to the "anthology." Initially, the opposition between these two stances is implicitly identified with the opposition between the poem's speaker and her addressee. In the end, however, the distinctions between life and death, self and other, seem to collapse; a public debate is subsumed in an interiorized conflict whose agony we are made to share, as we try to get a grip on the tortured syntax of the poem's final lines:

> Slow
> To remark the steep, too strict proportion
> Of your throne, you'll see the wrenched distortion
> Of suicidal dreams
> Go
> Staggering toward itself and with its bill,
> Attack its own identity, until
> Foe seems friend and friend seems
> Foe.

In other words, if one fails to maintain the necessary internal distance, self-critique may be suicide. To which all one can say is, so warned.

2. "No Poet has been so Chaste": Moore and the Poetics of Ambivalence

T. S. Eliot's 1923 review of Marianne Moore's first book of poems concludes with what he himself deems "a 'magnificent' compliment." "Miss Moore's poetry," he writes, "is as 'feminine' as Christina Rossetti's, one never forgets that it is written by a woman; but with both one never thinks of this particularity as anything but a positive virtue."[1] This assessment places Miss Moore in an impossible position, branded as ineluctably feminine, yet obliged to distance herself from all of the negative connotations that femininity carries with it. She can be feminine in a "positive" sense only if she is willing to negate her femininity in its usual sense. It is to Moore's willingness in this respect that Betsy Erkilla, writing seventy years after Eliot proffered his dubious compliment, attributes Moore's "complex status as *the* modernist woman poet male modernists chose to sponsor and admire." "Both sexually and aesthetically Moore could be counted on to observe a ladylike decorum," Erkilla explains, "and her male critics were grateful."[2] Moore's "decorum," Erkilla implies, was a merely negative virtue, a means of purifying her femininity of its disturbing aspects. Moore herself anticipates accusations like Erkilla's, when in "An Octopus" (1924) she implicitly compares herself to "Henry James, 'damned by the public for decorum'; / not decorum, but restraint" (*BMM* 317). Although Moore's poems are often said to lack passion, the implication here is that her work, like James's, is actually marked by strong passion held in check; as against a passive "decorum," "restraint" is the art of active negation.[3] In other words, Moore knew

that she was called to occupy an impossible position, a position that was at once sexual and aesthetic; and her response was to mine the contradictions of that position, to make of her necessary negation something like a "positive virtue."

In so describing Moore's strategic response to the contradictory demands placed on the "feminine" poet, I draw once again on Adorno's definition of the work of modernist art as "one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure."[4] When I cited this definition in the previous chapter, I proposed that it might hold not only for works but also for institutions of modern art. In this chapter, I will trace a connection between Moore's sexuality and her aesthetics, between her liminal relationship to "this institution," as she called marriage, and her situation on the imaginary fault line that divides the institution of modern art from within. To grasp this connection will, I think, not only enrich our understanding of Moore's poetic character but may also help to clarify our view of the relationship between politics and aesthetics in an era when "the status of art in bourgeois society" is not only "defined," as Peter Bürger would have it, but also occulted, by "the concept of autonomy." For what "marriage," as Moore defines it, and autonomous art, in Bürger's sense, have most deeply in common is their "cycloid inclusiveness," their appearance of having no outside from which to establish a critical viewpoint on the institution. In "Marriage," Moore speaks of the "criminal ingenuity" that might nonetheless enable one at least to imagine taking an outsider's view of marriage, a view that is neither positively feminine nor masculine. The poet strives to take a similarly distanced view of both "literature" and "pictures," as she calls the two halves of the divided institution of art, although, as with marriage, she suspects that there is something illegitimate about this effort. Through her cultivation of "criminal ingenuity," then, Moore gains the purchase she needs to engage in what Adorno terms "immanent criticism," a practice of close reading attuned to conflict and contradiction and driven by the thought that even if one cannot get outside autonomous art, one may still generate a critique by turning art against itself, inducing it, in Moore's phrase, to "attack its own identity," as if from outside.

Adorno's name for the turning and returning from positive conceptions of social being—a restless motion that in art "expresses the idea of harmony negatively," as a flight from aesthetic satisfaction—is "negative dialectics." The term I will be using just as often here, however, is "ambivalence," a word that both evokes the painful emotional charge produced by dwelling on conflict (painful, Moore says, even to the point of provoking "suicidal dreams") and points to the sexual sources of our psychic conflicts. It was Moore's profound sexual ambivalence, I will claim, that drove, or empowered, her to dwell on points of conflict between forces,

each of which appears, in her work, to be simultaneously political, aesthetic, and psychic. It is not that I want to leave dialectics behind; I want to suggest, rather, that ambivalence is what dialectics feels like from the inside. Or conversely, we might say that the practice of dialectics is ambivalence in action. Hence, Moore's expressive restraint regarding sexual matters was not, or not merely, an act of repression or denial, a maintenance of "decorum" in the interest of keeping the social peace; it was, for her poetic peers and heirs alike, an exemplary act of artistic discipline. Here, for example, is Eliot again, in his introduction to Moore's *Selected Poems* (1935), now speaking not in the distanced tone of one who "never forgets that [Moore's poetry] is written by a woman," but in the confiding tone of the critic who has found a point of identification with his subject:

> We all have to choose whatever subject-matter allows us the most powerful and most secret release; and that is a personal affair.
>
> The result is often something that the majority will call frigid; for to feel things in one's own way, however intensely, is likely to look like frigidity to those who can only feel in accepted ways.[5]

Eliot imagines himself, together with Moore, being damned by the public for "frigidity," a word that links the coolly ironic brand of modernism both are known for to a sexuality that may seem—like their poetry—unreadable to the majority to the extent that it deviates from the "accepted ways." This is a strange quasi-confession, reminiscent of that moment in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" when Eliot defines "poetry" by negation—it "is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; not the expression of personality, but the escape from personality"—then adds, startlingly, that "of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things."[6]

The ambivalence at the core of Eliot's own poetics is exemplified in his divided view of Moore: her "frigidity" is for him an effective instance of the "escape from personality," while her femininity raises the specter of just the sort of personal "particularity" he fears in himself. And Eliot was not alone: as I will show, it was precisely this kind of ambivalence toward Moore's poetic character on the part of her artistic peers and their critical avatars that enabled, or condemned, her to occupy the impossible position of token woman in the canon of American modernist poetry. Erkilla is thus partly right when she says that Moore's "complex status as *the* modernist woman poet male modernists chose to sponsor and admire" derives from her "ladylike decorum." But the obverse of this acceptable femininity is, as Eliot hints, an unacceptable sexuality—unacceptable not so much because it

explicitly violated social norms as because it tended to baffle all attempts to describe it in terms of those norms. Richard Howard offers an indispensable warning to any critic who would make such an attempt when he writes that "I am uneasy, of course, in discussing the eroticism or lack of it in Marianne Moore. I think we all are," primarily, he says, because "we have not yet devised or developed a vocabulary in which we can readily express or understand the erotics of withdrawal or recessiveness or obliquity, or the refusal of explicit sexual gesture."[7] Howard is no doubt right; we have not yet devised such a vocabulary, but I suspect that Moore already has. In what follows, then, I will be looking closely at certain poems of Moore's, searching for words to describe her negated sexuality, or as she called it, late in life, with unwonted candor, her "Foiled explosiveness." My search begins, however, not with this revealing phrase, but with the word that for Moore embodies the "accepted ways" of thinking about gender and sexuality. That word is "institution."

i. Institution or Enterprise?

The single, but also singularly prominent, use of the word "institution" in Moore's poetry occurs in the first line of her longest and perhaps most ambitious poem, "Marriage," which reads simply, "This institution" (*BMM* 115). Marriage, which brings the volatile substance of erotic life under the sway of law, is, the poet implies, *the* institution, the one on which all others are founded. Taken in isolation, the line recalls that moment in *Jane Eyre* when Jane pauses at the threshold of Lowood Institution to read the "stone tablet over the door," which bears the school's name, and becomes lost in thought, "pondering the signification of 'Institution.'"[8] For Moore as for Jane, the word "institution" is a daunting sign of patriarchal authority. However, the second line of "Marriage," "perhaps one should say enterprise," suggests that the name, and therefore the meaning, of Moore's "institution" may not be set in stone, after all. The suggestion seems tossed off; Moore never does elaborate on the distinction between "institution" and "enterprise." Still, it bears noting that the relationship between the dominant and subordinate clauses that open the poem, in which the second clause undercuts the tone of authority established by the first, rather neatly mirrors the relationship between Adam and Eve, the characters whose contentious exchanges make up the bulk of "Marriage." With Eve's entry into Eden, what was once whole is fractured; in Moore's words, she is "the central flaw / in that first crystal-fine experiment." Hence, when she says, "'I should like to be alone,'" Adam responds "'I should like to be alone; / why not be alone together?'" in a vain attempt to restore the monadic status quo (*BMM* 74). "This

institution, / perhaps one should say enterprise": what looks at first like a unitary institution divides in two before our eyes, just as Eve splits off from Adam.

Marriage resembles autonomous art, then, in that it may be advertised as a haven in a heartless world, yet is inevitably riven from within by a version of the ideologically charged struggle for dominance from which it appeared to be an escape. Moore ties this struggle to a particular historical moment by opening her poem not with the ostensibly timeless opposition between Adam and Eve, but with the opposition between two terms, "institution" and "enterprise." While the first of these terms had undergone subtle shifts in meaning through the mid-nineteenth century, the second was in the process of shedding its antique meaning and assuming its modern one even as Moore wrote. The older meaning of "enterprise" is, according to the *OED*, "a bold, arduous or momentous undertaking," involving "risk or danger." It is this meaning that is at work in a phrase that must have been in Moore's mind, the passage in the wedding service from the *Book of Common Prayer*, which warns that marriage "is not to be enterprised . . . unadvisedly."[9] However, around the end of the nineteenth century, "enterprise" had begun to acquire the additional, and now more familiar, sense of "a unit of economic organization or activity"; the *OED*'s first citation of "entrepreneurial" is from 1922, the year Moore began to compose "Marriage."[10] Thus, like modernist art in general, "enterprise" is associated with risk and experiment, and like modern visual art in particular, it is increasingly bound up with the world of commerce. By contrast, "institution" denotes "a regulative principle or convention," as well as "an establishment . . . instituted for the promotion of some object, especially one of general or public utility"; as opposed to the experimental and commercial "enterprise," an "institution" is traditional and disinterested in character. The connotations that attach to "institution" and "enterprise" thus may be said to link this opposed pair to the other such pairings that emerged in the previous chapter, such as Moore's "academy" and "museum" or Greenberg's "poetry" and "painting."

Seen from one angle, the social forces represented by these paired terms produce a unified effect—just as the capitalist ruling class encompasses both professionals and entrepreneurs, so there appears to be only one institution of art in modernity—but from another, the balance of power between those same forces is seen to be both unequal and unstable. In the almost programmatically dialectical opening lines of "Marriage," Moore is careful to give priority to the then culturally dominant term in each of her opposed pairs—to "institution" and "enterprise," she adds "public" and "private," and, of course, Adam and Eve.[11] The feminine poet's natural bias in favor of Eve (who, "is so handsome," Moore puns, "she gave me a start") might lead us to suspect her of wanting to overturn the established order, as

Greenberg does when he establishes the triumph of "painting" by rhetorical fiat. However, the climax to which these lines build offers something quite other than a neat reversal of terms. Here is the poem's first sentence in full:

> This institution,
> perhaps one should say enterprise,
> out of respect for which
> one says one need not change one's mind
> about a thing one has believed in,
> requiring public promises
> of one's intention
> to fulfill a private obligation:
> I wonder what Adam and Eve
> think of it by this time,
> this firegilt steel
> alive with goldenness;
> how bright it shows—
> "of circular traditions and impostures,
> committing many spoils,"
> requiring all one's criminal ingenuity
> to avoid!
>
> (*BMM* 115)

The classical balance and clarity of the first eight lines suggest that Eliot was right, that there is no essential discontinuity between "traditional" and modern poetry. Moreover, there is nothing about the smooth tacking back and forth between opposed terms that indicates that these oppositions are intransigent. Moore could be setting the stage for a "positive" dialectic, the kind that results in a synthesis, a true "marriage." Our expectations of receiving such rhetorical satisfaction are encouraged by the appearance, at the end of line eight, of a colon, a promise of further clarification.

Instead, what we get is an impasse. "By this time," the modern moment to which Adam and Eve have been summarily called to bear witness, marriage looks like nothing we have ever seen before. It is nothing, that is, if not an embodied contradiction, "this firegilt steel / alive with goldenness," sensually apprehensible yet difficult to get a fix on. Like Adorno's work of modernist art, this image of wedded bliss cannot represent anything that actually exists—that would be to promote what he calls a "spurious harmony"; and yet, "how bright it shows"—it has what Adorno calls "the ability to appear," which, he explains, "represents a promise"

of an as-yet-nonexistent felicity.[12] To this abstract canvas is appended a collage element, a fragmentary quotation which, Moore tells us in a note, is from Francis Bacon (*BMM* 144). What the note does not tell us, however, is that Bacon's phrase refers not to marriage, but to the intellectual obstacles, "the circular traditions and impostures," that stand in the way of the philosopher's pursuit of knowledge. In context, Bacon's words refer to an obstacle; wrenched out of context, and so rendered opaque, they present one to the reader's comprehension. Marriage, that is, just is an impasse, intractably contradictory and difficult, susceptible to representation only in abstract and fragmented form. In Moore's image of marriage, we find a perfect example of what Adorno means by negation, the artist's deliberate frustration of an expected aesthetic satisfaction. At the same time, though, the elusive ideal, "alive with goldenness," that these lines evoke arouses a utopian longing for the very satisfaction that they deny.

Moore might have left us suspended in this state of frustration and longing, contemplating "marriage," a.k.a. the work of modern art, in all its difficulty. Instead, she provides a closing couplet in the aphoristic style of the sentence's first half, which contains the deferred third term in her dialectic. This phrase, "criminal ingenuity," may be said to stand in much the same relation to "institution" and "enterprise," and to "public" and "private," as the serpent does to Adam and Eve. It stands, that is, just outside the pair's charmed circle, plotting how to exploit the potential for conflict that lurks in their relationship. This presumes, however, that there is an outside to "this institution," that one may be neither Adam nor Eve, but a third, nameless thing, among whose salient traits is a talent for avoidance, a word which at its root means voiding, emptying out, negation. But negation is precisely what cannot be represented; at best, we can imagine this third, or outsider's, position as occupying a severely reduced space. This narrowed room for maneuver may seem painfully limiting, as when, addressing an alter ego in "To Statecraft Embalmed," Moore speaks of "the steep, too strict proportion / of your throne." Or it may be recast as source of poetic strength: thus, the first of "The Labors of Hercules," in Moore's poem of that title, is "To popularize the mule, its neat exterior / expressing the principle of accommodation reduced to a minimum" (*BMM* 105). If we take Hercules to be the type of the modern artist, the sleek and stubborn mule becomes an emblem for a compressed and rebarbative poetic style, a style that is connected, we may infer, with the creature's sexual sterility. Although the mule cannot help being sterile, its stubbornness makes its sexual anomalousness seem to stem from conscious resistance. In this respect, it resembles the figure of "criminal ingenuity" that stands outside looking in at Adam and Eve and their institution; and it is like that dialectical figure as well in that it represents the negation,

rather than the self-transcendence, of the conjoined-yet-opposed pair that has generated it. In short, Moore's "mule," like modern poetry itself, is an end-of-the-line phenomenon. Just as the flourishing of "criminal ingenuity" could spell the death of marriage, so popularizing the mule could spell the death of poetry. And yet, Moore suggests, modern marriage, like modern art, can survive only under the shadow of its possible negation; better the minimal accommodation that such institutions afford our desires, than none at all.

ii. The Place of the Token Woman

Here is another "'magnificent' compliment," from another of Moore's greatest and (perhaps therefore) most ambivalent admirers, Randall Jarrell: "Miss Moore has great limitations—her work is one long triumph of them."[13] By a wry shift of preposition—Moore's work is not a triumph *over*, but *of*, limitations—Jarrell implies that it is possible to view her "principle of accommodation reduced to a minimum" as a positive virtue. But to the extent that he sees Moore's limitations as a poet as deriving from what Eliot, for lack of a better word, names her "frigidity," Jarrell cannot help but disapprove. "We are uncomfortable," he says, "or else too comfortable—in a world in which feeling, affection, charity, are so entirely divorced from sexuality and power, the bonds of the flesh."[14] In the Modernist and New Critical eras, a number of male critics floated versions of this claim, that Moore's avoidance of the subject of sex constitutes her signal failure as a poet; and the first generation of feminist critics, who might have been expected to provide a corrective to this view, tended instead "largely to confirm this stereotype," as Jeanne Heuving has remarked.[15] More recently, however, Heuving and other second-wave feminists have charged such readers with placing undue emphasis on Moore's sexuality, or more precisely, her lack thereof, since Moore was not merely markedly androgynous and explicitly chaste, but of no known or even inferable sexual preference. "Why," Sabine Sielke asks, having run once more through the litany of critics' complaints about Moore's sexlessness, "should there be 'sex' and 'flesh' in women's writings?"[16] While I agree that this kind of insistence in regard to Moore represents an imposition of accepted ways of feeling on one who feels things in her own way, I would add that we should not be too quick to dismiss the negative characterizations of Moore's sexuality, insofar as they are marked by critically productive signs of conflict.

For example, Eliot's remark about the "feminine" quality of Moore's writing and Jarrell's complaint about its lack of "sexuality and power" have often been cited as evidence of misogynistic attitudes toward Moore, without mention of the fact

that these two poet-critics are among her canniest appreciators. Their efforts to distance themselves from Moore have such force precisely because they so deeply identify with her, for reasons that I will discuss further in a moment. But first I must attend to a passage by R. P. Blackmur, also much cited by Moore's feminist readers, that contains perhaps the most powerfully negative depiction of Moore's sexuality in all of the critical literature. Having first sounded the theme of Moore's peculiar limitations—"her sensibility," he says, "imposes limits more profoundly than it liberates poetic energy"—Blackmur then traces this compulsion to impose limits to its source.[17] "No poet has been so chaste," he declares, "but it is not the chastity that rises from an awareness—healthy or morbid—of the flesh, it is a special chastity aside from the flesh—a purity by birth and from the void." Blackmur's Moore, like her own figure of "criminal ingenuity," voids our conventional conceptions of the poet's place in the sexual order. He imagines her as standing outside that order, yet at the same time, through the vatic excess of his language, signals that this space outside or "void" cannot actually exist. And Moore's power to make us imagine that it does stems not from any merely personal idiosyncrasy, but from her character as a poet: Blackmur raises the subject of her sexuality only, he stresses, as a means of throwing light on "the sensibility informing that objective thing a body of poetry."[18] "No poet," he asserts, "has been so chaste"—no poet, that is, rather than no person, or, more particularly, no woman. For insofar as Moore is viewed as a woman, she can be accepted only on sufferance by her male critics and peers; to cite Eliot again, they can forgive but not "forget" her "particularity." But insofar as she seems to them a creature of "the void," someone who by virtue of the nature of her sexuality appears to stand outside the system of sex and gender, they may not only accept her, they may see her, as Eliot's remarks about her "frigidity" suggest, as the bearer of a nearly unspeakable truth about themselves.

This truth has to do, again, not just with the personal particularities of these male modernists but with their character as poets. More specifically, it has to do with the relationship between modern poets and those persons referred to by Eliot as "the majority." The majority are the enforcers of the norms Eliot calls the "accepted ways," norms that are explicitly aesthetic, but to the extent that they concern one's ways not just of writing but of "feeling," are also implicitly social. Eliot reflects on these norms in the course of defending Moore's attraction to subject matter the majority might dismiss as "minor." But for her, he says, "the minor subject . . . may be the best release for the major emotions": poetry like Moore's effects a transvaluation of values whereby minor becomes major, the exception takes on the force of a norm. Eliot's defense of Moore against accusations of writing in a "minor" mode forms part of a larger argument about the uses of "minor" poetry

that he develops throughout his critical career. John Guillory has carefully tracked the changes in this argument, which he reads as an allegory about Eliot's shifting fears and hopes regarding the cultural status of poetic modernism in general, and of his own work in particular. In its late stages, the Eliotic case for the major importance of what might seem to be a minority taste was embraced by the New Critics, Guillory writes, as "a fantasy of power," the foundation for these critics' quasi-religious belief "that literary culture is the site at which the most socially important beliefs and attitudes are produced, the site at which those beliefs and attitudes are generated which *unify* the culture."[19]

At its best, Eliot's argument about the relation between majority and minority is delicately dialectical; to say that the "minor subject" may hold the key to the "major emotions" is to speak of the complex interdependence of subordinate and dominant elements in culture, and by implication, in society. Still, the need to affirm the unqualified social importance of his kind of modernism kept asserting itself, in his own writings, and even more, in the writings of his critical epigones. And in such efforts to establish the major status of one kind of modernism, Moore proved to be an invaluable foil. As Eliot's defense of her implies, and Jarrell's defense of her makes clear, certain of Moore's critics felt compelled to stress the "limited" or "minor" character of her work, "the astonishing fact," as Blackmur put it, "that none of Moore's poems attempt to be major poetry."[20] John Crowe Ransom offers a particularly telling version of this critique in an essay on Moore in which he first calls her poems "revolutionary," but soon afterward begins to "wonder if Mr. Eliot does not do Miss Moore a disservice when he raises the question of the 'greatness' of her work. . . . Greatness is something for the kind of poetry in which he practices, perhaps, but it would seem beyond the intention of her kind."[21] In "When I Buy Pictures," Moore satirizes the sort of critic who speaks of "that which is great because something else is small," and surely the Eliot who set himself up as the defender of "minor" poetry would agree. But the Eliot who forgives Moore her "particularity" signals that she will always be considered small relative to her male peers; that if she can be said to be great, it is only in a carefully limited sense. Hence, shortly after acknowledging Moore's "great limitations," Jarrell feels he must add that "I have read that several people think So-and-So the greatest living woman poet; anybody would dislike applying so clumsy a phrase to Miss Moore—but surely she is."[22] No critic had a greater aversion to clumsy phrasing than Jarrell, but here he is driven to it by the need to keep Moore in her place, the place of the token woman in the canon of modern American poetry.

The need to keep the token woman in her place is necessarily related to, but not the same as, the need to assert male dominance over women as such, since the

need to assert male dominance would ultimately seem to mandate the complete exclusion of women from artistic canons. What then is the function of a figure like Moore, for whom her male peers and readers are always making exceptions? Even Ransom, who in his infamous essay, "The Poet as Woman," equates the "lack of intellectual interest" in the work of his exemplary woman poet with "deficiency in masculinity" reluctantly concedes that "[n]ot deficient in it are some female poets, I suppose, like Miss Marianne Moore."[23] However, when he asserts Eliot's greatness relative to Moore's lack thereof, Ransom implies that it is precisely Moore's inherent "deficiency" that not only distinguishes her from her closest male peers but also determines the nature of her place among them. And yet, as Blackmur's fantastic characterization of Moore's sexuality suggests, that place may not in fact exist; it may be that what the critics keep calling Moore's "limitations" are, like the recurring images of "steep, too strict" spaces within her poems themselves, actually a means of representing negation itself. For as Blackmur puts it, in yet another ambivalent compliment, Moore's "sensibility . . . like its subject matter, constitutes the perfection of standing aside." In other words, the extreme negativity of Moore's "sensibility," and hence, of her writing, allows her, and it, to stand for what her male peers are not, a mode of being for which, Ransom ultimately acknowledges, "deficiency in masculinity" is only "a conventional symbol."

What these male modernists are not, or rather, what they cannot finally be perceived to be, is "minor" writers, a term which, as Guillory makes clear, speaks not just to questions of taste, but to the question of cultural unity. For by contrast with the Adornian view that the modern artwork's task is to embody irresolvable contradictions, and so to "express the idea of harmony negatively," the New Critical sensibility locates "tensions" in the poem, the better to transcend them. The former view implies an adversarial, the latter a meliorative, relation between art and society. And yet, the New Critics at their best were as exquisitely sensitive to conflict as any Adornian; what's more, they doubtless knew at some level that their "fantasy of power" was a fantasy, that like the high modernists from whom they drew much of their authority, they would never be embraced by "the majority." Still, they could not say this outright: their sense of powerlessness, and their intuition that the contradictions embodied in the artwork, and thus by implication, in society, were indeed irresolvable, could only be expressed by negation. The place of the token woman is the place of this negation: she represents minority in the space of majority, conflict in the space of its transcendence. Thus, she cannot be merely "deficient in masculinity," like other women poets, she must be uncannily sexless.

In this the token woman resembles another figure central to the "fantasy of power" cultivated by Eliot's followers, the "[o]ld man with wrinkled female breasts,"

Tiresias, in *The Waste Land*. Tiresias is described as occupying an impossibly narrow space, "throbbing between two lives," and the stanzas in which he appears take up less than a tenth of the poem; yet despite these evident limitations, the blind seer is said to embody what F. R. Leavis terms the poem's "effort to focus an inclusive human consciousness."[24] Eliot himself was the first to stress the unifying function of this figure, claiming, in a much-cited note to the poem, that "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character,' is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest."[25] Leavis glosses this note by explaining that Tiresias is the "appropriate impersonation" of Eliot's principle of unification because "[a] cultivated modern is (or feels himself to be) intimately aware of the experience of the opposite sex."[26] Not "is," exactly, but "feels himself to be"; not "women," but "the opposite sex." Far from evoking intimacy, Leavis's language suggests that the male modern is at pains to keep his distance from feminine experience. At the same time, this distancing effect reminds us that inasmuch as Tiresias is a "mere spectator and not indeed a 'character,'" he occupies exactly that position that the poem cannot include. It therefore may be truer to say, contra Leavis, that Tiresias is the appropriate impersonation of the *failure* of Eliot's "effort to focus an inclusive human consciousness," a failure that the more rigorously negative sort of modernist would view as inevitable.

If the negative conception of modernism requires of the artist that she continually fail to affirm the unifying function of human consciousness, repeating, with Rimbaud, that "'I' is an other," then Tiresias, like Moore, may be said to stand in the purely notional place of this "other." While this place is in fact an aporia, a "void" or impasse "between two lives," this fact is intolerable to the sort of Eliotic modernist who harbors what Moore elsewhere calls an "academic feeling . . . in favor of continuity and completeness." Thus, in order to arrive at a positive conception of modernism, he must recast the aporetic "other" in the positively conceived form of sexual otherness. As a modern in good standing, however, he knows that no ordinary woman can fill this role. Rather, what is called for is a figure who makes him "intimately aware of the experience of the opposite sex" as sheer opposition; this uncanny "feminine" masks the void, but only just. From the Eliotic modern's point of view, the token woman represents the possibility of reconciling modernist art's ineluctable negativity with the need to affirm that art has a positive role to play in modern life; she stands at once, to borrow a line from Wallace Stevens, for the nothing that is not there and the nothing that is. The place that has been reserved for the token woman is uncomfortably limited, having been shaped by "the principle of accommodation reduced to a minimum." Her limitations ensure her poetic minority; yet, if we see the position she occupies as an exemplary

one, then all modern poets may be considered similarly minor. Ransom, then, is both right and wrong when he says that "greatness" is beyond the intention of Moore's kind; he is wrong, that is, to infer that therefore Eliot is not of her kind. And where two of a kind are concerned, questions of majority and minority may be reduced to questions of dominance—to the "approved triumph," to cite Moore again, of "that which is great because something else is small."

iii. "Unsheathed gesticulation": The Attack of the Token Woman

From the point of view of a certain sort of Eliotic modernist, the token woman serves to mask a void. Does this mean that Moore's "principle of accommodation reduced to a minimum" must be judged, in the end, to be merely a negative virtue? Or may Moore's work still be said to serve the ends of what Adorno would describe as a negative dialectic, one which mobilizes internal contradictions in the interest of social critique? I have been suggesting that we may see such contradictions at work in the ambivalent compliments paid to Moore by her male peers and critics, such as Blackmur's observation that her "sensibility . . . like its subject matter, constitutes the perfection of standing aside." For while Blackmur may flag the act of "standing aside" as a sign of "the defect of [Moore's] method," he also knows that from Moore's own point of view the act of avoidance may be seen as a positive achievement, the end to which one marshals "all one's criminal ingenuity." In a 1916 poem titled "'To Be Liked By You Would Be a Calamity,'" for example, the poet reframes "the perfection of standing aside," which might seem to be the essence of passivity, as a positively aggressive act. The poem's speaker initially concedes to an opponent that "when / You tell me frankly that you would like to feel / My flesh beneath your feet . . . I can but put my weapon up, and bow you out" (*BMM* 79). But no sooner has she said this, than she replays the confrontation, in a less concessive mood.

> Gesticulation—it is half the language.
> Let unsheathed gesticulation be the steel
> Your courtesy must meet,
> Since in your hearing words are mute, which to my senses
> Are a shout.

In Moore's hands, a seemingly decorous gesture takes on a steely edge. Even if her opponent cannot now feel the thrust, she implies, he may yet; since what he takes to be her silence, as she would later write, is "not silence, but restraint" (*BMM* 124).

The object of Moore's animus here is one of the "critics and connoisseurs" who appear frequently in her poems of the mid-1910s, poems which are simultaneously about the struggle for recognition and intended to gain Moore the recognition she craved. Reading them, one recalls the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's dictum that style in art is "nothing other than the space of the positions and self-positionings constituting the field and within which the artistic intention of the artist in question has defined itself, generally by opposition."[27] Bourdieu's description may be reductive, but so too is the world of Moore's early poems, which is made up of those the poet imagines to be her opponents, who largely go unnamed (although they sometimes merit epithets, such as "steam roller," or "scarecrows of aesthetic procedure") and those she imagines to be her allies, whose names are featured prominently in such poems as "To William Butler Yeats on Tagore," "To Bernard Shaw: A Prize Bird," and "George Moore." Taken altogether, these poems of opposition describe Moore's own personal version of what Bourdieu terms "the space of possibles." That is, each of these negatively and positively charged figures represents for Moore a position in her chosen cultural field, like a coordinate on a map, and the poems in which she measures her relative distance from various positions serve to help her determine her own possible place in the field. Thus, in 1915, the year her work first appeared in little magazines, ten out of the nineteen poems that Moore published are dedicated "to" some actual or imagined figure. The tendency of these generally brief and epigrammatic efforts is epitomized in the title of "To a Man Working His Way through the Crowd," a poem addressed to the stage designer Gordon Craig (*BMM* 352). (Craig also figures as a reference point in a later and lengthier exercise in aesthetic position-taking, "Picking and Choosing.") "Undoubtedly you overbear," Moore admits, to herself as much as to Craig, "But one must do that to come where / There is a space, a fit gymnasium for action."

Moore's acute consciousness of the imperative to find and hold a space for herself in a competitive cultural arena often brings her analysis of this milieu remarkably close to Bourdieu's: an aperçu such as "adversaries whom one would prefer to destroy by ignoring them cannot be combated without consecrating them" sounds like the poet but is actually the sociologist.[28] And just as Moore examines the opposition between "Critics and Connoisseurs" in the 1916 poem of that title, so Bourdieu devotes a portion of his study of taste, *Distinction*, to examining the conflict between two types of high-cultural arbiter, whom he labels "connoisseurs" and "scholastics." Bourdieu's "scholastics," like Moore's "critics," are members of the professionalized intelligentsia, while both the poet and the sociologist depict the "connoisseur" as an aristocratic holdover, who nonetheless represents a cultural power held in reserve that threatens the professional's dominance.[29]

Interpreters of Moore's poem have had trouble telling whether her sympathies lie with the critic, personified by a diligent ant, or the connoisseur, embodied in a languid swan. As Bourdieu remarks about the scholastic and his rival, however, "the terms designating the opposing dispositions can be taken as complimentary or pejorative, depending on the point of view";[30] and being stringently devoted, especially at this point in her career, to defining her position by opposition, the view that Moore takes of both critics and connoisseurs is simultaneously complimentary and pejorative. She at once identifies with and stands opposed to both ant and swan, since like Bourdieu, she is less immediately interested in the outcome of the struggle for dominance than in the terms that define it, or more precisely, in mapping the shifts in point of view from which these terms may be seen. "I have seen this swan and / I have seen you," Moore's speaker informs an unnamed interlocutor, "I have seen ambition without / understanding in a variety of forms" (*MMCP* 38). The poet's proper task, like the sociologist's, is not to referee the contest between a dominating "I" and a dominated "you," but to come to the best possible understanding of the greatest possible variety of forms that "ambition," that is, the struggle for dominance, might take.

To say that the poet and the sociologist are not immediately interested in the outcome of the struggle for dominance is not, however, to say that they are uninterested. Bourdieu's allegiances are explicitly leftist, but as with most artists, Moore's political position is more difficult to define. When, in the previous chapter, I discussed the opposition that Moore establishes between a culturally dominant "academic feeling" and "that sometimes disparaged, most powerful phase of the anthology, the museum," I concluded that the poet displays a certain bias in favor of the museum insofar as it is "disparaged." In the realm of art, though, what appears as "disparaged" one moment may seem to be "most powerful" the next. Aesthetically speaking, Moore's Adam and Eve seem evenly matched; while she is "so handsome," he "has beauty also; / it's distressing" (*BMM* 116). If only appearances are at stake, why "distressing"? Because, as Moore says later in the poem, as her case against marriage mounts, "experience attests / that men have power / and sometimes one is made to feel it" (*BMM* 120). Moore uses plain language here to describe a harsh reality; that outside the realm of art, inequality is a source of suffering. In this suffering, Eve is allied with the ostensibly sexually neutral "one" who is the poem's speaker, since, although this "one," like "the museum," is only "sometimes" made to feel decisively inferior to her opposite number, to be dominated is always in some sense to be feminine, or at least, to be prone to being seen as feminized.

If the institution of art were nothing but an autonomous space of disinterested judgment, then inequalities of power between Adam and Eve would be of no

concern to the poet, but only their relative beauty, which is purely a matter of taste. But the institution of art in modernity does bear a determinate relation to society as a whole—a relation of negation, which is not to say, of detachment. Rather, in negating the substance of the struggle for dominance, art reveals its form, presenting the struggle not in the necessarily hierarchical terms of gender (or class or race or nation) but in terms of an opposition as such, in which the order of dominance is not already given, and so may be more readily seen as subject to change. Like the dominated "one," the artist does not have power, yet paradoxically represents this negative relation to power as a positive virtue. I suggest above that Moore's acceptable femininity served as a kind of cover for her unacceptable sexuality—that the former is merely a negative virtue and the latter the true source of her rigorous negativity. However, it might be more accurate to say that Moore's femininity is the visible sign of her negativity, and as such is a trace of the link between the one who does not have power, and the one who chooses to cultivate the perfection of standing aside from relations of power. Such standing aside would be merely perverse, if it were not at the same time connected with our need to envision the conditions under which social change might take place. This then is the critical function of the token woman: simultaneously to reveal and to conceal the link between the powerlessness which one suffers, which generates the call for social justice, and the powerlessness which one chooses, which generates the call for aesthetic judgment.

For Moore, the realm of aesthetic judgment is, like the realm of social justice, a space of endless conflict: in her encounter with the critic in "To Be Liked By You" she may put her weapon up, but she comes armed. Moore's martial imagery is one of her poetic trademarks; as Jarrell puts it, "a good deal of her poetry is specifically (and changingly) about armor, weapons, protection, places to hide; and she is not only conscious that this is so, but after a while writes poems about the fact that this is so."[31] Thus, by 1936, we find her beginning "The Pangolin" with the rueful sigh, "Another armored animal" (*MMCP* 117). However, Moore's somewhat resigned tone here represents a change from the more directly combative rhetoric that characterizes her earlier work; compare her assertion in "To Be Liked By You" that "'Attack is more piquant than concord'" to her later assurance that "Pangolins are not aggressive animals" (*MMCP* 118). If we take such language to be tied, as Bourdieu would have it, to the battle for aesthetic distinction, then we may see the change in Moore's tone as a register of the difference between the struggling artist and the established one. Still, although Moore's deployments of martial imagery may be more frequently accompanied by disavowals of aggressive intent later in her career, such imagery does continue to play a central role in her work. The drive

for recognition may have been the first, and strongest, but it is not the only, or deepest, motive behind Moore's poetic interest in the struggle for dominance.

The question remains how we might characterize this deeper motive. My sense is that the nexus between private eros and public expression is never more fully visible in Moore's poetry than when she is at her most militantly martial. Moore herself points to this possibility in an unpublished poem titled "Museums" (1918–25), where she writes that "The collection of armor, at / first sight no more than so much hardware, becomes // upon examination, cause for burning speculation."[32] Much critical speculation has been devoted to parsing the meaning of Moore's interest in armor and weapons, from Bonnie Costello's useful survey of the poet's tropes of "internalized combat" to the many fruitful studies that connect Moore's martial writing to particular historical events. Such scholarship has shown, among other things, that there is a good case to be made for Moore as a significant World War I poet.[33] For the purposes of this discussion, though, it is the "burning" nature of Moore's attraction to the accoutrements of war that matters most. To those who complain, with Jarrell, that Moore's work is "entirely divorced from sexuality and power, the bonds of the flesh," one might say that Moore's war poetry *is* love poetry, albeit of a strangely negative kind. Where there is war, there is love: the kind of primal antithesis at work in this claim derives less from critical theory or *marxisant* sociology, which have relatively little to say about love, than from Freudian psychoanalysis, which at the beginning of the twentieth century asserted the centrality of love as lyric poetry once had, but apparently no longer could. In the remainder of this chapter, Freudian thought will be indispensable to my effort to illuminate two moments in Moore's career, one early and one late, in which she tried and, inevitably, failed to make explicit the "cause of burning speculation" embodied in her martial metaphors. The poems that arise out of these exceptional attempts to assert the centrality of love to her writing at once represent a promise that must go unfulfilled and stand as turning points in the development of Moore's poetics of ambivalence.

iv. Moore's Mirror Phase: "Those Various Scalpels"

In 1915, after several years of facing consistent rejection of her work, the then twenty-seven-year-old Moore saw her poems published in quick succession in such prestigious little magazines as *The Egoist*, *Poetry*, and *Others*. At the end of that year, she made a trip into New York City from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where she lived with her mother. During what she called her "sojourn in the whale," she

introduced herself in person to a number of her literary correspondents and also began to establish contacts with the art world in her visits to galleries, including Alfred Stieglitz's 291.[34] From this point onward, Moore's network of contacts rapidly grew more refined and extended, as her list of publications continued to lengthen. Moreover, as soon as she began to sense that there might be a place for her in the world of the moderns, her poems, too, began to grow more refined and extended. Such epigrammatic sallies as "To Be Liked By You" were recognizably modern in their concision, obliquity, and tough-mindedness, but the longer poems that began to appear in 1916 had those crowning qualities of modernist verse: extreme difficulty and strangeness. One of the very strangest of these, 1917's "Those Various Scalpels," was a particular favorite of Moore's peers. Eliot made it the focus of his first piece of writing on Moore's work, and Williams in his *Autobiography* recalls Moore giving a reading of the poem during one of Lola Ridge's ritual gatherings of the modernist tribe.[35] Yet after this first flurry of attention, "Those Various Scalpels" seemed to recede from view. As literary modernism made its way into classrooms and textbooks, this poem that Eliot had singled out as an "excellent example for study" of Moore's characteristic methods was seldom studied or anthologized.

Beginning in the late 1980s, however, "Those Various Scalpels" once again began to attract readers, especially feminist readers.[36] Both the critical neglect of and the renewed interest in the poem may be explained by reference to its anomalous character. Extended descriptions of human figures are relatively rare in Moore's poems to begin with—rare, that is, relative to the many passages and poems devoted to the allegorized animals who tend to displace the human in Moore's thinking and thus in that of her critics—and this poem is the only one in her oeuvre devoted entirely to the description of a female figure. Or is it a female figure? Many of the poem's later readers have raised this question, since the figure bears no definitive mark of sexual difference, nor does Moore "have recourse" here, as Kirstin Hotelling Zona notes, "to a single gendered pronoun."[37] Still, as most of these critics have also observed, the description of the figure does take the form of a *blazon*, the erotically charged enumeration of and elaboration on a series of body parts, traditionally addressed to a woman. The figure's femininity may also be inferred from certain details of its dress, especially the extravagant set of jewels whose description takes up a fifth of the poem. Finally, those seeking extrinsic evidence of the figure's gender have found it in the often-repeated suggestion that "Scalpels" was inspired by the poet Mina Loy, whom Moore first met in 1915. During this initial encounter, Loy, who was on her way to perform in a play by Moore's friend Alfred Kreymborg, was wearing a theatrical getup that included, as

Moore later recalled, "a black Florentine mosaic brooch, long gold earrings and some beautiful English rings" that are certainly reminiscent of the piled-on ornaments of "Scalpels."[38] In the end, though, the poem presents the question of its subject's gender as a problem to be solved by the reader and so has proved to be tailor-made for a certain kind of psychoanalytically informed feminist analysis.

Like the poem's first admirers, feminist critics have been drawn by its complexity and strangeness, by the way Moore's "scalpels" cut against the grain of accepted ways of writing and feeling, norms which for Moore here take on a force that she equates with "destiny." However, these later readers see in the poet's experimental attempt to "dissect destiny" not only an assault on tradition by the individual talent but also a critique of the axiom that anatomy is destiny, a corollary of which is that to become conscious of one's gender is also to know the limits of one's life chances. Hence, although the question of sexual difference, of what distinguishes male from female, is as crucial to this poem as it is to "Marriage," here that question—is this a woman or not?—remains entirely implicit. In "Those Various Scalpels," a series of oppositions may be seen to unfold from this overarching question of gender, much as, in "Marriage," the internal conflict within "this institution," which generates a second term, "enterprise," is traceable to the primal conflict in which Eve splits off from Adam. But by contrast with "Marriage," where Moore lays out the opposed terms that define "this institution" with a programmatic clarity, in "Scalpels" the distinctions between paired terms have a troubling tendency to collapse. The force of something that cannot be said exercises a powerful pull on the language of this poem, working against the central thrust of a poetic mastery that takes the form, as Wordsworth writes, of the power to generate "From manifold distinctions, difference / Perceived in things, where to the common eye / No difference is."[39] As with so much of Moore's work, this poem underwent a series of revisions over the course of its existence; here is the 1924 version, the one with which Moore's peers would have been most familiar.

Those Various Scalpels,

those
various sounds consistently indistinct, like intermingled echoes
  struck from thin glasses successively at random—the
  inflection disguised: your hair, the tails of two fighting-cocks head to head
    in stone—like sculptured scimitars re-
  peating the curve of your ears in reverse order: your eyes,
    flowers of ice

and
snow sown by tearing winds on the cordage of disabled ships: your raised hand,
an ambiguous signature: your cheeks, those rosettes
of blood on the stone floors of French châteaux, with regard to which the
guides are so affirmative:
your other hand

a
bundle of lances all alike, partly hid by emeralds from Persia
and the fractional magnificence of Florentine
goldwork—a collection of half a dozen little objects, made fine
with enamel in gray, yellow, and dragon-fly blue; a lemon, a

pear
and three bunches of grapes, tied with silver: your dress, a magnificent square
cathedral of uniform
and at the same time, diverse appearance—a species of vertical vineyard
rustling in the storm
of conventional opinion. Are they weapons or scalpels? Whetted

to
brilliance by the hard majesty of that sophistication which is su-
perior to opportunity, these things are rich
instruments with which to experiment but surgery is not tentative. Why dissect
destiny with instruments which
are more highly specialized than the tissues of destiny itself?
(*BMM* 103–4)

A scalpel is a precision instrument, albeit one, as Moore will remind us, that tends to draw blood in the process of distinguishing one thing from another. So why then does she describe the "various sounds" to which the scalpels of the title are implicitly compared at the poem's outset as "consistently indistinct"? This initial failure to make sufficiently precise distinctions may stem from the absence, in these opening lines, of a body on which the scalpels might operate or from which the sounds might emanate. In place of a human presence, we find "thin glasses"—the very image of absence—"struck"—by whom?—"successively at random"—that is, without intention. In other words, at this point the poem seems to be missing a subject, in both senses of that word: we can neither tell who is speaking nor what is

being spoken about. Yet despite the absence of these expected referents, Moore twice uses the demonstrative "those," as if these palpably strange scalpels and sounds were things with which we could be supposed to be familiar. David Trotter has identified this sort of use of demonstratives as a typically modernist poetic strategy, one that is intended to create a sense of intimacy between a poet and her potential readers.[40] However, because this intimacy is offered as compensation for discarded poetic conventions that once might have provided writer and reader with a surer bond, this strategy may also underscore the absence of the expected tropes and forms.

This poem's recent interpreters have taken their orientation from the familiar convention of the *blazon*, showing how the *blazon* brings order to Moore's portrait of a lady even as she subjects that order to critical scrutiny. However, these critics all assume that the Petrarchan catalogue begins after the initial colon and so have had trouble specifying the relation between what they take to be the description of the body proper and the "consistently indistinct" scene staged in the poem's opening clause. Insofar as this "seemingly unrelated meditation," as Jeanne Heuving terms it, depicts the place where the body should be as empty, it may indeed be said to stand outside the Petrarchan order, an order that is at once aesthetic and sexual.[41] This place, however, is not utterly empty; rather, it is full of signs of life that are not recognizably human. Or perhaps just not yet recognizably human, since Moore's culminating characterization of the scalpels / sounds / echoes as "the / inflection disguised" would seem to suggest that a human will-to-mean has been present in the scene all along. Then again, this phrase may equally serve to impose a meaning, or notion of the human, where there originally was none. For it is only once we read the phrase "your hair," which is divided from the "inflection" by a colon, that we can be sure that we are dealing with a human being.

On one hand, then, the initial colon seems to mark an absolute break in the poet's thinking; on the other, though, Moore seems to imply that there is a developmental logic at work in the movement from one clause to another. Let us imagine for the moment that the latter is the case, that the whole of the sentence that begins in the title and runs almost to the end of the poem's penultimate stanza describes a single process: thus, from indistinct sounds emerge fragmented body parts that are finally subsumed into a monumentally coherent form, "a magnificent square cathedral of uniform / and at the same time, diverse appearance." In other words, Moore here enacts

> a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of fantasies that extends from a

> fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopedic—and lastly, to the assumption of the armor of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development.[42]

These words are, of course, not Moore's but Jacques Lacan's, describing the movement into and through what he calls the "mirror stage." In Lacan's version of the Freudian developmental narrative, this stage marks the moment when the infant, emerging from the cloud of unknowing in which the borders between her body and the world remain "consistently indistinct," attempts to bring the "the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating [her]"[43] under control by fixating on her own mirror image, which has the coherence that she has heretofore been unable to impose on her internal body-image. As Lacan cautions, though, this coherence is "orthopedic," or premature, since the bounded form in the glass that the child will eventually identify as "I" still shimmers with otherness. At the same time, the relation between the not-yet-self and its other remains unclear: there is at this point no firm distinction in the child's mind between "I" and "you." It may be the "destiny" of this figure to assume "the armor of an alienating identity," as Lacan, using one of Moore's favorite tropes, terms it, with its "rigid structure," its "hard majesty," but the moment has not yet come for that.

I impose this Lacanian scene on Moore's own at the risk of lending the latter a premature coherence, in order to stress that Moore, like Freud and his followers, conceives of the self not as a thing but a process, an endless struggle to make meaning out of unmeaning. In this particular poem, moreover, she may be said to depict this struggle as a losing battle, for "Scalpels" remains haunted to the end by the scene of unmeaning with which it begins. No "I" and "you" ever do fully emerge, for example, in that Moore here abjures not just gendered pronouns, but all personal pronouns. Still, as I note above, what Lacan might call an "anticipation" of coherence does emerge in the second clause with the appearance of the possessive pronoun "your." So there is a subject of this poem, we think, and it is other than the subject who is speaking. And yet: the paired subjects of the next lines are not separate persons, but opposed parts of the same body, which confront one another as if each were the other's transfixing mirror image; thus, "your hair" metamorphoses into "the tails of two fighting-cocks head to head in stone—like sculptured scimitars re- / peating the curve of your ears in reverse order." Where we had hoped to discern difference, we once again find sameness, a redoubled repetition—just as each ear and coil of hair mirrors its counterpart, so the curve of the ears mirrors that of the hair—that reminds us of the "intermingled echoes" of line 2. Visual echoes then give way again to auditory ones in the subsequent

homophonic pairing of "eyes" and "ice," in which we may also hear ghostly echoes of the poem's missing "I's." In Moore's scenario as in Lacan's, then, the order imposed by the mirror image on the not-yet-self's "turbulent movements" proves to be merely provisional, "orthopedic." As this order breaks down, the violence that is already implicit in the "fighting-cocks" and "scimitars" of stanza 1 breaks out in the guise of "tearing winds" which, true to Petrarchan form, sunder the parts of the body one from another and scatter them abroad.[44]

At this point, we come to the third colon; and the speaker and her subject enter a developmental stage, which might be termed differentiation with a vengeance. Moore presents two successive and overlapping—one might say, "echoing"—versions of this process, one tragic, one comic. The tragedy lies in the poet's inability to pry apart erotic impulses from aggressive ones. For as with each successive iteration of "your" the poem's speaker grows more distinct from its subject, the possibility increases that the latter might reveal itself to be the object of the former's affections. The conventional comparisons of the figure's eyes to "flowers" and its cheeks to "rosettes," taken together with the mention of "French châteaux," further suggest that this might be a love poem in the old style. It might, that is, if it were not the case that for Moore, to see eyes as "flowers" is as much as to summon "tearing winds." Likewise, an abrupt enjambment scores "your cheeks, those rosettes / of blood on the stone floors of French châteaux, with regard to which the guides are so affirmative," transforming the symbol of the figure's beauty into the sign of its suffering. Or is it the speaker who suffers? One is reminded of the moment in "Marriage" when that poem's speaker looks at Eve and thinks, "the strange experience of beauty; / its existence is too much; / it tears one to pieces." In these lines as well, it is not clear whether it is the beholder or the beheld to whom beauty presents a danger; and this is in part because the "one" who narrates the poem alternately identifies with Eve and distances herself from her.

Even at those moments when the speaker in "Marriage" identifies with Eve, however, Moore still draws a distinction between the two, while in "Those Various Scalpels," it never becomes clear whether the figure is the speaker's love object or mirror image. Heuving casts an interesting light on this problem when she reads "Scalpels" together with poems by Eliot, Pound, and Williams that ring variations on the Jamesian theme of the "portrait of a lady."[45] Moore's failure in this poem to make a proper distinction between speaker and subject, to establish whether the "lady" in question is in fact "male or female, subject or object, a wielder of scalpels or a victim of weapons,"[46] stands in contrast, Heuving shows, to her male contemporaries' success in distinguishing themselves from their fem-

inine subjects. And this success, she argues, marks a crucial stage in their development as poets, since it is only by establishing his "superiority and wholeness" relative to his lady that the male portraitist "can construct an authoritative stance from which to write" (32). Heuving emphasizes that this construction nonetheless remains unstable; the male moderns' poems are tinged with awareness that the danger both to gender identity and to poetic authority that the lady represents has been evaded, but not defused. Thus far, we agree. Heuving, though, claims that Moore "remains outside this dynamic" through which "the male speaker establishes himself as superior to the woman he addresses" and so attains to a position of literary authority.[47] She assumes, that is, that a certain sort of feminine artist may stand outside the struggle for dominance, whereas it is a premise of the present argument that no such space outside "this institution" exists. My sense is that the crucial difference between Moore and her male peers lies not in her capacity to stand aside from the struggle, but in her compulsion to internalize it. "There never was a war that was / not inward," Moore wrote, at the height of World War II; which is to say, that to have conceived our enemies as being wholly "other" than ourselves is not to have settled the terms of the conflict (*MMCP* 138).

For while in theory the "other" that shadows the "I" may be nothing but a negation, in practice this projection more often takes a feminine, or feminized, form. When all else fails, Moore's fellow portraitists can always break the spell of identification with the lady simply by claiming to belong to the opposite sex. Between Moore and her feminized other, however, there can be no such decisive break. Since the struggle to differentiate oneself from the other is also a struggle for dominance, and since, furthermore, those who "have power" are always to some extent viewed as masculine, Moore's agon with the lady at first looks like a standoff, "two fighting-cocks head to head in stone." But as the thought begins to dawn that differentiation might bring desire in its wake, blood is spilled. Or rather, blood was spilled, at some unspecified moment in the past, about which the "guides" are "affirmative" but curiously inexpressive; for Moore's powerful negation of even the possibility of desire relegates that possibility to the realm of unmeaning, where everything is as yet "consistently indistinct." Even more than the possible disclosure of her split subject's gender, then, it is the disclosure of that subject's desire that awakens a regressive impulse in the poet, the impulse to return to the inchoate state out of which the figure had begun to emerge. Of the many and various names that Freud and his inheritors have attached to this state, the one that has the greatest bearing on my thinking here is "ambivalence."

v. The Poetics of Ambivalence

"Ambivalence" was once a psychoanalytic neologism, but is now commonly used to refer to the state of indecision one enters into when faced with two equally weighted alternatives, or to mixed feelings of love and hate. We are also familiar with the phrase "sexual ambivalence," which refers to an indecisive attitude toward one's own gender identity and/or sexual preference. However, Freud himself traced the sources of this attitude to a phase of our development that precedes the coalescence of anything that might be called an identity. As the consistently indistinct perceptions of the infant begin to take more definite shape, Freud writes, "there is as yet no question of male and female; the antithesis between *active* and *passive* is the dominant one."[48] These paired terms characterize the "two currents which [run] through all sexual life," but they are to be distinguished from their later, more fully sexualized manifestations in one crucial respect. That is, whereas the "question of male and female" is inextricably linked to the establishment of social inequality, in the early stages of the elaboration of "the antithesis between active and passive," "the opposing pairs of instincts are developed to an approximately equal extent."[49] It is specifically because neither activity nor passivity is decisively dominant in the infant's affective makeup that these currents, which drive all subsequent sexual development, are said by Freud to be marked by what he calls "ambivalence."[50]

This primal ambivalence may be said to be the foundation of all disinterestedness, in that it provides a model for an opposition in which neither term of a pair is necessarily dominant. In this respect, ambivalence might be the aesthetic emotion par excellence, a utopian state in which one might see Eve and Adam as equally beautiful, without distress. And yet, there is always anxiety attached to this state, or more precisely, to our depictions of it; since it can be depicted only from the retrospective viewpoint of one who is already fully enmeshed in the interconnected systems of language and gender, which appear (to Wordsworth as much as to Freud) as dependent on the ability to establish and sustain one's sense of "difference."[51] Insofar as the establishment of differences is identified with the establishment of hierarchies—as it is by, say, Lacan, when he portrays our entry into language as conditional on our submission to the Law of the Father—ambivalence poses a threat to our ability to function as communicative and social beings. That is, it presents the threat that the oppositions that structure "this institution" may collapse once again into a state of indifference. However, insofar as such hierarchies are not fixed but dynamic, insofar as our structuring oppositions are not set in stone, but are truly dialectical, the ambivalence that underlies these oppositions

may be said to "represent a promise," in Adorno's sense. An artist like Moore, whose character intersects with the culture in such a way that she finds herself compelled to dwell in and on her own ambivalence, is therefore at once more anxious and more utopian than her more securely differentiated—although necessarily still ambivalent—peers.

The anxiety that pervades "Scalpels" derives, I have suggested, from the not-yet-self's inability to sustain an opposition between the impulses to love, and to aggress against, its not-quite-object. "The relation of hate to objects is older than that of love," writes Freud; therefore every erotic impulse is shadowed by the threat that it may suffer a reversion into its opposite.[52] The more marked by ambivalence our relations are, the greater the threat of this ultimate regression. Moore's failure in this poem to maintain a sufficient internal distance between feelings of love and hate, like the related failure sufficiently to differentiate between the self and an externalized other, thus may be said to be a direct consequence of the poet's commitment to her "special chastity." That is, to avoid "marriage" is to remain ambivalent, and so to court the reversion of love to hate, and of other-directed passion to narcissistic self-enclosure. However, while her ambivalence is clearly a source of suffering for Moore—weapons are designed to kill, and scalpels to heal, yet both "tear one to pieces"—it is also a source of power, in that it enables her to imagine alternative outcomes to the struggle for dominance.

With the utopian bent of such imaginings also comes the potential for comedy. Accordingly, the funniest bit of business in "Scalpels" coincides with the poem's most utopian moment. As in one of those cartoons where a reflection in a mirror behaves as if it had a mind of own, when "your raised hand," which is described simply as "an ambiguous signature," confronts "your other hand," what should be yet another mirror image proves instead to be wholly and extravagantly "other." On the one hand, then—a pun Moore must have anticipated—we find a laconic and "ambiguous" piece of writing, and on the other, "a collection of half a dozen little objects," the obsessively precise description of which fills up one stanza and spills over into the next. Although the very phrase "on the other hand" signals a commitment to rhetorical balance, "the 'message' here" as Bonnie Costello observes, "is that her jewels weigh down her hand just as the details weigh down the sentence."[53] However, whereas Costello claims that Moore's description of the "other hand" is meaningless except as an example of excess, I see in this rhetorical excess also the residue of a process of negation. What Moore negates with her "other hand" is the writing of the poem itself, or rather, she negates the poem *as* writing. For if the staking of "an authoritative stance from which to write" requires of the portraitist that he resolve his ambivalence toward the lady, the intractably

ambivalent writing of Moore can only ever be "ambiguous" at best. The utopian thought concealed in the "little objects" is that nonetheless there might be another language available to the feminine poet—not the severely "restrained" language to which Moore consigns herself in her early poems of opposition, but an extravagant idiom suited to the unambiguous, and unambivalent, celebration of beauty.

The catch, of course, is that this language is composed of objects rather than of words. We have encountered the dream that the feminine poet might find a refuge in the institution of visual art elsewhere in Moore's writing: for example, in "Museums," where the museum is most notably a cache of armor, and in the essay discussed in the previous chapter, in which Moore opposes "that sometimes disparaged, most powerful phase of the anthology, the museum" to "[a]cademic feeling . . . in favor of continuity and completeness," a.k.a. Eliotic "tradition." However, the protection these dream spaces offer invariably remains incomplete: the museum is still "sometimes disparaged," and the suits of armor in "Museums," although "[o]stensibly made to prevent pain," ultimately "defeat the / purpose for which they were invented." Similarly, the museum-quality collection that weighs down the "other hand" only "partly" hides the threatening "bundle of lances," which constitutes the hand itself. Still, by dint of its excessive length, extreme detail, and quasi-encyclopedic range, Moore's list of precious objects creates the effect of a utopian world apart, a dream of the possibility of a pleasure unshadowed by pain.

In revising her work, Moore frequently subjected similarly "excessive" lists, in poems like "An Octopus" and "The Steeple-Jack," to stringent cuts. However, for her *Selected Poems*, published in 1935, Moore actually expanded the list in "Scalpels" to include two more collector's pieces, "sapphires set with emeralds and pearls with a moonstone." These items at once add to the effect of excess and, in their close color valuations, hark back to the "consistently indistinct" sounds that baffle our attempts to establish clear-cut differences between one thing and another. Closely valued colors are a favorite trope of Moore's. They may seem to represent a threat, as in the "fifty shades of mauve and amethyst" that engulf the "acacia-like lady" in "People's Surroundings," or a promise, as in the embroidery in "raw silk—ivory white, snow white / oyster white and six others" that depicts Eden, in "Marriage." However, just as it is difficult to tell ivory white from oyster white, wherever the trope of similar shades appears in Moore's work, it remains difficult to tell threat from promise. This trope is linked to her utopian bent in that the differences between colors may be said to be purely a matter of aesthetic judgment, but insofar as Moore's colors tend to blur into one another, they also represent her tendency, when anxious, to revert to a state of unmeaning.

Ultimately, Moore knows that she can no more write with objects than she can project a possible love object for herself through the process of writing. Her poetry, like her erotic life, is destined to remain peculiarly limited. Nevertheless, even as she relinquishes the dream that the world of objects could offer her a conflict-free refuge from the world of words, she continues to see her ambivalence not only as a limitation but also as a personal and poetic strength. Thus, just as the figure finally seems ready to assume what Lacan calls "the armor of an alienating identity" in the shape of "your dress, a magnificent square cathedral of uniform," the figure's "appearance" is revealed, across the line break, to be at once integral and multiple, "uniform, / and at the same time, diverse." At the beginning of the next clause, the dress grows still harder to bring into focus, turning into "a species of vertical vineyard," a wildly idiosyncratic metaphor that would seem designed to rouse "the storm / of conventional opinion." The extravagance of this image also recalls the attention-getting quality of Loy's theatrical costume, which Moore implicitly associates in her account of their meeting with this poet's much-bruited beauty. In her description of Loy, Moore keeps returning to the subject of her beauty, although it is difficult to tell whether she does so out of attraction or envy; at the same time, it is likely that as a poet Moore at once identified with and felt competitive with this fellow female modern, who was often paired with Moore in the writings of their male peers.[54] Loy, in short, was for Moore the very model of the feminine poet, and her dress, like the dress in "Scalpels," is a metonym for the mixed feelings of attraction, aggression, and identification that attach to such a figure. In "Scalpels," this charged emotional atmosphere threatens the figure's integrity, first in the form of "tearing winds," and later as a "storm." However, unlike the earlier, more manifestly eroticized tokens of the figure's femininity, the dress-as-cathedral is not destroyed by the storm, even if its "rustling" suggests that it is not invulnerable. For a moment at least, Moore holds dialectical opposites, the "uniform" and the "diverse," the monumental and the decorative, in an ideal state of balance.

Like all ideals, though, this one cannot be maintained in its pure state. To join Eliot's "order of existing monuments," at the cost of negating her femininity in the interest of institutional uniformity, or to be dismissed as merely decorative: these are the incompatible alternatives open to the "feminine" poet. That is, she may either be, like Moore, admitted to the canon but "damned by the public for decorum," or like Mina Loy, condemned to have her poetic reputation obscured by the legend of her sexual allure. In light of this dilemma, the poem's speaker's last-ditch effort to repudiate the figure's "sophistication" may be seen as simultaneously compulsive and calculated, as the repression of a never-to-be-expressed desire and the

express choice of a particular kind of poetic career. However, even as Moore takes the side of "destiny" to ward off the suspicion that she might be too closely identified with her subject, she knows, as Zona puts it, that "in its promise of ontological plenitude such 'destiny' is an illusion."[55] Like the figure of "criminal ingenuity" in "Marriage," Moore's sophisticated lady stands for negation as against an illusory plenitude, or "spurious harmony"; but whereas the "criminal" is consigned to the margins of "this institution," in "Scalpels" the lady takes center stage.

vi. The Case for Moore's Late "Love" Lyrics

To the extent that "Those Various Scalpels" may be said to represent a promise of an alternative future for love poetry, a revision of the Petrarchan tradition in which sexual ambiguity and affective ambivalence are regarded by the poet not as obstacles to, but as the conditions of, erotic fulfillment—to this extent, the poem must be viewed as something of a false start. It is a false start, that is, in the context of Moore's career, although another American modernist would shortly claim this project as his own. Langdon Hammer has given us a brilliant account of the way in which Hart Crane's writing "converts the 'negation' under which homosexuality takes its place in culture" into an eroticized "pursuit of boundlessness, a pursuit that overrides the representational means by which identities are conventionally fixed and counted."[56] Insofar as the modern love poem in English might be said to have had a future, it lay in the hands of poets like Crane, W. H. Auden, and Frank O'Hara, for whom "the 'negation' under which homosexuality takes its place in culture" was of urgent interest. Still, in modernist artworks even the "pursuit of boundlessness" must be subject to the "principle of accommodation reduced to a minimum": hence Crane's portrayal of his poems as "Oval encyclicals in canyons heaping / The impasse high with choir."[57] In the face of the impasse thrown up by poetic modernism, Crane did not so much convert negation into boundlessness, as infer the possibility of boundlessness from the fact of negation.

Moore was like Crane in her commitment to the fact of her sexual negation, a commitment that made these two the most difficult of all the poets in their formidably difficult cohort; but while Crane emphasized the utopian boundlessness that is negation's obverse, Moore laid her stress on limitation. Because she explicitly acknowledged the limits placed on her enterprise, as Crane would (or could) not, Moore was rewarded with entrée to key institutions of modernism, such as the Stieglitz circle and *The Dial* magazine, while Crane remained an institutionally marginal figure. Crane's early death by suicide was at least in part the result of his

failure to find, as Moore might say, "a fit gymnasium for action"; and although after death he almost immediately attained canonical status, as with Moore, the place reserved for him has been carefully hedged. Blackmur calls Crane a "great failure," as opposed to Moore, whom he characterizes as a limited success. However, Blackmur could also be describing Moore when he says that "the quality of Crane's success is also the quality of his failure, and the distinction is perhaps by the hair of an accident."[58]

In writing "Those Various Scalpels," then, Moore may be said to have failed to discover a viable language in which to express her erotic desires; or she may be said to have succeeded in affirming the existence of such a language, but only as an indefinitely deferred possibility. In any case, while this "love poem" may be an anomaly in Moore's oeuvre, it is also, by the same token, a manifesto, a grand ascetic gesture. Moore's subsequent success would be founded on the tacit agreement that she would not write love poetry—or at least, that she would write not-love-poetry, that is, a poetry of "armor, weapons, protection, places to hide." This agreement held, more or less, until the death of her mother, Mary Warner Moore, in 1947, thirty years after the writing of "Scalpels."[59] The general consensus among Moore's critics is that her work began to decline precipitously from this point on, although Moore continued to write poetry and prose into her eighties, falling silent only in the year or so preceding her own death, in 1972. While it seems to me undeniable that Moore produced her best work between 1915 and 1936 (the year in which she published the self-consciously nonaggressive "Pangolin"), I would argue that certain of her poems of the late 1940s and early 1950s compel our interest precisely because they represent a return to the project Moore would seem to have abandoned after "Those Various Scalpels." I am joined in this opinion by a few other readers, such as the poet Donald Hall, who writes of two of these later lyrics, "Efforts of Affection" (1948) and "Voracities and Verities Sometimes Are Interacting" (1947), "[i]t interests me that in these two poems and in 'Marriage,' three of Miss Moore's most obscure works, the subject is love."[60] Hall adds that the love in question is "not mothering love, but, one gathers, love between the sexes." However, given that a careful reading of the later poems reveals, as Cristanne Miller notes, a "lack of reference to a heterosexual or even to a two-person relationship," and a concomitant tendency "to disrupt any clear distinction between lover and beloved," it might be best to stick with Hall's first formulation and say simply that their subject is love.[61]

Then again, as we have seen, it can never be quite that simple, since any discussion of Moore's erotic life is complicated by the fact that love tends to appear in her writing under the sign of negation, as what Howard calls an "erotics of

withdrawal" or Blackmur a "special chastity." Nonetheless, in this set of poems, all written in the five years immediately following the death of Mary Warner Moore, the poet does address the fact of her sexual negation with unprecedented directness. Thus, when in "Efforts of Affection," Moore's inner voice protests, "'You know I'm not a saint!'," her interlocutor gently mocks her by referring to the speaker's virtue as her "Sainted obsession." In "Then the Ermine" (1952), which Hall identifies as "one of the last poems [of this period] in which oblique style harbors depth of emotion,"[62] the similarly obsessed speaker's motto is "'rather dead than spotted'." Again, however, this is not merely the language of chastity, but of a "special chastity," one that holds passion in reserve. Hence, at the conclusion of "Ermine," Moore posits that while the language she has devised to express such negated passion, or passionate negation, may have no immediate future,

> Foiled explosiveness is yet
> a kind of prophet,
>
> a perfecter, and so a concealer—
> with the power of implosion;
> like violets by Dürer;
> even darker.
>
> (*MMCP* 161)

Here, as in "Scalpels," Moore connects the unmediated pleasure produced by the art object with the claim to power that derives from her "foiled" sexuality; but now the latter is not merely painful but "explosive," while the former has grown "darker," more intense. The poet's famous restraint is under threat. It may even be seen to give way, in what several critics have pointed to as an exceptional moment, when at the end of "Voracities and Verities Sometimes Are Interacting" (1947), Moore exclaims, with uncharacteristic simplicity, "One may be pardoned, yes I know / one may, for love undying" (*MMCP* 148).

Moore's mother was, in many ways, the love of her life.[63] The poet's father, John Milton Moore, had a nervous breakdown shortly after his daughter's birth and left his family, never to return; Mary Warner Moore brought up Marianne and her brother Warner alone. With the exception of Marianne's semesters at Bryn Mawr and her brief stint working in Lake Placid for Melvil Dewey (of the decimal system), mother and daughter lived together, first in Pennsylvania, and then, from 1918 on, when the poet judged that proximity to New York was crucial to her career, in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Formidably intelligent and upright, Mrs. Moore was both Marianne's staunchest supporter and her fiercest detractor: when Moore's poems

were first published, she wrote to her brother that "Mole [their mother's family nickname] is very much disgusted with me for owning up to them, or at least to consenting to discuss the matter." As the poet struggled to establish herself in the world of the moderns, reports of further instances of "opprobrious attack" on their mother's part were duly forwarded to Warner, whose own moves toward independence consistently met with strong resistance from Mrs. Moore.[64] The obverse of this inward war between mother and daughter, though, was an almost telepathic closeness. In Moore's postscript to her *Selected Poems*, she makes public a claim about her mother that she had often repeated in private, "that where there is an effect of thought or pith in these pages, the thinking and often the actual phrases are hers."[65]

Besides being the chief object of her daughter's affections, then, Mary Warner Moore was also her chief critic and muse; in their relationship, private eros could hardly be separated from public expression. Moore's early attentiveness to the intricate dance of alliance and opposition that moves the world of critics and connoisseurs was a natural outgrowth of her sensitivity to her mother's moods. Conversely, with the end of this most intimate, most ambivalent relationship, the poet also lost a certain sense of intimacy with her public. This change in Moore's sense of vocation was reinforced during this same period by crucial shifts taking place both in her professional life and in the culture at large. In 1949, Moore received the first in what was to be a long series of honorary degrees from colleges and universities; in 1952, her *Collected Poems* won the Pulitzer Prize, the Bollingen Prize, and the National Book Award; and in 1953, she was awarded the Gold Medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. These were personal triumphs, of course, but not just that: the poet was fast becoming what is called "an institution." Most immediately, what Bourdieu might term Moore's "consecration" may be seen as a sign of an overall trend toward the canonization of modernist poetry by a newly powerful literary-academic establishment. However, as I argued in the previous chapter, while from one perspective modern poetry's move into the academy seemed designed to augment its cultural power, from another, that same move looked like a retreat to the cultural margins, as the visual arts ascended to a position of dominance within the institution of art as a whole. Finally, one other factor must be taken into account as we calibrate the shift in Moore's position in mid-century, and that is the degree to which developments internal to the institution of art had begun to be overshadowed by the external threat posed by an ever more diverse and omnipresent array of mass media. We may recall in this connection that "Towards a Newer Laocoon," the essay in which Clement Greenberg announced the triumph of painting over poetry, was conceived as a follow-up to his jeremiad against mass culture, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch."

The struggle between the institution of (high) art and what Greenberg calls "kitsch" and Adorno, "the culture industry," resembles the agon of poetry and painting in that both conflicts mirror a broader social tension between a disinterested but relatively closed professionalism and a mercenary but relatively open market culture. It is not surprising, then, that after the success of the *Collected Poems* brought her a measure of fame, Moore would approach the mass media much as she had the art world. That is, she treated the media complex as a "fit gymnasium for action," managing her appearances in the popular press, and on television and radio, with skill and élan; and at the same time expressed a deep worry about mass culture that is summed up in the title of her 1963 essay "Profit Is a Dead Weight" (*CPr* 568–71). Moore's career as a pop icon has been well-documented: many who have never read a word of her work have heard about the throwing of the ball at the Yankees game, the friendship with Muhummad Ali, the guest shot on the *Tonight Show*. The story of how the uncannily "chaste" modern came to assume a shadow identity as America's favorite spinster aunt has its own interest, but this interest has little to do with poetry as such. Most critics agree that Moore's increasing absorption in "the publicity network," as her biographer Charles Molesworth calls it, was largely responsible for her turn to what Elizabeth Gregory describes as "a radically simplified style that trades subtle parodies and ironies for attempts at straightforward literary mimesis and a new moralistic tone."[66] Gregory herself values "Moore's performance of the 'great' or 'difficult' poet played for a popular audience," on the grounds that it "offered her a new kind of authority."[67] However, the cost of such authority was high; once she abandoned "the principle of accommodation reduced to a minimum," Moore's writing began to go slack. When word and image struggled for dominance in Moore's poems, the opponents were relatively evenly matched, while as between autonomous art and the culture industry, it seems, there could be no real contest.

Or at least, the culture industry was bound to win once the struggle was recast in its own, nondialectical, terms, according to which the possibility of critique that high culture represents must be raised only to be dismissed, over and over again, in favor of the "accessibility to experience" promised, if not always delivered, by mass culture. Before her poetry was reduced to a prop in her "performance of the 'great' or 'difficult' poet for a popular audience," though, Moore would make one last attempt at striking a public stance that would not preclude the possibility of artistic autonomy. In the "love" poems she produced in the immediate aftermath of her mother's death, Moore developed a new form of poetic difficulty, one that reflects a powerful inward turn in response to the growing pressures of publicity. The poetic ideal she aims at is a state in which "efforts of

affection— / attain integration too tough for infraction," in which the force of poetic compression turns the tenderest feelings into a "tough" protective coating (*MMCP* 147): the love lyric *as* armor. Deprived of their primary object, Moore's "efforts of affection" become her chief poetic subject, compelling her to rethink the dialectical relation between "public promises" and "private obligation," between expression and restraint.

vii. Moore's Imperishable Wish: "Armor's Undermining Modesty"

I would nominate "A Face" (1947) as the first of the late lyrics that marry a certain type of "oblique style" to "depth of emotion," and agree with Hall that the last in this series is probably "Then the Ermine"; in between, in order of publication, come "Voracities and Verities Are Sometimes Interacting," "Efforts of Affection," "By Disposition of Angels," "Like a Bulwark," and "Armor's Undermining Modesty." It is the last-mentioned of these that I want to focus on here, both because it seems to me the most fully achieved of the poems in this group and because as its resonant title suggests, "Armor's Undermining Modesty" is a kind of artistic summa, a retrospective assessment of the limits and potential of Moore's martial theme. It has not been much discussed, in part because the late poems are generally neglected, but also because it is unusually difficult, even by Moore's standards. Although Jarrell calls it "one of Miss Moore's best poems," all he can say in support of this judgment is, "I don't entirely understand it, but what I understand I love, and what I don't understand, I love almost better."[68] Hall offers one of the few plausible accounts of this poem, yet nonetheless finds many lines so difficult that he actually claims that "I feel certain that Miss Moore did not know [what she meant] when she wrote them."[69] Even the very strongest reader of the poem thus far, Pamela White Hadas, lists "Armor's Undermining Modesty" under the heading "Three Confusing Poems" (the other two being "Efforts of Affection" and "Then the Ermine").

In a 1964 letter in response to a critic's query about the poem, Moore herself admits that in it, "I seem slow to reduce speculation to explicit statement"—then goes on to do just that, reductively characterizing the poem as "merely a protest against decadence, over-aestheticism and sybaritism: one might say Why not be willing to seem to be trying to do right rather than wrong?"[70] However, by recasting her argument in such black-and-white terms, Moore belies the procedures of the poem itself, which from its oxymoronic title on—how can armor, which is designed to protect, "undermine"?—speaks in a double voice about both ethics

and aesthetics. Hadas describes "Armor" as structured by "opposition between forces (always able to be reduced to male and female) that can never be unified," and as characterized by an "ambivalence of language," which stems from a tension between "the instincts of excess and the instincts of restraint."[71] Hadas believes, moreover, that such structuring oppositions mark Moore's work from the beginning; and clearly, to some extent, this is my view as well. But because Hadas reads Moore's poems without regard for biographical or historical context (her method is wildly, if fruitfully, free-associative), she cannot account for the marked difference in style between the earlier and the later work, and this change in style is, I believe, inextricably linked to a crucial change in Moore's argument.

Margaret Holley traces certain features of Moore's late style to her work on a project that Richard Howard calls both "a labor of mourning" and "the one real blunder Marianne Moore ever made in her literary life."[72] This was the translation of La Fontaine's *Fables*, which Moore took on in 1945 and which absorbed much of her time and energy until 1954, when the book was published, to unenthusiastic reviews. As Howard implies, Moore's version of the *Fables* is fatally overworked because it is an act of mourning, or rather, of melancholia, a refusal to accept her mother's loss. And yet, the excesses that mar Moore's translation can be curiously effective when transferred to the context of the lyrics. I am thinking in particular of the way in which, as Holley describes it, Moore's attempts to reproduce in her translation the "readily available close rhyme" made possible by the consistent suffixes in French leads to the appearance in her own poems of "chain[s] of abstractions with echoing suffixes."[73] Where such echo effects occur—think of "efforts of affection— / attain integration too tough for infraction," "Voracities and Verities," "Dürer" and "darker"—words blur into one another, like closely valued colors, testing the reader's powers of distinction. Although Holley briefly mentions "Armor's Undermining Modesty" as an instance of "the difference in sound" typical of what she calls "the fable years," she does not discuss the poem's last two stanzas, which contain perhaps the densest and most sustained example of this typical sound pattern. In the stanzas that precede these final ones, Moore has been discussing "those familiar / now unfamiliar knights who sought the Grail." These figures represent the poet's ethical ideal in that "[t]hey did not let self bar / their usefulness to others who were/different," and yet the armor that is a symbol of their self-effacement is also a sign of their potential for violence, since "Mars is excessive / in being preventive." As the poem draws to a close, then, Moore considers whether it is possible to reconcile the knights' desire to be open to others with their instinctive recourse to what the poet elsewhere calls "that weapon, self-protectiveness" (*BMM* 70).

I should, I confess,
like to have a talk with one of them about excess,
and armor's undermining modesty
instead of innocent depravity.
A mirror-of-steel uninsistence should countenance
continence,

objectified and not by chance,
there in its frame of circumstance
of innocence and altitude
in an unhackneyed solitude.
There is the tarnish; and there, the imperishable wish.

(*MMCP* 152)

In Moore's high modernist verse, where rhyme appears it is, Holley notes, "not available to the ear alone."[74] That is, one must see Moore's rhymes before one can hear them, as when, in "Scalpels," one begins to see that the single-syllable words suspended at the top of each stanza all rhyme, after a fashion, with the end-words of the eighteen-syllable lines that follow them—those/echoes, and/hand, a/Persia, pear/square, to/su-. Holley calls these "inaudible" rhymes, but it might be more accurate to say they are repressed, since they can be retrieved, but only with conscious effort. In a poem like "Those Various Scalpels," then, the sensual pleasure of rhyme, which is connected to sexual pleasure in that it involves a felicitous pairing-off, is not so much denied by Moore as it is deferred. By contrast, in a poem like "Armor's Undermining Modesty," the rhymes, while excessively audible, are not conventionally pleasurable; or rather, they offer the reader a pleasure that might be available if Moore were writing in French. As in "Scalpels," a poetic excess signals the presence of the wish that there might exist another language in which the poet could express, or as she says here, "confess," her desires. However, whereas in the earlier poem this ideal language takes the rebus-like form of a collection of objects, here it appears as a ghostly echo, an "other" that lodges in the words themselves. In both the early and the late work, the appearance of the "other" is attended by a breakdown of distinctions. Weapons and scalpels, though, are difficult to tell apart because they are similar *things*—as a linguist would say, they are related on the level of the signified; whereas "countenance" and "continence" are difficult to tell apart because they are similar *words*, related on the level of the signifier.

"In language there are only differences," Ferdinand de Saussure famously observes; words are distinguished one from the other only through a system of

oppositions, whereby each word is recognizable only in terms of what it is not. However, Saussure adds, "the statement that everything in language is negative is true only if the signified and signifier are considered separately"; once you combine signified and signifier, you get "a positive fact," language as a communicative medium.[75] When Moore forges a "chain of abstractions with echoing suffixes" like the one that binds together the concluding stanzas of "Armor's Undermining Modesty," she is playing at decoupling signifier from signified, and so at recovering the negative dimension of language. "Once," she tells us near the beginning of the poem, "self-determination / made an ax of a stone / and hacked things out with hairy paws. The consequence—our mis-set / alphabet" (*MMCP* 151). The poet knows that there is no going back before this mythical moment when language fell into existence as "a positive fact." Nevertheless, at the poem's end, this "hacked out" reality gives way once more to the dream of a return to an "unhackneyed solitude," a prelapsarian state akin to the one in which Adam subsisted before the advent of Eve.

"For the compositions which Miss Moore intends," William Carlos Williams wrote in 1925, "each word should first stand crystal clear with no attachments"; in fact, "Miss Moore" he said, "gets great pleasure from wiping soiled words or cutting them clean out . . . taking them bodily from greasy contexts."[76] As Williams's language here implies, there is a strong connection in Moore's mind between the wish that poetic language might be restored to an original purity and the idea of sexual purity. This long-standing connection between Moore's aesthetics and her "special chastity" seems to be the subject of the "Armor's" first four stanzas. However, as Hall says of the late love lyrics more generally, the poet's rigorous "suppression of the copula" between thoughts here is designed to obscure such connections.[77] That is, the transitions between thoughts, especially in the first half of this poem, are not the hairpin dialectical turns that test the reader's wits in so much of Moore's earlier work, but are closer to free associations in the Freudian sense, with one crucial difference: as Moore, the mistress of the unaccidental omission, well knows, the unconscious of the text lies not in the mind but in other texts.

Given "Armor's" retrospective character, many of the texts that lie behind this text are Moore's own. Hadas, intuiting this, interprets "Armor" largely by reference to earlier poems by Moore. For example, she elucidates the poem's enigmatic first lines,

> At first I thought a pest
> must have alighted on my wrist.
> It was a moth almost an owl,
> its wings were furred so well,

> with backgammon-board wedges interlacing
> on the wing—

by connecting them to those lines in "Marriage" in which Eve irritably describes her suitor as "'This butterfly, / this waterfly, this nomad / that has "proposed to settle on my hand for life" .'" Meanwhile, the gorgeousness of the moth's wing, "like cloth of gold in a pattern / of scales with a hair-seal Persian / sheen," reminds Hadas of both the "Persian miniature of emerald mines" that the speaker in "Marriage" associates with Adam's "distressing" beauty, and the beauty of the butterfly that attracts the Moore-ish "nymph" in a 1935 poem, "Half-Deity."[78] These glosses lead her to conclude that the "tension" in these lines "is that between the desire to own and appreciate the beauty of the 'pest' and the desire to kill it for its presumption, its trespassing on one's hand."[79] In "Armor" as in "Those Various Scalpels," that is, the possibility of love is shadowed as it emerges by its potential reversion to hate.

Hadas also relates Moore's use of the word "Persian" here to some of the many other references to Persian art that occur in the poems.[80] The poet feels an "ambivalent attraction," Hadas writes, to this "art of religious sensuality," which represents an "obvious luxury" that clashes with Moore's sense that "things of the spirit should be spare."[81] In other words, Persian-ness stands in Moore's poems for an aesthetic ideal that is at once enhanced and compromised by its association with precious materials, as in the "cloth of gold" here, or the "emeralds from Persia" that grace the "other hand" in "Those Various Scalpels." Moore is also, I would add, attracted to such objects by virtue of their being works of visual art, although visual art of a particular kind. For the ambivalent mix of greedy desire and disinterested aesthetic pleasure that Persian art provokes in Moore derives, I think, from her consciousness of the fact that in it (as in Chinese art, which plays a similar role elsewhere in Moore's work) words and images often appear in combination with one another. Moreover, just as the images in Persian miniatures have a narrative function, so the writing has a decorative component: each element in itself combines the literary and the visual. Persian art thus arouses in Moore a longing for a once "familiar, now unfamiliar" moment in the past when image and word, desire and disinterestedness, were not yet mutually exclusive.

It may be this thought that leads Moore, in the lines in "Armor" that follow the opening description of the moth, to speculate on the origins of the alphabet. Again, the copula between thoughts is missing in the poem proper. However, if we turn to Moore's notes to the poem, we find that these lines contain an altered version of a phrase from *The 26 Letters*, a popular history of the alphabet.[82] If we were then to turn to this text behind the text, we would see that its author, Oscar Ogg, places a

strong emphasis on the pictographic origins of written language. He does so, moreover, not only in explicitly argumentative terms but also in terms of the book's design, composing pages that combine text and image in unexpected ways, and presenting letters and words as images—much as Moore does, when in "When I Buy Pictures," she includes among her "pictures" "the literal biography perhaps / in letters standing well apart upon a parchment-like expanse" and "the snipe-legged hieroglyph in three parts." This Moore-ish trope of the coupling of word and image may also be said to be secreted in the line that follows the ones about the alphabet, which reads, "Arise for it is day," since if we turn once again to Ogg's book, we find that this phrase, together with an image of "a sleeping man awakened by the rising sun," formed the printer's mark of John Day, a sixteenth-century publisher who helped to introduce roman type to England.[83]

Curiously, although Moore does provide a note for this line as well, she identifies "Arise for it is day" only as "Motto of the John Day Company," without crediting Ogg. Might this omission signal that yet another text lies behind this one? Laurence Stapleton offers a potential clue when she refers in passing to the biblical sources of Moore's armor in this poem, one of which is Romans 13:12, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."[84] Which brings us back, as Hall might predict, to "the subject of love": for the day into which one awakens in this chapter is the knowledge that "love," as St. Paul says twice, "is the fulfilling of the law." In the saint's sermon, however, as in Moore's poem, this love whose symbol is armor is, Paul emphasizes, a chaste love, not "for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." "No wonder we hate poetry, / and stars and harps and the new moon," Moore angrily declares toward the end of "Armor's" third stanza; since for her the poetic language of love is always already impossibly "hackneyed," which in the context of this poem means not only "overused," but also "soiled" by its association with accepted ways of loving. "If tributes cannot be implicit," the poet continues,

> give me diatribes and the fragrance of iodine,
> the cork oak acorn grown in Spain;
> the pale-ale-eyed impersonal look
> which the sales-placard gives the bock beer buck.
> What is more precise than precision? Illusion.

A beer poster (Moore's note identifies it as "Poster unsigned, distributed by Eastern Beverage Corporation, Hammonton, New Jersey") might seem at first glance a poor substitute for a poetry of "stars and harps and the new moon" even at its most degraded. Yet like Persian art, modern advertising combines word and image

in such a way that each takes on some of the properties of the other. Moreover, in their strange objectivity these thing-like words and semaphoric things have something of the "impersonal" quality so valued by the makers and consumers of modernist art. At the same time, though, this sales-placard is also, like Moore's Persian luxuries, designed to awaken desires of the darker sort.

Even at its most "implicit," in other words, beauty arouses an intolerable ambivalence in Moore. And so, the much-cited line "What is more precise than precision? Illusion" at once brings the reflections on aesthetics that preoccupy Moore in the first half of the poem to a striking close and marks a shift in the terms of her argument. It is at this point that she turns to the subject of "Knights we've known," who are the bearers of the poem's ethical message. As such, though, the knights must first slough off the last traces of the merely beautiful, appearing, as they once did in the "familiar, now unfamiliar" past, as "*ducs* in the old Roman fashion / without the addition / of wreaths or silver rods, and armor gilded / or inlaid." And with that ascetic gesture, Moore begins in earnest, as I phrase it above, to play at recovering the negative dimension of language, a realm of "various sounds consistently indistinct" that is always already lost in the "familiar, now unfamiliar" past. The dialectic between word and thing is henceforward displaced in this poem by the form of negation that appears when "the signifier and signified are considered separately." With this displacement, moreover, comes not only a shift in the poem's sound pattern but also a shift in vocabulary, from the concrete to the abstract. For on the level of the signifier, the negative character of language, the purely differential relation between, say, "continence" and "countenance," is relatively easy to grasp. It is harder, though, to pry apart meaning and referent, to grasp that the difference between "weapons" and "scalpels" is not, as I have said, mistakenly, a difference between "things," but a difference between concepts. The more abstract the word, however, the easier it is to conceive of its meaning as emerging from a series of oppositions between concepts; hence the uncharacteristically high quotient of abstract nouns in Moore's poems of the "fable years."

The speaker in "Armor's Undermining Modesty," unlike the one in "Those Various Scalpels," is identified in the very first line as "I," and at the poem's exact midpoint, Moore introduces its second subject, "those familiar / now unfamiliar knights." In the poem's last lines, though, these human referents are completely subsumed in a chain of abstractions, the putative subject of which is a "mirror-of-steel uninsistence." To an extent, then, the end of "Armor" may be said to resemble the beginning of "Scalpels," in that both baffle our efforts to locate a human presence that would help to orient us in poetic space. In the later poem, however, things have taken a linguistic turn. Thus, whereas, in "Scalpels," Moore describes

the echoing "sounds" that take the lady's place, in "Armor," the echoes emanate from the words themselves. "Scalpels" begins with a tense opposition between paired body parts, while "Armor" ends with a set of closely related conceptual antitheses—"excess" / "continence," "modesty" / "depravity," "not by chance" / "circumstance." In the earlier poem, while initially, the internal divisions that rend the body are "consistently indistinct," they eventually take the relatively explicit form of an opposition between "signature" and "object." In the later one, the crucial opposition between signifier and signified must remain implicit.

The opposition is nonetheless palpable, as Moore places heavy stress on the negative dimension of language on both levels, setting ear-filling echoes against mind-bending abstractions. This clash between signifier and signified is one of the two main sources of the poem's notorious difficulty (the other being the "suppression of the copula" that forces us to make speculative leaps, particularly in the poem's first half), but Moore's intention is not merely to test the reader's endurance. When she stresses the division between this poem's linguistic levels, she is also pointing to a distinction between its aesthetic and moral registers. These two expressive registers must retain a degree of relative autonomy, but their capacity to signify depends on our also being able to perceive the way in which they are linked. On one level, then, the concluding lines of "Armor" hold out the promise of a "pure" pleasure that is lost in translation; while on another, they offer the prophetic vision of a world in which the conflicting claims of "modesty" and "depravity"—decorum and desire, law and freedom—might be not so much reconciled, as fully recognized, in all their dialectical force. "There is the tarnish," that we have fallen into a world in which differences entail inequalities, "and there, the imperishable wish," that because such differences remain in some sense purely negative, we can still find words in which to suggest that difference may yet prove compatible with equality. Of course, both iterations of the ostensive "there" point to the same location, the poem itself, the armor/mirror that both conceals and reflects the poet's deepest wish.

The linguistic turn that Moore takes at the end of this poem may be seen, as I suggest above, as a turn inward, away from the culture of the commodity that once merely tempted the poet to imagine what it would be like to "buy pictures," but later threatened to draw her deep into the sphere of publicity, where she would be induced to sit for portraits of the artist as a bock beer buck. At such moments of maximum recalcitrance in the late "love" lyrics, Moore's poetry can still represent an institution that is at once unitary and divided from within, although the old opposition between word and image no longer provides an adequate model for this split, but must be supplemented by the evocation of a conflict internal to

language as such. I do not, however, mean to imply that this shift in focus represents some sort of return or retreat on Moore's part to the literary fold. The echoes that reverberate through these poems do not sound the soothing note of "tradition"; like Moore's "knights," they are "familiar / now unfamiliar," transposed into a language that we should, yet do not, understand. "What is more precise than precision?" asks the poet who once called herself a "precisionist," who could trace for us every line on a moth's wing. Her answer, "Illusion," once again brings her close to Bourdieu, who speaks of "the *illusio*, the collective belief in the game and the value of its stakes, which is both the condition and the product of the functioning of the 'literary mechanism.'"[85] For Moore, the game was almost up. The hermeticism of a poem like "Armor's Undermining Modesty" signals the poet's withdrawal from the peculiar public/private space of the institution of art, a withdrawal that was soon succeeded by her final move into the sphere of publicity. In order to sustain the necessary dialectic between "public promises" and "private obligation," Moore would have had to have been able to go on writing in a language that had become foreign to her.

But "foiled explosiveness is yet / a kind of prophet." Moore's poems of the late 1940s and early 1950s may mark for her the end of a line, but the position that was shaped for and by her had begun to look, around just this time, like a plausible starting point to a number of younger artists and writers. These included not only such candidates for the position of token woman as Sylvia Plath and Elizabeth Bishop but also men like Joseph Cornell and John Ashbery, who saw themselves in Moore insofar as their sexual otherness would entail both institutional homelessness and an aesthetics of negation. Although the full story of Moore's legacy cannot be told without attention to Plath and, especially, Bishop, it is Cornell and Ashbery who figure most prominently in the succeeding chapters.[86] This is in part because their career trajectories will allow me to hew close to the plot of the shifting relations between poetry and the art world; but also because these two share with Moore an unusually high tolerance for the cramped conditions of the "steep, too strict" space that houses the other within the self. To linger with "'This otherness, this / 'Not-being-us,'" as Ashbery calls it, is not merely to embrace negation. It is also to establish the imaginative preconditions for a more just relation between the imperial self, whose "excessive" armor attests to both to its capacity for love and potential for violence, and "others who were/different."

3. An Inconsequential Past: Joseph Cornell after Marianne Moore

The June 1946 issue of *Dance Index*, a magazine published in association with Ballet Society, a company directed by George Balanchine prior to the establishment of the New York City Ballet, was one of several guest-edited by the artist Joseph Cornell.[1] Actually, "edited" does not quite describe Cornell's intervention. Rather, as the magazine's founder (and Ballet Society's and, subsequently, the NYCB's co-director) Lincoln Kirstein put it in his first-page "Comment":

> Mr. Cornell has a very special gift: the energy for collection, juxtaposition and contrast. For him, the inconsequential past is neither frivolous nor dead. . . . Many amateurs love the vaguely preposterous past, but few pursue it with the affectionate surgery and relentless skill of Joseph Cornell. He is brother to the scientist who recreated a whole pre-historic age from the glimpse of a dinosaur's tooth.

Which is to say, the issue consists, like all of Cornell's art, of found materials selected and arranged in such a way as to maximize the pathos that attaches to them by virtue of their seeming to have been, to quote Kirstein again, "completely lost. Only now we find they are merely sleeping, waiting for him to surprise them back into life."[2] Among the fragments of texts, quaint engravings, and scratched photographs, however, one item stands out by virtue of its newness, an essay expressly commissioned for the issue by Cornell from his friend Marianne Moore.

What is it about Moore that moves Cornell to make an exception here to his usual practice of relying on secondhand materials? I suspect that Cornell intended us to ask this. For behind this highly specific question, I will show, lies the more general one of the place that the poet holds in the artist's imaginative universe. And ultimately, behind that question lay what was for Cornell the still more pressing one of his own place within the world of art. Of course, Cornell's work for *Dance Index* was conducted, not under the auspices of the art world in which he had begun to forge the rudiments of a reputation, nor within the confines of the literary world in which Moore's reputation was by then well-established, but in the context of Kirstein's quixotic effort to recast that quintessential remnant of the "inconsequential past," the romantic ballet, as a major mid-twentieth century art form.[3] The position of Kirstein and Balanchine's ballet within the institution of modern art is as anomalous in its way as the position of Moore's writing within Cornell's collage. Ballet is not only an anachronism, the last gasp of court culture, "Ballet," as Balanchine famously declared, "is woman," and as we have seen, the arrival of "woman" tends to signal the opening of a breach in the "completeness and continuity" of art as an institution.[4] Moreover, when Kirstein characterizes Cornell as a particular sort of "amateur," he points to a contradiction at the heart of his own project. Even as he worked to create the institutional infrastructure that would bring Balanchine's ballet up to professional standards, that is, Kirstein himself continued to think of the ballet as in some special sense the province of amateurs. The position that Kirstein and Cornell have marked out for themselves is thus devalued three times over, as feminine, as amateur, and as destined to be "lost" among the flotsam of "the inconsequential past," rather than preserved among the monuments that constitute "tradition."

And yet this position is not merely abject, just as Moore's presence in Cornell's collage—by which, Kirstein takes care to note, "Mr. Cornell and *Dance Index* are particularly honored"—is not merely anomalous. Something must offer to fill the breach that repeatedly belies modern art's appearance of impregnable autonomy. Kirstein's and Cornell's projects were conceived at a moment when this task took on a particular urgency, the mid-century interregnum after Greenberg had announced the triumph of painting over poetry, but before painting's dominance had in fact been fully established. When neither word nor picture can be judged decisively to dominate the artistic scene, the adequacy of either to serve as the supreme representative of autonomous art comes into question. Therefore, like Moore's "anthology," which is never quite at home in either the institution of literary or of visual art, both Cornell's boxes and Kirstein's ballet are situated in the no man's land between word and image. Almost every writer on Cornell notes the

distinctive way in which "[t]he Cornell box, with its fragments of printed materials, and its enumerations of suggestive objects, maintains a tension between the verbal and the visual."[5] In the case of ballet, this tension is wrought to an exceptionally high pitch since, as Kirstein observes, "Dancing to be recalled communicatively, requires either word or picture. Neither can create a complete recapture of vanished movements, but each complements the other toward a more comprehensive seizure of the lost act."[6] Kirstein simultaneously gestures at the possibility of "a complete recapture of vanished movements," and signals its impossibility: word and picture may combine only to re-enact the *failure* to seize the lost act. Yet the dance historian's failure to find a medium adequate to his aims is, again, not merely abject. When we believe that a given art is adequate to the "complete recapture" of life we may turn away from life, content, but the suspicion that that art may not be autonomous enough will keep us turning back to life (or to another art, which we mistake for life). And where autonomy ends, critique may begin.

Kirstein's institution and Cornell's art, then, are formed under the pressure of the question that arises at their century's midpoint, as to what is to become of modernism. Whereas this pressure drives Greenberg to announce that "there can be such a thing as a dominant art form," Kirstein and Cornell take advantage of a moment when power hangs in the balance between word and image to register their ambivalence about such an equation of the realm of art with that of power politics. Whereas the question of art's future leads Greenberg to adopt a prophetic tone, it turns modernists against the grain like Kirstein and Cornell in the direction of "the vaguely preposterous past." As token woman, Moore is a reminder of the ambivalence that underlies all relations of dominance, and as one suspended between "academic feeling" and "the museum," she may play the role of emissary between modernism's past and its future. Thus, Kirstein and, especially, Cornell saw her as preparing the way for an institution, and an artistic practice, that could honor art's autonomy in the breach rather than the observance.

i. Elephants and Divas: Cornell's Position, Modernism's Impasse

The theme of the Moore–Cornell *Dance Index* is the circus, like the ballet a disreputable and archaic arts institution out of which self-styled modernist outsiders from D. H. Lawrence to Marsden Hartley salvaged the dream of finding a home for their homeless aesthetic.[7] The subject of Moore's piece is the elephant ballet choreographed in 1942 by Balanchine to music by Stravinsky for the Ringling

Brothers–Barnum & Bailey Circus—a "vaguely preposterous" (to borrow another phrase from Kirstein) event if there ever was one. By commissioning Moore to review Balanchine's big-top experiment, Cornell tightens the connection between the ballet, the circus, and the modernist imagination loosely suggested in his choice of theme. Perhaps incidentally, he also thereby reminds the readers of *Dance Index* that the project of making Balanchine's art at home in America (a project in which the magazine itself, as an organ of publicity and provider of scholarly legitimacy, played a small but essential part) was far from complete. Until the end of the 1940s, Kirstein was still struggling to build the school, the theater, and the audience that Balanchine's work required to thrive; in the meantime, the choreographer took on a fair amount of pop-culture piecework in order to survive, crafting dances for Hollywood films and Broadway musicals.[8] The elephant ballet looks less peculiar in the context of Balanchine's other jobs-for-hire, without ceasing to share the "vaguely preposterous" quality of such modernist appropriations of frivolous and moribund materials.

Cornell knew Moore to be an avid circus-goer and knew also that elephants were among the most significant figures in her menagerie. They make striking appearances in such poems as "The Monkeys," "Poetry," and "Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle," and are the subjects of "Diligence Is to Magic as Progress Is to Flight," "Black Earth," and "Elephants," from *Nevertheless* (1944), a copy of which the poet gave to Cornell. With its thick skin, "fibred over like the shell of / the cocoanut" and paradoxically "delicate," "columbine-tubed trunk," the elephant represents for Moore the simultaneous promise and inefficacy of art to defend the artist against criticism, a.k.a. "scarecrows / of aesthetic procedure." Elephant skin, like Moore's deliberately rebarbative poetry, is a kind of armor, "that on which darts cannot strike decisively the first // time"; but after that? The poet's fear is that despite her claim to be classed among "such of those / tough-grained animals as have outstripped man's whim to suppose / them ephemera," the critics will still consign her work to the trash heaps of the inconsequential past.[9]

Once thrust into the role of elephant-critic, Moore is therefore particularly sensitive to the possibility that the "routine" that Balanchine has devised for Ringling's animals may leave them vulnerable to ridicule. "Routine is the carefully right word," she insists, "since an elephant is graceful when doing things it could not do if not taught to do them, and is enhanced by a skirt as the grace of a venerable live oak would be enhanced by a skirt."[10] Moore is ambivalent about the modernist routine, which goes against the "venerable" elephant's grain, yet brings out its "grace," and is still more critical of the creature's feminine trappings, which she sees as vaguely preposterous. On another occasion, though, "when asked about

[a famous female] elephant's appearance," Moore described such trappings with the precision that was for her the surest sign of approbation. This elephant, she recalled, "was very simply dressed. She was powdered a matte rose all over, and wore ankle bracelets, large copper hollow balls, on her front legs. Her headdress consisted of three white ostrich plumes."[11] Like the feminine accoutrements of the figure in "Those Various Scalpels," such tokens of the elephant's "sophistication" simultaneously attract and repel the poet. On one hand, Moore seems to wish that the creature might remain both untrained and unmarked as to its gender. On the other, she knows that the outfit and the routine gain the elephant an audience, and, to the extent that this audience is attracted by the Stravinsky–Balanchine connection, a sophisticated one at that. From the sidelines, Moore feels the critic's temptation to dismiss the act as ephemeral; but at the same time, since she is herself a reluctant participant in the routines of femininity and of modernism, she also feels the impulse to shield her animal counterpart from the critic's darts.[12]

Moore's fear of being deemed ephemeral must have resonated with Cornell, who frequently referred to his own art as a "metaphysique d'ephemera" (*sic*).[13] This "metaphysics" arises out of the conflict between the artist's attraction to devalued materials and his impulse to revalue them, between, to cite a fragmentary phrase from Cornell's diary, the "humble nature of these neglected documents and the unsuspected treasure waiting to be revealed, discovered afresh."[14] To a certain extent, then, the artist may be said to have solicited Moore's review in order to play out a rescue fantasy, classing Moore's writing with the rest of his ephemera so that he may save it from neglect. At that point in their careers, however, it was Moore, then nearing the height of her considerable fame, who was actually in a position to help Cornell, sixteen years the poet's junior and as yet known only to a small, if select, group of art world insiders. By the mid-1940s, Cornell could number among his supporters the artists Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Dorothea Tanning, Matta and Robert Motherwell, as well as Julien Levy and Peggy Guggenheim, who showed Cornell's work at their galleries; and yet, when Cornell applied for a Guggenheim Foundation grant in 1945, he wrote to Moore that a letter of recommendation from her "would be signally helpful, for those in the galleries most familiar with my work I have found are not ones whose opinions carry far with the Guggenheim committee."[15] In other words, in 1945, literary prestige still trumped the credit to be garnered in even the most rarified precincts of the art world. Moore may have feared that her hold on her place in the culture might prove tenuous, but from Cornell's perspective, her position appeared to be an enviable one. To "rescue" Moore, then, was also to defend a position to which he might hope to succeed.

However, before he could conceive of taking Moore's place, as it were, the artist first had to find a way of traversing the distance between the poet's sphere and his own. By 1946, Moore and Cornell had long had many friends in common, but it was not until 1943 that their friendship began, or rather, was engineered with some difficulty, by the avant-garde impresario Charles Henri Ford. Ford began as a poet but became better known as the co-editor, with Parker Tyler, of *View* magazine, which began as a literary broadsheet but rapidly turned into a slickly produced showcase for surrealist art.[16] In 1943, Ford and Tyler invited Moore to contribute to an issue of *View* that was to be guest-edited by Cornell. She declined, but on seeing the issue expressed her admiration for one of Cornell's contributions to the magazine to Ford, who reported the remark to Cornell, prompting the artist to send Moore an elaborate letter-collage strewn with visual and verbal allusions to her writings, together with some beautifully illustrated volumes of natural history. This act of homage elicited an equally elaborate thank-you note, in which Moore protested that "[t]he pleasure given me by work of yours at the Museum of Modern Art, and the Julien Levy Gallery when it was on Madison Avenue are so great a gift it is scarcely just that these present gifts could be added."[17] Moore's familiarity with Cornell's work must have been encouraging to him not only in itself but also as a sign of her intimacy with the art world. For several years after this initial exchange—years during which Cornell intensified his efforts both to codify his artistic methods and to establish his professional reputation—the artist assiduously pursued his connection with the poet through a series of similar letters and gifts, supplemented by the occasional visit. Meanwhile, in 1944, Moore published an essay on Pavlova in *Dance Index*, inspiring Cornell to strengthen their connection through yet another mutual acquaintance, Kirstein, who had come to know the poet in the early 1930s, when he sought her work for publication in *Hound and Horn*, the little magazine he started while still at Harvard.

In short, Cornell's fantasy of someday occupying Moore's position was incited by her literary prominence and abetted by Ford and Kirstein who, in their shift away from the literary sphere and toward what they saw as more promising cultural arenas, came to bridge his world and hers. Still, while Moore's fame and relative accessibility may have fueled Cornell's dreams of success, what makes his idea of taking her place a fantasy in the Freudian sense, a product of the unconscious and not just an ambitious daydream, is the extent to which he conceived this place as reserved for a feminine artist. In Cornell's fantasy, we may say, to conceive of himself as an artist is to conceive of himself as a woman. If one were to plot out the key coordinates on Cornell's Bourdieuvian map of potential positions, one would find a disproportionate number of places occupied by woman friends

and colleagues, from Mina Loy (whom Cornell met in her role as factotum to her son-in-law, gallerist Julien Levy) and Dorothea Tanning, to Carolee Schneeman and Allegra Kent. In the sealed-off fantasy world of the boxes, this proportion shifts still further: all but a few of the artist figures featured in Cornell's art itself are female. With some notable exceptions such as Emily Dickinson and Susan Sontag, however, the subjects of such portraits-of-the-artist are not creative artists but performers, the actresses, opera divas, and ballerinas to whom Cornell dedicated dozens of boxes and "dossiers," at once research for works of art and ends in themselves, from the mid-1930s onward.

Of Cornell's attitude toward these performers, his biographer Deborah Solomon says that "it was unclear whether the objects of his longing were the women he worshipped or the women he wanted to be."[18] The uncertainty of Cornell's position vis-à-vis the ballerinas and divas, his oscillation between wanting to be and wanting to have these women, is expressed in the formal irresolution of much of the work that centers on them. Where actual images of the artistes appear in the collages and boxes, for example *Hommage à Tamara Toumanova* (1940), in which the Balanchine star floats among pastel flowers and butterflies, and *A Pantry Ballet (For Jacques Offenbach)* (1942), with its chorus line of tutued lobsters, prettiness and whimsy tend to reign. (The artist has greater aesthetic success with boxes in which the performer is not seen, but only alluded to, such as *L'Égypte de Mlle. Cléo de Mérode Cours Élémentaire D'Histoire Naturelle* [1940], and *Taglioni's Jewel Casket* [1940], the latter of which I discuss at this chapter's end.) Other of Cornell's efforts in this vein never do crystallize into works of visual art proper, remaining instead in the form of the quasi- or mock-scholarly archives and monographs that the artist variously referred to as "dossiers" or "explorations" or "romantic museums." Although such eccentrically organized assortments constitute a significant part of Cornell's oeuvre overall, and play an especially important role in his thinking about the female performers, they have proven difficult both to categorize and to display. Materials from Cornell's files on the nineteenth-century opera singers Maria Malibran and Julia Grisi, for instance, were eventually distilled into two privately printed pamphlets, *Maria* (1954) and the *BEL CANTO PET* (1955), while his massive dossier on the nineteenth-century ballerina Fanny Cerrito, called *Portrait of Ondine* (c. 1940–late 1960s), "began as an album, moved into a suitcase, made a public appearance in a shadow box and wound up (but did not end) in [a] lidded paperboard slipcase," which contains, among other things "[e]xcerpts from nineteenth-century books (sometimes bound, sometimes loose), nineteenth-century watercolors of Naples, Kodachrome postcards of New York, European maps, a Cerrito autograph, and drafts of explanatory notes" (see figure 3.1).[19]

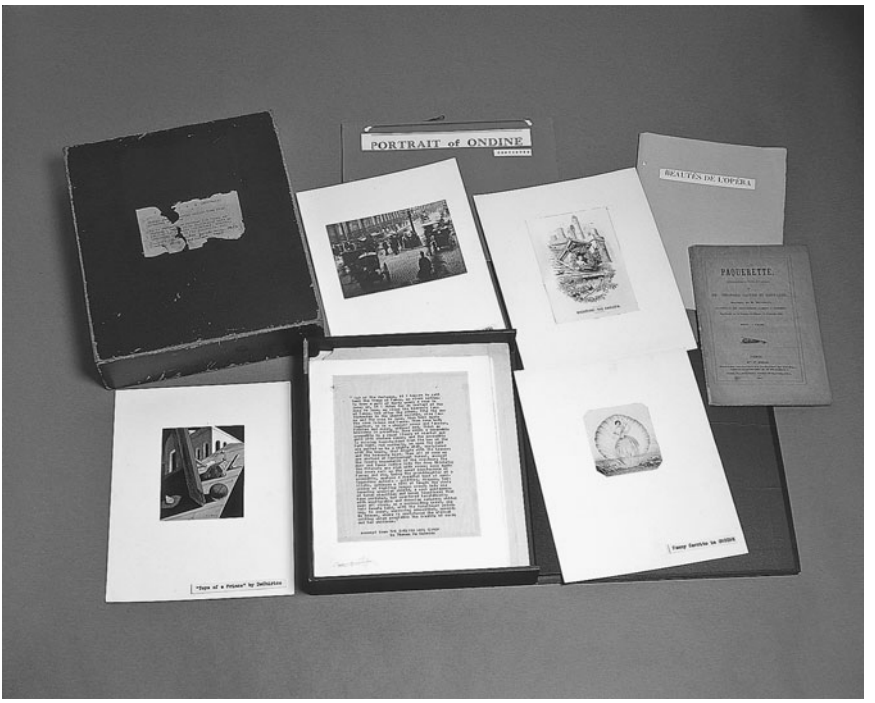

Fig 3.1 Joseph Cornell, *Portrait of Ondine*, c. 1940–late 1960s. Lidded paper slipcase containing photomechanical reproductions, watercolors, artist's notes, book excerpts, and pamphlets. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation.

Performance is ephemeral, an art destined to be lost, as Kirstein suggests, between word and image, and in the more overtly unresolved of his hybrid forms, like the dossiers, Cornell courts, and even embraces, the failure to seize the lost act. Furthermore, just as the dossiers are vulnerable to the accusation that they are not "real" art, so the performers are vulnerable to the accusation that they are not "real" artists, since even in the midst of their acts, the ballerinas and divas exhibit a typically feminine passivity insofar as they function as vehicles for the ideas of (typically masculine) creative artists. In his own artistic practice Cornell was, if not exactly passive, then minimally inventive. His "energy for collection, juxtaposition and contrast" brought a flicker of life to his ephemeral materials, but only just; to do more would be to violate their nature as ephemera. At the same time, he actively sought recognition as a creative artist and built his boxes to last. Toward the end of the 1940s, as recognition came within his reach, Cornell began to make fewer works centered on female performers and initiated the series of boxes known

as "aviaries." At first these featured images of birds, although as the series developed, they became increasingly abstract.[20] Solomon speculates about the meaning of this shift in subject matter: "Are they literal stand-ins for the artist . . .? Or are the birds not a self-image at all but, rather, objects of desire, symbolic sisters of the ballerinas and divas of Cornell's earlier work?"[21] The either/or form of Solomon's question is misleading, since, as she herself observes, the feminine performers function both as "stand-ins for the artist" and "objects of desire." Not only does the ballerina or diva embody impulses that are in conflict with one another (to "be" the woman precludes "having" her and vice-versa), but each of these impulses in itself creates an insoluble artistic problem for Cornell. To love women, in any full sense, would force him to abandon the stance of "feminine" passivity required by the metaphysics of ephemera, while to identify with women would be finally to consign himself to a relatively weak position vis-à-vis the institution of art, the position of the performer rather than the creator. The birds do not so much resolve the ambivalent feelings aroused in Cornell by his ballerinas and divas as they afford him a means of abstracting those feelings, of presenting them in negated form.

Negation takes the form of an act of violence in an early entry in the series, *Habitat Group for a Shooting Gallery* (1943) (see figure 3.2). As Solomon, who sees the box as Cornell's "personal memorial" to World War II, describes it:

> hand-tinted cutouts of a cockatoo, two parrots, and a bird that could be either type perch against a white wall upon which are scattered words and pictures pertaining mainly to France. This is no shooting gallery for children, however. A mock bullet hole has cracked the glass pane . . . directly in front of the central bird's crown, where red paint is splattered like blood. Splotches of blue and yellow pigment hint at further bloodshed, as do the fallen feathers in the lower right corner of the box.[22]

The box stands as an exception in Cornell's oeuvre in several respects. As I have mentioned, it is among the earliest of the aviaries, the greatest concentration of which were produced between 1949 and 1954.[23] The use of brightly colored paint, which makes this piece seem to anticipate the spatters of the abstract expressionists, is rare if not unique in Cornell's work, as are the explicit depiction of bloodshed and (if Solomon is right) the relatively direct reference to contemporary historical events. The *Shooting Gallery* might be said to represent a breakthrough for the artist, both in that it starts him on the path to a solution to certain aesthetic and psychic conflicts, and in that it admits certain elements—primary pigments, primal emotions—that are usually excluded from the dreamy precincts of what

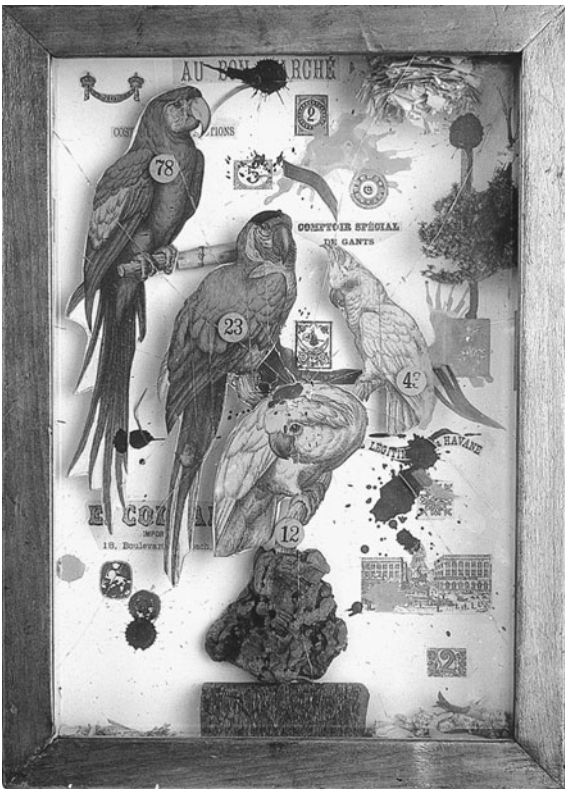

Fig 3.2 Joseph Cornell, *Habitat Group for a Shooting Gallery*, 1943. Mixed media: 15½ × 11 ⅛ × 4¼ inches. Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust; Nathan Emory Coffin. Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 1975.27.

one critic has termed Cornell's "crystal world."[24] We might even read the box as a confession of sorts; one of the artist's closest friends in his later years, Leila Hadley, has said that she "understood his murdered birds as his anger with the cock, with his own sexuality, and he corroborated the reading."[25] Still, this being Cornell, it is hardly a burst of uncontrolled rage: the "murdered" birds still cling to their perches, the paint is frankly paint, not blood, and the piece of glass with the "bullet hole" is carefully preserved between two intact panes.

The disturbing realities that threaten to break through the carefully crafted surface of the *Shooting Gallery* have been reduced to ghostly presences in a more characteristic entry in the *Aviary* series, *Untitled (Aviary with Watch Faces)* (c. 1949) (see figure 3.3). As in many of Cornell's works of the late 1940s and early 1950s, the interior of the box has been whitewashed, as have the pieces of wood that partition the box into three sections. One section contains a wooden grid that holds three neatly aligned rows of watch faces; in another, more gridded watch faces form the backdrop to a mounted cutout of a cockatoo, which is white (and partially whitewashed) except for a crest of orange feathers; and the last, below the

Fig 3.3 Joseph Cornell, *Untitled (Cockatoo with Watch Faces)*, c.1949. Mixed media: 16¼ × 17 × 4 ⅜ inches. The Lindy and Edwin Bergman Joseph Cornell Collection, Chicago.

bird, holds a white box that itself contains a music box, as well as a scattering of silver watch parts. The grid, the boxes within boxes, the ethereal whiteness that has descended like a veil over the "crystal world"—this *Aviary* is about almost nothing but order, containment, negation. Time has stopped or rather, been stopped by whoever eviscerated those watches (but that was elsewhere, and long before), and the music has gone silent. The one source of animation in this scene is the bird's eye, which seems to meet our gaze; but the bird's gaze, unlike ours, is sidelong, oblique. His is the look of the voyeur, who fears being caught in a full-faced stare. Anyone who doubts that the act of "facing" is fraught with risk should note how the black dot of the eye is echoed by the holes in the centers of the watch faces,

from which the hands have been torn. The cockscomb-like flare of the bird's crest signals the presence of a desire that has not yet been fully suppressed, but has been channeled; the desires to be and to have that were provoked by female bodies in motion have been absorbed by the desire to see, although who knows what it is a bird sees? With their inscrutable gaze the birds reflect, if not Cornell's renunciation of, then his alienation from, the twofold fantasy his women inspire.

Cornell had arrived, by his own complex route, at the conclusion that Moore had reached before him: the "animal" may substitute for the "feminine" at a point when the feminine position appears untenable, from the perspectives both of the desiring subject and the would-be artist. For the poet and the box-maker alike, the animal stands at once as the positive manifestation and as the necessary negation of the desires for love and for artistic recognition. In a letter to Moore, Cornell offers up the cherished memory of a "private zoo" that he used to pass on his way to work, adding, with emphasis, "I could only think that Miss Moore was the *only other person in the world* who could ever appreciate the birds and animals of a zoo to such an extent."[26] As Dickran Tashjian remarks, "Whether or not this 'private zoo' actually existed is rendered moot by the importance it assumed in Cornell's imagination."[27] Tashjian takes Cornell's confiding tone to mean that, a year into their acquaintance, the artist "finally considered the poet among the select who understood his art." More specifically, I would say, via the conceit of the "zoo" Cornell can convey an otherwise unspeakable thought: that if he is to gain access to the power accrued by Moore in her public role, he can do so only through the private channel of negated sexuality that provides what he considers to be a unique connection between his work and hers.

Like Moore, Cornell lived with his mother into his sixties, cultivated a rhetoric of sexual purity, and died without having had full sexual relations. However, whereas in Moore's life sexual desire (or at least what most of us would recognize as such) left astonishingly few traces, and in her art surfaced relatively rarely and even then in highly oblique form, for Cornell the pressure of desire was a more explicit source of disturbance, in life and in art. Leila Hadley was scarcely the only acquaintance to observe that Cornell struggled with guilt about his sexuality, whose most legible features were a strenuously sublimated voyeurism and passion for teenage girls that gave way, late in life, to a frank interest in pornography and uneasy indulgence in certain limited forms of sexual contact.[28] The boxes became at once a stage for, and means of containment of, these unruly longings—as Michael Moon phrases it, "erotic desire is 'all over the place' in Cornell's work."[29] Which is to say both that Cornell's desires may strain and sometimes wreck the artistic forms designed to contain them and that the omnipresence of desire in his

work, its diffusion across a field strewn with once despised or neglected objects, charges his art with an uncanny glow.

In the *Dance Index* "Circus" issue, the strain produced by the artist's efforts to find a form adequate to contain his warring impulses shows most plainly in the figure of the bareback rider, who Cornell names "the ballerina, or equestrienne," and describes as "a symbol of the combination of human and animal elegance, which the Greeks knew as centaurs." The images and texts that constitute Cornell's portrait of the "equestrienne" are erotically charged but also tinged with grotesquerie. For to say that the equestrienne combines the human and the animal is also to imply that she is a locus of ambivalence, a volatile switch point for tendencies toward activity and passivity, and by implication, for masculine and feminine identifications. As the artist himself puts it in his introduction to the issue, "Horses paw primly as dancers, and the bareback ladies are often as strong as horses."[30] The other two of the three sections into which Cornell divides the issue showcase less manifestly ambiguous aspects of his sexual persona. One of these is devoted to clowns (the harlequin, with his pathos-burdened masculinity, is the rare representative of male adulthood in Cornell's oeuvre) and the other, to elephants. The latter were not favorite animals of the artist's, whose taste ran to more patently vulnerable creatures, like birds, butterflies, and bunnies; but insofar as the elephant, too, can be viewed as a kind of ballerina, it provides Cornell with a link between his sensibility and Moore's.

When Moore expresses qualms about the elephant's skirt, though, she redraws the distinction between her take on femininity and Cornell's. One way to describe this distinction might be to say that while Cornell is something of a female impersonator, Moore is, as Sandra Gilbert once called her, a "female female impersonator." Like her male counterpart, the female female impersonator affects what Gilbert calls an "ironic estrangement" from the notion of a naturalized femininity. However, when faced with the restrictions and insults that remind her that she is a "real" woman after all, the female female impersonator must abandon her pose of detachment; she must shift, as Gilbert says, from a mode of "defense" to one of "offense."[31] As a person in the grip of certain psychosexual impulses, the female impersonator may feel himself to have been driven to occupy a feminine position, but as a man, he still may be presumed to be free to abandon that position at will. The female female impersonator can exercise a like freedom only in her imagination, and thus, as I wrote in the previous chapter, she serves simultaneously to reveal and to conceal the link between the powerlessness that one suffers, which generates the call for social justice, and the powerlessness that one chooses, which generates the call for aesthetic judgment.

I will claim, later in this discussion, that there is a critique of systems of social dominance implicit in Cornell's tendency to identify himself as a feminine artist. However, in his work that critique always remains implicit, coded in aesthetic terms; Cornell had virtually nothing to say about politics as such, either in art or in life. By contrast, the struggle for dominance is, to borrow Moon's expression, "all over the place" in Moore's work. Insofar as Moore is committed to a poetics of ambivalence, to staging conflicts in which neither one of an opposed pair decisively dominates, the politics implicit in that struggle must be presented in coded form. But since the token woman is tasked both with concealing and revealing the link between politics and aesthetics, at key moments the poet does invite her reader to break the code. For example, whenever the word "man" appears in Moore's poems, we are invited to consider the way it functions as a false universal. Thus, when she includes elephants among "such of those / tough-grained animals as have outstripped man's whim to suppose / them ephemera," she plays on the assumption that what counts as fully human must be masculine. Animal allegory was, of course, one of the chief mechanisms by which Moore managed the delicate business of alternately concealing and revealing the workings of power. As a woman, Moore felt herself to be relegated to silence, or if not silence, at least "restraint," but when, in effect, she renounces her claim to humanity, she gains freer access to her native language, to "plain American which cats and dogs can read!" (*BMM* 124, 99).

Among all of Moore's armored animals, perhaps the most plainspoken is the elephant protagonist of "Black Earth" (a poem which the elderly Moore may have considered *too* revealing, since she omitted it from the last edition of her work). "Black / but beautiful," this animal exclaims, "my back / is full of the history of power" (*BMM* 87). Another poet might frame these lines as a call for revolution, but Moore immediately takes the statement in a more equivocal direction: "Of power?" the elephant asks itself, "What / is powerful and what is not?" "Black / but beautiful," the elephant is both victim and victor, a symbol at once of social oppression and aesthetic success. Or to put this more dialectically, the elephant exemplifies the way in which Moore's negated femininity, the source of her poetic power, is rooted in the material conditions of her life as a woman, which repeatedly bring her up against the brute fact that, as she says in "Marriage," "men have power / and sometimes one is made to feel it." Moore, then, both is and is not like the performers of stage and screen who populate Cornell's fantasy world, just as her elephants are and are not like his birds. The sheer force required to effect the degree of negation necessary to make room for the token woman distinguishes the poet from Cornell's ballerinas who, while they may be "strong as horses," are

charged with the paradoxical task of using that strength to perpetuate the illusion of feminine fragility. Cornell's female impersonations are undoubtedly loci of sexual fixation, but they also serve, particularly early on in his career, as a crucial means of mobilizing his conflicting desires, and as such they betoken his affinity with an artist like Moore, who emerges from her struggle with sexual ambivalence as an adept of negative dialectics.

Cornell himself comes closest to the point where ambivalence passes over into dialectics when he grapples with the challenge of abstraction, the absence or cancellation of pictorial illusion that in visual art of the twentieth century frequently signals the arrival of the negative moment of the dialectic. Toward the middle of the century, as "painting" makes its bid for cultural dominance, abstraction moves to the very center of artistic theory and practice, becoming what difficulty was for high modernist literature, the privileged expression of modernism's commitment to the autonomy of art. Greenberg gives this theoretical tendency a characteristically absolutist turn when he concludes, in his 1944 essay "Abstract Art," that "[t]here is nothing left in nature for plastic art to explore" (*CE* 1:203). With its shells and grasses, birds and celestial maps, Cornell's art is nothing if not nostalgic for nature. Nevertheless, as if compelled by what Greenberg presents as an inexorable historical logic, the artist does turn away from nature and toward the abstract ideal in a series of boxes produced during the early 1950s that he calls "dovecotes." As their name indicates, the dovecotes are a conceptual extension of the aviaries; the birds, however, have flown, leaving only a grid of whitewashed compartments, often filled with small cubes or spheres.

Tashjian identifies as the source of Cornell's idea for the dovecotes a letter of Emily Dickinson's in which she refers to a "Columbarium"—itself an allusion to a Longfellow novella whose love-triangle plot ends in the retreat of the heroine to her Dickinson-esque white bedroom. Tashjian notes further that Cornell's interest in Dickinson had been "renewed . . . during the fall of 1952" by his reading of *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson* by Rebecca Patterson, the first critic to speculate about Dickinson's desires for other women.[32] The artist subsequently produced two boxes dedicated to Dickinson (see figures 3.4 and 3.5). In the first of these, *Toward the 'Blue Peninsula': For Emily Dickinson* (1953), the curved bird-feeder in the right-hand corner and the whitewashed wire grid that encloses the left side of the box suggest that this might once have been an aviary, but there is a gap in the "cage" that opens toward a painted square of blue sky, into which the bird has presumably fled. The second box, *An Image for 2 Emil(y) ies* (1954), is divided into twelve equal compartments, each of which contains a miniature hurricane lamp enclosing a single sky-blue marble; the whitewashed

Fig 3.4 Joseph Cornell, *Toward the 'Blue Peninsula' (for Emily Dickinson)*, 1953. Mixed media: 19 × 13¾ × 6¼ inches. The Robert Lehrman Art Trust.

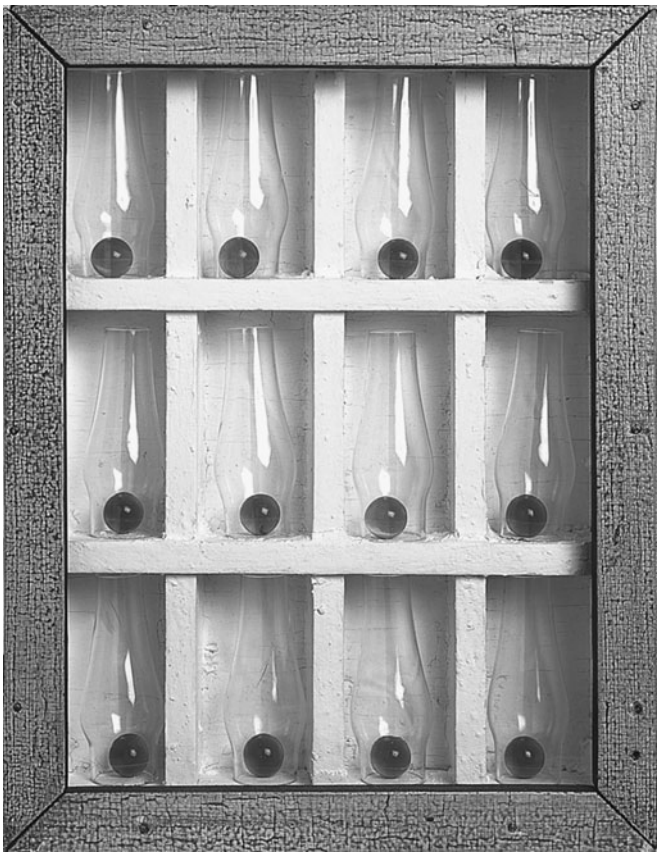

Fig 3.5 Joseph Cornell, *An Image for 2 Emil(y)ies*, c.1954. Mixed media: 13¾ × 10½ × 2¾ inches. The Robert Lehrman Art Trust.

grid, now made of wood, at once echoes the structure of the box itself and is integral to that structure. While the two boxes employ many of the same visual elements, between Cornell's first and second attempts to craft a response to Dickinson the last vestiges of representation and narrative have given way to geometry and enigma.

In a composition like *An Image for 2 Emil(y)ies*, Cornell might be said to approach that state of pure abstraction that Greenberg identified as the goal of the mainstream artist at mid-century. But was this in fact Cornell's goal in constructing the dovecotes? When a mid-century artist like Barnett Newman or Mark Rothko hit on a signature mode of making meaningful emptiness he built on that discovery over the long term in order to consolidate his position within the mainstream, but Cornell abandoned the aesthetic solution that the dovecotes seemed

to offer within a few years of having formulated it. Is it then merely a coincidence that Cornell produced his greatest concentration of abstract works when the theory and practice of painterly abstraction were at their height? The history of the Dickinson boxes suggests that the artist did have certain private motives for emptying the cages of those "stand-ins for the artist," the birds who displaced without effacing the ballerinas and divas through whom Cornell first acted out the drama of his ambition. Collector Robert Lehrman writes that in *Towards the "Blue Peninsula,"* inspired by a Dickinson poem that "asks if longing is better than having," Cornell "liberated both himself and the poet from the confines of desire."[33] This sounds right; yet at the same time, the intense blues of the patch of "sky" in the first box and the translucent spheres in the second one offer an immediate sensual satisfaction that stands in tension with the ascetic tendency represented by the boxes' otherwise ubiquitous veil of whitewash. Tashjian's story of the boxes' genesis invites us to trace this enlivening opposition between sensuality and its negation to Cornell's reading of Patterson's revisionist account of Dickinson's erotic life, which brought what had been until then the official public image of the poet as a nun-like, white-clad ascetic into tension with a private Dickinson who longed, as well as dreaded, to "gain My Blue Peninsula / To perish of Delight."[34]

The Dickinson who becomes the tutelary spirit of the dovecotes thus revives Cornell's fantasy of simultaneously being and loving a woman, while the poet's status as a creative artist lends new plausibility to the fantasy that Cornell might yet occupy the position of the token woman. Nevertheless, however vividly and persuasively they are evoked, these fantasies must remain fantasies, and not just because Cornell can never be a "real" woman, but because, insofar as she represents an absolute otherness, an otherness which is itself a token of the nonunified state of both self and society, the token woman is not a "real" woman either. And to the extent that it is the position of the "other" as such, the position of the token woman must remain vacant. Dickinson helps Cornell to complete in his art the process initiated in his life by his introduction to Moore, the process through which he arrives at a working definition of his position within the institution of art. But once the impossibility of this position is revealed, in all of its ramifications, there is nothing to do but abandon it. Hence, the emptiness of the dovecotes represents both the culmination and terminus of a certain line of thinking for Cornell.

To return to my earlier question, then: is the significance of Cornell's form of abstraction mainly personal, or is there a point at which his tributary rejoins the current of contemporary art history? Exemplary mid-century artists like de

Kooning and Pollock portray abstraction as the site of a fierce struggle for dominance, which in certain key works is cast in terms of the drive for mastery over an explicitly feminine other (one thinks of de Kooning's *Women*, of course, but also such formative Pollocks as *She-Wolf*, *Pasiphae*, and *Troubled Queen*). In Cornell's dovecotes, by contrast, the site of struggle seems already to have been vacated. As abstractions go, they are too pure for their moment: in its rigorous symmetries and obdurate muteness, a work like *An Image for 2 Emil(y)ies* seems to gesture past the violent erasures of abstract expressionism toward the refined vacancies of minimalism. Greenberg intuits the "untimely" character of Cornell's approach to abstraction early on, remarking in a 1942 review that "in Cornell's objects surrealism encourages a tendency it often opposes—the abstract" (*CE* 1:203). In Greenberg's story, abstraction's emergence stands as proof of the "inexorable" character of "the logic of the development" of visual art (*CE* 1:37). Cornell's kind of abstraction, though, emerges from what Greenberg thinks of as the "wrong" direction, from surrealism, a movement the critic repeatedly condemned as irredeemably retrograde due to its "literary" tendencies. For Cornell, pure abstraction does not point the way toward further "logical development"—his late collages are more nymph-haunted than ever—but it does illuminate an impasse.

In the dovecotes, Cornell's artistic self-conception assumes its crystalline form. This conception is powerful in that it carries the logic of negation implied by abstraction almost as far as it can go, and in the process reveals the purely phantasmal character of the other. The artistic confidence expressed in the austerity of the dovecotes, as well as of the series of "hotels" and "observatories" that Cornell began to produce around the same time, may also reflect his increasing professional success; 1953, the year in which he produced the first of the Dickinson boxes, saw the opening of the artist's first solo museum show. Yet the strength of the dovecotes can only exist in dialectical relation to weakness: Dickinson's hovering presence in the series continues to mark the position of the other not only as "feminine," but as "literary," and thereby places Cornell on the losing side in the artistic struggle for dominance. We will only settle on the latter conclusion if we take a Greenbergian view of Cornell's situation at mid-century; but I am guessing that to a degree the artist did view himself in this light, as having chosen a relatively weak position from which to pursue a career in the art world. Again, though, this weakness has its strengths. In the dovecotes, we may glimpse a purified form of the aporia toward which all of Cornell's work tends, that is, his failure to effectuate the passage from the first phase of modernism to the second. This failure is not merely personal but historically consequential insofar as it prompts us to consider that the history of modernism might have turned out otherwise.

ii. The Materialist and the Monster: History According to Moore and Benjamin

But in order to think this thought, that history might have turned out otherwise, we must first revise our conception of history. One brilliant and peculiar historian of the institution of visual art, the artist who goes by the critical *nom de plume* Brian O'Doherty, laments the fact that because Cornell lacks "the aggressiveness of the historicizing thinker," he has "come to stand for all that is marginal and eccentric." For his part, O'Doherty, who is himself something of a marginal figure, wants to claim for Cornell the status of a "major artist."[35] O'Doherty is surely right to set Cornell in opposition to the sort of historicist triumphalism that he associates, as I do, with the Greenbergian narrative. However, since every unequivocal assertion of success feeds "the aggressiveness of the historicizing thinker," perhaps we should continue to think of Cornell not as a "major artist" but as a force pressing us to take a more dialectical view of the relation between success and failure. As I suggest above, this is more or less how Cornell saw Moore, both as powerful and as ephemeral, both as a harbinger of the future and a thing of the past; or rather, he saw her as powerful because ephemeral, a prophetic figure by virtue of being one of the "lost" denizens of "the inconsequential past." Such paradoxes are the product of what Cornell once called "the dialectics of nostalgia," a recoil from the present moment that resembles no dialectical method so much as Walter Benjamin's eccentric version of historical materialism. Like Cornell, Benjamin has a powerful affinity for "the inconsequential past," one which led him to develop a gift that we might describe as "the energy for collection, juxtaposition and contrast."[36] What the philosopher can offer us that the artist cannot, however, is an explicit critique of the ideology and methods of "the historicizing thinker."

In Benjamin's methodological *summa*, the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," his materialist, like Kirstein's Cornell, turns toward a past that appears inconsequential in that it is associated with history's losers. In so doing, he places himself in opposition to the writers of that "universal history" that is designed both to glorify "the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are prostrate" and to gratify what we may call, with Moore, an "[a]cademic feeling . . . in favor of completeness and continuity." The materialist's gamble is that by rendering history as an assemblage of discontinuous fragments, he may disrupt the procession. His signature strategy is "to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger," that is, to locate a bit of history that the universal historians have deemed inconsequential or preposterous because it fails

to fit into the present rulers' sense of things as they are.[37] However, this gleaming shard of the past can become visible only in "a moment of danger," only in the negative moment of the historical dialectic. The once-repressed memory may augur a future shift in the relations of domination, but because it continues to remain, in a sense, under negation, as a social predictor it has, as Benjamin says, only "a weak messianic power."[38] The philosopher nonetheless sees this ephemeral "image of the past" as an essential tool in our present effort to think against the grain of historicism, a task that has for him the force of an imperative: "In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it." Keeping this imperative in mind, we may say that Moore appears to Cornell as a thing of the past in order to help him save tradition once again from its own tendency to mistake what it knows to be a "heap of broken images" for "an ideal order" of "existing monuments."

These last phrases are, of course, not Benjamin's but Eliot's, and indeed, up to a point, the concern for "tradition" that Benjamin expresses at the beginning of World War II closely resembles that expressed by Eliot at the end of World War I. Benjamin, though, is implacably opposed to the "conformism" that renders even the most radical works of art serviceable to "the present rulers," while Eliot is of two minds about what he, too, calls "conformity." "To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all," Eliot warns, yet conform it must, he concludes few sentences later, or be excluded from tradition's ideal order.[39] Still, while the St. Louis Brahmin and the Berlin Jew may differ in the degree of trust they place in the powers-that-be, their visions of culture-as-politics are similarly founded on the "heap of broken images" that in its abjection is the aesthetic equivalent of "those who are prostrate." (It is this persistent aestheticization of the historical fragment that makes Benjamin an eccentric materialist.) One implication of the argument that I have been making, in this and the preceding chapters, is that Moore is specially qualified as a woman, or rather, as a particular sort of woman, to press the claim of the Eliot who resists conformity in the name of "the new" (i.e., that which was previously excluded) against the claim of the Eliot who pays obeisance to conformity in the name of "order." I have suggested, moreover, that in the eyes of Cornell, the consummate practitioner of an art of Benjaminian fragments, Moore's femininity also qualifies her to appear as a claimant on behalf of "the inconsequential past" as against that "historicism" that, as Benjamin says, "gives the 'eternal' image of the past."[40] I will return to the question of the uses of the inconsequential past, which is also a question about the place of the excluded both in art and in social life. First, though, I would like to trace some ways in which the sense of social exclusion informs the struggle to develop a satisfactory relationship

to both historical and artistic form in the work of the female female impersonator herself.

Moore brings the element of gender to bear on the critique of what Benjamin calls "universal history" in one of the early works that I have termed "poems of opposition," "'He Wrote the History Book'" (*BMM* 76). This title, which as Moore's note tells us, is taken from a child's remark about his historian father, invites us, in characteristic fashion, to reflect on the problematic use of "he" as a universal pronoun.[41] The rest of the poem reads as follows:

> There! You shed a ray
> of whimsicality on a mask of profundity so
> terrific, that I have been dumbfounded by
> it oftener than I care to say.
> *The* book? Titles are chaff.
>
> Authentically
> brief and full of energy, you contribute to your father's
> legibility and are sufficiently
> synthetic. Thank you for showing me
> your father's autograph.

Although Moore mocks the tone of patriarchal authority adopted by the six-year-old son of a historian (a professor of Moore's from Bryn Mawr), the sting of the thought that even at his most childishly naïve the son has an authority to which no daughter can lay claim still lingers. The son derives this authority, in pure Lacanian fashion, not from the father himself, who hides behind "a mask of profundity," but from the Name of the Father, or as the poet terms it, "your father's autograph." The boy's naïveté allows Moore to grasp the arbitrary character, the "whimsicality," of this sign; at the same time, though, the autograph has the "energy" and "legibility" that is conspicuously lacking in the "ambiguous signature" that Moore attributes to the feminine figure in a poem written the year after this one, "Those Various Scalpels." In "Scalpels," moreover, the figure's lack of writerly authority corresponds to its lack of bodily integrity: it is subject to dissection, rent by "tearing winds," reduced to a Cornellian assemblage of "little objects." The historian's son, by contrast, is "sufficiently synthetic," a veritable word made flesh. Still, "sufficiently" is a rather grudging qualifier, and "synthetic" may mean "manifestly artificial," as well as "closely integrated." On one hand, the poet's declaration that there is no such thing as "*The* book" signals her refusal to remain "dumbfounded" any longer by the universal historian's assumption that history is always and everywhere "his" story. On the other, though, as we

have seen, Moore's turn from the word to the object in a poem like "Those Various Scalpels" indicates that she still has her doubts about the feminine poet's potential to become the bearer of a tradition from which she has heretofore been excluded.

For the feminine poet as for Benjamin's materialist, the question of her relationship to tradition comes down to a question of form. The challenge for them both is to find a form that will enable them to break the silence that has been imposed on them in the name of an "ideal order," without thereby coming to endorse that order. In poems like "Scalpels" and "When I Buy Pictures," Moore floats the possibility that her proper form may be more visual than verbal, just as in her *Dial* "Comment" on the subject of anthologies, she suggests that "the museum" may provide a refuge to the writer who cannot meet the requirements of an "academic feeling . . . in favor of continuity and completeness." However, throughout most of the *Dial* piece, Moore presents herself as a partisan, not so much of the visual over the verbal, as of fragmented over integral cultural and artistic forms. Like Moore, Benjamin places considerable stock in an idealized view of the potential for resistance inherent in certain media (see especially his "Work of Art in Age of Mechanical Reproduction"). But in the "Theses," his emphasis, like Moore's in her "Comment," is on form in the sense of structure rather than form in the sense of medium, and the structures he, too, prefers are systematically incomplete and discontinuous. Moore's "Comment" is like Benjamin's "Theses" in one further respect, that its author applies questions of form that originate in artistic practice to historiography, with curious results. Thus, following notices of three gallery shows, an avant-garde film, and two poetry anthologies, the poet concludes the "Comment" with a brief review of a "history book," a miscellany titled *American Orations*, whose structure she implicitly opposes to the universal historian's "synthetic" model of composition. Perusing the assembled parts of this collection produces, Moore says, "phenomenally an effect of history recalled as experience. . . . Unfamiliar, yet actual, like an animal reconstructed from certain bones, they curiously evoke the past, constituting in their chronological sequence, an anthology which results as a skeleton should, in being a 'body'" (*CPr* 183). Moore's description of these "unfamiliar, yet actual" utterances recalls Benjamin's previously repressed memories that surface "in a moment of danger," as well as Kirstein's comparison of Cornell to "the scientist who recreated a whole pre-historic age from the glimpse of a dinosaur's tooth." Her surpassingly strange syntax here also makes one wonder, among other things, what the difference is between a body and a "body."

Again, this is a question of form, the almost too obvious answer to which is, quotation marks. An anthology differs from a "synthetic" work of art or history in

part because it consists of second-hand material—of quotations, in effect—a fact that takes on a new significance in light of the unprecedented centrality to modernist art of the practice of citation and appropriation. If Rimbaud's "'I' is an other" is the motto carved over the door to the institution of modern art, then quotation is the voice of this "other." Moore was one of the first of the American modernist poets to incorporate quoted material into her verse, and as her work developed, she became increasingly reliant on such material. In her excellent study of the uses of quotation in modern American poetry, Elizabeth Gregory writes that quotation "provides [Moore] with a means of entry onto the poetic field by masking the fact that she attempts such an entry, by seeming to affirm the understanding that her work—composed as it is of borrowings—involves no speech at all."[42] By allowing her to speak and yet, as it were, to remain silent, quotation enables Moore to participate in a tradition that would seem to exclude her. The sources from which the poet draws her quotations, however, seem to derive not so much from this tradition as from some inconsequential past; her citations constitute, as Moore herself says, "if not a cabinet of fossils, a kind of collection of flies in amber" (*CPr* 551). Critics almost invariably define the poet's citational practice by contrasting it to Eliot's use of quotation in *The Waste Land*; Hugh Kenner, for instance, says that whereas Eliot makes "allusions," Moore presents "found objects."[43] Each of Eliot's quotations, in other words, refers us to the whole of which it is a part, a work that in its turn forms part of a still vital tradition, whereas Moore's largely "unfamiliar, yet actual" phrases appear to be the fossilized remains of an irrevocably lost world. The difference between a body and a "body," then, is like the difference between "tradition" and "the inconsequential past." A body, like that of the historian's son, is an organic whole, intrinsically "full of energy," while the kind of "body" the dinosaur's skeleton represents is a collection of fragments that can only be reanimated by an imagination that ventures beyond the bounds of recorded history.

Such an extra-historical imagination conceives of the past as the realm of the excluded, those whom the scribes of "the present rulers" have written out of "*The* book." Insofar as her uniquely liminal situation in relation to the institution of art enables her to speak—albeit under rigorous restraint—from within the tradition in the name of those excluded from it, the token woman is the bearer of this kind of imagination. But insofar as she speaks specifically as a woman, she associates the tradition with the myth of masculine universality, a myth that often takes the form of an assertion of bodily integrity. The opposite of integrity is fragmentation, and in its abjection, as a collection of mere inert fragments, the "heap of broken images" may be seen as feminine. But the force that animates the fragments is a third thing, neither masculine nor feminine, like the "criminal ingenuity" that

enables one to stand outside "this institution" that encircles Moore's Adam and Eve in "Marriage." This capability, it must be emphasized, is strictly negative, not inventive or creative or, as Moore might say, "synthetic"; rather, as Kirstein says in regard to Cornell's artistic practice, it is "the energy for collection, juxtaposition and contrast." The aim of such a practice, as Benjamin's historical materialist reminds us, is not to restore "completeness and continuity" to what has been broken, nor to assert the "greatness" of what might have been deemed "inconsequential." The aim, rather, is to activate the tensions that lie dormant behind the "sufficiently synthetic" façade of cultural artifacts and institutions—hence, Kirstein's emphasis on "energy" and his association of the process of collection with the tension-building strategies of "juxtaposition and contrast." However, because this kind of energy is always closer to possession or reanimation than to organic vitality, it may always be judged inferior to the kind of artistic power that seems to emanate from within—"such power as Adam had and we are still devoid of," as Moore calls it, in "An Octopus" (*BMM* 130).

In Moore's poems, Adam is often associated with a "sufficiently synthetic" artistic practice. In "Marriage," for instance, he is described as being, like the historian's son, instinct with creative power, "Alive with words / vibrating like a cymbal / touched before it has been struck" (*BMM* 117). The final items on Moore's shopping list in "When I Buy Pictures," "the silver fence protecting Adam's grave, or Michael taking Adam by the wrist," register the subsequent loss of this aesthetic ideal (*BMM* 101). As a daughter of the latecomer Eve, the poet adheres to this ideal at the risk of writing herself out of the picture; such is the problematic relation of the feminine talent to tradition. This dilemma is at the heart of "In the Days of Prismatic Color" (1919), a poem that stands in relation to "Marriage" as prehistory does to history proper (*BMM* 91–92). At the beginning of the poem we find ourselves

> Not in the days of Adam and Eve but when Adam
> was alone; when there was no smoke and color was
> fine, not with the fineness of
> early civilization art but by virtue
> of its originality

—an originality that is always already out of reach of the postlapsarian artist, yet serves to guarantee his work's value, much as the father stands behind his "autograph." "'I shall be there when the wave has gone by,'" declares a personified "Truth" in the poem's last line, reaffirming the promise, or threat, of the persistence of Adamic authority behind its shifting cultural manifestations.

A challenge to this authority does arise as the poem unfolds, although not from Eve, who is mentioned only once, at the outset, and then only under negation. Instead, in this strangely abstract version of the creation myth, "originality" is opposed to "sophistication," a quality which, as it is "principally throat," may be associated not with Eve but with the serpent.

> Principally throat, sophistication is as it al-
>
> ways has been—at the antipodes from the init-
> ial great truths. "Part of it was crawling, part of it
> was about to crawl, the rest
> was torpid in its lair." In the short legged, fit-
> ful advance, the gurgling and all the minutiae—we have the classic
>
> multitude of feet. To what purpose!

Here, as in "Those Various Scalpels," "sophistication" stands for an aesthetic that puts analysis before synthesis, that dissects rather than makes whole. "Prismatic Color" is like "Scalpels," too, in that the poem we have before us is an instance of the kind of art Moore seems to be attacking; thus, the lines cited above exemplify even as they satirize the "fit- / ful" animation characteristic of an insufficiently synthetic art. In Moore's case, this herky-jerky rhythm is produced in large part by the seemingly arbitrary breaks in syntax and even in individual words imposed by her syllabic stanzas, an effect accentuated in these lines by the rhymes, which depend on broken words. This passage's stutter-stop "advance" is further hindered by the insertion of a quotation, drawn, as Moore's note tells us, from the Loeb Classical Library's *Greek Anthology*. In their original context, the quoted words describe a mythical monster; here, they give body to "sophistication," even as they break this "body" into "parts." The discontinuous and incomplete form that Moore holds up for admiration in the essay on anthologies appears monstrous, then, when set against an Adamic style that is, as she says elsewhere in the poem, "plain to see and / to account for." Whose side is she on? Sensing that she has been caught in a contradiction, the poet feels compelled to assert, in line twelve, that "complexity is not a crime." Still, on the evidence produced here, she stands self-accused of something like "criminal ingenuity" the practice of an art that will always be "at the antipodes from the init- / ial great truths."

"The initial great truths": such universal principles, this poem makes clear, could only have been established in the absence of Eve. And yet to imagine an Eve-less Eden is also to go beyond the bounds of "*The* book," to propose a different history from the one recorded by the universal historian. In order to make a place for herself within the tradition, the token woman must effect her own negation: in

this double-bind originates the double-voiced character of Moore's lament for the days "when Adam was alone." For when he speaks as the founder of a tradition whose appearance of "completeness and continuity" masks its exclusive character, Adam is the hero of "*The* book," but the Adam who is imagined as inhabiting "the days of prismatic color" is a pre-historic creature, whose story will always have gaps in it, "like an animal reconstructed from certain bones." The "pre-historic age" is for Moore, as it is for Kirstein, a figure for an antihistoricist view of the past, a view that is necessarily fragmentary and therefore unresolved. The universal historian may aim at synthesis, but the specialist in reconstruction deals in fossils and flashes. Her "energy for collection, juxtaposition and contrast," however fitful, brings out the irreconcilable contradictions that inhere in the Adamic ideal.

iii. Collage and Class Fractions

The Benjaminian materialist in Moore may have cultivated her ability to dwell in contradictions, but the artist in Moore simply lived those contradictions, and her attitude toward her own approach to form was fraught with ambivalence. For example, when in later life Moore was pressed to expand on the political or personal implications of "Marriage," she frequently staved off such questions about "the thing (I would hardly call it a poem)" by referring to it as "a little anthology of statements that took my fancy," or "just an anthology of statements that I didn't want to lose."[44] Moore's qualifiers—"a *little* anthology," "*just* an anthology,"—are clearly meant to serve as disavowals of artistic authority, while to call "Marriage," one of her most ambitious works, a "thing" rather than a poem might seem purely self-deprecating. And yet this last remark also fits in with the anti-poetic tendency of Moore's manifesto, "Poetry," as well as with her repeated claim that "I can see no reason for calling my work poetry except that there is no other category in which to put it."[45] Such a statement, again, may be taken either as a disavowal of artistic authority or as a strong claim about form, of a recognizably avant-gardist cast. The anthology is one name for Moore's chosen form, or rather anti-form. It is not a "poem," yet it is an aesthetically effective means of preserving what otherwise might be lost. And to the extent that it represents a quixotic attempt to preserve cultural materials that might seem to have been destined for inconsequence, Moore's "anthology" is like a Cornell box.

Even more, Moore's anthology is like that hybrid form, part work of art, part scholarly research, part packrat's trash, that Cornell called a "dossier." In the artist's Guggenheim application, he described the dossiers he proposed to make with the

help of the grant in language even more diffident than the terms in which Moore speaks of "Marriage." Asked to lend their support to "a series of monographs presenting documents and notes on several subjects" that "would be presented in individual boxed albums, or portfolios, designed to become units for exhibitions" (i.e., something that sounded more like the contents of a file cabinet than a collection of artworks), the baffled committee, not surprisingly, said no. Solomon notes that even the three friends from whom Cornell requested letters of recommendation, Moore, Kirstein, and Museum of Modern Art curator Monroe Wheeler, "were a bit mystified by his proposal." In his statement, Kirstein acknowledges that Cornell's "creative aims . . . might seem peculiar to some people," but ultimately stresses the artist's "very eccentric and genuinely American talent for creating objects out of significant fragments." Moore, however, while praising Cornell's work's "associative force" and "consistent rigor of selection," which "constitute, it seems to me, a phase of poetry," was more openly critical of his application itself, emphasizing its "lack of finish," although, she added, with more than a touch of condescension, "I think the lack of Harvard and Oxford could be pardoned."[46]

That such hostile remarks were out of place in a letter of recommendation for a friend whose work she generally admired seems not to have occurred to Moore. While it is no excuse to say so, it seems to me that this hostility is ultimately self-directed, a perfect example of the workings of what Moore once called "that weapon, self-protectiveness." The poet feared that Cornell's diffident presentation of his project might lead people to suspect that his associations and selections, however rigorous, are no more proper works of visual art than her "anthology of statements I didn't want to lose" is a proper poem. Moore's anti-formal tendencies are most obvious in poems like "Marriage" and "An Octopus," with their high proportions of quoted material and undifferentiated blocks of free verse, but even at its most formalized, her work is still manifestly untraditional. The metrical strategy most closely associated with the poet, syllabics, is common in certain poetic traditions, but rare in English. Moreover, whereas in a traditional syllabic form like the haiku, the syllable counts per line are given by convention, Moore's syllabics were arbitrary in origin and varied from poem to poem: she simply began a given poem by composing a stanza, the syllable count of which would then serve as the template for all subsequent stanzas in that poem. Mastery of traditional forms provides the artist with a kind of shield, and Moore felt that her eccentric relation to form left her exceptionally vulnerable to criticism. Although her carping remarks on Cornell's statement's "lack of finish" conclude with the defensive assertion that his artistic "offerings" themselves "are all finish," she may have seen the reflection of her own work's vulnerability in his. Like Moore's "inconceivably

arcanic"[47] syllabic stanzas, Cornell's boxes have the air of having been constructed according to a rigid set of preordained rules, yet these rules are in fact not based in tradition but are, as they are in the poet's case, almost entirely idiosyncratic.

Generally speaking, of course, Cornell's boxes and dossiers fall under the rubric of collage, a technique that was introduced into high art by the most technically virtuosic of modernists, Picasso, as a means of resisting virtuosity. However, collage also proved attractive for certain artistic outsiders, who saw in the cubist and Dadaist rebellion against technique an opportunity for those who lacked technique in the first place. Walter Hopps observes that "Cornell is perhaps the most important twentieth century artist who did not, in any conventional sense, draw."[48] In fact, he had no conventional artistic skills. Cornell's painful consciousness of this fact is reflected in his stuttering response to a form from the Museum of Modern Art requesting biographical information: "EDUCATION: Went to Andover/No Art Instruction/Natural Talent."[49] Not only, that is, did he lack any kind of technical training, Cornell never went to college, a liability Moore underscores when she notes his "lack of Harvard and Oxford" in her Guggenheim recommendation. But again, she is speaking here about herself as much as about Cornell. For even though at Bryn Mawr Moore received the best college education available to a woman of her place and time, in her poetry and prose Harvard and Oxford repeatedly serve as symbols for an educational paradise—a "Persian garden," as Moore once called it—from which the poet felt herself to have been forever excluded on the grounds of gender.[50] Still, it must be said, she was better prepared for a poetic career than Cornell was for an artistic one. While quotation became an important artistic resource for Moore, without the invention of collage, Cornell could never have become an artist at all.[51] However, even if Moore was not, as Cornell was, wholly reliant on modernist techniques of appropriation as a means of gaining entry to the institution of art, in some deep sense she felt herself to be unqualified for full membership.

Fittingly, it was Eliot, a Harvard man, who was the first of Moore's critics to intuit her sense of educational inferiority. In response to a review by Glenway Westcott of Moore's first book, *Poems* (1921), in which Westcott labels Moore's "an aristocratic art, emulating the conditions of ritual"—that is, an art much like Eliot's own—Eliot argues that Moore's strength actually lies in "a peculiar and brilliant and rather satirical use of what is not, as material, an 'aristocratic' language at all, but simply the curious jargon produced in America by universal university education." As for that language's potential for emulating ritual—"I suppose the Ku Klux Klan is a popular ritual—as popular as a ritual can be in a country where there are only variations *within* the middle class."[52] Implicit in these comments is the

assumption, which Moore shares with Eliot, that graduates of Harvard somehow stand outside the American educational system. Eliot positions Moore herself at once inside and outside that system, confined to speaking in its "jargon," yet taking the distanced tone of the satirist. Similarly, he concludes his review with the remark that her work "is as 'feminine' as Christina Rossetti's, one never forgets that it is written by a woman; but with both one never thinks of this particularity as anything but a positive virtue." Moore, then, is feminine, and yet not, American-educated, and yet not, middle class, and yet not. That is, she simultaneously embodies and negates all those aspects of himself about which Eliot was most ambivalent.

Eliot could not bear the thought that he had been born into a place and an age that would witness the death of the aristocracy and its replacement by a set of "variations *within* the middle class." His attachment to the idea of an aristocracy can produce moments of repellent rhetoric, as in that remark about the Ku Klux Klan and in his reminder, in the same review, that no American can be an aristocrat because "a real aristocracy is of the same blood of the people over whom it rules." However, it is also the source of some of the greatest moments of pathos in his poetry, as when a noblewoman's exhilarating memory of a sled ride ("Marie, / Marie, hold on tight. And down we went") becomes a metaphor for a civilization's inexorable downward slide in *The Waste Land*. An attachment to the idea of an aristocracy, then, may stand at one and the same time for an antidemocratic longing for authoritarian rule, and for an antibourgeois identification with certain remnants of the inconsequential past. Moore is frequently seen as such a remnant, and so, despite Eliot's rebuke to Westcott, references to her "aristocratic art" continue to crop up in writing about her work; as Randall Jarrell puts it, "the association of aristocracy and obligation and danger" is "congenial to Miss Moore."[53] Following a like train of associations, Brian O'Doherty also attributes aristocratic leanings to Moore's fellow remnant Cornell. However, whereas Westcott and Jarrell speak of Moore's "aristocratic art" as if this label were relatively unproblematic, O'Doherty brings out the contradictions inherent in the late-modern idea of aristocracy by comparing Cornell's sense of what it means to be aristocratic with that of his idol, friend, and sometime collaborator Marcel Duchamp.

O'Doherty portrays the relationship between the two artists as a Jamesian clash of American innocence and European experience. Cornell, he posits,

> must have seen Duchamp as a traitor to culture as well as to good behavior. Cornell was very concerned with etiquette, and Duchamp's acrid and aristocratic ironies were a closed universe to him. Cornell behaved as he

> thought aristocrats might, with perfect good breeding, appropriate to one who bore major responsibilities as a curator of culture.[54]

In this account, Duchamp stands in much the same relation to Cornell as Eliot does, by his own account, to Moore, as the genuine to the pretended heir to aristocratic culture. Duchamp's and Eliot's responses to the death of the aristocracy may have differed—the one focused on his endgame while the other dreamed of a restoration—but neither could be described, as O'Doherty does Cornell, as "a modest courtier in the palace of art who feels keenly his sense of privilege."[55] In the palace of art, Duchamp and Eliot conduct themselves like insiders, while Cornell and Moore "feel keenly" their marginal status. In a society that has learned to do without an aristocracy, though, the distinction between these two pairs of artists cannot ultimately stem from a distinction between the aristocrat and the bourgeois but only from a distinction between types of bourgeois. In fact, shortly after he has identified Moore as a kind of aristocrat, Jarrell—without acknowledging the contradiction—situates Moore with great precision on the spectrum of "variations *within* the middle class" that Eliot correctly identifies as her proper context. "One could make a queer economic-historical analysis of Miss Moore," Jarrell speculates,

> as the representative of a morality divorced both from religion and from economics, of a class-segment that has almost been freed either from power or from guilt—whose cultivation, because of its helplessness and poverty, is touching. . . . Alone in your civility, precariously safe and beautiful in the enforced essential privacy of late individualism, you are like the reed which escapes, perhaps, the storm that wrecks the forest; or like the humble, the children and sparrows, who served as models for salvation in the similar convulsions of an earlier world.[56]

One thinks once again of Benjamin's "memory [that] flashes up at a moment of danger," which also evidences a touchingly weak messianic power. The "poverty" to which Jarrell refers, though, is not the poverty of the prostitutes and ragpickers who haunt Benjamin's Baudelairean arcades, but the poverty of the shabby-genteel underside of the haute bourgeoisie. No actual representatives of the underclass make an appearance in Jarrell's brief outline of a "queer economic-historical analysis of Miss Moore"—their place is taken by the more biblical, less controversial "children and sparrows." The agents of revolution, or as he terms it, "salvation," come from within the bourgeoisie itself, albeit from a "class-segment" that stands on its very margins. In this respect, Jarrell's millennial vision resembles

Bourdieu's analysis of the structure of the ruling class in modern society, which the sociologist depicts as divided between a "dominating" class fraction made up of businesspeople, the possessors of economic capital, and a "dominated" class fraction made up of knowledge workers, the possessors of cultural capital. The two groups' perpetual rivalry, Bourdieu observes, "tends, in its ideological translation . . . to be organized by oppositions that are almost superimposable on those which the dominant vision sets up between the dominant class and the dominated classes."[57] In other words, those who possess merely cultural capital may think of themselves as engaged, like members of the lower classes, in a struggle against oppression. On this view, the most oppressed of the oppressed, the haute bourgeois equivalent of ragpickers, would be those whose cultural possessions are either so outmoded or so outré as to be unsaleable on the current market.

Moore and Cornell, strangely, exhibit both liabilities at once, that is, they are simultaneously old-fashioned and avant-garde. Bourdieu provides some insight into this seeming contradiction when he describes the world of avant-garde art as an "institution of freedom." By this he means that the avant-garde is founded on an anti-institutional impulse that ensures that "it exists only at the lowest degree of institutionalization," such that its self-definitions remain relatively loose and its venues remain relatively open. Therefore, Bourdieu notes, "the avant-garde positions . . . bring together for a certain time writers and artists from very different origins, whose interests will sooner or later diverge." The avant-garde's "objectively contradictory intention" is to provide a place in the world for those who perceive themselves as having no such place.[58] Hence, the attraction of cutting-edge modernism to such remnants of the inconsequential past as Moore and Cornell. As per Bourdieu's account, the anomalous appearance of both on the modernist scene was contingent on the openness of its most advanced institutions. Both launched their careers in the same way, simply by walking into a leading avant-garde gallery and introducing themselves: for Moore, this scene took place in 1915, at Alfred Stieglitz's 291, for Cornell, in 1931, at Julien Levy's surrealist showroom.[59] Neither one offered any credentials or connections to recommend them to their hosts; they just seemed interested, and interesting, if different from the usual bohemian types. Insofar as these institutions of the avant-garde took their embrace of that difference as proof of their freedom, Moore's and Cornell's old-fashionedness, rather than disqualifying them from membership in these institutions, became part of their charm.

However, insofar as Moore's and Cornell's association with the inconsequential past served as a reminder of the tenuousness of the avant-garde institutions' claim to a place in the world, their failure to fit in was stigmatized. Their peers'

disparaging remarks about the two often have a sexual edge, as in Hart Crane's reference to Moore as "the Rt. Rev. Miss Mountjoy," or a painter friend's description of Cornell as "a Victorian old maid, a spinster stuck in an attic."[60] It must be said that Moore and Cornell themselves actively helped to create this "spinsterish" image. To take one immediately relevant instance, Moore ultimately made it clear that she had refused to contribute to *View* because of what she called, in a rather startling letter to the editors, its "demoralizing strangeness," which is to say, its sexual content.[61] Similarly, when Cornell sought to distance himself from the surrealists, he stressed that he practiced "white magic" as opposed to their "black" (i.e., sexually explicit) variety.[62] Moore's and Cornell's staunchest defenders consequently tend to present them not so much as things of the past, but as having emerged from elsewhere altogether. Walter Hopps recalls, "When I asked Cornell who was his favorite abstract artist of his time, he responded, 'What do you mean, "my time"?'" The implication is that the artist is not merely out-of-date, but in some sense outside history.[63] And Elizabeth Bishop describes the atmosphere surrounding her friend and mentor as, indeed, "'old-fashioned,' but even more, otherworldly—as if one were living in a diving bell from a different world, let down through the crass atmosphere of the twentieth century."[64]

What is Bishop's "diving bell" but a poetic name for Jarrell's "enforced essential privacy of late individualism"? The poetry in Bishop's description does, however, remind us of that element in art that remains resistant to the reductions of economic-historical analysis: Moore's "otherworldliness" makes her seem like an unusually pure manifestation of art's autonomous ideal. Meanwhile, the colder eye that Jarrell casts on the poet's situation helps us to see that the old-fashionedness that sets Moore and Cornell apart from their modernist peers is the product of a not-unusual conjunction of sexual and class positions. Both Moore's and Cornell's inability to leave their mothers and attain sexual maturity was at least in part the result of the early loss of their fathers, the same event that precipitated their families' descent into the ranks of the shabby gentility. Moore's mother, a minister's daughter, at first was dependent on her father after her husband's desertion left her alone with two small children. Later, Marianne and Mrs. Moore lived with somewhat theatrical frugality on the earnings from their sporadic employment (as, respectively, writer-editor-librarian and schoolteacher) and a small legacy of stocks and real estate, sometimes supplemented by gifts from moneyed admirers of Moore's work like the writer Bryher and Bishop's friend Louise Crane. Cornell's father died when the artist was fifteen, after which the family—which as Cornell frequently noted with pride, was of old Dutch stock—rapidly fell from upper-middle-class comfort. After he finished high school, it was left to Cornell to eke out a living

for himself, his mother, and his severely handicapped brother, first as a salesman, and, later, editor and archivist of visual materials for magazines. Cornell's art itself proved to be more of a critical than a financial success, in part due to the artist's own difficulty in dealing with collectors and dealers—an effect of the willed "helplessness" that Jarrell cites as characteristic of members of a certain class segment.

The combination of social pride, financial distress, and a protective attitude toward the abandoned mother produced by the circumstances described above links Moore and Cornell not only with one another but also with any number of spinster children of genteel widows of reduced means. What distinguished them from the other members of this group, as their old-fashionedness distinguished them from their artistic peers, was their capacity to make a connection between their social and sexual marginality and the equally marginal position of the avant-garde. It is this capacity that makes them seem not just old-fashioned, but even more, otherworldly, since it enabled, or drove, them to become messengers between two worlds, that of the inconsequential past and that of the future as envisioned by the weak messiahs of autonomous art. Moore carried her diving bell with her as she moved her reluctant mother from the provinces to Greenwich Village in pursuit of a career; fortunately, for the less enterprising Cornell, the Manhattan art world was only a subway ride away from his home in Queens. "Many amateurs love the vaguely preposterous past," as Kirstein reminds us, but few of them end up showing their findings at Madison Avenue galleries and the Museum of Modern Art. In setting Cornell apart from his fellow amateurs, Kirstein means to say that the artist is, if not exactly a professional, a special kind of amateur, at once an institutional outsider whose "gift" is sui generis and someone whose "skill" links him to that most prestigious example of professionalism, the scientist. In a similar vein, Moore speaks of the anthologist's aptitude for "the science of assorting and the art of investing an assortment with dignity." Still, the lingering suggestion that the "assortment" in and of itself lacks "dignity" may lead us to suspect that the anthologist herself continues to harbor some insecurity about her own social or professional status, an insecurity she shares with Kirstein's gifted amateur.[65]

iv. Amateurs and Aristocrats

"Amateur" was a particularly charged term for Kirstein. In personal terms, he too was both an insider and an outsider, a Jew and a homosexual, scion of a wealthy family and Harvard man. His uncertainties about his social position—by his own

account, he could pass in both "the aristocratic world of Boston" and the "half-world" of gay bohemia but was at home in neither—were reflected in his career pattern.[66] Although from his college years on Kirstein showed great talent as an editor, critic, and curator of art (and tried his hand, with less success, at novel writing and poetry), until well into his adulthood he seemed to himself and others to lack a proper sense of vocation. "I wanted to *do* lots of things," he recalled late in life, but "I had no idea what I wanted to *be*."[67] Among his many youthful enthusiasms was the dream of establishing that least American of art forms, the classical ballet, in the United States; and despite, or perhaps because of its unlikeliness, this was the project that over time Kirstein came to recognize as his true calling.[68] Even as he built one of the great cultural institutions of the twentieth century, however, Kirstein once again faced charges of amateurism, this time leveled not so much at himself as at his institution. Because the intellectual rigor that Balanchine brought to his art obviated the standards by which dance previously had been judged, and therefore laid the field for such judgments wide open, his modernist ballet attracted a devoted audience of intelligent amateurs—professors, artists, poets—rather than just the usual balletomanes.[69] "It is difficult to grasp, from today's perspective, how provocative, challenging, *special* City Ballet was back then," the editor Robert Gottlieb recalls; "'We happy few' prided ourselves on getting the point," while "a large part of the dance world . . . was in opposition."[70] Late in his career, Kirstein himself affectionately characterized this "ideal normal subscription audience, which Balanchine has relied on for support for the last thirty-five years" as "an informed or specialist public which brings to the theater experience in comparative judgment strengthened by interest in other arts and crafts, sciences and ideas."[71] Both Cornell and Moore were members of this audience; Cornell befriended and created tributes to a number of Balanchine's ballerinas, and Moore wrote a poem about the *premier danseur* Arthur Mitchell. While Kirstein cherished, as he shared, the Balanchine devotees' amateurism, he knew that their status as outsiders to the dance world rendered his risky project all the more vulnerable to ridicule by insiders. The opposition was led, as Gottlieb notes, by the *New York Times*'s dance critic John Martin, whose hostility to the work of Kirstein and Balanchine more or less ensured that they would have trouble attracting an audience beyond the "happy few" in the company's early years.

In response to such attacks on the territory he had begun to stake out, Kirstein attempted to redefine the "amateur" as a necessary supplement to the "professional." Thus, looking back over the Balanchine company's 1947 season, Kirstein writes that "The performances . . . were a fusion of professional standards and amateur taste (the word amateur understood in its meaning of careful selection, a

cultivated taste, but an absence of the timeworn formulae of production intended to guarantee safely commercial success)."[72] Kirstein values "professional standards" but also worries that these standards are prone to harden into "timeworn formulae" and, as such, are designed to serve commercial ends. One role of the "amateur," then, as Kirstein rather willfully defines it, is to combat the stagnation and corruption that come with art's codification and commercialization: "amateur taste" is to "professional standards" as the avant-garde is to the artistic mainstream. The "right" sort of amateurism may also help to combat professionalism's exclusive tendencies; or so Kirstein seems to suggest when he writes, in a 1938 column for the *Nation*, that by contrast with the "remoteness" and "spectral grandeur" of the performers of the European ballet, "the Americans are intimate, volatile, frank," qualities that derive from their "retention of their amateur status" and consequent "nearness to the audience." The egalitarian attitude promoted by the American ballet, he adds, is nonetheless consistent with the greatest refinement insofar as "[o]ur dancing artists have selected and amplified all that is most useful in the amateur spirit to make of it a conscious and brilliant frame for their individual theatrical projection."[73] Kirstein's "amateurs" may have their differences with professionalist gatekeepers and standard-setters, but they are neither levelers nor anarchists. Rather, "amateur taste" merely checks the tendency of "standards" to harden into "formulae," just as the "amateur spirit" checks the tendency of aristocracies of merit to harden into fixed hierarchies. In Kirstein's view, we may say, amateurism is not only consistent with professionalism, it is professionalism's good conscience.

Among the constituents of the culture of professionalism, however, this was and is a minority view. In his history of the professionalist ethos, Burton Bledstein recounts the process by which "[t]he word 'amateur,' which earlier in the eighteenth century had simply referred to a person who pursued an activity for the love of it, increasingly acquired negative and pejorative references as the nineteenth century developed" and professionalist culture came into its own.[74] Since then, amateurs have come to be thought of exclusively in terms of what they lack, that is, training and credentials; but at one time, amateurs were also defined in terms of what they possessed, capital and the leisure it buys to engage in unremunerative pursuits. From 1933, when Kirstein persuaded Balanchine to come to the United States, up to and even past the time when the New York City Ballet was established at City Center, Kirstein, the heir to a department-store fortune, drew heavily on his own personal funds, sometimes supplemented by money from family members and similarly well-set-up Harvard friends, to keep his ballet project afloat.[75] And to the extent that Kirstein and company redirected their money

from the business to the cultural sector, they allied themselves not with their own class segment, but with what Bourdieu terms "the dominated fraction of the dominating class." Hence, Kirstein's use of adjectives like "amateur" and "inconsequential" to evoke the relative abjection of the class fraction whose interests he is committed to promoting. However, this abjected portion of the ruling class may also claim to be the surviving representative of aristocratic values, insofar as these may be seen as the last bastion of resistance to the reduction of all interests to cash value. It is this claim that motivates Kirstein's attempt to revive the almost obsolete sense of amateurism as the disinterested pursuit of knowledge under socially elevated conditions.

Then again, we may recall from the discussion of professionalism and the academy in chapter 1 that, as Magali Sarfatti Larson observes, "to the extent that [professionalism] does not obey first to the profit motive, but seeks first to improve the *quality* of life," it, too, may claim to be the legitimate heir of the aristocratic ethos.[76] Focusing Larson's insights on the particular case of the professionalizing modernist, Louis Menand observes that this distinctively twentieth-century creature aims "to make his discourse seem not a new, but in fact the traditional discourse, and to make the language of the amateur he is supplanting appear to be an aberration."[77] The "professional" artist thus appears as historically consequential, while the scapegoat figure of the "amateur," a leisured dreamer whose discourse is not "traditional" but merely old-fashioned, is written out of history. Finally, expanding on Menand's account, Gail McDonald notes the way in which the would-be professionals of the institution of modern art tended to feminize their rivals. Not only were women seen as amateurs par excellence, possessed of too much leisure and too little education; contact with them was deemed likely to be "the cause of amateurism in others." And so, McDonald concludes, "Aspirations to professionalism help to explain why academic generalists and modernist poets were anxious not only to compare themselves to doctors and scientists, but also to dissociate themselves emphatically from women." (McDonald, 78–79). For such anxious moderns, to say that "Ballet is woman" is as much as to say that it is irredeemably amateur, and so, irrevocably a thing of the past.

The survival of the specter of "the amateur" into modernism's second phase, the era of institutional consolidation in both the academy and the art world, therefore suggests the degree to which professionalism continues to be haunted by its failure to be sufficiently disinterested. In his defense of the monopolists of cultural capital, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*, Alvin Gouldner remarks that the "old class," the industrial bourgeoisie, "has never been greatly beloved; its grip on society has never been matched by a *legitimacy* of equal force;

indeed, it was *born* with a 'legitimation crisis.'"[78] By contrast, Gouldner argues, the "new class" (e.g., Bourdieu's "dominated fraction") is born with the claim to disinterestedness that lends it legitimacy. However, while seen from inside the ruling class, its dominated and dominating fractions appear opposed to one another, from the point of view of the lower classes, they present a consolidated front. As Larson reminds us, "the professions' 'civilizing function' coexists, by definition, with a market orientation and is fused with it";[79] and to the extent that the cultures of professionalism and the market are "fused," the "new class" may be said to have inherited the "old" one's "legitimation crisis."

The archaic aspect of this crisis shows itself in words like "amateur" and "connoisseur," which enter the English language in the period immediately preceding the French revolution. By the beginning of the twentieth century, such terms would seem to be as outmoded as the idea of an aristocracy, and yet modernists like Kirstein and Moore still find them indispensable. Of the connoisseur, in "Critics and Connoisseurs," Moore writes that "Disbelief and conscious fastidiousness were ingredients in its / disinclination to move"; simply by refusing to go away it holds its own against the upstart "critic." On one hand, then, Kirstein's "amateur," Moore's "connoisseur," and Eliot's and Westcott's competing "aristocracies" are all archaic images of the Benjaminian sort, glimpses of a different history from the one that made it into *the* book. They are "inconsequential" in the sense that they do not fit into the unbroken chain of cause and effect that forms the historicist continuum, but as long as they may serve as warnings in "a moment of danger," they continue to signify. In this case, the danger is that professionalism will become so completely "fused" with a "market orientation" that it will cease to exercise a "civilizing" influence on an otherwise "savage" capitalist society. And so the aristocratic revenants appear, like Scrooge's ghosts, to urge the professional to carry on their tradition of *noblesse oblige*.

On the other hand, such visitations may also serve as lessons in the dialectics of dominance; one cannot forget that the displaced "aristocrat" who is now a figure of pathos was once an oppressor. In Moore's poem "The Student" (1932), the prerevolutionary aristocrat and the Eliot who expressed his contempt for "universal university education" come together in the figure of a "French man" who sniffs, "In America everybody must have a degree." Eliot had suggested in his discussion of her work that Moore shared his contempt, that her use of the "curious jargon" of educated Americans was "satirical"; but the poem's speaker's tone is more wounded than satirical as she replies, "We / may feel as he says we do; five kinds of superiority // might be unattainable by all, but one degree is not too much."[80] "The nearest approach to a line drawn between the common people and an aristocratic class

in New England is that which education furnishes," Henry Ward Beecher observes, since "[i]f a man has been to college, he has a title."[81] But as both Moore and Eliot know, some educational institutions are more "aristocratic" than others. In this connection, one recalls that the connoisseur in "Critics and Connoisseurs" is represented by an Oxford swan. The swan's education has taught him how to "dominate the stream in an attitude of self-defense"; by contrast, Moore's "student" says that education "prompts us to extend the machinery of advantage / to those who are without it." The uses of education, in short, depend on the user's "attitude," or position. The poet's own position is not fixed: we may see in her both types of student: the type who defensively wields an inherited privilege in order to "dominate the stream" and the type who, while possessing a certain "advantage," nonetheless identifies to some degree with "those who are without it."

In the previous chapter, I linked Moore's capacity for such radical shifts of position, both within and between poems, to that fundamental psychic tendency that Freud termed "ambivalence." Ambivalence, in its primal form, is a state in which neither one of a pair of opposing qualities appears as necessarily dominant. Later, these paired qualities—Freud calls them "passivity" and "activity"—are overlaid by the series of hierarchically ranked oppositions, first among them the feminine and the masculine, that govern our social lives, yet the order of dominance in these socially constitutive oppositions continues to be threatened by our underlying ambivalence. The closer an artist cleaves to a primal state of ambivalence, the more likely her work is to be driven by rapid shifts between opposed positions; this is the lesson I draw from Moore's poetic character. It is not in any one position, but in the changing relations between positions, between the "professional" and the "amateur," the bourgeois and the aristocrat, Adamic "originality" and colubrine "sophistication," that we may locate her deepest social critique.[82] Although Cornell placed his dreamworlds behind glass, literally and figuratively sealing them off from social life, he saw in Moore's artistic use of her ambivalence a precedent for his own effort to respond to that crisis in the relations of dominance unfolding within the institution of art in the middle decades of the last century. Just as, in the late 1920s, Moore locates a potential for dominance in "that sometimes disparaged, most powerful phase of the anthology, the museum," so the ballerinas who enter Cornell's work in the late 1930s may be seen as the avatars of his subsequent move toward painterly abstraction. In both cases, we see in the relative weakness of an art form the messianic promise of an eventual shift in the relations of dominance. We hope then for a revolution, but what we get more often is a coup d'état. The museum lost its pathos as it became more evidently "powerful" and less often "disparaged." As for the ballerinas, once they had served their

purpose as transitional objects in the modernist romance, they were once again discarded as things of the past. When Kirstein engineered City Ballet's move from City Center to a new, custom-built theater at Lincoln Center in the mid-1960s, the company finally became "an institution" in all senses of the word: stable, profitable, respectable. At that point, though, the "happy few" who had been drawn by the "provocative" quality of Balanchine's art drifted away, to be replaced by a more conventional ballet audience, made up of specialists and the upper bourgeoisie.

Moore, who came to artistic maturity at the height of modernism's first phase, developed a stronger taste for institutional power politics than did Cornell, who became a connoisseur of pathos at a moment when modernism's future seemed most insecure. Still, Moore was keenly aware that as a woman and a member of "a class-segment that has almost been freed either from power or from guilt," she would always be perceived as occupying a relatively weak position. As such, she attracted the "curator of culture" in Cornell, his impulse to preserve what might otherwise be lost, what might fall, as he felt himself in danger of falling, outside the ever more strictly defined bounds of the institution of art. The rise to cultural dominance of "the museum," or rather, of that dispersed and dynamic enterprise known as the art world, may have looked, early on, as if it would provide opportunities to open the palace doors to those who had once been excluded, or as Moore might say, "disparaged." This is, for instance, how it looked to William Carlos Williams when he recalled the period after the Armory Show, which introduced Duchamp's work to America, as one in which "There had been a break somewhere, we were streaming through."[83] However, as any aristocrat might have told Williams, once the relatively dominated ascend to a position of relative dominance, they guard their privileges as fiercely as those whom they have displaced.

v. The Collector and the Criminal: Cornell and Moore's Imaginary Economy

The positive function of an art like Cornell's is thus not to pave the way for an art form making the transition from a position of weakness to one of strength, but to serve as a reminder that the continued vitality of art depends on its capacity to acknowledge what it excludes. Greenberg was eager to move past the transition point and into the era of the triumph of painting, a triumph that he thought would secure the autonomy of art. Cornell, however, intuited that the assertion of the unquestioned dominance of a single art form would spell the end of the historical dialectic in which the relatively weak might yet serve as "models for salvation."

Some of the artist's characteristic themes remind us first and foremost of the weakness of these models: his ballerinas, for instance, whose "lost acts" escape between word and picture, never to be fully recaptured. There are also those of his works in which the "literary" element predominates, such as the dossiers and the "bookboxes," volumes partly hollowed-out and glassed-over to contain small assemblages. Cornell had, moreover, the peculiar habit, which he shared with Moore, of filling the books in his personal library with what Moore scholar Patricia C. Willis calls "laid-in material"—clippings, pamphlets, notes, and other ephemera—thus turning these volumes as well into hybrids between works of literature and works of art.[84] Conversely, the muter the object, the more abstract the composition, the more Cornell's art seems to side with painting, the soon-to-be dominant art.

But when Kirstein describes Cornell's talent as "the energy for collection, juxtaposition and contrast," he reminds us that the real energy of Cornell's work resides neither in its "weak" or "strong" elements as such, but in the tension, the "juxtaposition and contrast" between them. Like Moore, in other words, Cornell couches his social critique in terms of dialectical oppositions; but whereas Moore's nimble shifts between opposed positions keep us perpetually on the move and off balance, Cornell's juxtaposed elements are tensely poised in what the makers of action films call a Mexican standoff, or what Benjamin termed "dialectics at a standstill."[85] At the point where "the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest," Benjamin believes, the conflict between historical forces—say, between the tendencies toward professionalization and marketization—is best represented not as a process but as an "image"—say, a watch face that has ceased, for now at least, to tell the time. This "dialectical image" or "historical object" has suffered a "violent expulsion from the continuum of historical process":[86] it no longer figures in that progressive narrative whose completeness and continuity makes existing power relations appear inevitable. Benjamin, Kirstein, Moore, and Cornell all give the same name to the allegorical figure who has been charged with the keeping of objects that have been violently torn from their historical context, and ultimately, with lending them new meanings via the practice of an art of "juxtaposition and contrast." He, or she, is "the collector."[87] I want to bring this discussion to a close with a consideration of "collection," a concept which seems to me both to mark the point of closest connection between Cornell's aesthetic and Moore's and to illuminate the differences between them.

The dialectical opposite of the collector is the consumer. The two are at war over the fate of the commodity. The consumer uses it up, and so completes the cycle of historical violence that began with the exploitation of the workers whose alienated labor gives the objects they produce their uncanny glow, while the

collector harbors the fantasy of stopping this process in its tracks. "To him" Benjamin writes,

> falls the Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character by taking possession of them. But he can bestow on them only connoisseur value, rather than use value. The collector delights in evoking a world that is not just distant and long gone but also better—a world in which, to be sure, human beings are no better provided with what they need than in the real world, but in which things are freed from the drudgery of being useful.[88]

The collector is a peculiar kind of revolutionary: he liberates the products, not the producers, from their "drudgery," and his utopia is located not in the future but in the inconsequential past. His war against consumer culture is conducted not in the streets but in the psychophysical space Benjamin terms "the interior," which is constituted at that moment in the later nineteenth century when "places of dwelling are for the first time opposed to places of work." Constructed in a domestic space packed to the rafters with carefully sorted collections of mass-produced gimracks and secondhand finds, Cornell's boxes, with their compartments within compartments, are about nothing if not interiority. Or perhaps, given their shallowness and their glass fronts, it would be truer to say that they are about the illusion of interiority. In any case, the stillness that reigns among the "historical objects" that inhabit them signals that we are in the presence of the negative moment in the dialectic driven by the opposition between thing and commodity, or as Cornell might put it, between the "humble nature of neglected documents" and the "treasure waiting to be revealed." This opposition is reflected on another level by the way in which, for all its intense privacy, the Cornell box also resembles those very public display spaces, the department-store window and its aristocratic doppelgänger, the museum vitrine. Like modernity's other would-be autonomists, the collector can never be disinterested enough.

We can see the collector in Moore struggling with this thought, that the motives that drive her to possess things can never be pure enough, in a 1965 article written for *Women's Wear Daily* in which she insists that "I am not a collector, merely a fortuitous one," before launching into a long and obsessively detailed list of her "favorite possessions" (*CPr* 598–99). How can one be a collector and yet not? The logic of collecting drove both Moore and Cornell to ask themselves this question, to which they then responded in remarkably similar ways. Both came to conceive of the process of collection not just as a withdrawal from the existing economy but also as an effort to create an alternative economy, one which would make it possible for their art to circulate without ever taking on the character of a

commodity. Moore's riddling definition, in her 1923 poem "Novices," of "the artist" as "the only seller who buys, and holds on to the money" (*BMM* 113), could also serve as Cornell's motto. Rather than sell his work, the artist preferred to give it away to friends and the objects of his crushes, a habit that was the despair of his dealers and their clients. However, Cornell was also prone to ask for his gifts back after a certain amount of time had passed, a tendency that seems strange unless one thinks of it as the function of an economy in which the processes of circulation are literally circular.

Cornell never had to ask Moore to return his gifts. "All came safe," she wrote to him, upon receiving a particularly rich parcel of Cornelliana, "and when I have explored them (I may be deliberate about this), I shall be restoring them to you. The worm-holes, above all, belong in a collector's tower. Do not make me a criminal."[89] Why would taking permanent possession of Cornell's gifts make Moore "a criminal"? As any Marxist will tell you, property is theft. Only a peculiar sort of Marxist, however, would suggest, as Moore does here, that the "collector" is somehow exempt from this stricture. Benjamin thought of himself as a Marxist, while Moore and Cornell undoubtedly did not; but these three share a nearly identical conception of the collector as a hero of late capitalism. Moore knew without Cornell's asking that she was to return his gifts because she already understood herself to be engaged with him in the Sisyphean task of "divesting things of their commodity character"; and so, she completed the circular process he had initiated by restoring his things, not so much to Cornell himself as to the ideal inhabitant of his "collector's tower." This ideal collector is not a man of property but a perfectly disinterested "curator of culture" who preserves things of the past not, or not just, for their own sake, but in the hope that they may someday serve as "models for salvation." What makes the collector's task Sisyphean is the impossibility of sustaining this ideal state of disinterestedness, of ever drawing a firm enough line between actual and imaginary possession. "When I Buy Pictures // or what is closer to the truth, / when I look at that of which I may regard myself as the imaginary possessor": like Moore's claim that she is "not a collector, only a fortuitous one," these lines register the strain of the effort to keep the imaginary from collapsing into the actual.

This effort presents special difficulties to the feminine poet. As Lisa Steinman points out, it is significant both that the article in which Moore describes herself as not-a-collector was written during the last, "celebrity" phase of her career, and that it appeared in *Women's Wear Daily*, an organ dedicated to presenting women with and as "fetishized commodities."[90] While other of her peers, such as Eliot and Robert Frost, also acquired a measure of celebrity as representatives of old-fashioned

values in the brave new postwar world, Moore, the token woman, was the only one among them who was asked to write for high-end women's magazines like *WWD*, *Vogue*, and *Harper's Bazaar*. On one hand, Moore's presence was supposed to lend some gravitas to these publications, yet on the other, she was also expected to play there the stereotypically feminine roles of avid consumer and of image to be consumed. And so, this much-photographed and, in her own way, glamorous figure was assigned to write on the dresses of Worth and the jewels of Van Cleef and Arpels. Once she had been cast by the media as one of America's leading female female impersonators—the spinster in George Washington drag—Moore's plan, as Steinman describes it, was to draw on mass culture's "energy" and to assume the moral authority that comes with fame, while somehow managing to resist the culture industry's tendency to commodify whatever it touches. This, however, is another version of the task of Sisyphus. "Beware of greed," Moore the moralist warns toward the end of the *Women's Wear Daily* piece, "it comes in many disguises." As always, the poet's weapon is to some extent self-directed: Moore needs to be warned, not only against the possibility that she might possess commodities but also against the possibility that she might herself become a commodity.

However, Moore's richest critique of these possibilities is lodged (again as always) not in her Aesopian morals, but in the ambivalent discourse that pivots on her dialectical images. One image that was a particularly rich source of ambivalence for Moore in the context of her thinking about "possession" was that of the jewel. "I like *jewels*," she once replied to Elizabeth Bishop, when asked what sort of gifts she preferred.[91] Like art, jewels belong to that strange subset of commodities that have no use value and a high exchange value. Because they circulate but are not, in the strict sense, consumed, jewels epitomize for Moore the tension between the impulse toward and repulse from "possession." This thought helps to makes sense of the otherwise puzzling assertion with which Moore begins "Voracities and Verities Are Sometimes Interacting," her 1947 poem on the difficulty of sustaining the dialectic between desire ("voracities") and detachment ("verities"). "I don't like diamonds," the poet proclaims, "the emerald's 'grass-lamp glow' is better" (*MMCP* 148)—better, that is, because the economic value of emeralds is more unstable, more dependent on the vagaries of taste, than the value of diamonds, whose clarity is a sign of the purity of their commodity character. If jewels lose their "'grass-lamp glow'," Moore, in her role as collector, will no longer be able to see them as *objets d'art* but only as chunks of congealed currency: the pressure of consumer culture will have caused the internal distance between thing and commodity to collapse. We can see this pressure at work as well in the case of Moore the female female impersonator, who loses her capacity for critique and becomes

a mere entertainer once she can no longer sustain an "ironic estrangement" between private self and public persona. The mere woman in Moore, for her part, is acutely aware of the sexual connotations of "possession." The jewel is a traditional emblem of feminine sexuality, but Moore gives tradition a distinctive twist in a poem like "Those Various Scalpels," by making it difficult to tell whether the bejeweled figure at the poem's center is the desired object or desiring subject. In this case, if the poet cannot maintain the necessary internal distance between subject and object, she will be consumed by her own desire.

When he most closely identifies with women, Cornell, too, is in danger of being consumed by his own desire; the glass front on each box implicitly says "don't touch," a warning intended for the artist as much as for us. But as a man Cornell still participates, albeit at a distance, in the traffic in women that is central to the economy of any patriarchal society. Unlike Moore, who must make her objections to such an economy explicit if she is ever to claim a subject position for herself within patriarchy, Cornell need never acknowledge the sources of his ambivalence about "possession." The dangers represented by "collection" are more immediate for Moore than they are for Cornell; perhaps this is why in her work this concept plays a significant but carefully delimited role, while for him it is the key to the structure of the work as a whole. However, Cornell may also have found collection and the problems it posed more absorbing than Moore did because he came to artistic maturity at a later point in the development of commodity culture. The impulse to possess things and the impulse to possess women may always have been closely related in patriarchal societies, but in a culture devoted to perfecting the techniques of channeling all desires into a desire for commodities, it becomes increasingly difficult to tell sexual desire from what Moore would call greed.

For both personal and historical reasons, then, Cornell is, if not more explicitly, then more emphatically concerned than Moore is with the commodification of sexuality in general, and of feminine sexuality in particular. His artworks, with their thing-like women and erotically charged things, stress with the force of an obsession the connection between the cultural obligation to remove things from circulation, and so to "free" them, as Benjamin says, "from the drudgery of being useful," and the sexual compulsion to remove women from circulation, lest they be subject to actual possession. The atmosphere of sexual guilt that saturates Cornell's art is not absolutely foreign to Moore, but in her writing the expression of such guilty feelings is more deeply coded. "Do not make me a criminal": if we juxtapose the poet's plea regarding Cornell's gifts with "criminal ingenuity," a key phrase in "Marriage," and her protest, in "In the Days of Prismatic Color," that "complexity is not a crime," we may see that for Moore references to criminality (a) tend to be

self-reflexive and (b) encode economic, erotic, and artistic meanings. In "Marriage," Moore's expressed aim is simply to avoid "possession" in the sexual sense, an effort that will require all the "ingenuity" this great poet of negativity can muster. But given Moore's ambivalence, we may be justified in supposing that the reverse is also true—that Moore implicitly associates criminality with the urge to find the means to express a profoundly unconventional desire. Since the means themselves are thereby made suspect, this dauntingly complex writer finds herself in the strange position of having to convince us that "complexity is not a crime." Cornell is likely to have sensed all of these implications in Moore's seemingly casual request to him to save her from the very "criminal" impulses that his gifts have aroused, since he and she were, one might say, partners in crime. The intercourse between these similarly "fortuitous" collectors can never be consummated, but consists, rather, in a mutual effort to sustain the illusory yet necessary distinction between imaginary and actual possession.

Moore and Cornell's friendship was at its most intense in the mid-1940s, a time of artistic crisis in her career and a formative period in his. His last letter to her is dated 1955, although as late as 1970 he records in his journal a "dream of Marianne Moore & Coney Island and refreshment stands abutting into the water high up."[92] In his dream, Moore is both "high up," out of reach, and as accessible as Coney Island, both an aristocrat and a democrat. If the life of art in modern America depends on the continued possibility of sustaining the tension between an aristocratic disinterestedness and a democratic openness, then the task of art is to find ways of bringing these moral capacities into close confrontation with one another. Moore stages such confrontations as a series of violently abrupt shifts from position to position, while behind the glass of Cornell's boxes, the adversaries face one another in a dreamlike suspension. Of course, poetry unfolds in time, and visual art in space; but the distinction between Moore's work and Cornell's is a matter not just of medium but also of the meaning of medium at a given historical moment. Like Balanchine's elephant, which "is graceful when doing things it could not do if not taught to do them," Moore submits herself to the poetic routine, yet denies that what she writes are poems. She expresses herself in the dominant medium as if in the voice of the dominated, while keeping in mind that the latter is also in its way "most powerful," and so comes to register the central development of the high modern period, the potential for conflict within the institution of art created by the rise of "the museum." Cornell's art emerges at a moment when the outcome of this conflict seems to hang in the balance, when literature still seems the safest bet for high-culture types in search of a prestigious position, but power players like Greenberg are laying their money on the art world.

For his part, Cornell is at once drawn to the art world's strength and mistrustful of it, and so withdraws into a "private zoo" of weak creatures sequestered behind glass. Yet the Cornell box is not just an interiorized "refuge for art" insofar as it exhibits a kinship with the museum vitrine and the department-store window. And just as Cornell's intensely private art cannot help but reflect the institution and the market in which it has, despite the artist's best efforts, acquired currency, so the close relation between the vitrine and the store window is the most open of secrets. This is, again, the relation between imaginary and actual possession, a dialectic that continually threatens to collapse into an identity. The terms of this dialectic are laid out with exceptional clarity in Cornell's *Taglioni's Jewel Casket* (1940), a box dedicated to the nineteenth-century ballerina Maria Taglioni (see figure 3.6). This box is not the usual glass-fronted affair, but takes the dossier-like form of a velvet-lined carrying-case. When opened, the case reveals in its bottom a dozen glass cubes arranged in a grid, while the lid displays a "diamond" necklace and a text which reads:

Fig 3.6 Joseph Cornell, *Taglioni's Jewel Casket*, 1940. Mixed media: 4¾ × 11 ⅞ × 8¼ inches (closed). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of James Thrall Soby.

> On a moonlit night in the winter of 1835 the carriage of Maria Taglioni was halted by a Russian highwayman, and that enchanting creature commanded to dance for this audience of one upon a panther's skin spread over the snow beneath the stars. From this little actuality arose the legend that, to keep alive the memory of this adventure so precious to her, TAGLIONI formed the habit of placing a piece of ice in her jewel casket or dressing table where, melting among the sparkling stones, there was evoked a hint of the atmosphere of the starlit heavens over the ice-covered landscape.[93]

In terms of subject matter, one side of the box represents the thing (ice), and the other, the commodity (diamonds). In terms of form, the "jewels"-plus-text are literary and representational, and the gridded cubes, at least when considered apart from the text, are more abstract. To close the box is to collapse these categories, to erase the kind of productive ambiguity that in the Taglioni story makes it hard for us to say whether the ballerina's performance is work of art or of crime. By enlisting Moore in his (and Kirstein's and Balanchine's) effort to revive the romantic ballet, Cornell hoped to solidify his own position in the palace of art, as he literally solidifies Taglioni's fragments of ice. However, Cornell knew as well as anyone that the sexual and social bases of Moore's position were dissolving even as he claimed that position as his own. In a postwar society now composed, unmistakably, of nothing but "variations *within* the middle class," the institution of art was beginning to look less like a thing apart, a palace, and more like other workplaces. Those artists who wished to draw a distinction between jewels and ice, between those aspects of art that can and cannot be possessed, might still look to Moore and Cornell as models; but they would have to acknowledge, as Moore and Cornell either could or would not, the degree to which their kind of criminal ingenuity had already been factored into the system.


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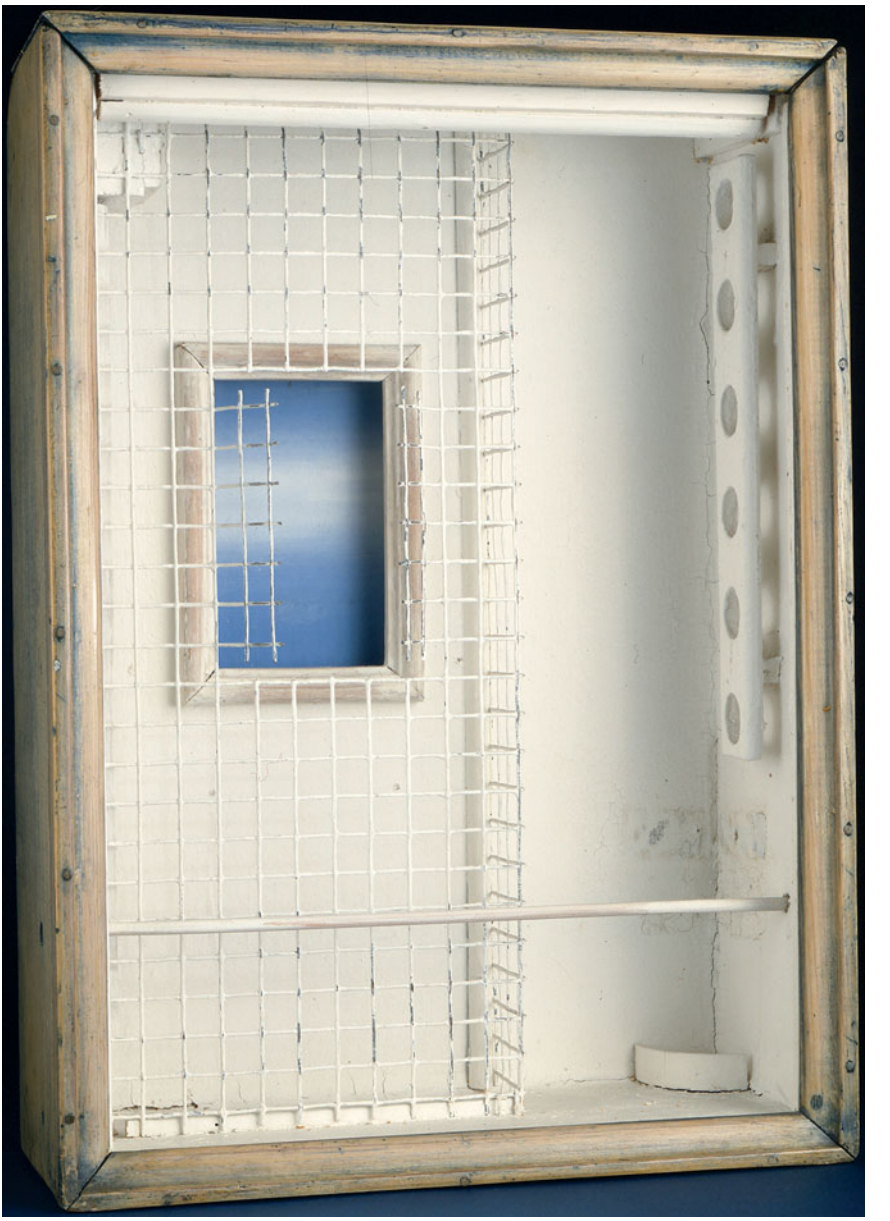

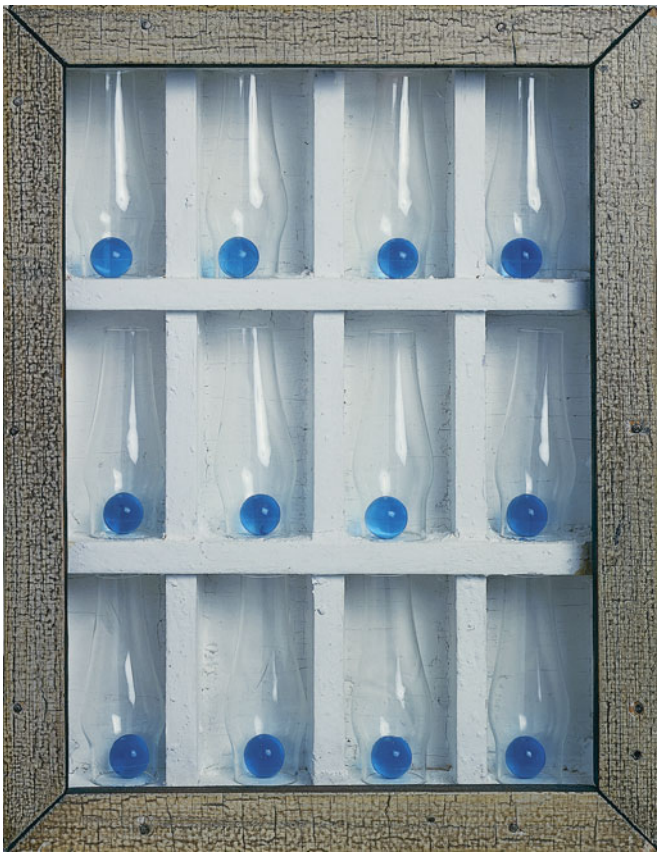

4. Surrealism in "the second, open sense": The Poets of the New York School

In 1967 John Ashbery, who was then editor of the magazine *ArtNews*, reviewed the Guggenheim Museum's retrospective of the work of an artist he had long admired, Joseph Cornell. One of the two epigraphs that Ashbery attached to the piece comes from a short story by another of the poet's favorites, the surrealist painter Giorgio de Chirico. The passage concerns a painter whose "bizarre and disconcerting" work "made certain highly esteemed critics repeat for the thousandth time the celebrated refrain: *It's literature*"; the very "same critics," that is, who "had in fact laid down the law *that painting must be art and not literature*" (*RS* 14). The painter himself "seemed to attach very little importance to all that, either because he understood nothing of it, or because he understood it all too well and therefore pretended not to understand," a response with which the artist in Ashbery doubtless sympathizes. In his role of art critic, however, Ashbery feels called on to defend Cornell from certain of his brethren who, like their counterparts in de Chirico's fiction, seek to judge Cornell's art by "the law *that painting must be art and not literature*." "Much has been made" by such critics, Ashbery observes, "of Cornell's transition from early, so-called picturesque works like the 'Medici Slot Machine' to the bare, quasi-constructivist 'hotels' and 'dovecotes' of the 1950's." These proponents of art-as-opposed-to-literature see in Cornell's move away from the "picturesque" (i.e., the literary) and toward abstraction a confirmation of their historical schema, whereby progress in the arts is measured in terms of the degree to which

each art can free itself of traces of the others. But Cornell subverts this schema, Ashbery believes, inasmuch as he "establishes a delicately adjusted dialogue between the narrative and the visual qualities of the work in which neither is allowed to dominate." Here we may recall the agonistic twist that Clement Greenberg adds to the critical argument for a progressive purity of medium: over the course of the twentieth century, the visual arts, he says, have striven not only to distinguish themselves from, but also to establish their dominance over, literature. To suspend this struggle for dominance, as Ashbery says Cornell has done, is, in a sense, to stand outside history; hence the poet's claim that "Cornell's work exists beyond questions of 'literature' and 'art' in a crystal world of its own making: archetypal and inexorable" (*RS* 16–17).

By Ashbery's own account, Cornell's art had been a touchstone for him ever since the future poet, aged ten, first encountered it in an article on Surrealism in *Life* magazine (*SP* 246). When he expresses admiration for the way Cornell has placed himself beyond the fray between "literature" and "art," Ashbery is, I think, voicing his own ambition as well. Still, as I argued in the last chapter, to seem, as Cornell does, to stand outside history is only another way of situating oneself within one's historical moment, and Ashbery's historical situation necessarily differed from the one to which Cornell felt compelled to respond. The latter's "delicately adjusted dialogue between the narrative and the visual qualities of the work" reflected a moment when the hierarchical relations among the various arts were unsettled, and it was unclear not only which art might come to dominate the scene, but even whether, as Greenberg then insisted, "There can be such a thing as a dominant art form." By the time Ashbery's generation arrived on the scene, however, the balance of power had begun to shift more definitively in the direction of one art in particular. Ashbery's friend Frank O'Hara gives this historical picture its caption: "poetry was declining / Painting advancing / we were complaining / it was '50."[1]

As we have seen, the response of many poets to their embattled situation at this time was to retreat to the academy, where they became an entrenched, if tightly circumscribed, power. But Ashbery and his fellow poets of the so-called New York School reacted instead by going over to the enemy camp, as it were. For them, the art world would serve as a source of income and a vehicle for spreading reputations, functions that were crucial at key moments in the poets' struggle to survive and thrive. Yet perhaps still more crucial, at a moment when the academic poets seemed to renounce the aesthetic radicalism of their high-modern forbears, was the art world's capacity to confirm these poets' belief that it was still possible, in David Trotter's words, to find "institutional audiences" for "a deliberately experimental art."[2] As Trotter's remark would suggest, the impetus behind the New York

School poets' turn to the art world has often been explained in "progressive" terms, that is, in terms of mid-century American painting's advance over poetry in the modernist race to make it new.[3] Ashbery has on occasion taken this line as well, recalling, for instance, that when he and his compatriots were starting out, "American painting seemed the most exciting art around. American poetry was very traditional at that time, and there was no modern poetry in the sense that there was modern painting. So one got one's inspiration from watching the experiments of others."[4] A vulgar Greenbergian might take such statements to mean that once poetry began to falter in the struggle for dominance, Ashbery and company sought to hitch their wagons to painting's rising star. Still, even if this thesis contains a grain of truth, it leaves open many questions, such as why these poets, all of whom enjoyed some degree of success as art critics, did not follow Greenberg's own example and simply abandon poetry for the art world. Or to take another, more specific instance, there is the inconvenient fact that many of the visual artists with whom Ashbery himself seems to have the strongest affinity are not the most advanced, either in the Greenbergian mode of medium-focused purism, or in the Duchampian line of an ever-more-disembodied conceptualism. These artists—a pack led by de Chirico and Cornell, and including such lesser oddballs as R. B. Kitaj, Saul Steinberg, Jess, and Trevor Winkfield—all go directly against the purist grain in that they are overtly, even extravagantly, literary.[5] Why, if as Ashbery says, he was initially drawn to the visual arts by their progressive qualities, their air of excitement and experimentation, should he then go to the trouble of singling out for praise artists who have in common a pronounced regressive streak?

I will speak more directly to this question a little further on. At this point, though, I would like to return briefly once more to the last chapter's discussion of the regressive aspect of Cornell's art and artistic persona. There I relied on the notion of "the inconsequential past," a phrase coined by Lincoln Kirstein in his attempt to explain Cornell's appeal, to help account for this artist's attachment, not to "tradition," in the manner of T. S. Eliot and his followers, but to what falls outside it. As Brian O'Doherty says, in his own eloquent defense of Cornell's retrograde tendencies, the artist "lack[ed] the aggressiveness of the historicizing thinker." Again, though, this is not so much to say that Cornell stands outside history as that his work complicates our reading of the official histories, narratives written under the aegis of the victors in the struggle for dominance. It is their association with the losers in this struggle that leads "the historicizing thinker" to dismiss certain aspects of the past as "inconsequential." Kirstein's comments on Cornell thus led to a reconsideration of Walter Benjamin's thought that it is precisely in those aspects of the past that have been repressed, in both the political

and psychoanalytic senses of the word, that we may find the makings of a counter-historicist, or as Benjamin terms it, "materialist," mode of historical writing. Such a materialist account would not be a "history of the losers" per se, but rather, a history informed by the thought that no party dominates by dint of its inherent superiority.

But it is extraordinarily difficult to sustain this thought, since insofar as we live in history we are all members of one party or another, all victors or losers in various ways and to varying degrees. To detach ourselves from such conscious and unconscious commitments, we must find a way to stand outside history, in imagination at least—to retreat to what Ashbery, in speaking of Cornell, calls "a crystal world," or to practice, as the poet phrases it elsewhere, "a kind of fence-sitting / Raised to the level of an esthetic ideal" (*JACP* 185). "Fence-sitting," maintaining a precarious balance between opposed alternatives, is, I have argued, the aesthetic attitude par excellence; and it is associated, I claim further, with a disposition to revert to the psychic state that Freud calls "ambivalence." This disposition is regressive in that it bespeaks a return to an inchoate welter of drives not yet bound to particular sexual identities or objects; but it may also be progressive, if in its undoing of primal hierarchies it enables us to imagine that a given order of dominance might yet be otherwise. The "otherworldly" character many have attributed to Marianne Moore and Cornell derives, I have suggested, from their unusually strong tendency toward a state of ambivalence; for both, the enigmatic character of their art is closely bound to the "unspeakable" character of their sexuality. The New York School group was dominated by gay men, among them Ashbery and O'Hara, a fact some critics have pointed to as a possible source of the esoteric writing style associated with the group in general and Ashbery in particular.[6] But Ashbery and O'Hara differ from Cornell and Moore in that their sexuality was "speakable," if only just, in the postwar, pre-Stonewall urban bohemias in which they came of age. It was an open secret, much like the scandal of their situation in the "wrong" institution. To be gay and in the art world is to be an outsider to *the* institutions of sexuality and of poetry, but these are clear and determinate positions, this-worldly rather than otherworldly.

Ashbery and his friends' sense of themselves as social outsiders was further circumscribed by the situation they faced as would-be late-modern avant-gardists; for in a cultural world in which the margin around officially sanctioned institutions seemed to grow ever narrower, it was becoming more and more difficult to imagine what might constitute an "outside." "In other words," Ashbery wondered, cutting to the quick of this dilemma, "has tradition finally managed to absorb the individual talent?" (*RS* 393). In this chapter and the next, while that "poet among

painters," O'Hara, will play a significant role, my emphasis will fall on Ashbery, who by comparison with O'Hara is less comfortable with, though no less conscious of, his institutional position. While O'Hara cheerfully admits he "would rather be a painter" at the outset of "Why I Am Not a Painter," Ashbery anxiously wishes that he could, like Cornell, get "beyond questions of 'literature' and 'art.'" Yet Ashbery sees that retreat to "a crystal world" is not an option for him. Instead, he is compelled to make ever more explicit what artists like Cornell and Moore (another of Ashbery's acknowledged models) may still to some degree leave implicit: that the avant-gardist's task is not to construct utopian retreats, but to commit himself to an ever-more-rigorous practice of negation, to positing an outside where there manifestly is none. The place of the other is empty, is nonexistent, but it is the only position from which we can conceive of history otherwise. "Barely tolerated, living on the margins / In our technological society" (*JACP* 184), we gazers into the mirror of art have come to a point, Ashbery writes, where "This otherness, this / 'Not-being-us' is all there is to look at / In the mirror, though no one can say / How it came to be this way" (*JACP* 486). Still, in what follows, I hope both to say something about "how it came to be this way," that is, how poetry in its decline came to embody the principle of "otherness" within the institution of art; and to unpack the contents of Ashbery's "all," to ask, once more, how far an art conceived as wholly "other" vis-à-vis "our technological society" can still bear a positive relation to that society.

i. "A confusion of painting with literature": Greenberg vs. the Surrealists

Clement Greenberg's name never appears in Ashbery's essay on Cornell, nor does the poet refer to him directly in any of his other writings on notably "literary" artists.[7] However, by the early 1960s, as Caroline Jones tells us, "Greenberg" had been "transform[ed] from a proper name to a dispersed critical function," and as an art-world insider, Ashbery knew that it was scarcely necessary to mention the name to summon up what Jones calls "the Greenberg effect."[8] "[P]ainting, as we know, [is] merely areas of color arranged on a flat surface," Ashbery imagines certain critics drawling, as they contemplate the work of the esoteric figurative painter R. B. Kitaj. It is their unthinking adherence to the Greenbergian line, Ashbery implies, that leads these viewers to "dismiss Kitaj for his 'literary' qualities"—qualities that the poet considers to be among this painter's "most daring innovations" (*RS* 307). Still, despite the satirical note he strikes here, there is evidence that

Ashbery also admired Greenberg. In 1964, when the poet was editor of the Paris-based journal *Art and Literature*, he wrote to the critic to ask if the magazine could publish "Modernist Painting," an essay that, in the words of Greenberg's editor John O'Brian, "lies at heart of Greenberg's account of how modernism works."[9] Ashbery knew that "Modernist Painting" had already been published elsewhere, "but," he explains in his solicitation, "I do think it a tremendously important article and that it should be seen by as many readers as possible."[10] Some of these readers, of course, came back to haunt Ashbery in the form of those apostles of flatness whom he takes to task in the Kitaj essay; but there, I think, it is not so much Greenberg himself who is the target as it is a kind of vulgar Greenbergianism. However, Greenberg himself could also be guilty of such a vulgar, which is to say, an undialectical application of his own principles, and I am guessing that at least part of what is behind Ashbery's defense of the "'literary' qualities" he finds in certain visual artists is the impulse to press Greenberg and his acolytes to follow through on the implications of their own schema.

That schema, as laid out in "Towards a Newer Laocoon," originates in an imagined tension between "painting" and "literature." However, once Greenberg, together with "painting," had attained to an unquestioned position of cultural dominance, "literature" drops out of the picture and "painting" reigns unchallenged in the critical discourse. In "Modernist Painting," one can actually see the paradigm shift in the course of a single sentence, in which Greenberg emphatically renounces the thesis of "Laocoon." "To achieve autonomy," the critic writes, "painting has had above all to divest itself of everything it might share with sculpture, and it is in its effort to do this, and not so much—I repeat—to exclude the representational or literary, that painting has made itself abstract" (*CE* 4:88). The "literary" need no longer concern us, in other words, now that we see that the institution of visual art is, and *always has been*, the true center of artistic modernism's struggle to achieve autonomy. This is what history as written by the victors sounds like.

In Greenberg's earlier reports from the cultural front, however, "literature" played a prominent role, perhaps most notably in the critic's attack on the movement he saw as the most serious challenge to painting's effort finally to resolve itself into "areas of color arranged on a flat surface." This problem is glanced at in "Laocoon," in a mention of certain "young orthodox surrealists" who in the face of artistic progress have "reacted against abstract purity and turned back to a confusion of literature with painting as extreme as any of the past" (*CE* 1:36). Despite the brevity of this allusion, at least one reader saw in it a tactical move in a larger battle. Nicolas Calas, a critic who was instrumental in turning the literary journal

View into a house organ for the Surrealists, wrote a letter to the editor that was published in *View*'s second issue (October 1940), in which he lashes out at length at Greenberg's "jesuitic form of attack against Surrealism." Calas even goes so far as to suggest that the *Partisan Review*'s support of Greenberg could undermine that magazine's leftist credentials, to the point where it might be "turned into a monthly supplement of the *Commonwealth*, where no doubt its jesuit methods would be appreciated at their just value by all concerned and especially by T. S. Eliot."[11] Greenberg's immediate response to this sally came in the form of a short notice of *View* (published in January 1941) in which he dismisses the journal with the remark, "From it we gather that the surrealists are unwilling to say goodbye to anything" (*CE* 1:42–43).

Three years later, though, Greenberg felt compelled to produce a more considered and extended justification of his animus toward the Surrealists, who since he first took aim at them had, having fled the war in Europe, arrived in New York almost en masse and established a powerful presence in the art world.[12] In "Surrealist Painting," he repeats the charge that the work of the Surrealists is "more literature or document than painting or art," by which he means that these artists continued to depict illusionistic space and to include figurative elements in their paintings, in defiance of the historical mandate in favor of abstraction and flatness. The issues at stake in this essay, however, are not merely formal. In the guise of "revivers of the literal past" the Surrealists also act, Greenberg writes, as the "advance agents of a new conformist, and best-selling art," which is to say, they deliver the autonomous institution of art into the hands of its worst enemy, the culture industry: Surrealism is avant-garde *as* kitsch (*CE* 1:230–31). However, Greenberg's harshest criticisms here are directed not at the mass audience that Surrealism may yet attract, but at the elite one it already has. In the following passage, Greenberg throws Calas's claim that it is the Surrealists, and not Greenberg and his comrades at the *Partisan Review*, who are the true leaders of the cultural left, back in his face.

> The anti-institutional, anti-formal, anti-aesthetic nihilism of the Surrealists—inherited from Dada with all the artificial nonsense entailed—has in the end proved a blessing to the restless rich, the expatriates, and the aesthete-flaneurs in general who were repelled by the asceticisms of modern art. Surrealist subversiveness justifies their way of life, sanctioning the peace of conscience and the sense of chic with which they reject arduous disciplines. (*CE* 1:225–26)

The insults fly so fast in this passage that it is difficult to disentangle them one from another. Even if, for example, Surrealism is in many ways the direct successor

to Dada, Greenberg must know that the highly polished, eminently museum-ready work of painters like Yves Tanguy, Max Ernst, and Salvador Dali (his three *bêtes noires* in this article) is neither "anti-institutional" nor "anti-aesthetic." And when he refers to "the restless rich, the expatriates and the aesthete-flaneurs" who serve as the Surrealists' patrons and promoters, one must ask, is it their wealth, their foreign ties, or their dilettantism that most repels him? The last of these three charges seems most defensible, particularly coming from a critic who did so much to bring philosophical rigor to the impressionistic genre of art writing. It seems hard to believe, though, that Greenberg really means to claim that the buyers and sellers of the modernist art he prefers are superior either because they are all-American or because their taste for that art's "asceticisms" sets them apart from the other "restless rich." Leaving aside the jingoism for the moment, let us compare Greenberg's jab at "the restless rich" with his much-cited remark, in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," that "[n]o culture can develop without a social basis, without a source of stable income. And in the case of the avant-garde, this was provided by an elite among the ruling class of that society from which it assumed itself to be cut off, but to which it has always remained attached by an umbilical cord of gold" (*CE* 1:10–11). The conclusion we may draw from Greenberg's attack on the Surrealists' supporters, then, is that this "elite" is actually divided into two parties: one characterized by a professionalist preference for "arduous disciplines," which comes combined with an aristocratic disdain for mass culture and the aristocrat's deep-rooted attachment to a particular place; the other amateurish, culturally promiscuous, and rootless. The first is the party of "painting," the second, the party of "literature."

As I remarked in chapter 1, Greenberg's drive repeatedly to reconstitute the division within the institution of art stems from his insight that modernist art can never be autonomous enough, that it will always bear the stigma of its "social basis." When this thought becomes intolerable, the defenders of art's autonomy often feel compelled to project this stigma onto one type of art or another. Hence, Greenberg's otherwise inexplicable association of Surrealism's failure to achieve formal autonomy, such that it appears to be "more literature or document than painting or art," with the putative failure of its patrons to keep a properly "ascetic" distance from their own wealth. The break in logic signals the critic's own failure to sustain the dialectic between art and its social basis, which he so finely formulates at the outset of his career. Greenberg could not clear the avant-garde as such of the unending scandal of its connection to "the restless rich" via his flawed attempt to write the Surrealists out of the history of modernism. Nevertheless, when in the postwar period American curators and gallerists sought, both for reasons of

narrow commercial and broader national interest, to discount the Surrealist influence on Abstract Expressionism, Greenberg proved a useful adjunct. Their combined effort to put an American stamp on mid-century modernism succeeded: through the last decades of the century, Surrealism would never achieve the prestige in the United States, as measured either by museum exposure or by market value, of what Greenberg labeled "American-type painting."[13] And in those art-historical precincts where Greenberg's influence was strongest, Surrealism was consigned to the dustheap of the inconsequential past.

ii. "Stupid paintings" and "old-fashioned literature": Ashbery's Regressive Avant-Garde

The *Life* magazine article in which the young Ashbery first encountered Cornell's work also had wider implications for his sense of vocation. "I think it was at that moment," he recalled decades later, that "I realized I wanted to be a Surrealist, or rather that I already was one" (*SP* 246). Yet Ashbery has never been what Greenberg might call an "orthodox surrealist." Ashbery's writing may share with Surrealism what the poet has identified as its "irrational, oneiric basis" (*RS* 7), but it is free of the Freudian literalism that marks the work of many of Surrealism's central figures; and Ashbery's strongest allegiances have been not to the movement's leaders, but to outriders like Cornell and de Chirico. In any case, for the purposes of this argument, the crucial question is not so much what makes Ashbery a Surrealist as what it meant for him to identify himself as one during a period when Surrealism functioned as what Caroline Jones terms "the resistant other" within the "unifying regime" of Greenbergian formalism.[14]

We may see an allegory for the fate of Surrealism in the Greenbergian schema in the other epigraph that Ashbery chose for his Cornell essay, a famous passage from *A Season in Hell* in which Rimbaud (another figure on the Surrealist periphery) confesses his love for "stupid paintings, decorated transoms, stage sets, carnival booths, signs, popular engravings; old-fashioned literature, church Latin, erotic books with nonexistent spelling, the novels of our grandmothers" (*RS* 13). Viewed from the perspective of "the historicizing thinker," these are all art forms that no longer signify in the history of art proper, that still matter, if at all, only to those "amateurs" who, as Kirstein says, "love the vaguely preposterous past." In the view of the Cornellian "amateur," however, such seemingly outmoded art forms still have a role to play, the role of the "resistant other" to the dominant mode of art-making. These "other traditions," as Ashbery has called them, do not so much aim

to displace "the" tradition, as to restore to the idea of tradition its dialectical dimension.[15] "Thus," Ashbery interprets Cornell's art as saying, "we are allowed to keep all the stories that art seems to want to cut us off from, without giving up the inspiring asceticism of abstraction" (*RS* 17). At his best, Greenberg is our most powerful exponent of "the inspiring asceticism of abstraction," and his best moments are those in which he is most conscious of the "social basis" of art "from which it assumed itself to be cut off, but to which it has always remained attached." Ashbery's language here is strikingly similar to Greenberg's; just as art seems to have been "cut off" from society, abstraction seems to have been "cut off" from "stories." In both instances, the writer is concerned with art's struggle to achieve autonomy, but while Greenberg speaks directly of that struggle, Ashbery registers one of its effects: that within the "crystal world" of the institution of art, the social world from which a heroically ascetic modernism has turned its face cannot appear as itself, but only as more art—as "stories," Surrealism, sculpture. The longing that Ashbery expresses for those aspects of culture from which we would seem to have been irrevocably cut off thus is not merely nostalgic but transgressive insofar as it is connected to the desire to return art to life, to violate the commitment to autonomy that defines art as an institution in modernity.

In at least one sense, then, Greenberg was right after all to speak of Surrealist painting as "anti-institutional" and "anti-aesthetic," even if the painters he had in mind, unlike the Dadaists, were known more for their canvases than for their provocative gestures. If, in the allegorical language spoken within the precincts of the institution of art, certain art forms stand for the social world from which art must cut itself off in order to survive, then to evince a longing for what Rimbaud calls "old-fashioned literature" is to be a traitor to the institution. On this view, a taste for the "literary" aspect of visual art may be seen as the aestheticized expression of an anti-aesthetic impulse. Still, the question remains as to why this particular taste should be so pronounced in a mid-century modern like Ashbery. For the beginnings of an answer we may turn again to Peter Bürger, the critic who has most insistently equated "the institution of art" with "the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy." For Bürger, the anti-art provocations of the Dadaists marked both the apex and the ending of what he calls "the historical avant-garde." "The attack of the historical avant-garde movements on art as an institution has failed," Bürger concludes, but this failure has been critically fruitful in that "the attack did make art recognizable as an institution and also revealed its (relative) inefficacy in bourgeois society as its principle."[16] In the aftermath of the historical avant-garde, anti-aesthetic gestures must always acknowledge their inefficacy, which is to say, their intrinsically, inescapably aesthetic character. And to

the extent that it has been safely contained within the institution of art, the avant-garde itself becomes, to borrow Ashbery's phrase, "the invisible avant-garde."

"The Invisible Avant-Garde" is the title of a talk given by Ashbery at the Yale Art School in 1968 (*RS* 389–95). In this talk the poet registers his response to the failure of the historical avant-garde, which he presents, in Vernon Shetley's neat summary, in the form of "a dialectical model of successive negations, in which the avant-garde, which begins as the antithesis of tradition, comes to constitute a tradition in itself, and is thus transformed into its opposite."[17] The apparent dead end at which this process lands the would-be avant-gardist drives Ashbery to resort, as Shetley says, to an "often absurdist logic."[18] For instance, the poet suggests that "it might be argued that traditional art is even riskier than experimental art; that . . . since traditional art is always going out of fashion it is more dangerous and therefore more worthwhile than experimental art." Ashbery is not actually recommending a wholesale return to traditional forms of art-making, a path that when followed by his beloved de Chirico took the latter "from being one of the greatest painters of this century to a crotchety fabricator of bad pictures" (*RS* 391). Rather, he hopes to unlock what potential remains in what he terms "an avant-garde which has become a tradition" by locating those aspects of this modernist tradition that have fallen most completely out of fashion, that have been consigned most thoroughly to the inconsequential past. Hence, Ashbery's interest in "literary" art in general, and in Surrealist art in particular: as David Sweet remarks, in his astute discussion of the poet's place among the heirs of Surrealism, "Ashbery likes the Surrealists as much for what is regressive about their technique as for what is presumably progressive."[19] "What is regressive" in modernism may lead the artist into a sterile neo-academicism, like de Chirico, or out of art-making altogether, like Duchamp who, at the time when Ashbery gave the Yale talk, had retreated into a silence the poet calls "exemplary without question for a whole generation of young artists" (*RS* 391). To a degree, then, Ashbery may be said to share Greenberg's belief that these "regressive" tendencies toward the academic and the anti-aesthetic, especially as embodied by the Surrealists and the Dadaists, pose the greatest internal threats to the continued existence of autonomous art. But unlike Greenberg, Ashbery also believes if the avant-gardist is to go forward, he cannot simply avoid these threats, but must face them on their own ground.

Both Greenberg and Ashbery have named this ground "literature." However, whereas Greenberg at a certain point in his career imagines himself to have left literature behind, Ashbery commits himself to following the trajectory of literature (which he also refers to by its Eliotic name, "tradition") even, or especially, in its decline. In general, as we have seen, for the poets who have succeeded Eliot, to

follow this trajectory means to enter the academy. But as we have also seen, to enter the academy is in some sense to step out of the current of modernism; even if the mid-century academic poets thought of themselves as carrying on the Eliotic tradition, unlike their peers in the visual arts, they were not labeled modernists. At the beginning of an omnibus review that includes his enthusiastic notice of Ashbery's first book, *Some Trees*, Frank O'Hara offers a characteristically flippant-yet-also-somehow-dead-serious account of this state of affairs. "Among contemporary painters there is great distaste for academicism," O'Hara reports, "But judging by much recent poetry, this is not true of the poets. The latter do not feel that their art is contemporary, they feel that their loneliness is; for them being academic is a way of being friendly with the other poets" (*SS* 73). O'Hara shares the loneliness of his poetic contemporaries, their sense of having fallen off the cultural map, but eschews their preferred antidote because to be academic is not to be, as one of his poems' titles has it, "In Favor of One's Time." How then does the poet who wishes to keep in step with the art of his time deal with his sense of isolation?

iii. Institutions of Freedom: The Coterie and the Art World

One solution is to found an alternative school. The "Black Mountain" poets tried this; and of course, O'Hara and his friends came to be known as "the poets of the New York School."[20] However, the latter neither invented nor embraced this label, which was first attached to them in a 1961 little-magazine piece by John Bernard Myers, then director of the Tibor de Nagy gallery and one-time managing editor of *View*. The derivation of the "School" in "New York School" was in any case painterly rather than literary, the tag having been originally applied to the Pollock–de Kooning generation of abstract artists in joking homage to the "School of Paris." Even Myers eventually admitted (in the introduction to a 1969 anthology to which he nonetheless once again attached the label *The Poets of the New York School*) that Ashbery, O'Hara, and company "do not constitute a 'school of poets' in the old-fashioned sense." Instead, he suggests, "despite the pejorative flavor of the word, it might be more accurate to call them a 'coterie'—if we define as a coterie a group of writers rejected by the literary establishment who found strength to continue with their work by what the anarchists used to call 'mutual aid.'"[21] A number of critics, including Shetley, Geoffrey Ward, and Lytle Shaw, have since taken up Myers's suggestion and considered the dynamics of the group in general, and the writing and careers of Ashbery and O'Hara in particular, in the context of

the "coterie," an institution which, they all point out, has its roots in literary history. As I have been suggesting, though, what makes this particular coterie unique is that at the historical moment that witnessed its emergence it was the art world rather than the literary world that offered the kind of support that this most fragile of institutions needed in order to thrive. Furthermore, it was no accident, I think, that one of the first to offer such support was Myers, who developed in the Surrealist milieu of *View* a fierce attachment to art's "vaguely preposterous past."

As institutions go, the coterie, at least in its late-modern form, is relatively loose and unofficial, and thus might be classed with those avant-garde formations Pierre Bourdieu refers to as "institutions of freedom."[22] Yet it is also, as Shetley observes, "what one might paradoxically call an old-fashioned type of vanguard formation, one that depends heavily on personal acquaintance and word-of-mouth dissemination of reputation."[23] And as we have seen in the cases of Moore and Cornell, when one works in an avant-garde context, the appearance of being "old-fashioned" can be a liability. Shaw delves into the etymology of the word "coterie" to discover how it acquired what Myers calls a "pejorative flavor," such that the term now consistently "works," as Shaw says, "to transform . . . the fact of an association into a symptom." The term, he notes, originally referred to groups of rebellious peasant farmers—cottagers—in seventeenth-century France, but by the time its use "became widespread in the eighteenth century" it had taken on its current sense of cliquish cultural in-group. However, Shaw concludes, insofar as the earlier sense of the term still clings to it, *coterie* "carries at once the force of cultural marginality and the authority of deeply established cultural interest": it invokes both the pathos of the inconsequential past and the malign power of an exclusive tradition.[24] In the previous chapter, I discussed Lincoln Kirstein's attempt to revive the non-pejorative sense of the term "amateur" in the context of his effort to create a favorable critical atmosphere for that curiously old-fashioned institution of modern art, the New York City Ballet. Like "coterie," "amateur" retains certain associations with prerevolutionary France, and thereby connotes an aristocratic exclusivity at odds with our present-day commitment to democracy; but at the same time amateurism, too, "carries the force of cultural marginality," insofar as ours is an age in which the professional has displaced the aristocrat as the guardian of traditional values. In short, both terms provoke deep ambivalence in the modern reader; thus Kirstein's and Myers's attempts to redefine them so as to make them mean something like "avant-garde" seem at once justified and perverse.

In the introduction to his New York School anthology, Myers first offers as evidence of his coterie's avant-garde tendency their anarchistic opposition to the "literary establishment," but this is just by the way. For him, the ultimate guarantee

of these poets' vanguard status is to be found in the fact that "all of them . . . were and are involved with advanced styles in painting and sculpture, and with the artists who have been and are committed to these styles."[25] It should be noted that Myers's interest in the connection between certain poets and painters was at least in part a material one. Again like Kirstein, if on a very much smaller scale, he had some literary and theatrical ambitions, but became best known as an editor and impresario. In the latter role, Myers came up with the idea of cross-promoting his stable of second-generation American abstractionists and proto-pop painters at de Nagy together with a group of poets who were friendly with some of the gallery's artists, as well as with members of the first-generation "New York School."[26] (His desire to affirm the continuity between the Abstract Expressionists and their would-be successors at de Nagy may explain Myers's peculiar slippage between tenses—"were and are," "have been and are"—in the passage cited above.) Myers offered the poets a certain degree of exposure, providing a venue in which to see and be seen, producing theatrical collaborations between artists and poets, and publishing a series of poetry chapbooks, often featuring work by de Nagy artists, among which were the first published volumes by the core New York School members Ashbery, O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, and Barbara Guest. In turn, the poets, who had all begun to try their hand at art criticism, waxed enthusiastic about their friends from the gallery—than which there could be, Myers says in his introduction, "no finer form of publicity," one which "form[s] precious barnacles about these works, guaranteeing a rise in their market value." However, he reminds us, "No such market can attach itself to a poem," a truism that prompts him to pose the question "What did the poets get from the artists?"[27]

Given the context, one might assume that Myers is asking what other kind of material advantage the poets might derive from their connection to the visual artists. And given how hard he worked to turn his gallery into a platform for these poets' careers, at a time when they had few other professional outlets, there could be no one more qualified to answer such a question. But at this point Myers's discussion takes another tack. The real source of the poets' attraction to their artist contemporaries, he suddenly insists, can only be the "vital energy" that "had, almost thermally, been bequeathed" to the latter by the Surrealists, and more particularly, by André Breton, Myers's idol from his *View* days. Although at first glance this claim looks like a non sequitur (and Myers's subsequent argument in support of it is less than convincing), it does seem to fit with Ashbery's own repeated claim that he is a Surrealist *après la lettre*. And yet, Ashbery himself apparently registered such strong objections to Myers's discussion of the "surrealist ambience" of his work that Myers felt obliged to append this note to the introduction: "'The early

Auden, Laura Riding and Wallace Stevens were the writers who most formed my language as a poet,' declares Ashbery. He will have nothing to do with the view of his work presented in this preface." Elsewhere, of course, Ashbery writes of his affinity with many Surrealist and quasi-Surrealist figures, including Raymond Roussel and Pierre Reverdy, the two writers Myers names, together with Breton, as influences on Ashbery. Although Myers does not say so, then, it is possible that what Ashbery really objected to was Myers's enshrinement of Breton as prime mover behind both the poetic and painterly New York Schools.

Breton's authoritarian tendencies ran counter to the impulse in Surrealism that Ashbery most values, what he calls, borrowing a phrase from another of his favorite "literary" artists, Henri Michaux, "la grande permission," an unlimited license to experiment (*RS* 398). In a 1968 review essay titled "The Heritage of Dada and Surrealism," Ashbery discusses the attempts made by Breton, in his role as self-declared leader of the Surrealists, to abridge the *liberté totale* that had become the movement's watchword, taking as his prime example the elder poet's efforts to expel homosexuals from the group (*RS* 5–8; see especially 6). This is one of the few direct references to the social oppression faced by homosexuals to be found anywhere in Ashbery's writing—and even then, once he has raised the issue he feels it necessary to concede that this particular instance of bigotry "may seem unimportant, since homosexuality affects a relatively small fraction of humanity." Nonetheless, he says, Breton's narrow-mindedness was important insofar as it compromised the intellectual integrity of Surrealism in general, for "to restrict something proclaimed as 'total' is to turn it into its limited opposite." Rather than end on this ringing indictment, however, Ashbery closes his case against Breton by turning once more from the general to the particular, as he recounts the story of writer René Crevel, whose suicide Ashbery blames on Breton's sexual strictures. In the end, Ashbery imagines, "Crevel must have felt like an exile in the promised land he helped to discover"; and with that empathic "must have felt" Ashbery signals that he too knows what it is to feel like an outsider even among outsiders.

In this passage, Ashbery affirms his concern both for aesthetic freedom and for personal liberty, and implicitly, yet emphatically, draws a connection between the two. At the same time, though, he scrupulously avoids any statements that might be construed either as a political brief in favor of the rights of an oppressed minority, or as special pleading on his own behalf as a member of that minority. In fact, Ashbery's scrupulous avoidance of the language both of partisan politics and of personal confession is one of the distinguishing features of his oeuvre as a whole.[28] Only rarely, though, does the strain of maintaining this disinterested stance become visible, as I think it does in the poet's attack on Breton. Breton's was

exactly the wrong name for Myers to invoke in connection with Ashbery, insofar as Breton strove to transform the coterie from a relatively porous "institution of freedom" to a more disciplined kind of organization, dedicated first of all to establishing the distinction between insiders and outsiders. As an institution man, Myers may have been attracted by the power—and the commercial advantage—to be gained in making such a distinction. But to Ashbery's way of thinking, Surrealism's signal achievement was precisely to render problematic the distinction between inside and outside; and in his writing more generally, as in the story he tells about Crevel, this distinction has personal, professional, and aesthetic implications.

The "governing principle" of Surrealism, according to Ashbery, is the imperative toward "self-abnegation," toward the attainment of "the state in which *Je est un autre*, in Rimbaud's phrase" (*RS* 26). The Surrealists arrive at this state by conducting anti-intentionalist experiments, which range from Rimbaldian derangements of the senses to rigorous word games à la Roussel, but which all aim to blur or erase the fundamental psychological distinction between inside and outside, self and other, "I" and "you." The glimpse we gain when in such a state of a self freed of its defenses and an other freed of its stigma has its progressive uses (has there been any practicable increase in liberty that has not been rooted in a vision of *liberté totale*?), but the regressive collapse of the I into its other also poses a threat to our sense of personal and social stability. In my discussion in chapter 2 of the function of the "token woman" in the modernist canon, I claim that an otherworldly figure like Marianne Moore appears to her modernist-minded readers both as a necessary confirmation of art's autonomy, of its absolute otherness vis-à-vis society, and as a "void," an uncanny representative of otherness as such. *Je est un autre*: under certain experimental conditions, the modernist may endure, and even embrace, the displacement of the I by its other. But when the gaze into the void where the "I" once was becomes intolerable, the token woman ceases to represent the purely negative "other" and resumes the role of a positively conceived being defined, which is to say, limited, by her sexual character. In Ashbery's attack on Breton, the homosexual functions in the system of *liberté totale* much as the token woman does within modernism, as a sign of the link between art and life, aesthetic judgment and social justice. However, because within the institution of modern art the relationship between art and life is a love that dare not speak its name, this sign can only function effectively so long as it remains under negation. Ashbery's uncharacteristic failure in this passage to prevent the negated sexual other from reverting to its "limited opposite" suggests that Myers was at least partly right, that Surrealism did have a special significance for "his" poets. But "Surrealism" meant something

quite different to the latter than it did to Breton; as Ashbery puts it, for them Surrealism signified "not in the parochial 1920's sense of the term but in the second, open sense in which it can still be said to animate much of the most advanced art being done today" (*RS* 27).

For Ashbery, Surrealism still provides the "advanced art" of his day with a usable past insofar as it may be said to have escaped absorption into that "avant-garde which has become a tradition." In order to survive, however, the poet's "invisible avant-garde" has had to become thoroughly self-abnegating. Ashbery writes approvingly of another group of artists, American expatriates working in Paris in the late 1950s and early 1960s, that they "are permanently out of fashion, first ahead of it and now behind it, without ever having gone through an intervening period of acceptance" (*RS* 88). Only by staying "permanently out of fashion," it seems, can the artist evade what in "The Invisible Avant-Garde" Ashbery calls "[t]he Midas-like position into which our present acceptance-world forces the avant-garde" (*RS* 393–94). Ashbery's proposed solution to the avant-garde's dilemma is, strictly speaking, impossible; art cannot survive if it does not meet with some measure of acceptance. In fact, Ashbery was himself in voluntary exile in Paris in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but by the time of the Yale talk had returned to New York, where he had begun to find an audience for his work. Moreover, on his return he chose as his base not the out-of-step enclave of the academy, but the fashion-driven milieu of the art world—in Paris, the poet had already taken on regular part-time work as art columnist for the *International Herald Tribune*, but the increased expense of moving back to New York forced him to accept Thomas Hess's offer of a full-time job as an editor at *Art News*.[29] How then, we might ask, do these career moves sort with Ashbery's avowed ambition of remaining, like Surrealism in its "second, open sense," "permanently out of fashion"?

In interviews, the poet has repeatedly stressed his lack of professional interest in the art world, yet often adds that it is precisely this unprofessional attitude that got him his jobs: "If I hadn't displayed a genuine reluctance to write art criticism, people wouldn't have asked me to do it."[30] Ashbery has also described Hess, who employed most of the New York School writers at one time or another, as "a nice man who happens to like poets."[31] Given Ashbery's shrewd measure of the value of his "reluctance" to his would-be employers, though, one might draw another conclusion: that the art editor's liking for poets is not mere happenstance, but rather, is evidence of that programmatic resistance to professionalism that was a defining feature of the art world. The poets were valued by Hess and other art world insiders, in other words, for much the same reason as intractable eccentrics like Cornell and de Chirico were valued by the official members of the Surrealist movement. Both

types of institutional outsider, the deeply unassimilable and the merely professionally unqualified, served to confirm for the insiders the *liberté totale* that set their enterprises apart from other, relatively more exclusive institutions of art. Greenberg, for his part, heard in the Surrealists' stress on an unlimited openness an echo of the rhetoric of capitalism and saw their audience, "the restless rich, expatriates and aesthete-flaneurs," as caught up in an unceasing movement that parodied the dynamism of the market. If the art world were not more open than the literary establishment, though, the failed poet and amateur critic Greenberg would never have come to make a career there; moreover, his remarks on the avant-garde's "umbilical cord of gold" remind us of how closely not just Surrealism, but the art world as a whole, is tied to the market. Ashbery nonetheless believes that it is possible to distinguish the value of openness from that "acceptance" whose "Midas-like" touch instantly converts art into a commodity. Like the ambivalent urbanite in Moore's poem "New York," he approached that city's more open-ended art institutions in the hope of finding "not the plunder, / but 'accessibility to experience.'"

Surrealism in Ashbery's "second, open sense" thus may be said to stand for that aspect of the art world that is anti-institutional insofar as it remains accessible to "experience," which is to say, to just those forces that most threaten its existence as an institution. The institution can only remain open-ended in this way, however, as long as it does not acknowledge these forces as a threat. The moment it does so, the institution's heretofore purely negatively defined "other" turns into its "limited opposite." When Greenberg gives this other the name of "literature," he nonetheless still keeps the threat it poses within the bounds of the institution of art; but when Breton calls this other "the homosexual," he breaches those bounds. And when Ashbery recurs to Breton's other-that-dare-not-speak-its-name, he reopens the breach even as he tries to recontain the threat, in the process signaling that for him the *liberté totale* offered by a certain kind of artistic institution translates into a freedom to experiment both aesthetically and sexually. For by comparison with the "small world" of the academy, New York and its expansive art world were relatively welcoming to more or less out gay men like Ashbery, O'Hara, and Schuyler. Still, inasmuch as they were also poets, the art world was alien turf; and so in order to be, like their academic counterparts, "friendly with the other poets," they had to form a "coterie," a quasi-institution within the institution. (In this connection, one recalls that the only heterosexual man among the core members of the coterie, Kenneth Koch, was also the only one to establish an academic base for his career from early on.) The advantage of being an outsider even among outsiders is that one thereby acquires a degree of immunity to the Midas touch of acceptance; as Myers reminds us, poems are barred from entry into the market

that turns paintings into commodities. The disadvantage, as Ashbery knows, is that the outsiders' outsider is always in danger of finding himself "an exile in the promised land he helped to discover."

iv. "Dear New York City Ballet, you are quite like a wedding yourself!": Institution as Form in the Poems of Frank O'Hara

Those redoubts of the avant-garde that Bourdieu terms "institutions of freedom" may seem to offer refuge to the embattled members of certain minorities, but their weakness as institutions in some ways underscores their constituents' vulnerability. No matter how you redefine it, a "pejorative flavor" still clings to the word "coterie," as it does to the word "amateur," even when used in Kirstein's special sense. And like Kirstein's ballet, Myers's literary coterie was vulnerable to attack not only on the grounds of its being what Greenberg might call "a revival of the literal past" but also as a haven for sexual others. In fact, there were strong ties between these two "permanently out of fashion" institutions of modernism. *View*'s editors, all gay men, were early supporters of Kirstein's enterprise.[32] Ads for Kirstein's journal *Dance Index* ran in the magazine, editor-in-chief Charles Henri Ford included his own tribute to company star Tamara Toumanova in one issue, and his companion, painter Pavel Tchelitchew, served as designer for several Balanchine ballets of the 1930s and 1940s.[33] Myers continued to be a regular audience member during the NYCB's halcyon years at City Center (1948–64), where, as O'Hara's lover Vincent Warren recalls, one encountered "a very different audience from the one they presently have at Lincoln Center—a faithful band of intellectuals delighting in Balanchine's latest masterpieces."[34] Prominent among the "faithful band" were the members of the New York School and their associates, including dance critic and poet Edwin Denby and O'Hara's Harvard roommate, the illustrator Edward Gorey, who was known for never missing a performance. Balanchine was the draw, but the lobby provided its own kind of theater. It was there that John Myers first met his partner Tibor de Nagy and John Ashbery got someone to introduce him to Marianne Moore; and it was there as well that an incident occurred that has acquired a peculiar significance in the history of the coterie.[35]

O'Hara and painter Larry Rivers were, as Rivers tells it, "making our way down from the cheap seats to the mezzanine when our mutual friend and my dealer John Myers thinking he was being funny screamed out for general use 'there they are all covered with blood and semen.'"[36] Myers was quoting Paul Verlaine's

wife on the subject of her husband's liaison with Rimbaud, the "joke" being that the predominantly heterosexual Rivers had become involved with O'Hara. The painter may have been annoyed with Myers at the time, but something about the event stuck with Rivers and O'Hara, who memorialized it in one plate of *Stones*, a series of lithographs on which the two collaborated. What made this scene, then, a source not just of scandal but of art? My sense of the situation is that by "screaming out" an arcane reference "for general use," Myers was outing the "faithful band" at City Center not just as homosexuals but also as intellectuals. We may infer, that is, both from Rivers's reference to "the cheap seats" and from Myers's citation of a scene of bohemian squalor that the scandalous character of Kirstein's core group of "amateurs" had to do in part with their subversive attitude toward the ballet itself. For these balletomanes were not there to see the comfortably bourgeoisified version of an aristocratic pastime that much ballet had become, but an uncompromisingly difficult modern art that had yet to find a substantial middle-class audience.

By and large, the members of the "faithful band" were themselves middle-class, but with a difference. They had gone downwardly mobile—had been relegated to the "cheap seats"—when they assumed their membership in bohemia; while by education and vocation they were tied to that quasi-aristocratic portion of the elite that Greenberg saw as distinguished from "the restless rich" by its taste for "arduous disciplines." However, while as intellectuals they had become declassed by choice, as homosexuals they had always been to some extent declassed by chance. Traveling along the axis of their sexuality, gay men in particular have been distinguished by the capacity to move fluidly back and forth across class boundaries. This fluid class identity may also take on a more than personal significance, enabling certain gay men to function as emissaries between opposed social groups at moments when the need for traffic between those groups becomes urgent. In the 1940s and 1950s, as the New York art world began to kick into high gear, its constituent components—an increasingly profitable art market, the increasingly professionalized museums, and the still rough-around-the-edges artists themselves—were still very imperfectly meshed. When they first met, Myers recognized that Ashbery, for one, might be valuable to him as someone who could negotiate between these disparate subworlds. "I expected," Myers later recalled, "the usual . . . untidy, poetic-type American," but was delighted to find that "[n]o one could have been less poetical or less untidy. It was a hot summer, but Ashbery looked as fresh as laundry and as couth as they come."[37] Myers's use of "couth" here, a word usually prefaced by a negating "un-," suggests that it was what Ashbery was not that counted most for Myers: not an "untidy" Beat or a tweedy academic, but someone you could take anywhere, precisely because he belonged nowhere.

In the event, however, it was not Ashbery but O'Hara whose capacity for bridging uptown and downtown, museum and studio, would make him truly indispensable to the art world. It was, as his painter friend John Button put it, O'Hara's mix of "civility and wildness" that got the poet a job as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art despite his lack of academic or professional qualifications. However, the shape-shifting character that got O'Hara into MoMA also brought him "under suspicion" there, according to a former colleague at the museum, because "[e]ssentially he was the artist's spokesman and that was considered in some quarters a questionable role for a museum professional and compromising to the institution."[38] From the artists' point of view, on the other hand, O'Hara had to be defended against the charge that he had sold out to the establishment. Thus, we find Button struggling to find suitable terms with which to define that aspect of his friend's character that smoothed his interactions with both the museum's properly credentialed staff and its well-heeled patrons: O'Hara's "manners," Button writes, "were not those of an aristocratic elite. They sprung from his sense of Nobility . . . perhaps the strongest sense in Frank's character."[39] Ashbery uses different terms to evoke O'Hara's peculiar elegance of manner in describing his last glimpse of his friend just before his untimely death in 1966, at the opening of a show O'Hara had curated at MoMA, "where I kept catching sight of him (in black tie) at a distance, moving from group to group with the purposeful but effortless grace of a Balanchine dancer."[40]

Ashbery admires the grace with which O'Hara moves through the rarified atmosphere of the museum, but regrets the distance that this very ease puts between them. That is, he values, as he shares, O'Hara's fluid sense of social identity, but fears that his friend has ceased to hover on the borders between groups and become an insider. It was hard for someone like Ashbery, who, equally suspicious of the seductions of "art" and "literature," had raised fence-sitting to the level of an aesthetic ideal, to accept the comparative lack of ambivalence with which O'Hara embraced the opportunities offered to him by such institutions as the literary coterie, the Balanchine ballet, and, especially, the Museum of Modern Art, where he worked for the last eleven years of his life. Two years after O'Hara died, Ashbery wrote, "I sometimes wish he had not been so fruitfully involved with the museum and the art world," because "[t]his meant he could never devote more than a fraction of his time to his poetry"—a turn of events, Ashbery implies, his friend regretted.[41] Writing a few years after this, though, James Schuyler, who also worked at MoMA for a time, begged to differ: "It has been suggested that the museum took too much of so gifted a poet's time. Not really: Frank needed a job, and he was in love with the museum and brooked no criticism of it."[42] A look at

O'Hara's poems would seem to tip the balance in favor of Schuyler's view. Explicit references to works of modern art are as rare in Ashbery's poems as explicit references to sex, but O'Hara's work celebrates both often and at length. These are, indeed, "inside" references, in that they mark O'Hara as a card-carrying member of both the art world and the gay subculture; by the same token, however, such references place the poet firmly outside the literary mainstream.[43] O'Hara's explicitness about the things he loves comes at a cost, then, in that the level of detail at which he presents matters many readers might find either unacceptable or arcane marks his work as destined for a coterie audience.

That O'Hara had calculated and accepted this cost is evidenced in his conspicuously careless attitude toward the fate of his oeuvre. O'Hara chose to publish a relatively small percentage of his work in his lifetime; what little of it saw print did so largely through the initiative of the poet's friends, who often had to salvage the only existing copies of poems from odd corners of his apartment, or from his correspondence.[44] We may see the effects of the conditions under which the poems circulated not only in the history of O'Hara's reception but also in the poems themselves. Susan Rosenbaum points, for instance, to the fact that because "O'Hara used many of his poems as literal letters, and gave many as gifts [,] they often bear the signs of this exchange, if not in theme then in the naming of the recipient."[45] And even when such specific marks of intimacy are not present in the poem, O'Hara's work tends to give the impression that, as the poet himself famously declares in his mock-manifesto "Personism," "[t]he poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages"—which state of affairs, he thinks, must be an unmitigatedly good thing, since "the poem is correspondingly gratified" (*SS* 111). This ideal of poetic immediacy is, of course, as impossible as Ashbery's ideal of an avant-garde that preserves itself by remaining "permanently out of fashion." Thus, just as Ashbery's ascetic rejection of the "acceptance-world" is countered in his work by what he calls "the lush, Rousseau-like foliage of its desire to communicate" (*JACP* 519), so the illusion of immediacy that O'Hara produces through what David Trotter describes as his "continuous apostrophe to the people and places and events which imposed on his everyday life"[46] is countered by this poet's sense of the limits of his address.

For however intense the intimacy between O'Hara and his audience, it was the "wrong" audience insofar as the poet's career unfolded within an institutional framework that, as Trotter notes, encompassed "avant-garde art and film and music, *if not yet poetry*," but was shaped above all "by the proliferation of museums and galleries" in the postwar period.[47] In poetry, the framing effect of the institution has traditionally been rendered visible as form, but in the wake of the avant-garde, we

no longer have access to this institutional effect, at least in its original transparency. O'Hara and Ashbery wrote the majority of their poems in free verse, in the prescribed fashion of the historical avant-garde. And while Ashbery's oeuvre does offer evidence of a concern with traditional poetic form, it is evidence of a rigorously negative kind, given that such forms as he has chosen to work in tend to be either outmoded, like the pantoum and the sestina, or explicitly antipoetic, like the prose poem. His concern with form is but one indication that, as I will go on to argue, Ashbery's thoughts are never far from the question of his place in what Eliot called "the tradition," which is to say, literary tradition. It is not that this question did not matter to O'Hara, but rather, that his status as an insider in the "wrong" institution allowed him to keep it carefully bracketed off.

O'Hara does visibly work within certain constraints in his poems, but they are institutional rather than formal; or perhaps one might say that in these poems the institutional displaces the formal, that O'Hara's work is given form by the art world itself. However, it can be difficult to trace the way the institution shapes the poems, since, as I note in chapter 1, the outlines of "the art world itself" are exceptionally hard to discern, largely because the art world does not center on a single institution in the way that the literary world now centers on the academy. Nonetheless, the museum has sometimes been cast as *the* institution of visual art because like the academy—and unlike galleries, auction houses, art fairs, and other more commercial art world venues—the museum still makes a strong claim for its autonomy relative to society at large. The museum's outlines, in short, are relatively easy to discern; thus, among the shapeliest of O'Hara's poems are those whose parameters were most explicitly defined by his work at the museum.

These are the "lunch poems," so-called because they were, at least as legend has it, written during O'Hara's lunch break from MoMA. Not all of the work to be found in the poet's slim 1964 volume *Lunch Poems* is clearly "marked," as Rosenbaum puts it, "by his employer's restrictions, the constraints of the lunch hour." However, the poems that give most evidence of the force of these constraints include some of O'Hara's best-known pieces, like "Personal Poem," "A Step Away from Them," and "The Day Lady Died." In such lunch poems "proper," the constraints of the lunch hour manifest themselves not only in terms of time ("It is 12:20 in New York a Friday," begins "The Day Lady Died") but also of space, since the poet is usually on foot ("Now when I walk around at lunchtime," begins "Personal Poem") and so the events he narrates tend to take place within a half-mile radius of the museum. Perhaps the most dramatic example of the way these practical limitations surface in these poems *as* form may be seen in the epiphanic vision of Billie Holiday that concludes "The Day Lady Died" (*FOHCP* 325). The explicit trigger for O'Hara's memory

of a moment when Holiday "whispered a song along the keyboard / to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing" is a newspaper headline announcing the singer's death. However, the poet's sense of an ending is also implicit in the fact that "the tobacconist in the Ziegfield Theatre" where O'Hara purchases the paper is located a block from MoMA. Where the museum begins, that is, the poem—which here is identified with the "breathing" that sustains life itself—must end.

Of course, given the spatio-temporal constraints that define this group of poems, the converse must also be true, that where the museum ends, the poem may begin. Thus, the beginning of each lunch poem finds the poet stepping out into the world of everything that the museum excludes. And in the lunch poems what the museum excludes for O'Hara is life itself, or almost that. In her account of the rise and fall of "the Greenberg effect," Jones details the process through which mid-century viewers of modernist painting learned to subsume all bodily experience in an experience of pure "opticality," to subordinate all other senses to "eyesight alone." The MoMA employee is constrained to practice this kind of bodily discipline in the museum; once escaped, though, he revels in bodies, his own and others', which sweat, hunger, lust:

> It's my lunch hour, so I go
> for a walk among the hum-colored
> cabs. First, down the sidewalk
> where laborers feed their dirty
> glistening torsos sandwiches
> and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets
> on. They protect them from falling
> bricks, I guess. Then onto the
> avenue where skirts are flipping
> above heels and blow up over
> grates. The sun is hot, but the
> cabs stir up the air.
> ("A Step Away from Them"
> [*FOHCP* 257–58])

In the synesthetic image of the "hum-colored cabs," O'Hara violates the Greenbergian protocols that "constrained the body," as Jones explains, "to focus on one sense at a time," while with those "falling / bricks," precariously poised between one line and the next, he casually alludes to the limit-cases of bodily experience, pain and death. However, we realize as the poem goes on that this casual pose in the face of mortality is feigned, that the "them" of the poem's title are the dead, who

like the ghostly singer in "The Day Lady Died" come abruptly to consciousness as the poet nears the end of his ritual excursion.

> There are several Puerto
> Ricans on the avenue today, which
> makes it beautiful and warm. First,
> Bunny died, then John Latouche,
> then Jackson Pollock. But is the
> earth as full, as life was full, of them?
> And one has eaten and one walks . . .

The abruptness with which O'Hara introduces death into "A Step Away from Them" is perhaps even more striking than it is in "The Day Lady Died," since there at least he specifies the external cue that brings Holiday to mind. Yet when one reads the lunch poems as a group, the seeming disjunction in these lines between the anonymous "Puerto Ricans" and the tenderly recalled names of O'Hara's lost intimates instead reveals itself to be part of a pattern of association. For just as O'Hara's evocations of the extremes of sensual experience conjure up the insubordinate physicality that the museum excludes, so his repeated references in these poems to members of subordinated races and classes remind us that the institution excludes certain elements of the body politic as well. And at those moments in the poems where the specters of pain and death emerge, the association between physical repression and social oppression becomes especially close. The connection may be oblique, as in the case of those "laborers" who remain blithely unaware of the danger of "falling / bricks"—the slash indicating the precariousness of their social and physical status—or it may be shockingly direct, as when Leroi Jones, O'Hara's lunch date in "Personal Poem" (*FOHCP* 335–36), "comes in / and tells me Miles Davis was clubbed 12 / times last night outside BIRDLAND by a cop."

Jones's entry onto the scene of "Personal Poem" also reminds us of another element of O'Hara's life that the museum excludes, which is to say, literature in general and poetry in particular. Thus, once Jones's bit of shocking news about Davis has been absorbed, the two writers' conversation becomes exclusively, even incestuously, literary—"we don't like Lionel Trilling / we decide, we like Don Allen we don't like / Henry James so much we like Herman Melville." The question of race, though, still hangs in the air, since Jones himself is African-American, a fact O'Hara stresses when he recalls this same lunch in "Personism" (*FOHCP* 499). We may see O'Hara making a similar association between literature and blackness in "The Day Lady Died," when he buys "an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets / in Ghana are doing these days" at one store and peruses "*Les Nègres*

/ of Genet" at another. In O'Hara's work, however, social concerns ultimately tend to be subsumed under the sign of aesthetics.[48] And so, rather than buy the Genet at that point, the poet "stick[s] with Verlaine," thus signaling the allegiance to the French Symbolists (and their Surrealist followers) that marks O'Hara and the other members of his coterie as nonmembers of an American literary establishment led by those who do "like Lionel Trilling." His attraction to French poets is a sign that, however skillfully he may mimic the manners of institutional insiders, O'Hara ultimately knows that he will never feel quite at home, either inside or outside the museum. It is this acute awareness of his liminal position vis-à-vis the institutions of both painting and poetry, I think, which gives the last lines of "A Step Away from Them" their peculiar poignancy. "A glass of papaya juice / and back to work," the poet sighs; but then for a moment he looks neither forward to the museum or back, to "life," but inward, where he finds Surrealism, in what Ashbery calls its "second, open sense": "My heart is in my / pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy."

The three poems I have been discussing are, as I have mentioned, among O'Hara's best known. The frequency with which they are discussed in the classroom and in the criticism is in part due to what I have called their shapeliness: in each both the trajectory of the narrative and the pattern of imagery are tightly constrained by the psychic and physical limits marked by the museum, and each contains epiphanic moments in which the poet simultaneously acknowledges and strains against those limits. But the lunch poems' canonical status is also due to the fact that they appeared in the volume that, of the few books of O'Hara's work that were published in his lifetime, circulated the most widely and stayed in print the longest. These poems, that is, owe their form to one institution of art and their fame to another.[49] I next want to consider, by way of contrast, an O'Hara lyric that shares the lunch poems' formal neatness together with their respect for the constraints of the lunch hour, but which is more exclusively bound to the art world, in terms both of the circumstances of its initial presentation and its content, and is therefore much less well-known. This is "Digression on *Number 1, 1948*," a poem which O'Hara did commit to print once, but in an entirely nonliterary context. He called the poem a "digression" because it appears, without introduction or subsequent explanation, in the midst of his own 1959 monograph on Jackson Pollock, the first such work ever devoted to that artist. Here is the poem in full:

> I am ill today but am not
> too ill. I am not ill at all.
> It is a perfect day, warm
> for winter, cold for fall.

A fine day for seeing. I see
ceramics, during lunch hour by
Miro and I see the sea by Leger;
light, complicated Metzingers
and a rude awakening by Brauner,
a little table by Picasso, pink.

I am tired today but I am not
too tired. I am not tired at all.
There is the Pollock, white, harm
will not fall, his perfect hand

and the many short voyages. They'll
never fence the silver range.
Stars are out and there is sea
enough beneath the glistening earth
to bear me toward the future
which is not so dark. I see.
(*FOHCP* 20)

As in the lunch poems "proper," the poet takes care to inform us that he has gone off his employer's clock, but this time his lunch hour wanderings unfold within the confines of the museum itself. And it shows: this poem is in several respects more "disciplined" than its extra-institutional counterparts. The stanzas of the latter are of irregular lengths, while here O'Hara employs an unusual, for him, pattern of alternating four-and six-line stanzas. The sense of order this produces is reinforced by the poem's high degree of euphony, which again contrasts with the urban cacophony evoked by the lunch poems, in which "Everything / suddenly honks," as the poet puts it in "A Step Away from Them." The two types of stanza are, moreover, fairly neatly divided between two types of subject matter, or more precisely, two types of sensual experience. The quatrains focus on sensations that are tied to the body, that part of the "I" that feels ill, warm, cold, tired, while the sestets are narrated by an "I" who is all eye, who is training himself to "see" as a way of mastering the body's demands, in accordance with Greenbergian protocol. And if the emphasis on "eyesight alone" were not enough to alert us that we are dealing with an art world insider, the list of artworks in the second stanza should be, since these are all either minor works by major artists, or typical works by minor ones—the sort of things in which only a connoisseur deeply familiar with the collection would be likely to take an interest.

However, the last work on the list, which appears before us with the same abruptness and force as the ghosts in "The Day Lady Died" and "A Step Away from Them," suggests that the wandering curator may not be an entirely typical museum professional after all. For this is not, like all the previously named pieces, a selection from the high modernist canon on which MoMA had staked its reputation, but a painting not long out of the studio, whose place in history had yet to be secured. O'Hara's interest in it speaks to his allegiance to a scene unfolding outside the museum's walls, a connection that makes him seem suspect to some of his more thoroughly professionalized colleagues. This particular Pollock, moreover, violates more than one professional protocol, in that it is marked around its edges by the artist's own handprints, and these "seemingly bloodstained hands," as O'Hara calls them elsewhere in the monograph, conjure up the specter of the body of the artist whom Greenberg had designated as his prime example of the triumph of pure opticality in mid-century painting.[50] Consequently, the poem's neat division between bodily and optical experience begins to break down in the middle of the second quatrain, with the suggestion of pain in "harm," which finds its match, both in terms of sound and sense, in the painter's "perfect hand." At last, in the final stanza, the poet seems to achieve a sense of boundlessness, which is at once spatial, as sky, sea, and earth blend into a single "glistening" expanse, and temporal, as Pollock renews O'Hara's faith in the avant-gardist promise of an expansive future for art.

And yet, that future is not exactly bright; rather, it is "not so dark," a negative locution that harks back to the poet's protest that "They'll / never fence the silver range." Who is this unnamed "they" who threaten to block that impulse in O'Hara that John Button terms his "wildness"? On one hand, "they" are those museum professionals who would sever the connection between Pollock's painting and the vital testing-ground of the studio, blunting the work's power to shock its viewers into questioning their assumptions about the place and nature of art. However, his MoMA colleagues' worry that O'Hara's own connection to the artists' world may be "compromising to the institution" derives not only from their obligation to police the boundaries of the art-historical canon but also from their need to affirm the museum's autonomy relative to the contemporary art market, which has its own kind of "wildness." Insofar as his commitment to poetry places him outside that market, O'Hara stands with his fellow museum workers; and he is like them, too, insofar as he is drawn to the sublime effect produced when one subordinates the other senses to "eyesight alone." "I see," the curator exults, yet for the poet this triumph over the body, the market, the workshop in which the artist dirties his hands, is still edged with darkness. Thus, what may look like an expansion outward

in this poem, beyond the museum's walls, is equally a movement inward. O'Hara makes a similar move at the end of "A Step Away from Them," where we are afforded a glimpse of the poet's "heart," which guards him against the darker tendencies of both of the institutions of art to which he owes allegiance. Like Reverdy's book in the latter poem, which has been secreted away for its own safety, O'Hara's poetic "digression" on Pollock was hidden where its "proper," literary audience was least likely to find it, in the pages of an art-historical monograph. Meanwhile, as the poem interrupts the smooth flow of O'Hara-the-curator's professional discourse, it draws our attention—although who "we" are in this case is not quite clear—to the edges of the art world from a position staked at the heart of the institution itself.

Again, though, when one tries to view "the art world itself" as a whole, the institution's limits become harder to discern. And in its apparent open-endedness, the art world resembled, to O'Hara's eye at least, such "institutions of freedom" as the literary coterie and the Balanchine ballet, which the William Carlos Williamsian rebel in him embraced relatively unquestioningly as alternatives to a literary establishment that had, under the sway of Eliot, "[given] the poem back to the academics." Yet the skeptic in O'Hara knows that freedom is always relative rather than absolute, just as the poet in him knows that formlessness in verse has meaning only in relation to some circumscribing form. In the lunch poems, the tension between the museum and what it cannot contain provides the poet with a neat solution to the problem of form versus formlessness. However, just as "the museum" is not an adequate descriptor for the art world as a whole, so the formal solution offered by the lunch poems, however satisfying, is not representative of O'Hara's poetic practice as a whole. I want to conclude this part of the discussion of the way poetry functioned under the sign of painting in mid-century New York, then, with a look at a poem whose subject is the opportunities and problems presented by O'Hara's preferred "institutions of freedom," in which he raises without pretending to solve the problem of formlessness versus form.

"Poem Read at Joan Mitchell's" (*FOHCP* 265–67) is set, as the title tells us, in the studio of a painter friend of the poet's, perhaps the most talented of the second-generation Abstract Expressionists. O'Hara was more than usually at home in this particular artist's space because Mitchell, who frequently traveled to Paris, where she would soon move for good, had given the poet and his longtime roommate Joe LeSueur a set of keys so that one or another of the men could escape there when he needed to be alone.[51] O'Hara pictures himself writing in Mitchell's studio in such poems as "At Joan's" and "Adieu to Norman, Bonjour to Joan and Jean-Paul," but in this case he has been called on to perform at a party held there for

another painter, New York School muse Jane Freilicher, on the occasion of her second marriage. This, then, is O'Hara's version of an epithalamion, a poem traditionally dedicated to the celebration of what Marianne Moore calls "this institution." Like Moore, O'Hara views marriage as *the* institution on which all others are founded. However, because it is also an institution from which O'Hara knows himself to be definitively excluded, in an act of what Moore might call "criminal ingenuity," the poet takes what he slyly describes as his friend's "peculiar desire to get married" as an opportunity to rethink the institution of marriage itself in such a way as to bring it more in line with the standards set by the avant-garde's "institutions of freedom." Freilicher's remarriage, he writes, is "so / original, hydrogenic, anthropomorphic, fiscal, post-anti-aesthetic, bland, unpicturesque and WilliamsCarlosWilliamsian! / it's definitely not 19th Century, it's not even Partisan Review, it's new, it must be vanguard!" However, after he invokes a few more icons of vanguardism—various streets in the West Village, "Cooper Union where we heard the piece by Mortie Feldman with 'The Stars and Stripes Forever' in it," "the CEDAR's neon circle"—a certain melancholy creeps into O'Hara's tone, which can only be dispelled by an even more forceful equation of marriage with one of the poet's most cherished institutions:

> It's the day before February 17th
> it is not snowing yet but it is dark and may snow yet
> dreary February of the exhaustion from parties and the exceptional desire for spring which the ballet alone, by extending its run has made bearable, dear New York City Ballet company, you are quite a bit like a wedding yourself!

Like the ballet's run, the poem, too, is extended; it "goes on too long," the poet explains, "because our friendship has been long, long for this life and these times, long as art is long and uninterruptable, / and I would make it as long as I hope our friendship lasts if I could make poems that long." On the one hand, the deliberate clownishness of these lines, with their repetitive language and overstrained syntax, suggests that O'Hara has his doubts about the potential of a truly open-ended poetics. Yet in the melancholy chiming of the word "long" we may discern a genuine longing for the possibility of unbounded intimacy that O'Hara's friend's marriage seems to foreclose. These self-consciously endless lines, in other words, are a defense against the thought that this is the "end of the line" for Frank and Jane. But it is a weak defense, insofar as these lines are bad poetry; the institution of literature may provide a stay against "loneliness" for his academic brethren, but O'Hara feels scarcely more at home there than he does in "this institution." As his dark mood returns, then, the poet tries once more to inscribe himself within the circle described by his friends'

marriage by listing the rituals that bind them together: "I hope there will be more / more drives to Bear Mountain and searches for hamburgers, more evenings avoiding the latest Japanese movie and watching Helen Vinson and Warner Baxter in *Vogues of 1938* instead," and, inevitably, "more discussions in lobbies of the respective greatnesses of Diana Adams and Allegra Kent," two Balanchine stars of the 1950s.

There is something desperate about O'Hara's tone here. However much one sympathizes with the poet's longing for an expanded sphere of intimacy, one also feels, or fears, that there may be no end to O'Hara's demand for more, more, more, that in principle this line could go on forever. Here as elsewhere, that is, this poem reveals a tendency toward formlessness, an urge to assert a *liberté totale*, which threatens to destroy it from within; a tendency which is checked, although just barely, by a set of relatively weak institutions. The least formalized of art world venues, the studio, provides the frame for O'Hara's ode to the institutional redoubts of "peculiar desires" and the Balanchine ballet serves as a kind of magic charm to ward off threats from without, threats which may emanate, such is the narcissism of small differences, "even" from such a supposedly vanguard institution as the *Partisan Review*. To say that the New York City Ballet is "quite a bit like a wedding" is, furthermore, to suggest that when viewed from within, the avant-garde's "institutions of freedom" may even seem to offer a plausible alternative to "this institution." This suggestion is reinforced in the penultimate lines of the poem, where O'Hara summons up what is for him the most crucial, if most fragile, of institutions, the coterie. His fellow poets seem to him at once to be at a distance from the painter's apartment and present within it, like music on the radio:

> and now there is a Glazunov symphony on the radio and I think of our friends who are not here, of John and the nuptial quality of his verses (he is always marrying the whole world) and Janice and Kenneth, smiling and laughing, respectively (they are probably laughing at the Leaning Tower right now)
> but we are all here and have their proxy
> if Kenneth were writing this he would point out how art has changed women and women have changed art and men, but men haven't changed women much
> but ideas are obscure and nothing should be obscure tonight
> you will live half the year in a house by the sea and half the year in a house in our arms
> we peer into the future and see you happy and hope it is a sign that we will be happy too, something to cling to, happiness
> the least and best of human attainments

"If Kenneth were writing this": as his epithalamion comes to a close, O'Hara calls on the married man Koch to mediate between himself and a world that forbids someone like him from uttering the "public promises" (as Moore terms them) that are the best assurance it can offer of private happiness. But as the poet himself admits, this detour through heterosexuality-by-proxy is an "obscure" path by which to reach his final assertion of the value of social life and the happiness it alone makes possible.

Theodor Adorno counsels us that avant-garde art cannot substitute for ordinary happiness, but only remind us of its absence, and yet, he says, this reminder is not merely negative in that "what has no being none the less represents a promise, if it has the ability to appear." The value we place on autonomous art's "promise" of happiness rises, moreover, in proportion to the degree to which we perceive other social institutions as having failed us in our quest for happiness. Therefore, it is not so much on Koch's insider's view of marriage that O'Hara stakes his hope of happiness, as it is on the "nuptial quality" of Ashbery's verses. Ashbery's work represents for O'Hara the promise of "marriage," not as it is, but as it might be, as a model for a kind of generosity of feeling that might be extended indefinitely, through an expanding set of social circles, from the couple to the coterie to the ballet to the art world and beyond. However, as long as marriage is as it is, the institution(s) of art must serve as O'Hara's primary model for the life beyond art. In this respect, his work is, to borrow the poet's own phrase, "post-anti-aesthetic," in the mode of the successors of Bürger's historical avant-garde. And yet, O'Hara cannot relinquish the hope, which he associates with this failed avant-garde, that art might yet point our way back to a life in which we would not have to place so much value on aesthetic difficulty, but might be satisfied with "the least and best of human attainments."

Again, one believes that O'Hara may indeed value life over art because of the illusion of immediacy his work produces, with its lines that run on until they fall down, its references to real things and people, its weather reports and announcements of exact dates and times of writing. Yet the poet never forgets that it is an illusion. For like Ashbery, although perhaps not to the same extent, O'Hara is explicitly committed to a practice of self-abnegation that stands as a critique of less ascetic artistic modes. After all, in "Personism" it is not the "two persons" but the poem that he describes as "gratified." In the next part of the discussion I will return to the question of just how, and how far, O'Hara may be said to share Ashbery's commitment to exposing the other within the "I," a commitment which for both poets clearly derives from their interest in Surrealism. Here, though, I will simply point once more to the paradox that O'Hara's affirmation of the value of life over art is as persuasive as it is because he was such an art-world insider. Which is to say, his

submission to the constraints imposed by the art world was itself a form of self-abnegation: first, insofar as that discipline sharpened his sense of the dialectic between inside and outside, between the self and its internalized and externalized others; but also insofar as his presence in the art world enforced, or enabled, the poet's absence from the mainstream literary scene. The literary world was for O'Hara what a wedding was for Moore, that is, the scene in which one must declare one's "public promises / of one's intention / to fulfill a private obligation," and O'Hara was deeply ambivalent about this kind of socially sanctioned publicity. One might say that O'Hara's resistance to publishing his work derived not from personal reticence but from his sense that he already had the audience he wanted in his immediate social circle. Inasmuch as the expansive and relatively open-ended art world could be said to resemble the public sphere, this circle might even be called a "public."[52] But inasmuch as it was the "wrong" public for a poet, O'Hara's words remained under negation, and remain so still, in the marks they bear of the conditions of their production.

Thus, while O'Hara is "out," in more than one sense of the word, in his poems, he would never be out *as a poet* as long as the spread of his reputation was kept within the bounds of the art world and the circulation of his work was kept within the bounds of the coterie. These institutional constraints produce the effect of reticence insofar as they may be said, in Rosenbaum's phrase, also to "function as a closet"; which they must have done to some extent, she adds, since "anything but selective circulation of explicitly gay poetry would have been highly improbable in 1950's and early 1960's America."[53] It is impossible to say what kind of poet O'Hara might have become had he lived into the heyday of gay liberation. But through those days and beyond them Ashbery has continued to take a position that is diametrically opposed to O'Hara's: he is out as a poet but not out in the poems. In other words, Ashbery's writing is as stringently impersonal as O'Hara's is insistently personal, yet the former is as "public" a writer as the latter is "private." For while in O'Hara's work the quintessential problem of the modern poet, the problem of audience, is to a certain extent displaced by the institutional frame, in Ashbery's work it has always been front and center. "Did they notice me, this time, as I am / Or is it postponed again?" he asks, in the opening poem of *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, the book that did in fact signal his entry into the poetic mainstream (*JACP* 427). However, the hope of being noticed "as I am" does not tempt Ashbery, as it does O'Hara, to create an illusion of immediacy; and this is because unlike that "poet among painters," Ashbery has from the first seen the poet's "loneliness" as an irremediable condition.

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5. "A medium in which it is possible to recognize oneself": Ashbery between Poetry and Painting

Here are the final lines of two poems by John Ashbery, one from "Hop o' My Thumb," in the watershed 1975 volume *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, and the other from one of the series of untitled pieces that together with a matched series of drawings by the artist Joe Brainard make up a project published the same year, *The Vermont Notebook*.

> There are still other made-up countries
> Where we can hide forever,
> Wasted with eternal desire and sadness,
> Sucking the sherbets, crooning the tunes, naming the names.
>
> (*JACP* 450)

> I will go to the dump. I am to be in the dump. I was permanently the dump and now the dump is me, but I will be permanently me when I am no longer the dump air. The dump air lasts. (*JACP* 353)

The second of these passages was written, as Ashbery himself has said, under the sign of Gertrude Stein, and the first, I think, under the sign of Joseph Cornell, whose obsessive themes—"The grand hotels, dancing girls"—are invoked in the first line of "Hop o' My Thumb," and whose generous urge "to allow us to keep all

the stories that art seems to want to cut us off from" is reflected in this poem's repeated references to fairy tales and childhood rituals.[1] "Hop o' My Thumb"'s ending invites us to retreat to a "made-up" world of familiar, perhaps all too familiar, pleasures, while the alien and alienating landscape of *The Vermont Notebook* lies under the grim rule of the reality principle. We are allowed to keep nothing here; everything has been consigned to the dump, except that elusive remnant of the "permanently me" that somehow survives the general trashing. Is this the "inspiring asceticism of abstraction" that Ashbery claims that Cornell's work also encompasses? Perhaps, up to a point; but with every repetition of the word "dump," with its ugly sound and scatological overtones, the poem becomes less "inspiring" and more grating, less like a poem and more like noise.

Too pretty, too ugly; too familiar, too alien: these are the fixed aspects of the janus-faced personage who has come to be known as the "two John Ashberys."[2] In this chapter, I will portray these two aspects of the poet as bound together by the force of a negative dialectic and will specify some points at which this internal conflict intersects with the agon between poetry and painting, as well as with the struggle between larger social forces that the aesthetic agon shadows. As in the cases of poetry and painting, professionalism and the market, I will argue that the poet's opposed aspects can be neither separated nor reconciled, that the continued life of Ashbery's enterprise depends on the conflict between them. To an extent, this focus places me in the critical mainstream, since by now virtually all of Ashbery's critics and followers acknowledge the existence of the "two John Ashberys" as a fact that they must grapple with. Yet many of these critics and poets have been concerned not so much with considering what it might mean that Ashbery's poetic persona is so relentlessly divided from within, as with establishing which of Ashbery's faces is the true one. Anyone familiar with the Ashbery literature will have run through many rehearsals of this debate, whose terms were set in the 1970s by Harold Bloom, who cast the poet as the last of the American Romantics, and Charles Bernstein, who claimed him as the first of the Language poets.[3]

A new phase of the discussion was initiated in 1998 by "Normalizing John Ashbery," a brief polemic in which Marjorie Perloff attacked such second-wave proponents of the lyric-romantic Ashbery as James Longenbach and Vernon Shetley.[4] While Perloff's aim seems to have been to depose Ashbery One once and for all in favor of Ashbery Two, the Steinian denizen of "the dump," on some readers at least, her essay seems to have had the opposite effect: the black-and-white terms in which she cast the debate threw into relief the sheer strangeness of Ashbery's divided character, making it clear that it is something to be explained, rather than explained away. Hence, Nick Lolordo's announcement, at the outset of a 2001 essay

aimed at "positioning" the poet in the field of modernism, that "[r]ecent literary history tells us that there are two John Ashberys." Lolordo is attracted by the avant-gardist Ashbery, but ultimately concludes that Perloff's thesis is too exclusive, that only by keeping both Ashberys in sight may we explain how the poet manages to remain a "moving target," occupying a position in the contemporary canon that appears now eccentric, now central.[5]

To amplify this insight, I would like to return to the words of Walter Benjamin's with which this book begins. "What are phenomena rescued from?" he asks; "Not only, and not in the main, from the discredit and neglect into which they have fallen, but from the catastrophe represented very often by a certain strain in their dissemination, their 'enshrinement as heritage.'" These cultural artifacts may be "saved," Benjamin says, from the depredations of "a tradition that is catastrophe," but only through the exposure of a self-inflicted wound—"through the exhibition of the fissure within them." The main problem with the debate over the "two Ashberys," as I see it, is that at both of its extremes it threatens to tether Ashbery's work firmly to one poetic line, thus effecting its catastrophic "enshrinement as heritage." The steady yet skeptical gaze that Ashbery has trained on "tradition" throughout his career is a match for Benjamin's, and what has made him the preeminent poet of his generation, I would suggest, is the unusual degree of clarity and precision with which his poems "exhibit the fissure" within themselves (in this, he is a match for early Eliot). This is not merely a matter of establishing sets of opposed terms but also of putting them into dynamic relation with one another. Thus, for example, while there is an Ashbery who remains attached to an Eliotic "tradition" and another who may be claimed, à la Perloff, by a Rimbaldian "avant-garde," as David Sweet rightly observes, "Ashbery assumes a nomadic tangency in relation to these two discursive poles of poetic production," such that the terms of the tradition/avant-garde binary become strangely "reversible."[6] Similarly, Shetley, whom Perloff casts as a partisan of the Bloomian-romantic Ashbery, in fact gives a powerfully dialectical account of the poet's struggle to occupy the "slender and dangerous middle ground between a sentimental lyricism and a radical impersonality."[7]

In Shetley's account as in Ashbery's own story of the perils of the artist under late capitalism in "The Invisible Avant-Garde," the risk the poet takes is that he may fall outside the bounds of art altogether, either into kitsch, exemplified in Ashbery's essay by DeChirico's return to "traditional" painting, or into what Shetley terms "surrender in the face of the antipoetic," that "silence" into which Ashbery feared Duchamp had permanently receded. I must add that there exists in fact no "middle ground," however "slender," from which the poet might mount a defense against these dangers, there is only the negative space produced by the

self-cancelling agon of the "two Ashberys." Yet even at its most painfully negative, in its vision of "the dump dumped and dumping," Ashbery's writing retains a glimpse, albeit fugitive, of the positive content that the negative dialectic keeps projecting out of itself. This is the "permanently me" that struggles to breathe in "the dump air," and in the more romantic "Soonest Mended" takes the form of "an occasional dream, a vision: a robin flies across / The upper corner of the window, you brush your hair away / And cannot quite see, or a wound will flash / Against the sweet faces of the others" (*JACP* 185). When he sees his own "wound" flash across the faces of "the others," the poet's isolation is pierced by a "sweet" ray of recognition; but against this pleasure he weighs the pain of seeing that these others suffer as he does from profound self-alienation. To say, as Ashbery does in the climactic lines of his best-known poem, that "This otherness, this / 'Not-being-us' is all there is to look at / In the mirror" is both to render the familiar alien and to show how the alien is still haunted by the familiar (*JACP* 486). The mirror image in that poem is painted, and therefore permanent, yet we value it less for that than for its ability to project the illusion of a fugitive substance, "a pinpoint of a smile, a spark / Or star one is not sure of having seen / As darkness resumes" (*JACP* 475). This possibly "made-up" residue of an all-too-real darkness is the reward Ashbery offers us if we are willing to follow him as he swerves between categories and institutions, between the familiar and the alien, between the lyric and the antipoetic, between poetry and painting.

i. Breathing Space: Ashbery In and Out of the Art World

When Ashbery first arrived in New York in 1949, shortly after graduating from Harvard, he went to the downtown loft building where his college friend Kenneth Koch then lived, and since Koch was out of town, rang the bell of his neighbor, the painter Jane Freilicher, who gave him Koch's keys. This casual meeting not only marked the beginning of one of Ashbery's closest and most important friendships but also, as the poet tells it in a 1986 essay on Freilicher's work, the beginning of his immersion in a social and intellectual world dominated by painters and painting. With characteristic disingenuousness, Ashbery offers as the reason why he, Koch, and the rest of their group "gravitated toward painters" that "the particular painters we knew happened to be more fun than the poets, though I don't think there were very many poets in those days" (*RS* 240). Not many poets, in the Village, in the 1950s? That *is* the voice of the coterie speaking. Ashbery spent the next several

years in the company of this close-knit circle of friends as he completed the group of poems that would go into his first book, *Some Trees*. That collection won the 1956 Yale Younger Poets' Prize, although this public honor came to Ashbery through the private workings of the coterie, his poems having been put into the hands of that year's judge, W. H. Auden, by friends of friends, after Auden had rejected all of the official entries.[8]

Still, in retrospect it is hard to see *Some Trees* as anything but a promising debut. The young Ashbery exhibits an ease with traditional forms, from the beautiful rhymed quatrains of the title poem to a graceful pantoum dedicated to Cornell, and a confident way with such precursors as Auden, Moore, and Wallace Stevens. Some poems, like "Some Trees," "The Mythological Poet," "Illustration," "The Painter," and "The Thinnest Shadow," would fit comfortably enough, give or take certain quirks, in any anthology keyed to the prevailing style of the period (even Richard Wilbur, the 1950s academic poet par excellence, once said that he like "Some Trees"[9]). But the majority unmistakably display the jarring disjunctions and shuffling of multiple rhetorics set loose from their prescribed grounding in Eliotic irony that mark Ashbery as a rebel against academic norms. In his foreword to *Some Trees*, Auden traces this aspect of Ashbery to Rimbaud, who "declared his intention of taking rhetoric and wringing its neck." Which was all well and good for Rimbaud, Auden implies, but not so much for his disciple, whom he warns at length against the temptation "to manufacture calculated oddities," a scolding that comes toward the end of a discussion notably short on praise for any aspect of Ashbery's writing.[10] The book's first reviewers proved equally wary of Ashbery's "oddities." O'Hara did take it upon himself to write a favorable notice, but this gesture only underscored the fact that the time was not yet ripe for the members of the coterie.[11]

> Who are the great poets of our time, and what are their names?
> Yeats of the baleful influence, Auden of the baleful influence, Eliot of the baleful influence
> (Is Eliot a great poet? no one knows), Hardy, Stevens, Williams (is Hardy of our time?),
> Hopkins (is Hopkins of our time?), Rilke (is Rilke of our time?), Lorca (is Lorca of our time?), who is still of our time?
> Mallarme, Valery, Apollinaire, Eluard, Reverdy, French poets are still of our time . . .

So proclaims the narrator of Kenneth Koch's "Fresh Air" (1962), whose very Koch-like response to the "suffocating atmosphere" of the postwar poetry scene is

to take an axe and start swinging.[12] His chief targets here are not in fact the high moderns "of baleful influence" themselves but their academic followers, those "men with their eyes on the myth / And the Missus and the midterms." For Koch, "fresh air" signifies not merely what lies outside the academy but also a more positively conceived set of artistic and professional possibilities; this poem narrates his search for what the young Marianne Moore termed "a fit gymnasium for action." At first, then, the poet searches for breathing space within literature itself, and quickly finds it, although not in the Anglo-American tradition, which while it contains some congenial figures is still too thoroughly under the sway of Eliot and his ilk, but rather, among French poets, the inheritors of Rimbaud. Once he has invoked the latter, Eliot's followers appear harmless enough: "they are trembling in universities, they are bathing the library steps with their spit." Soon, however, the charm wears off and the academics renew their assaults, until finally, the poem's speaker finds himself about to "give in . . . Already I see my name in two or three anthologies, a serving girl comes into the barn bringing me the anthologies." But all is not lost, since the "serving girl" turns out to be the poet's savior in disguise. "Air, air, you've come back!" he exclaims; and in this, its final, appearance, the air takes the form not of a poet, French or otherwise, but of "a young art student, who places her head on my shoulder." As a messenger from the institution of visual art, this muse-figure at last points the way out of the academy. At the same time, as a mistress she is implicitly opposed to the "Missus" who keeps the men of the "Poem Society" (and in Koch's vision they are all men) in thrall to the institution of marriage.

Koch's stance in "Fresh Air" is one of pure opposition, in the spirit of the William Carlos Williams who exulted that the Armory Show made him and his fellow poets suddenly feel as if "there was a break somewhere, we were streaming through," and mourned the baneful moment when "Eliot gave the poem back to the academics." Painting here is nothing but poetry's other, a sweetly pliant feminine object of desire. Toward the beginning of Koch's career, the art-world institutions most closely associated with the coterie, like *ArtNews* and the de Nagy gallery under John Bernard Myers's direction, did help to spread the poet's reputation and to give him some antiacademic cachet. Over the long term, however, Koch chose to conduct his rebellion against the academy from within its confines, cultivating scholarly and poetic followers of the New York School in his classes at Columbia, expanding the canon to include his friends' work, and producing a ground-breaking series of books on writing pedagogy. O'Hara, as we have seen, chose the opposite path, maintaining certain ties with the weaker institutions of the literary world, but conducting his career largely from within the "wrong institution."

Painting could also function for him as a muse figure ("sometimes," he wrote, "I think I am 'in love' with painting" [*FOHCP* 329]), but his insider's sense of the art world's limitations, together with his acute consciousness of the unconventional nature of his love objects, kept him from simply viewing painting as poetry's idealized other.

When he graduated from college, Ashbery seemed to be headed, like Koch, for an academic career (it was his rejection by Harvard and acceptance by Columbia for graduate school that initially propelled him from Cambridge to New York). However, he kept resisting the pull of the Ph.D., completing an M.A. in English only to pursue another degree in French, a project that led him to travel to France on a Fulbright in 1955. While there, he met and fell in love with the journalist and poet Pierre Martory, and in 1958, after a brief time spent back in the States, he returned and remained in Paris with Martory for the next seven years. It was in Paris that Ashbery found his "fresh air," a space outside all of the existing institutions, including that of the coterie, which seemed to beckon to him as he began to stake out a position for himself as an American poet. To a degree, the poet associated his marginal position in this period of his life with professional failure: the public's neglect of his first book, together with Ashbery's sense of isolation in Europe, put him in a mood in which, he recalls, "I didn't expect to have a second book published, ever."[13] Yet despite this sense of despair, he went on writing. His poems of this period, which would eventually go into *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962), thus represent the paradoxical urge to address a nonexistent audience. In *Some Trees*, Ashbery takes a skeptical attitude toward "the mythological poet" who "accepts / Beauty before it arrives" (*JACP* 17), yet in that book he himself never quite manages to shed the "beautiful" manner that comes so easily to him. It was only in Paris, freed from the hope of pleasing an audience, that he could set about systematically eliminating all traces of the merely pleasing from his work via what Andrew Ross identifies as "the classical strategies of the historical avant-garde": "shock, chance, and defamiliarization."[14] He did so, however, Ross notes, in the spirit of a "retro consciousness" that views all such anti-aesthetic gestures as doomed in advance, since ultimately, what "Dada has proved," as Ashbery himself put it, is that "once you've destroyed art you've actually created it."[15]

Nonetheless, a genuine air of risk still attends the often painfully disjunctive poems of *The Tennis Court Oath*, which were produced in part through the collaging of cut-up words and phrases gathered from "low" sources such as newspapers and pulp novels. "He had mistaken his book for garbage," taunts one of the ghostly voices in "Europe," Ashbery's first attempt at a long poem and in many ways the culminating expression of his hopes and fears regarding his work in this new

mode (*JACP* 93). David Sweet, on whose impressively lucid reading of "Europe" my own largely depends, singles out "garbage" as a key trope here, associating it in particular with that aspect of Surrealist practice that Ashbery calls "self-abnegation." Insofar as "self-abnegation" merely refers to the use of experimental techniques that enable an artist to relinquish a degree of conscious control over his work, this term has positive or at least neutral connotations. Thus, in calling his book "garbage," Ashbery draws our attention to his turn to the practice of collage, a "classical strategy" of the avant-garde that substitutes cultural castoffs for the tradition's "existing monuments," and ready-made words for lyric "voice." But insofar as "self-abnegation" involves an assault on the ego, it may also verge on self-hatred: to say one has mistaken one's book for garbage is also to identify with one's harshest critics. "Garbage," then, in this poem, like "the dump" in *The Vermont Notebook*, represents the anti-aesthetic impulse in Ashbery, which may either drive him to make art in spite of himself, or drive him to despair. "You cannot illusion: the dust. / abstract vermin the garden worn smiles," read the last lines of the nineteenth of "Europe"'s one hundred and eleven sections, exemplifying even as they refer to the artist's failure to project the "illusion" of a self-contained imaginary world; while in the wake of this failure, the twentieth section flatly announces, "That something desperate was to be attempted was, / however, quite plain."

In "Europe" as in the rest of Ashbery's poetry, "garbage," one of a set of tropes connected with a refusal or failure to communicate, is systematically opposed to a set of references to letters and "messages" of various sorts, which the poet associates with what he elsewhere describes as "the lush, Rousseau-like foliage" of his "desire to communicate" (*JACP* 519). However, this desire is more often than not baffled or balked: the messages are often coded, the letters uncertain of reaching their destination. For example, the second section of "The Skaters," the great long poem that concludes Ashbery's third book, *Rivers and Mountains*, begins "Under the window marked 'General Delivery' . . ." and not long after this, the poem's speaker insists that "All this must go into a letter." Toward the end of the section, it seems that delivery is imminent, "A postman is coming up the walk, a letter held in his hand," but there is a glitch: "he looks warily around / Alas not seeing the hideous bulldog bearing down on him like sixty, its hellish eyes fixed on the seat of his pants, jowls a-slaver" (*JACP* 155, 165). In "Europe," which consists in large part of shards of *Beryl of the Bi-planes*, a World War I–era novel for teenage girls that Ashbery found in a Paris bookstall, urgent wartime communiqués are similarly in danger of going awry, a danger symbolized by the ellipses and blank space in the otherwise coherent collaged lines that make up section 51:

They were written upon English paper, and English penny stamps are
upon them . . .
they can be put into any post-box . . . They
mostly contain instructions to our good friends in Great Britain.

All poems are in a sense "marked 'General Delivery,'" but in the poems of *The Tennis Court Oath* the poet's uncertainty regarding the nature of his potential audience reaches crisis proportions. In the disproportionately long final section of "Europe," which consists almost entirely of a lineated but otherwise unaltered portion of the novel in which the hero sees a message in Morse code flash against the sky, Ashbery lets himself indulge for once in the naïve lyricism of the found object. This passage is saved from sentimentality, though, precisely by the uncertainty that surrounds it: the message comes from a distance, from an unknown sender, who cannot himself know whether he has reached his intended audience—one that will be not only receptive to his message but also competent to decode it. As the passage begins, the hero looks up and sees "a miniature searchlight of great brilliance / —pierce the darkness, skyward"; then "the light began to 'wink,' / three times in quick succession / the Morse letter 'S.'"

Suddenly the light was shut off—for five minutes by Ronald's watch no
flicker was shown
Then suddenly, once again the series of S's was repeated
in a semicircle from north to south
and back again

Another five minutes passed in darkness

Once more the light opened out and commenced
to signal the Morse flashes and flares,
"N.F.", "N.F."
followed by a long beam of
light skyward, slowly sweeping in a circle

the breath

(*JACP* 113)

The line-fragment that ends the poem breaks the illusion of narrative coherence, and so compounds our uncertainty as to who might be speaking to whom; and yet, if we take "breath" to be a token of lyric immediacy, this ending might be said to

heighten rather than undermine the lyricism of the preceding lines. Even when one of the "two Ashberys" seems to be most decisively in the ascendant, the other is always there, somewhere, raising doubts in us as to where we stand.

In a 1995 essay, Fred Moramarco includes a "flow chart" of the poet's work to date that maps a consistent pattern of oscillation from book to book generated by the tension between the "two Ashberys." That pattern, Moramarco notes, was set from the very beginning of Ashbery's career, when "the formalism of *Some Trees*, his first published book," was succeeded by "the innovative experimentation of *The Tennis Court Oath*, which secured his reputation as an avant-garde poet."[16] At the time of writing these two books, of course, Ashbery could not have known he was setting such a pattern for himself. However much he subsequently may have chafed at the limits he imposed on himself in forging the style of the poems in *Some Trees*, he must have had great hopes for the book; and however liberating he found the experiments that resulted in *The Tennis Court Oath*, he turned to them only once it became "plain" that "something desperate was to be attempted." This second book received even more hostile reviews than did the first, but Ashbery's work nonetheless began to attract readers, particularly in New York, where the coterie's influence was strongest. Both Richard Kostelanetz and Richard Howard offer as proof of Ashbery's growing reputation their memories of a reading that the poet gave at the Living Theater in 1963, on a brief trip back from France, which "drew a packed house."[17] "[T]here was the poet," Howard recalls, "striding up and down the set of *The Brig* . . . wreathed in clouds as he consumed one cigarette after another and with remarkable skill and security read out the poems that already indicated how far he had come from the atomized shocks of *The Tennis Court Oath*."[18] These were the poems that would go into *Rivers and Mountains* (1966), the book whose style represents the first successful synthesis of Ashbery's warring impulses. By the time it was published, he had moved back to New York.

Ashbery had long hovered at the margins of the art world, becoming attached to it first through his friendships in New York, and then through his work while in Paris as art critic for the international edition of the *New York Herald Tribune*. Back in New York, however, he suddenly found himself at its very center, both because the city itself was now indisputably the center of the international art market, and because the poet himself was now working as editor of the influential monthly *ArtNews*. Yet art, artists and the art world would remain—with a few notable exceptions—marginal presences in Ashbery's poems themselves. In this he is, of course, strikingly unlike his friend O'Hara, whose tragically early death came a year after Ashbery's return to the United States. O'Hara's carefully cultivated position as an art world insider gave him a ready-made audience, although

at the cost of his forgoing the immediate hope of attracting a wider audience. His letter-poems always reached their intended recipients, but were in danger of remaining unread or unreadable outside the intensely intimate context in which they were conceived. The letters in Ashbery's poems, by contrast, are Dickinsonian letters-to-the-world, always marked "General Delivery," yet with the proviso that such a general audience for poetry no longer exists (and perhaps never did exist). O'Hara's waspish remark that it was his poetic contemporaries' "loneliness" that drove them into the academy might be applied to his own impulse to take shelter in the art world; while if Ashbery ever had such an impulse, he successfully resisted it. "Loneliness" is for him both a matter of position and disposition, a painful fact first, but one he then raised to the level of an aesthetic ideal. "The lyric poet in the era of high capitalism" (as Benjamin once labeled Baudelaire) just is a lonely figure; to trade that loneliness for a ready-made audience is, Ashbery suspects, to give up one's hope of reaching the kind of unaccountable readers who will make one's words their own. Merely to see one's work understood on one's own terms is not enough. The "lush, Rousseau-like of its desire to communicate / Something between breaths" is fully gratified, the poet tells us, only when others "understand you and desert you / For other centers of communication, so that understanding / May begin, and in doing so be undone" (*JACP* 519–20).

For all of Ashbery's skepticism regarding the art world's suitability as a home for stray poets, his association here of the fantastic jungles of Henri Rousseau with the desire to write in the lyric mode ("between breaths") suggests that visual art nonetheless still plays a privileged role in his thinking about the options open to the poet of his time. Rousseau was a painter, but more specifically, he was, like Ashbery's beloved Cornell and de Chirico, a quasi-outsider admired by the Surrealists whose art was at once avant-garde and retrograde. In other words, he stands on what Clement Greenberg would identify, and dismiss, as the "literary" margins of the art world; and it is from a like position, illegitimate in the eyes of art world insiders and of literary academics alike, that Ashbery chooses to mount his defense of poetry. Because Ashbery conducts this defense under the shadow of painting, his poetic impulse at its purest tends, paradoxically, to manifest itself in visual form (in this respect he *is* like O'Hara). But because he refuses to submit to the Greenbergian discipline that enforces clear distinctions between one art and another, only on rare occasions may this form be identified as "painting."

More often in Ashbery's work the unstable relationship between poetry and its other takes the form of two tropes, or rather, one figure with two faces, each of which in its way reminds us of the fugitive nature of the visible world. David Bromwich offers the most eloquent account I know of this crucial motif, which, he writes, "has

to do with exposure of a self that is diminished by experience, pictured side by side with the concealment of a self that is untouchable by experience. The first is associated with figures of commercial reproduction and above all, photographs. The second is associated with figures of reflection."[19] As an instance of a trope of the first type he cites the photograph of "that threesome, / Waiting for the light to change" in Ashbery's "City Afternoon," an image protected by "a veil of haze" even as its subjects are "Sucked screaming through old age and death." This image also has a political valence: the impulse to capture time in a photograph is connected to the thought, "If one could seize America [. . .]" (*JACP* 468). Bromwich is more interested, though, in the trope of the second type, the (always somewhat alienated) reflection: the speaker of "Summer" who murmurs to himself, "the face / Resembles yours, the one reflected in the water" (*JACP* 187), the speaker of "Wet Casements" who contemplates his "ghostly transparent face" in the window (*JACP* 508), and, of course, the speaker of "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," who seeks and does not quite find himself in Parmigianino's painting of his own artfully distorted mirror image. To a certain extent, Bromwich sees the commercial reproduction and the mirror image as twinned; what "interests Ashbery," he says, "is how the mass productions of culture make an uncanny double of the reflections sacred to art."[20] And yet, he concludes, the two are, in the end, implacably opposed, since for Ashbery, "a work of art . . . for as long as it feels original, is a work against commerce."[21]

I agree with this last premise and adopt it as my own, with the caveat that the opposition as it appears in Ashbery's work between art and commerce, auratic reflection and mechanical reproduction, is not always as clear-cut as Bromwich's examples might suggest. The remainder of this discussion, then, will focus on three instances of the trope of reflection in Ashbery's poetry. The first occurs in "Definition of Blue" (a poem Bromwich only alludes to in this context, although he does discuss it elsewhere) and the second, inevitably, in "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," the only poem of Ashbery's in which the act of reflection is explicitly identified with the act of painting. The third of the mirror images makes the briefest of appearances in *The Vermont Notebook*, which was published, as I have mentioned, in the same year as the eponymous volume in which "Self-Portrait" appears. *The Vermont Notebook* may be the least discussed of Ashbery's books, in part because when placed side-by-side with the magisterial *Self-Portrait* it cannot help but look, as John Shoptaw writes, "like a wastebasket for all the extraneous poetic matter ruled out by its famed contemporary."[22] Then again, Ashbery is the sort of poet for whom "He had mistaken his book for garbage" is not only a dismissive insult but also a call to reexamine, and perhaps revalue, that which has been dismissed. On second glance, I will argue, *The Vermont Notebook* looks less like the waste thrown

off by *Self-Portrait*, and more like its "uncanny double," which has certain profane truths to tell about "the reflections sacred to art."

ii. The Adventures of "the personality": "Definition of Blue"

Given Ashbery's penchant for misdirection, it comes as no surprise that "Definition of Blue," from *The Double Dream of Spring* (1970), offers no such definition, but still we may ask, what is the definition of "blue"? In the painterly sign-system of Wallace Stevens, blue is the color of the imagination, as in the "Man with the Blue Guitar," or the "fresh transfigurings of freshest blue" that finally clear the air in "Sea Surface Full of Clouds." Yet as Stevens is well aware, "the imagination" is a Romantic concept, and thus in need of radical renovation if it is to prove viable at all for the modern poet. In Stevens's most pointed critique of "the romantic," "Sailing after Lunch," Romanticism's "heavy historical sail" nearly sinks the poet's craft as it makes its way "[t]hrough the mustiest blue of the lake."[23] *The Double Dream of Spring* is one of, if not *the* most romantic of Ashbery's books, and is particularly rich in Stevensian figures of capable imagination, from the speaker of "Soonest Mended" to the "one who moves forward from a dream" in "Parergon" to the goofy-yet-godlike Popeye in "Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape." In another lyric from *Double Dream*, "Years of Indiscretion," Ashbery associates the "strange sensations of emptiness, anguish, romantic / Outbursts, visions and wraiths" that attend such figures with the Cornellian "stories that art seems to want to cut us off from," here called "Fables that time invents / To explain its passing" As always, though, the poet's yearning to "hide forever" in such fantasies is countered by the need to move forward. The old stories may now be used chiefly to "entertain / The very young and the very old," but the skeptical adult in Ashbery may still imagine "standing up in them to shoulder / Task and vision, vision in the form of a task" (*JACP* 205).

Yet for the poet who finds himself caught, as Ashbery says in "The Invisible Avant-Garde," "between an avant-garde which has become a tradition and a tradition which is no longer one," the "task" is not exactly, as it was for Stevens, to renovate the Romantic imagination. The time for that has passed, because—well, if we are looking for reductive sociological explanations, we might say something like, "The rise of capitalism parallels the advance of romanticism, and the individual is dominant until the close of the nineteenth century," then add, to indicate how things have changed even since Stevens's moment, that "In our own time, mass

practices have sought to submerge the personality." One might interrupt the lecture here to ask about the terminological slippage between "the individual" and "the personality"—are they meant to be synonyms? Or does the professor mean to suggest that the changes in the economy and the culture to which he refers effected a fundamental change in the conception of the self? One might, that is, if the speaker were indeed a professor and not John Ashbery, or his surrogate, and these were not the opening lines of "Definition of Blue" (*JACP* 211–12).

There is something comic about the act of ventriloquism in which Ashbery engages here, but also something chilling, and indeed, later in the poem's first stanza, the speaker refers to the "cold atmosphere" in which the adventures of "the personality" unfold. The death of romantic individualism is announced in commensurately dead language, which, even though it comes from the university rather than, as in "Europe," from the popular press, may be classed as "garbage" insofar as it is antipoetic. However, in this poem, the pressure of the antipoetic does not break the poet's discourse into disconnected phrases, or even, as happens in most of Ashbery's verse, bend its syntax into unexpected shapes. For in this case, the antipoetic derives more from the superego than from the id: here, we are in the realm of instrumental rationality. Yet something still struggles to escape its grip:

> In our own time, mass practices have sought to submerge the personality
> By ignoring it, which has caused it instead to branch out in all directions
> Far from the permanent tug that used to be its notion of "home."
> These different impetuses are received from everywhere
> And are as instantly snapped back, hitting through the cold atmosphere
> In one steady, intense line.

Although, as we will see, the question of what constitutes a proper medium for art is central to this poem, Ashbery uses the phrase "mass practices" rather than the more common "mass media." Does he mean to imply by this that the mass media are not media "proper"? Even if so, it is clear from the first that the existential struggle between "mass practices" and "the personality" also takes place at the level of the medium. Ashbery heightens our sense of conflict here, for example, by drawing on that fundamental resource of English poetry, the tension between Anglo-Saxon and Latin root words: verbs like "tug," "snap," and "hit" struggle to maintain their vivid specificity against an onslaught of abstract nouns such as "impetuses," "atmosphere," and that "notion" that fences off the once-welcoming "home" in quotation marks. Bromwich sees "the rebound of the personality" in the "steady, intense line" with which the stanza concludes; even if in "a language it could not remedy," he says, "the individual asserts its claim."[24] However, it is hard

to count this assertion as a triumph, given the severely reduced nature of the claim. What was once warm is now cold, what was concrete is abstract, a three-dimensional being shrunk to a mere line in space.

As I imply above, I suspect that the "the individual" loses crucial ground the moment it consents to be called "the personality." "Personality" may refer to that aspect of the self that is most particularized and private; this is the sense on which Eliot drew when he defined poetry as an "escape from personality." But in a later and increasingly dominant sense, "personality," usually accompanied in this incarnation by an objectifying "a" or "the," signifies a commodified replacement for a now obsolete individuality. "The personality" in this sense is at home with, and indeed is the creature of, "mass practices." I think that Ashbery is making a dark joke here about the diminished efficacy of modernist impersonality as a homeopathic remedy against the spread of instrumental rationality, which since Eliot's time has gained in strength and resourcefulness. "There is no remedy for this 'packaging' which has supplanted the old sensations," laments the speaker at the beginning of the second stanza,

> Formerly there would have been architectural screens at the point where the action became most difficult,
> As a path trails into shrubbery—confusing, forgotten, yet continuing to exist.
> But today there is no point in looking to imaginative new methods
> Since all of them are in constant use. The most that can be said for them further
> Is that erosion produces a kind of dust or exaggerated pumice
> Which fills space and transforms it, becoming a medium
> In which it is possible to recognize oneself.

The "screens" that once marked off the theatrical setting in which our self-fashioning took place constituted one kind of defense against the irrational, but one whose frank theatricality nonetheless reminded us that those energies that exceed the bounds of the "self," although seemingly forgotten, still continue to exist. From the regime of "mass practices" that trains us to "package" ourselves like any other commodity, however, there is no such relief. Wherever we turn, we encounter "imaginative new methods" of packaging, including the language of advertising of which this phrase is a sample.

And yet somehow, out of this terrifyingly cold atmosphere, a semblance of humanity emerges, or at least a hope that such a semblance might emerge. But where does this "medium / In which it is possible to recognize oneself" come from, what is it made of? Apparently, like the Terminator, the romantic individualist

reassembles itself, or its semblance, out of its own atomized remains. "You cannot illusion: the dust," stutters one of the voices of "Europe," but here "dust," another Ashberyan trope of waste and communicative failure, presages the return of the consoling illusions of art. Or does it? What kind of image of the self forms out here in boundless space?

> Each new diversion adds its accurate touch to the ensemble, and so
> A portrait, smooth as glass, is built up out of multiple corrections
> And it has no relation to the time or space in which it was lived.

A portrait that "has no relation to the time or space in which it was lived" is no longer recognizable as a particular person, a fact underscored by the simultaneously creepy and awkward construction "it was lived." This image combines the least human aspects of the painted portrait and the mirror image, the deathlessness of the one and the glassy smoothness of the other, to form a tough-skinned hybrid, like one of those beautiful but flavorless fruits designed to survive the rough-and-tumble of the global market and to satisfy mass taste. Yet insofar as it still looks like fruit, or art, the mutant serves to remind us of lost sweetness, and thus

> its existence is a part of all being, and is therefore, I suppose, to be prized
> Beyond chasms of night that fight us
> By being hidden and present.

The unpoetic locution "is therefore, I suppose" links personal authority to the mastery of dependent clauses, and so is consistent with the voice of the academic lecturer who dominates the poem's first lines and keeps its syntax on track thereafter. At the same time, though, the carping "I suppose" not only stands as a reluctant concession of the value of even the most commodified versions of human existence but also marks the only appearance in the poem of that romantic anachronism, the first person speaker. In this pivotal clause, then, the modern professional, who prides himself on his impersonal approach, and the romantic individualist, who prizes "personality" in its old sense, vie for recognition. The balance seems to shift in the direction of the romantic in its purest form in the following line, with the appearance of the lyrical phrase "chasms of night." "And yet," begins the final stanza: meaning the romantic at its purest is not for us, or as Stevens put it, "the romantic must never remain // Mon Dieu, and must never again return."[25]

> And yet it results in a downward motion, or rather a floating one,
> In which the blue surroundings drift slowly up and past you
> To realize themselves someday, while you, in this nether world that could not

be better,
Waken each morning to the exact value of what you did and said, which
remains.

The poem's first hint of syntactical ambiguity arrives in this sentence, in the typically Ashberyan form of an "it" that has come loose from its referent. Is "it" the construction of a mirror-like "portrait" that is at once recognizable and utterly alien? Or is it perhaps the mere instinct to survive in the face of "chasms of night," which is to say, death, or the death-in-life we suffer when things are in the saddle and ride mankind?

More generally, we might say, "it" is the battle that we have been tracking between the romantic "individual" and late capitalist "mass practices." May we then also say, with Bromwich, that at the poem's end "the individual asserts its claim"? The "you" of this stanza is recognizably human, yet it stands at one remove from the lyric first-person, and the "blue" of the imagination finally makes its appearance only to disappear into the same distance into which the "I" has receded. One might say that the value of the everyday is being affirmed, that this ending represents the fulfillment of the historical avant-garde's aspiration to bring an end to art's autonomy and thereby diffuse art's power to revalue our devalued existence throughout the social sphere. And yet: a hint of mockery lurks in the Panglossian shrug of "this nether world that could not be better." The historical avant-garde, as Ashbery knows, has proved itself ineffectual, as "mass practices" keep converting the artist's gestures of rebellion into the advertiser's "imaginative new methods." The post-romantic vision of this poem is frighteningly persuasive, its reflexive return to a revised romanticism less so; the science-fiction nightmare of the first three stanzas is not quite dispelled by the light of common day that breaks in the final lines. The world of this poem could be better, even if it is not the poet's business to change anything. All he can do is sift through the debris produced by the self's negation in a quixotic search for "a medium in which it is possible to recognize oneself."

In the reading of "Definition of Blue" that I offer above, I suggest that there is at least one respect in which this poem is an atypical sample of Ashbery's poetic practice. Not only does the poem's speaker assume a hyperrational, quasi-academic tone, the poem's syntactical structure has also been rationalized. There are none of the unmotivated pronoun shifts or subjectless predicates that introduce an element of the irrational into Ashbery's discourse even, or especially, when it affects the appearance of rationality. And while the struggle between "dead" language and a tenuously revivified lyric speech is a staple of Ashbery's work, it is seldom presented so schematically as it is here. Yet despite the relative transparency of its

argumentative and grammatical structures, this poem seems as alien as anything Ashbery has ever written. In fact, in this case it is the poem's very orderliness that is the sign of the poet's self-alienation. There is, he seems to be saying, a certain kind of compulsion to bring order to the "dust and exaggerated pumice" into which our self-representations have dissolved that dooms our subsequent efforts at self-reflection to failure.

"Definition of Blue" thus marks one extreme of the poet's antipoetic tendency, even if the antipoetic here takes a form that might seem alien to avant-gardists in general and to Ashbery's surrealist forebears in particular. The "I" of this poem confronts an "other" that is more super-ego than id. Yet it is also true that here, as in surrealism, where the pressure of the unconscious on the conscious often corresponds to the pressure of one art on another, the discovery of an alien "medium" constitutes the main challenge to the existing order. For Greenberg, at least, the eruption of "literature" into surrealist painting represented an unwelcome return of the repressed. The tendency toward medium-specificity in modernist art, which Greenberg first merely identified but then felt compelled to defend, became associated in his mind with increasing abstraction in painting, on one hand, and increasing professionalism in the practice of art criticism, on the other.[26] Ashbery admired the Greenberg who preached "the inspiring asceticism of abstraction," and up to a point "Definition of Blue" might be said to follow the Greenbergian plot, in which a highly purified, specifically visual medium is taken up as the subject of, even as it is to a certain extent produced through, the discourse of the professionalized critic. The purity of the medium seems to guarantee the autonomy of the artwork made manifest through it, and the artwork in its turn seems to offer a refuge to the would-be autonomous individual, once the latter has been expelled from "what used to be its notion of 'home.'" However, in Ashbery's version of this story, at the point when the critic begins to view the rationalization of art and art-making that the tendency toward medium-specificity entails as not just necessary but desirable, he ceases to critique and begins to collude with the enforcers of the regime of instrumental rationality, a.k.a. "mass practices." And it is at that point that what looked, for a moment, like "a medium in which it is possible to recognize oneself" turns instead into a medium fit only for rendering chilling parodies of our once-prized "reflections sacred to art."

From the perspective of the visual artist, the danger is that the medium that makes critical self-reflection possible will come to assume the inhuman form of the commodity. Clearly, the photograph is, as Bromwich says, a crucial metaphor for the commodified artwork in Ashbery's poems, but I would add that painting itself, although not, like photography, directly implicated in the system of "mass practices," is also viewed by the poet at times as coming dangerously close to the world of "commerce." Poetry is now perhaps the art least susceptible to commercialization—even

the composer of new music or modern dancer (currently the poet's chief competitors for the title of least popular artist) is occasionally commissioned to write a film score or choreograph a Disney musical. We may recall in this connection the gallerist John Myers's observation that, while the writings of the New York School poets served as an especially "precious" form of publicity for their friends' artworks, "guaranteeing a rise in their market value," the painters could not respond in kind, since "[n]o such market can attach itself to a poem." When I cited this remark in the previous chapter, I suggested that what the poets gained from their associations with artists and the art world was also a form of publicity, one which may have circulated first within the precincts of the "wrong" institution, but which ultimately enabled the members of the coterie to make names for themselves, both collectively and individually, in the world of literature as well. Again, though, for the poets fame would never translate into money. To be known, to have an audience, was a value in itself.

Still, to say that poems barely qualify as marketable commodities is not to say that poets have placed themselves beyond the reach of "mass practices." The pressure to professionalize that comes with the academic jobs that most poets must now take to survive also tends to erode "the personality"; as I note in chapter 1, academics go to market to sell a strenuously rationalized version of themselves. At their characterless worst, if they are critics, they write sentences such as "[t]he rise of capitalism parallels the advance of romanticism and the individual is dominant until the close of the nineteenth century," and if they are poets, they find themselves, as Koch says in "Fresh Air," "gargling out innocuous (to whom?) poems about maple trees and their children." O'Hara hoped that proximity to the painters, with "their great distaste for academicism," might help protect him and his work from such a fate. The shimmering apparition of "a medium / In which it is possible to recognize oneself" in the midst of the dry-as-dust discourse of "Definition of Blue" might seem to represent a similar thought about the power of painting to reinvigorate poetry. But the glossy portrait that emerges from the dust is as much a triumph of "packaging" as the lecture of which it is the subject; image and word alike are prey to the crushing power of "mass practices."

iii. The Case of the Fairy Decorator: Robert Lowell and the New York School

If not to the art world, then where, in the America of the postwar years, might a poet with a distaste for academicism turn? To art's uncanny double, the mass

media? Poetry's uncommercial character might seem to make that an unlikely option. Yet two of the major strains of the poetry of this era did draw on the culture of celebrity in such a way as to make it increasingly difficult to distinguish the poet as individual from the poet as personality. These were, first, Beat poetry, and second, that late-flowering subspecies of academic verse that came to be called confessional poetry. To a certain extent, the members of the New York School coterie opposed the academics simply because the latter sought to consolidate modernism's "enshrinement as heritage." However, the rise of confessionalism brought out a more fundamental conflict between the two groups, one that pointed more precisely to the link in each between personal disposition and institutional position. Before I turn to that story, however, I would like to touch briefly on the relationship between the Beats and the New York School poets, which played a small but crucial role in the latter's conception of "the personality."

Ashbery has recalled how, while he was away in France, poetry had acquired a new kind of publicity "thanks largely to Ginsberg and Corso. Readings for younger poets were nonexistent before I left. They were the sort of thing only Robert Frost did. I returned to find them an institution."[27] For the Beats, the poetry reading was a key form of mediation which while not new, was transformed in their hands from a ceremonial occasion to an event in which the poem became a vehicle for charismatic performance and the poet "a personality" in the Hollywood sense. Ashbery registers a certain resistance to this development when he refers to readings as "an institution," a label likely to irritate Ginsberg and Corso, who considered themselves to be not merely antiacademic but anti-institutional *tout court*. One never quite gets outside institutions, Ashbery implies; but one may point to their limits. Thus, on one hand, the stories about the poet's career-making performance at the Living Theater show him following the path blazed by the Beats. Yet Ashbery has also responded to the institutionalization of the poetry reading by cultivating a markedly flat reading style, one that, in Kostelanetz's phrase, "mutes the music" of even his most lyrical lines.[28] Even as he participates in the rituals of celebrity culture, in other words, Ashbery resists that culture's edict that its participants exhibit "personality."[29]

Then again, while Ashbery's ambivalence about poetry readings may imply a critique of the Beats' embrace of celebrity culture, when he characterizes Ginsberg and Corso as the founders of a new "institution," he also reminds us of what their poetic coterie had in common with his own. Insofar as the members of both groups stood opposed to the literary academy, that is, they had to find or make alternative forms of institutional support for their work. Sometimes this shared situation led the two groups to make common cause, as when editor Donald Allen

chose to include Ashbery, O'Hara, Koch, Schuyler, and Guest among the Beats and other west coast luminaries whose work composed the greater part of *The New American Poetry*, the chief combatant on the antiacademic side of the "anthology wars" that did so much to define the postwar poetry scene.[30] O'Hara is the best-represented member of the New York School in Allen's volume, with fifteen poems to the others' three or four, a sign that he served, in this case as in so many others, as a bridging figure between groups. O'Hara was also the only member of the coterie to publish a book with Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights press, and he published as well in Beat journals such as *City Lights Journal*, *Yugen*, and *Floating Bear*. The latter two publications were co-edited by Leroi Jones, who like his friend O'Hara was perpetually on the move between poetic and social groups, though the pivot for Jones's mobility was race rather than, as in O'Hara's case, sexuality. A degree of openness about homosexuality that marked them as exceptional within their respective groups served, in its turn, to link O'Hara and Ginsberg—"a common ear," as Ginsberg termed their likeness in his elegy for O'Hara, "for our deep gossip."[31] At the same time, all of the members of these two groups were united, whatever their attitude or orientation toward sexuality, in viewing the poetic academy as the nexus of the association of literature and heterosexuality as institutions. Hence, Gregory Corso—like Marianne Moore in this if in no other respect—titled his poetic manifesto of social marginality "Marriage," and the married professor Koch felt obliged to distance himself from the anointed devotees of "the myth / and the Missus and the midterms." Again, "the Missus" is an essential part of the equation: as he rebels against the "Poem Society," Koch comes to link sexual and artistic freedom.[32]

For Ashbery, however, this equation is not so simple. In fact, as I noted in the last chapter's discussion of Ashbery's interpretation of the Surrealist credo of *liberté totale*, for him sexual freedom in life is linked to the *negation* of sexual content in writing. This association derives less, I think, from any native Puritanism on Ashbery's part than from his intuition that in the age of "mass practices," to make one's personal life public is to hasten the impending displacement of "personality," in its old sense, by its uncanny double, "the personality." Although Ashbery is more consistently guided in his work by this belief than are any of his closest poetic colleagues, it is nonetheless shared to some extent by all the members of the coterie, at least insofar as they subscribe to that proto-Surrealist dictum, "'I' is an other." "My quietness has a man in it, he is transparent," begins O'Hara's central poetic exploration of the otherness of the self, "In Memory of My Feelings" (*FOHCP* 252–57). This exploration is in theory endless: the poet's internal other "has several likenesses, like stars and years, like numerals," which keep exfoliating

throughout the poem, like the skin of the serpent that is its central metaphor for the daemonic, which is to say, never merely personal, aspect of the self. O'Hara's commitment to this kind of Surrealist revision of romantic self-alienation provides a strong counterbalance to his tendency to rely on personal charisma, a gift that served him well both on and off the page. And to the extent that his choice to limit the circulation of his work "functioned as a closet," the otherwise unbuttoned O'Hara might even be said to share his friend Ashbery's reticence.

It is this unstable mix of personal reticence and ideological commitment to Surrealist "otherness" that distinguishes the work of the New York School poets from one strain of academic verse in particular, confessional poetry. The Beats became "personalities" in performance, but poets like Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton achieved another kind of stardom through those of their poems that their readers came to correlate with the painful facts of their private lives. When O'Hara was asked, in a 1965 interview, to compare himself to Lowell, the poet singled out an image from "Skunk Hour"—the lyric that serves as the capstone of Lowell's autobiographical tour-de-force *Life Studies*—that encapsulates the tension between privacy and publicity characteristic of the confessional mode. Referring to the stanzas in which Lowell's poem's speaker peers into "love-cars" then in guilty recoil cites Milton's Satan's "I myself am hell," O'Hara irritably exclaims, "I don't think that anyone has to get themselves to go and watch lovers in a parking lot necking in order to write a poem, and I don't see why it's admirable if they feel guilty about it. They should feel guilty. Why are they snooping? What's so wonderful about a Peeping Tom?" O'Hara's use of the plural "they" rather than the singular "he" suggests that he is thinking of Lowell's audience as much as he is of the poet himself. For Lowell, like his readers, has come to associate artistic authenticity with the exposure of what was meant to be private; "vision" here, as Deborah Nelson remarks, is "the profit of voyeurism."[33] This poem, then, like its companions in *Life Studies*, is generated out of the dialectical relation between two Lowells, the visionary and the voyeur. The former's endlessly exfoliating sense of self may be stabilized through the sacrificial offering of a few well-chosen true-to-life details provided by the latter; which details are, in their turn, saved from mundanity by being packaged in the daemonic Lowell's broken and wrenched, yet still strangely immaculate, version of traditional prosody. O'Hara, however, complains that "the metrics aren't all that unusual. Every other person in any university in the United States could put that thing into metrics" (*SS* 13).

Although none perhaps, one must protest, as elegantly as Lowell, whose keen historical sense dovetailed with his formal gifts, such that his ruined forms retain their uncanny power to conjure up the ghosts of grandeur past. O'Hara's offhand

comments hardly constitute a proper critique of this achievement. That said, we may still credit O'Hara's suggestion that in seeking to defend his fragile sense of self against the depredations of what Ashbery elsewhere refers to as "our technological society," Lowell concedes too much both to literary tradition and to social convention. For it is not, needless to say, Lowell's inclusion of sexual content as such that prompts O'Hara's objection, but rather, his presentation of sexuality as a guilty secret. As a gay man, O'Hara felt peculiarly bound to oppose both external imputations of guilt about his sexuality and the internalized sensations of guilt such pressures produced. "Is it dirty / does it look dirty," he wonders in "Song" (1959), as he feels himself drawn to someone who is "as attractive as his character is bad." Then again, he counters, what looks "bad" from one angle "improves constantly" when looked at from another; after all "dirt" is as ubiquitous as the air we breathe, and "you don't refuse to breathe do you" (*FOHCP* 327). However, if O'Hara did mean through his choice of example to portray Lowell as a colluder in the repressions of what the latter labeled "the tranquillized *Fifties*," then it is curious that he did not also adduce an in some ways more apposite instance that appears in the same poem.

When Elizabeth Bishop, to whom Lowell dedicated "Skunk Hour," praised O'Hara in a 1959 letter, Lowell responded with an odd piece of free association.

> I'll read O'Hara. The other night Ginsberg, Corso and [Ginsberg's longtime companion Peter] Orlovsky came to call on me. As you know our house, as Lizzie says, is nothing if not pretentious. Planned to stun such people. When they came in they all took off their wet shoes and tiptoed upstairs. They are phony in [a] way because they have made a lot of publicity out of very little talent. But in another way they are pathetic and doomed. . . . There was an awful lot of subdued talk about their being friends and lovers, and once Ginsberg and Orlovsky disappeared in unison to the john and reappeared on each other's shoulders. I haven't had the heart to tell this to Lizzie or anyone else.[34]

Lowell implicitly registers his resistance to reading O'Hara, and perhaps some repressed uneasiness with his beloved Bishop's own sexuality as well, by way of a reference to a third gay poet, Ginsberg, whose markedly "subdued" behavior Lowell nonetheless finds unspeakable. The contempt in which Lowell holds Ginsberg seems to have as much to do with class as with sexuality; yet as usual, Lowell seems to stand both inside and outside his own class, mocking his house as "pretentious," even as he makes fun of Ginsberg and his friends ("such people") for being stunned by it. "In a sense," Nelson observes, "Lowell's originality lay in his

exquisite sensitivity to his own unique position" as the scion of a once-great American family whose "impending displacement" the poet manages to correlate simultaneously with the dissolution of social norms, poetic forms and his own integral sense of self.[35] The plot of "Skunk Hour" accordingly traces a descending curve through the miniature society of a Maine resort town, from the "hermit/heiress" who stands above and apart in "hierarchic privacy," to the trash-picking mother skunk at Lowell's doorstep, whom he confronts, but who "will not scare."[36] Lowell's power to stun has been diminished, in part because, as he says, "my mind's not right," but also because his ability, or compulsion, to see himself as if from outside leads him to identify with those feminized outsiders, the heiress and the skunk.

Bridging the aristocrat and the trash-picker, however, are two figures whom Lowell finds less sympathetic, the "summer millionaire" and the "fairy/decorator," each a type of the bourgeois social climber. The former disappears, leaving the social order intact, his "nine-knot yawl . . . auctioned off to lobstermen," but the latter, lingering on,

> brightens his shop for fall;
> his fishnet's filled with orange cork,
> orange, his cobbler's bench and awl;
> there is no money in his work,
> he'd rather marry.

The two stanzas that follow this one chronicle the scene of Lowell's degradation and breakdown among the "love cars." Lowell draws no causal connection between the appearance of the "fairy" and his own downhill slide; but then, it is precisely this poem's "air / of lost connections," to borrow a phrase from elsewhere in *Life Studies*, that gives its images their jewel-like clarity. And the images themselves suggest that the decorator represents a threat to the poet as an artist, a man, and a Lowell: by turning the fisherman's and cobbler's tools into accent pieces, he makes a mockery of traditional craft, and by aspiring not only to marry, but to marry up, he makes a mockery of both the sexual and social orders. "Skunk Hour" comes at the end of a volume that portrays the poet as exceptionally vulnerable on all these counts. Marriage under threat, for example, is the subject of the two poems that precede this one in *Life Studies*, "Man and Wife" and "'To Speak of the Woe that is in Marriage'"; and throughout the book, each time he airs his dirty linen and loosens his metrics, Lowell reminds us that he is putting at risk his standing both as a member of his class, and as the leading proponent of the academic return to traditional form in poetry.[37]

So: having brought up "Skunk Hour," why wouldn't O'Hara have mentioned the fairy decorator, the embodiment of everything the poet strove against, in himself and in his society? Unlike Lowell, O'Hara learned take an unguilty pleasure in the freedoms conferred by his uncertain status vis-à-vis both the class hierarchy and "this institution." However, O'Hara also practiced a strategic reticence, confining his most candid expressions of his sexuality to contexts over which he maintained some control. An interview, in this case conducted by the critic Edward Lucie-Smith for the art magazine *Studio International*, was not the place to focus on the "fairy." Moreover, to the extent that he keeps things between Lowell and himself impersonal, O'Hara reinforces his criticism of Lowell's reliance on personal experience to give his poem an air of authenticity. Such a criticism may seem strange coming from someone whose own poems are famously thick with personal detail, yet there is also a sense in which, as O'Hara himself insists, his work "does not have to do with personality or intimacy, far from it!" (*FOHCP* 499). Like other mass media celebrities, the confessional poets became "personalities" first by projecting an air of glamour—in the poets' case this derived from the authority of the literary and academic institutions with which they were affiliated, on one hand, and from their mastery of poetic craft, on the other—and then by revealing the "real," which is to say, unloved, addicted, mad, helpless person behind the glamorous mask.[38] Because O'Hara and his friends at once distanced themselves from traditional sources of poetic authority and eschewed the pathos that derives from the revelation of personal pain, they have never attracted the kind of readers who seek to repair their own alienated sense of self through an identification with figures whose representative status depends on their ability to seem at once godlike and all-too-human.[39]

Of the poets of his generation, Lowell had the most glamour to bank on. His formal mastery and ambitious themes won him exceptionally early and continuous acclaim, and his pedigree set him still more clearly apart from the rest; to some extent, David Herd observes, all poets of the postwar period faced "the problem of not being Lowell."[40] Thus, there may seem to be nothing to explain in the fact that although O'Hara and Ashbery each more than once expressed dislike for both academic poetry and its confessional offshoot, Lowell's was the only name either ever mentioned in connection with these prejudices. But just as gay men symbolized to Lowell both the connection between, and potential instabilities in, his own sexual disposition and class position—instabilities that he exploited to good effect in his art, even if he feared them in life—so "Lowell" had, I believe, a special meaning to O'Hara and Ashbery, insofar as their sexuality was connected to their opposition to the cult of "personality." Class also plays a mediating role in

this case. For just as Lowell, like Eliot before him, emblematizes the bourgeoisie's aristocratic aspirations in a society without aristocracy, so O'Hara and Ashbery are emblematic bourgeois to the degree that they cannot be firmly pegged to a particular class position. Homosexuals as a group are like the bourgeoisie, in other words, in that that class, as Alvin Gouldner observes, "was *born* with a 'legitimation crisis.'"[41] In this respect, we may say, the bourgeoisie is the class that dare not speak its name.

While the quasi-aristocratic poet may seem ideally positioned to offer the bourgeois the legitimacy he or she lacks, Lowell, again like Eliot before him, keeps pointing at the shaky foundations of his anomalous position even as he fetishizes it. Gouldner, for his part, locates the solution to the bourgeoisie's legitimation crisis not in the fantasy of a resurgent aristocracy but in the rise of what we have been calling professionalism and what he calls the "New Class," which in his view may originate in the bourgeoisie but constitutes a genuinely "new class" insofar as it transcends its origins. As Gouldner tells it, the members of the "New Class" effected their separation from the old bourgeoisie in large part through language, specifically, through their development of a "relatively . . . situation-free" language and consequent constitution of what he terms the "culture of critical discourse," or CCD.[42] The culture of critical discourse uproots its speakers from their former social positions and sets them afloat in what the essayist George W. S. Trow once called "the context of no context."[43] Here, Gouldner writes, "Speech becomes impersonal. Speakers hide behind their speech. Speech seems to be disembodied, de-contextualized and self-grounded";[44] or as Ashbery might say, "it has no relation to the time or space in which it was lived." For as "Definition of Blue" suggests, as it seesaws between the languages of sociology and aesthetics, the rise of the "culture of critical discourse" has had crucial implications not only for modernity but for modernism as well. In speaking of the rationalized discourse of the boardroom and the classroom, Gouldner might also be describing the voices from nowhere that haunt Eliot's Waste Land or Joyce's Dublin, voices which another of these writers' peers once compared to "intermingled echoes / struck from thin glasses successively at random."

In describing this writer, Marianne Moore, with particular reference to this poem, "Those Various Scalpels," Eliot spoke of her "peculiar and brilliant and rather satirical use of what is not, as material, an 'aristocratic' language at all, but simply the curious jargon produced in America by universal university education." As his lofty tone here implies, the aristocrat in Eliot stood opposed to what Langdon Hammer identifies as the "democratizing element" in the lingua franca of white-collar America. In this connection, Hammer cites Gouldner's assertion that

"The grammar of critical discourse claims the right to sit in judgment over the actions and claims of any social class and all power elites." However, Hammer adds, the aristocratic Eliot also had his hidden obverse, an insecure "social climber" who readily drew on the prestige conferred by his academic associations, since these, too, have their quasi-aristocratic aspect, insofar as they enable the professional class to distinguish itself from the old bourgeoisie.[45] This distinction nevertheless remains difficult to establish and enforce. Thus, as I suggest in chapter 3, the "satirical" distance Eliot imputes to Moore is a sign of his fear that he himself may still be implicated in the culture he left behind in America, "a country where," he remarks in the essay on Moore, there can be no aristocracy, but "only variations *within* the middle class." When Eliot does employ the "curious jargon" of the bourgeoisie's professionalist offshoot in his poems, he tends to imply that it is an obstacle in the way of his efforts to recover a more authentic poetic speech. By contrast, Moore, who frankly acknowledged herself a product of the system of "universal university education," accepted its idiom as her *donnée*.

The first lessons Ashbery received in how make a "disembodied, de-contextualized and self-grounded" language resonate in a poem doubtless came from Auden, who explicitly linked such impersonal speech with the homosexual's protective mask. It was Moore and her "kaleidoscopic collage effects," however, that Ashbery credits, in a 1966 review, with giving him "a necessary lesson in how to live in our world of 'media,' how to deal with the unwanted information that constantly accumulates around us." Moore, Ashbery implies, combats the barrage of information that seeks "to submerge the personality / By ignoring it" not by directly opposing this assault, but by reproducing in it another register, as "kaleidoscopic collage effects" (*SP* 86). For Hugh Kenner, this is the crux of Moore's achievement; her writing, he says, "is a turning point as Stevens' is not" because "it has no traffic . . . with the Grand Style, with Tradition," but is entirely a creature of the age of mechanical reproduction, "referable less to the voice than to the click of the keys."[46] In renouncing her claim on the Romantic inheritance, Moore endows her poems with a new kind of resonance; she teaches us, Kenner writes, that "the poem is *other* than an utterance: other than what the poet 'has to say.'"[47] The two main means by which she produces this effect of otherness are collage, the use of cited material, which is further estranged through fragmentation and decontexualization, and the use in poetry of the rigorously impersonal language of the modern professional. Moore cannot have been the only model Ashbery turned to when he began to work with collage, just as she is not his only guide to the culture of critical discourse. However, by showing that it is possible to *combine* these two seemingly antithetical modes of expression, she provides him with a crucial link

between the anti-rationalism of Dada and Surrealism and the hyper-rationalism of the regime of "mass practices," which, he sees, are not antithetical in that they are both anti-aesthetic.

I would propose, then, as a model for the portrait from outer space in "Definition of Blue" the following passage, from the last stanza of Moore's "People's Surroundings" (*BMM* 108–10). The almost-human image depicted here is constructed from the "surroundings" of the title, those pieces of evidence of their existence that humans leave behind.

> In these noncommittal, personal-impersonal expressions of appearance,
> the eye knows what to skip;
> the physiognomy of conduct must not reveal the skeleton;
> "a setting must not have the air of being one"
> yet with x-raylike inquisitive intensity upon it, the surfaces go back;
> the interfering fringes of expression are but a stain on what stands out,
> there is neither up nor down to it;
> we see the exterior and the fundamental structure—

The remainder of the stanza following the dash consists of a long list of occupational types and locations, an x-ray vision of the "fundamental structure" of a society that runs the gamut from "dukes, princes and gentleman" to "hostlers and chimney-sweeps," all "in their respective places." In other words, the society evoked by this list, which Moore has taken from a typically obscure source, a nineteenth-century book of astrology titled *Raphael's Horary*, is transparently hierarchical, its stability guaranteed by the existence of a hereditary aristocracy. By contrast, the modern world as portrayed in the stanzas that precede this one is at once repellently bureaucratic, a "vast indestructible necropolis" composed of steel, oak, and glass, and refreshingly democratic, productive of "medicaments for 'instant beauty' in the hands of all, / and that live wire, the American string quartette." "There is neither up nor down to it": the leveling tendency of this society is a good thing so long as "the eye knows what to skip," maintaining respect for individual privacy. For while Moore's strangely autonomous "eye" is suggestive of Big Brother, it is also the signature faculty of the modern artist, which at its best enables a disinterested critique of the regime of instrumental rationality. At its worst, however, it colludes with that regime; thus, with that "yet," the eye turns "x-raylike," dispassionately stripping its object of her last shreds of individuality, which appear to *it* simply as "the interfering fringes of expression." In this poem, as in "Definition of Blue," something recognizably human struggles to emerge from its alien "surroundings." In both cases, the poet's painterly "eye" manages to

strike a delicate balance between the "personal" and the "impersonal," between a hierarchical past and an instrumentalist future, for just a moment, before the portrait goes out of focus once again.

For Moore as for Ashbery, the key to achieving this kind of dialectical poise is what the former called "restraint" and the latter once termed "this leaving-out business." But whereas Moore's near-silence on personal, and especially, sexual subjects in her poetry was as much a matter of compulsion as of choice, such discretion for Ashbery is largely a poetic strategy. A tendency toward what I have called, in Moore's case, "sexual negation" is for both of these poets rooted in sexual disposition, particularly as it came to be connected to class position, but a shift in class relations, on one hand, and in the relation between privacy and publicity, on the other, has occurred between Moore's moment and Ashbery's. What seemed so idiosyncratic as to be inexpressible in Moore, her simultaneous identification with and distance from the class which emerged in tandem with a system of "universal university education," and her outsider's critique of marriage, a.k.a "this institution," had become within two generations standard equipment for poets who hoped to make sense of a culture that demanded of them that they be both professionals and "personalities," that, like all good commodities, they subject themselves to standardization while projecting an air of uniqueness. The difference between Lowell and Ashbery is that the former had more to lose under these conditions; this sense of loss gives his language its keen edge, but it also makes it something of a dead end. Unlike Lowell, Ashbery has little nostalgia for the hierarchical past, but neither is he eager for the instrumentalist future. Each of these temporalities is represented in his poetry, in the form of his lyric-romantic and antipoetic modes, but again, it is not in one or the other of these modes, but out of the conflict between them, that Ashbery generates his vision of a possible present to live in, a possible language to speak.

iv. Cornell/Parmigianino

If "Definition of Blue" gives us Ashbery at his most chillingly futuristic, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" is the poem of his that would seem to come closest to providing those satisfactions we associate with the art of the past. It has attracted far more critical attention than any of his other works, in part because in it Ashbery shows an unusual "willingness to accommodate readerly expectations," as David Herd puts it. Chief among those expectations, Herd notes, are that a poem should have a "continuous subject," which Ashbery here supplies in the form of

the painting by Parmigianino that gives his poem its title, and that it should have "a clearly identifiable and sustained narrative voice," in this case, a speaker who consistently refers to himself as "I" (rather than sliding among pronouns, as is Ashbery's wont) and "who seems indistinguishable from the poet."[48] Ashbery's poetic persona acquires in addition a degree of reflected glory from Parmigianino's self-portrait, which besides being a certified great work also purveys a glamorous image of the working artist. This elevated subject and the subject-position it elevates give the poem an always-already-canonical air that is another source of its attraction for critics. Ashbery himself was still a cult figure when he wrote "Self-Portrait," but with the publication of the volume in which this poem appears, also titled *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, he became a canonical one. The book won the National Book Critics Circle Award, the National Book Award, and the Pulitzer Prize, effectively lifting the poet out of the circle of the coterie once and for all.

The description offered above would seem to suggest that in "Self-Portrait" Ashbery lapses from the skeptical attitude he otherwise maintains toward tradition, whether it takes the form of an Eliotic "avant-garde which has become a tradition" or a ghostly "tradition which is no longer one." This poem's most perceptive readers have argued, however, that Ashbery only seems to bow to tradition here the better to arm us against its seductions, that his poem ultimately constitutes "a radical criticism of the illusions and deceptions inherent in [certain] forms of traditional representation." This last phrase appears in what is still perhaps the most masterly reading of "Self-Portrait," which Richard Stamelman first published in 1984; since then, many critics, from Lee Edelman (1986) to Herd (2000) have usefully amplified his claims.[49] It is puzzling, then, to find Barbara K. Fischer still asserting, in 2006, that "commentators have overlooked the ways this poem thematizes and interrogates the very notion of what constitutes 'tradition' and an artist's position in it."[50] Since Fischer seems both to know, and to admire, Stamelman's and Edelman's essays, her claim may be not so much mistaken as it is symptomatic. The more critics struggle to break the spell that this poem casts over its readers, the more one suspects that theirs is a desire that misses its aim. My sense is that in the case of "Self-Portrait," the poet and his readers alike want not, or not only, to demystify a tradition that is, as Ashbery reminds us, "no longer one," but to regain access to "all the stories that art seems to want to cut us off from." This latter desire is consonant with a skeptical attitude toward tradition insofar as these "stories" represent that aspect of art that has escaped "enshrinement as heritage," but insofar the old stories represent our continued investment in magical thinking, they resist the skeptic's most strenuous efforts.

For Ashbery, Cornell is the figure who most fully embodies this contradictory desire for a version of the past that at once enables and disables his critical powers. Ashbery has evinced an enduring interest in Cornell, from "Pantoum," in *Some Trees*, to which the poet attached a dedication to Cornell when this poem was reprinted in Dore Ashton's 1974 monograph on the artist, to the Cornell collage reproduced on the cover of *Hotel Lautreamont* (1992).[51] Such direct references might be adduced in support of John Shoptaw's guess that Cornell, as a "descendant" of Parmigianino, was also "foremost in Ashbery's mind at the time of 'Self-Portrait,'" although Shoptaw himself offers no further evidence or argument in support of this claim. Shoptaw is certainly right to note that Parmigianino was among Cornell's influences—a reproduction of the former's *Antea* is featured, for instance, in a box the latter dedicated to New York City Ballet star Allegra Kent—but a more precise set of connections between the two artists emerges in light of Ashbery's decision to write about the mirror portrait, which at once is and is not a "typical" Parmigianino. As the poet himself explains, in one of those passages in the poem in which he assumes the tone of the disinterested scholar,

> Later portraits such as the Uffizi
> "Gentleman," the Borghese "Young Prelate" and
> The Naples "Antea" issue from Mannerist
> Tensions, but here, as Freedberg points out,
> The surprise, the tension are in the concept
> Rather than its realization.
>
> (*JACP* 479)

—Parmagianino's concept being to reproduce the effect produced by a convex mirror by painting his self-portrait on a half-round of wood, so that, to quote Ashbery again, "the consonance of the High Renaissance / Is present, though distorted by the mirror" (479). The normative tradition is present, yet out of reach, while the Mannerist counter-tradition is at once invoked in the image's strange swerves and disproportions, and disavowed insofar as the painter's "extreme care in rendering / The velleities of the rounded reflecting surface" constitutes a kind of super-realism.

In his self-portrait, in other words, Parmigianino has placed himself smack between an avant-garde about to become a tradition and a tradition on the verge of retreat. It is a difficult balancing act, one that depends on an unrepeatable trick. In order to strike a balance between the surreal and the classical, so that (writes Professor Ashbery, quoting the art historian Sydney Freedberg) the mirror portrait's "distortion does not create / A feeling of disharmony" and its "forms retain / A strong measure of ideal beauty," the painter must violate the most fundamental

convention of his art (478). "There is no way / To build it flat like a section of a wall" (475); instead, the painting's support swells out of the wall, as much sculpture as painting. In a passage Fischer cites as a prime example of Ashbery's critique of tradition, the poet dramatizes the conflict between art and life in terms of the tense relationship between the museum and its public. Ashbery's museum-goers rush "so as to / Be out by closing time," knowing that "You can't live there," yet are held back by "the dread of not getting out / Before having seen the whole collection / (Except for the sculptures in the basement: / They are where they belong)" (484). "The desire here," Fischer says of these last lines, "is for there always to be more to see, even if only some obscure and unnoteworthy sculptures in the basement."[52] She is right, I think, to suggest that for Ashbery the affirmation of the life that goes on outside of art continues to be connected to his search for signs of life within art, but she misses the art-historical joke in that aside about the sculptures. In Greenberg's revised version of his story of the artistic agon, we will recall, "sculpture" replaces "literature" in the role of painting's chief opponent in its struggle to achieve autonomy. Ashbery's sculptures, then, are not "unnoteworthy" in themselves, but in the eyes of viewers who have cultivated a Greenbergian taste for "flatness," to the exclusion of other artistic values.[53] They represent to Ashbery that part of the past that, because it has been deemed inconsequential, remains as yet untouched by the dead hand of official culture.

Unlike the sculptures, Parmigianino's self-portrait has escaped being consigned to the basement, if only just, because it pays homage to the aesthetic norm—its "forms retain a measure of ideal beauty"—even as it departs from it. Cornell's art may be seen as similarly poised between the canonical and the unacceptable in that in it, as Greenberg writes, "surrealism encourages a tendency it often opposes—the abstract."[54] Ashbery, too, portrays Cornell's art as finely balanced between abstraction and the kind of art Greenberg dismisses as mere "literature," but unlike Greenberg, Ashbery continues to long for "the stories that art seems to want to cut us off from." This longing contains the elements of a critique of Greenbergian orthodoxy, but it also has an element of what Lee Edelman, in calibrating Ashbery's attitude toward Parmagianino's image, terms "nostalgic desire: a desire for presence that will disallow absence or loss."[55] In the Freudian schema, such a desire is founded on the denial of sexual difference, on a primal narcissism that, as Edelman writes, "posits the self-enclosure of desire."[56] However, he adds, in Ashbery's poem this inward turn is matched by an outward one, whereby "the eroticism that characterizes [the poem's speaker's] obsessive fascination with the painting's face . . . inflects narcissism in the direction of a homosexuality."[57] When Ashbery turns to Parmigianino's mirror painting in the course of

his search for "a medium in which it is possible to recognize oneself," then, he discovers in its bent realism "an eros that insists," as Edelman puts it, "on the otherness of the self,"[58] and the discovery of this other-within-the-self enables him to project an other beyond the self, "a pinpoint of a smile, a spark / Or star one is not sure of having seen / Before darkness resumes." Later in the poem Ashbery presents the spark of sexual longing as a thing of the past: "Love once / Tipped the scales, but now is shadowed, invisible." Yet it is still, he adds, "mysteriously present, around somewhere" (482)—if not in life, then in art, in the face of the beautiful young painter which strains away from the wall, but remains "captive . . . kept / In suspension, unable to advance much farther / Than your look as it intercepts the picture" (474).

"Sometimes," said Frank O'Hara, "I think I am 'in love' with painting." And for once, one may say that in this poem Ashbery allows himself to confess his love for painting, and furthermore, that here, as in O'Hara's work, the relationship between poetry and painting is linked with the love of one man for another. This connection remains implicit throughout most of the poem, then for a moment, in what may be the only unmistakably autobiographical passage in Ashbery's poetry, it comes to the surface. In the passage that leads up to this revelation, the poem's speaker has come close to mistaking the painting for reality, the painter's image for his own, "like one of those / Hoffman characters who have been deprived / Of a reflection." It is to counter the spell of narcissism, therefore, a state that Ashbery associates with the dream of an absolutely autonomous art (another projection of "nostalgic desire"), that "The shadow of the city injects its own / Urgency":

> Rome where Francesco
> Was at work during the Sack: his inventions
> Amazed the soldiers who burst in on him;
> They decided to spare his life, but he left soon after;
> Vienna where the painting is today, where
> I saw it with Pierre in the summer of 1959; New York
> Where I am now, which is a logarithm
> Of other cities.
>
> (*JACP* 480)

"Pierre" is Pierre Martory, with whom Ashbery lived in Paris during the years in which he came to poetic maturity, but then "left soon after" for "New York / Where I am now." This kind of direct reference is as startling in an Ashbery poem as the appearance of soldiers in a painter's studio and tempts us to think of the poem as a whole as a disguised elegy for his relationship with Martory.

The skeptical Ashbery knows that a mature love allows for absence and loss, just as he is critical, as readers of "Self-Portrait" from Stamelman onward have observed, of the nostalgic desire for art as a thing apart from life, rather than as an instrument for reflecting on life. However, if Edelman is right, that the prevailing erotic mood of the poem is one of narcissism "inflected in the direction of" homosexuality, then the possibility of mature object choice is always shadowed here by the threat of regression to a state in which one refuses to acknowledge the difference between oneself and any other, including the other within the self. Thus, the passage in which Ashbery appears, unmistakably, as himself, may be read either as a clear-sighted acknowledgment of the realities of absence and loss, or as an instance in which the poet assumes the armor of "the personality," the false projection of an undivided self, designed for public consumption, as a defense against the thought of absence and loss. Either way, this moment in the poem is, like Parmigianino's painting, an exception within the artist's oeuvre that proves the rule, which in Ashbery's case stipulates that to give one's loves their proper names in art is to freeze art in its tracks; and this is so even if, as in Ashbery's case, one loves the "wrong" art or the "wrong" gender. Edelman says that the poet's desire for the painter "questions the inevitability and absolutism of the pairing of male and female by exposing the element of sexual difference that can supply the basis for erotic desire within either category alone."[59] One implication of this claim is that homosexuality poses a threat to "marriage" insofar as that institution is predicated on the inherent, because gender-based, inequality of sexual partners. However, insofar as it functions as a stable social category governing adult object choice, "homosexuality" may also work to reinforce social norms; for example, it may, like "heterosexuality," serve as a bulwark against the regressive force of primal narcissism, which enables us to deny sexual difference. And as Edelman himself suggests, the strong current of narcissism that runs through the love between poet and painter makes it difficult to call this love "homosexual" *tout court*.

For just as the painting's sculptural quality brings it dangerously close to "literature," so its subject matter threatens to collapse the difference between self and other. Parmigianino's self-portrait provokes narcissistic desire, first, because it presents the viewer with a beautiful mirror image, but also because, like many of the painter's other portraits, it has an androgynous beauty, "'more angel than man,'" as Ashbery, quoting Vasari, puts it. Thus, the poet is attracted by the painting's power to unsettle, even as it seems to confirm, his sense of his own sexual identity. Cornell, too, was attracted by the androgyny of Parmigianino's portrait subjects. They are kin to his ballerinas, who stand at once for the compulsive denial of sexual difference and the strategic evasion of stable categories, for a fixation that condemned

him to loneliness and a "criminal ingenuity" that enabled him to make art that could serve as a switch-point between word and image at a moment when neither seemed decisively to dominate the artistic scene. By the time Ashbery wrote "Self-Portrait," visual art's dominance was well established and homosexuality had attained to the status of an "identity." Yet Cornell could still represent to him a set of aesthetic and erotic possibilities held in reserve, located not exactly outside the institutions of art and of sex, but "in the basement," as it were.

Like Cornell, Ashbery frequently associates this cultural reserve with childhood pleasures, which both aim to recover through their art. But along with the pleasures of regression,

> The motor cars, tinsel hats
> Supper of cakes,

come its dangers; thus,

> the amorous children
> Take the solitary downward path of dreams
> And are not seen again.
> What is it, Undine?

These lines come from "Hop o' My Thumb" (*JACP* 449–50), which begins, as I have noted, by sounding Cornellian themes. Besides the "grand hotels" and "dancing girls," another reference to Cornell may be cached here in the mention of "Undine," a water nymph from German folklore whom Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué made the subject of an 1811 novella. That story in turn inspired a series of other works, including the ballet *Ondine*, which provided one of Cornell's obsessions, the nineteenth-century ballerina Fanny Cerrito, with her signature role, as well as the opera *Undine* by E. T. A. Hoffman, whose fairy tales for adults Ashbery alludes to in "Self-Portrait." Undine appears in Ashbery's poem on the heels of the "amorous children," too late to warn them against the dangers of dream life, and in any case "The notes now can scarcely be heard / In the hubbub of the flattening storm / With the third wish unspoken." What follows is the description of a dream, which is, if not exactly childlike, then profoundly regressive:

> I remember meeting you in a dark dream
> Of April, you or some girl,
> The necklace of wishes alive and breathing around your throat.
> In the blindness of that dark whose
> Brightness turned to sand salt-glazed in noon sun

> We could not know each other or know which part
> Belonged to the other, pelted in an electric storm of rain.
> Only gradually the mounds that meant our bodies
> That wore our selves concaved into view
> But intermittently as through dark mist
> Smeared against fog. No worse time to have come
> Yet all was desiring though already desired and past
> The moment a monument to itself
> No one would ever see or know was there.

"You or some girl," the poet says, loosening the knot that ties us to one gender or another; after which the self rapidly "concaves" into its other, in what one might describe as a sex scene if one could determine who is doing what to whom. In the "dark mist / Smeared against fog," we glimpse the *mise-en-abyme* of the terrors of de-differentiation: this bottomless concavity is the obverse of the convex mirror, with its fantasy of a plenitude that would "disallow absence or loss."

And yet, out of the abyss opened up by the poet's regressive impulse comes a work of art, a "monument." However, rather than take its place in an "ideal order" of "existing monuments," as in the Eliotic tradition, this monument disappears with the moment it memorializes, "without ever," as Ashbery once wrote admiringly of a set of expatriate artists in Paris, "having gone through an intervening period of acceptance." As I remarked in the previous chapter, Ashbery's dream of an art that exists for itself alone can never be anything but just that, a dream. Yet this dream is not merely the expression of nostalgic desire, it also has a utopian element. Thus, insofar as "Hop o' My Thumb" may be said to be regressive, it threatens us with de-differentiation, but insofar as it discovers in childish stories and dreams the model for an unmonumental art, it may be said to stand for another history than the one written by the victors, one which enables us to project a different, perhaps more egalitarian future. In dreams, said Delmore Schwartz, begin responsibilities. And it is at this point, where aesthetics meets ethics, says Ashbery in "Self-Portrait," that "[s]omething like living occurs, a movement / Out of the dream into its codification."

There is nonetheless a note of resignation in the phrase "something like living," as there is in "this nether world that could not be better" with which the poet leaves us at the end of "Definition of Blue." With the end of a certain kind of hierarchy comes the loss of a certain "ideal of beauty," and Ashbery feels this loss as keenly as any of his readers. At the end of "Hop o' My Thumb," he affirms the regressive impulse to "hide forever" in one's dreams, where one at least feels safe from the world's dangers. Yet just before this escapist ending, the skeptic in him

cries, "Ariane! Ariane! / Was it for this you led your sisters back from sleep / And now he of the blue beard has outmaneuvered you?" Ariane, like Undine, is the heroine of a fairy tale adapted for adults, in this case a play by Maurice Maeterlinck, subsequently made into an opera by Paul Dukas; as the latest bride of the murderous Bluebeard, Maeterlinck's Ariane tries to free her still-imprisoned predecessors, but is stymied by their reluctance to escape.[60] Moore also draws on the Bluebeard tale in "People's Surroundings," and although I doubt that Ashbery's "Ariane" directly refers to that poem, still, we may detect here as in many other places in his work the influence of Moore's irrational rationalism, which in some respects is at home with, but in others provides a counterbalance to, his tendency toward Cornellian dreaminess. Ashbery has a nose for the (usually well-concealed) Romantic in Moore, observing, for example, that the ending of "An Octopus," his favorite of her poems, "could be out of Shelley" (*SP* 111). And the Romantic in Moore was never more evident than in the penultimate stanza of "People's Surroundings," where the "curious jargon" of the university-educated ironist gives way to a Keatsian lushness as the poet conjures up "Bluebeard's Tower," at once the real-world site of a tropical garden once visited by Moore, and the "dungeon with odd notions of hospitality" of the legend.

In Moore's version of the Bluebeard story, it is difficult to tell whether the unnamed bride, "the acacia-like lady shivering at the touch of a hand," dies by that hand, or whether she is simply overwhelmed by the beauty that surrounds her, "lost in a small collision of the orchids— / dyed quicksilver let fall / to disappear like an obedient chameleon in fifty shades of mauve and amethyst." At this crisis point, as so often in Moore's work, the dangers of de-differentiation are represented by the difficulty of distinguishing between various shades of a single color. The distinctions enforced by the traditional society that the poet invokes at the poem's end may seem to offer the lady a way out of her dilemma: knowing one's place in a highly articulated hierarchy is one means of protection from infinite regress into sameness. And yet, the same relations of domination that sustain this hierarchical order also enable the murderous beauty of Bluebeard's garden to flourish. Moore's Bluebeard, like Ashbery's, casts a spell whose power derives from our reluctance to escape the charmed circle described by "marriage," an institution closely connected in both of these poets' minds with the institution of art. Both are drawn, as who would not be, to the haunted houses of tradition and of love, but both are driven to conclude, with a finality few of us can muster, that "You can't live there." This asceticism, again, is rooted in disposition, but insofar as it is marshaled in the service of teaching us all how to live with absence and loss, in our language as in our lives, it becomes that mixed blessing, a poetic power, an

impulse tensely balanced between resignation to things as they are and stubborn utopianism.

v. Facing Pages: *The Vermont Notebook*

In 1972, Ashbery lost his job as editor of *ArtNews* when the magazine came under new management. At that point, he accepted an offer to teach at Brooklyn College, "which I took," he recalled, "in spite of the qualms I had about teaching. The same year, though, I got a Guggenheim, so I didn't have to start immediately."[61] "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" was thus the fruit of what was, for Ashbery, an unusually sustained and intensive period of writing. Fred Moramarco labels the project that the poet took on at the end of this period, *The Vermont Notebook*, an "earned playful respite" and Ashbery himself calls it "kind of a messy grab bag, as the word notebook implies."[62] With one exception, the written portion of the book is comprised of untitled prose poems, the first third of which are simply lists, and the longest of which, aptly described by John Shoptaw as "five pages of seemingly parodic discourse, calmly inventorying ecological disaster" is in fact found poetry, "taken verbatim" according to Shoptaw, "from a newspaper article titled 'Fishing Improves at Marco.'"[63] With its junk aesthetic and nod toward automatic procedures, *The Vermont Notebook* would seem to bear the same relation to *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* that *The Tennis Court Oath* does to *Some Trees*. That is, it serves as an ascetic corrective, "playful," but also sometimes painful, to an earlier work that Ashbery came to see, at least in retrospect, as marred by romantic excesses.

However, *The Vermont Notebook* also closely resembles *Self-Portrait* in that it is the other work of Ashbery's in which visual art most persistently comes to the surface; in this respect the former is, so to speak, the latter's distorted mirror image. In *Self-Portrait*, Parmagianino's painting is a richly figurative presence, mined for its multiple meanings as it is kept before our inward gaze by Ashbery's extended act of ekphrasis, while the facing-page drawings by Joe Brainard that run the length of *The Vermont Notebook* are literally, merely, present, unavoidable yet uncommented-on. The pictures' relationship to the poems is intentionally indeterminate: Ashbery simply presented Brainard with his completed manuscript and then, Brainard explained, "I divided it up by pages and I started in the middle and just tried to add to the poem, but not to illustrate it. I tried to relate at certain points but in factual ways, not in emotional ways."[64] In "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," Ashbery exploits the auratic power of painting in the service of the expressive possibilities of lyric as never before or since. In *The Vermont Notebook*,

the repeated and excessively literal act of "facing" reveals the unbridgeable gap between word and picture, and thereby underscores the quixotic character of Ashbery's search for "a medium in which it is possible to recognize oneself." Yet as always in Ashbery's work, these oppositions are not as clear-cut as they might seem. Just as "Self-Portrait" critiques even as it celebrates the powers of traditional artistic media, so at the heart of *The Vermont Notebook* lies a powerful instance of one of those "reflections sacred to art" that signal the poet's determination to go on with his work in the face of forces that aim to transform the self beyond recognition.

At first, the Parmigianino of "Self-Portrait" seems capable of holding these forces at bay. The image of art as a world apart projected by the painting may be a fantasy, but it has a strange tensile strength: "The skin of the bubble-chamber's as tough as / Reptile eggs" (*JACP* 478). Even the soldiers who burst into the painter's studio are charmed into sparing him. However, from the point of view of the would-be autonomous artist, the greatest threats tend to come from within; and so it is painting itself that brings that enemy of art that Bromwich calls "commerce" into the poem. The ambivalent eros the self-portrait calls forth, the desire on the part of its viewer alternately to be and to have the glamorous image it purveys, on one hand, bespeaks a very particular psychosexual disposition, but, on the other, suggests a more widely shared attitude, that of the consumer toward the commodity. Like other new, improved products, the self-portrait promises satisfaction and leaves us wanting.

> What should be the vacuum of a dream
> Becomes continually replete as the source of dreams
> Is being tapped so that this one dream
> May wax, flourish like a cabbage rose,
> Defying sumptuary laws, leaving us
> To awake and begin living in what
> Has now become a slum.
>
> (*JACP* 478)

The slightly distorted grammar of the first three lines of this passage makes it difficult to tell whether, as it seems at first, the phrases "the vacuum of a dream," "the source of dreams," and "this one dream" all refer to the painting, or whether "this one dream" is to be distinguished from the others. The subject of this sentence, then, seems to split in two as we watch: the painting is at once an opponent and an agent of commerce, at once enriches and impoverishes our conceptions of what we might hope for out of life. We may love it, but warily, knowing that to do so may be to collaborate in a system that glorifies things at the expense of their makers.

In "Self-Portrait," the sustained metaphoric presence of the painting ensures that "enough of a cover burnishes / To keep the suppositions together / In one piece of surface" (478); hence, the conflicts embodied by the painting remain internal to the institution of art even as the poem's speaker expresses skepticism about the continued usefulness of the concept of artistic autonomy. In *The Vermont Notebook*, the metaphoric keeps giving way to the literal, and as it does so, the conflicts—between poetry and painting, art and society, "commerce" and disinterestedness—come out into the open. For example, while each the first three of the series of lists with which the book begins appears alone on a single page, the next four sets of lists come in pairs (*JACP* 334–41). The first pairing consists of a list of voluntary associations—

> Bridge clubs, Elks, Kiwanis, Rotary, AAA, PTA, lodges, Sunday school, band rehearsal, study hall, book clubs, annual picnics, banquets, parades, brunches, library teas, slide lectures, séances, concerts, community sings

—followed by a list of corporations—

> Gulf Oil, Union Carbide, Westinghouse, Xerox, Eastman Kodak, ITT, Marriott, Sonesta, Crédit Mobilier, Sperry Rand, Curtis Publishing, Colgate, Motorola, Chrysler, General Motors, Anaconda, Crédit Lyonnais, Chase Manhattan, Continental Can, Time-life, McGraw Hill, CBS, ABC, NBC

—the second of a list of names of commercial establishments ("Paraphernalia, Tapemeasure, Dorothée Bis, La Boutique, Alice Schweitzer . . .") and one of poetically named colors ("Grey, ocher, mauve, gentian, tabac, beige, greige . . ."); the third of a list of games and a list of crimes; and the fourth of North American place names and the names of newspapers. These pairs may be said to be generated out of the opposition between commerce and art, or more broadly speaking, between self-interested and disinterested forms of activity.

The next two lists, the longest in the series, may also be said to form a pair, even though they occupy subsequent text pages (342–45). The first of these is made up of the names of art-world types: first- and second-generation New York School painters, such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Larry Rivers, and Jane Freilicher, but also dealers, critics, and collectors, as well as an odd lot of hangers-on, from Pollock's girlfriend Ruth Kligman to the ubiquitous mid-century socialites Nan Kempner and Chessie Rayner. The second list includes a handful of contemporary artists such as Vito Acconci, Jennifer Bartlett, and Scott Burton, but otherwise consists of the names of poets, many but by no means all of them associated with Ashbery's coterie (Lowell and Bishop are there, for example, as are

Ginsberg and Corso). Unlike the painters, then, who are surrounded by buyers and sellers, publicists and personalities, the poets are largely on their own, even if Ashbery does slip in a few names toward the end of the list—Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, Rod McKuen—that mark the intersection between the worlds of poetry and publicity. In short, the implication here is that the art world is a commercial enterprise, the poetry world a voluntary association. Brainard's accompanying pictures reinforce this thought: the poetry list faces a circle of identical silhouetted figures, their hands outstretched toward one another, while the art world list faces an image of a dolled-up woman in a high-bourgeois living room, which is framed and composed to look like a snapshot (see figures 5.1 and 5.2).

This latter image suggests both that Brainard, as per Bromwich's reading of Ashbery, associates "commerce" with photography, and that, as per my reading of "Self-Portrait," he conceives of painting as a glossily self-sufficient object of desire. The other image, meanwhile, is manifestly hand-made, even crude—it looks like something out of a high-school literary magazine—and suggests both the pleasures and dangers, the warmth and the loss of identity, that come with collective enterprise.

The lists, like the other pieces in the book, are frequently funny, although at the same time abject, or rather, they are funny because abject. For example, certain of the listed items, like those "library teas" and "community sings," have an outdated air, and this appearance of belonging to an inconsequential past clings particularly to feminine or feminized actions, objects, or figures. Thus, the art-world list ends, incongruously, with "Bricktop," the moniker of a nightclub hostess in 1920s Paris, and among the poets, Elinor Wylie, a writer of genteel lyrics from the

Fig 5.1
Joe Brainard, *Untitled* (snapshot woman), from *The Vermont Notebook*, c.1974. Ink on paper: 9 × 6 inches.

Fig 5.2
Joe Brainard, *Untitled* (circle of friends), from *The Vermont Notebook*, c.1974. Ink on paper: 9 × 6 inches.

same period, pops up in between Ashbery's friends James Tate and Ron Padgett. However, abjection is just as often linked in this book not to the genteel feminine but to its opposite, the vulgar or obscene. "Man dreams of putting penis between girl's boobs," begins one poem; "November 3. Sometimes the idea of going to the bathroom makes me sick," begins another. The latter theme returns in the song of the dump, the first of the poems "proper" to appear after the lists:

> . . . I tell the old story of the dump. I work on the story to be the real story of the dump which is never telling. If it ever was telling it would not be the dump that it is. The dump escapes the true scape of the telling and in so doing it is its own scape—the dump dumped and dumping. As I swear the dump is my sweet inner scape self so do I condone the dump for having nothing left for me only the will to go on dumping creating it out of its evacuation. (*JACP* 353)

Of course, this is not "proper" poetry either insofar as the prose poem tends toward formlessness, a tendency that merely reaches an extreme in the lists, which are, one might say, not so much poems as "evacuations," just piles of crap. To some extent, in fact, this seems to be the poet's own view of the project as a whole: "The book I read is the dump it is printed in dump letters," he says, in the same self-lacerating voice in which, a dozen years earlier, he claimed to have "mistaken his book for garbage."

But one might also think of the lists, conversely, as *collections*, as evidence of that power to turn trash into treasure that Cornell dubbed "metaphysique

d'ephemera." For Ashbery, as for Cornell, the collectable is a peculiar kind of treasure, one which hangs suspended, if only for a moment, between the dump and the market. "A collectable," Ashbery explained, when asked by an interviewer if he thought that his poetry was "in any sense . . . engaged in the act of collecting," "is something that doesn't yet have the status of an antique." However, as it has become progressively harder to perform what Benjamin calls the "Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character," the collector has been forced to seek out ever more unlikely combinations of the abjectly nostalgic and harshly anti-aesthetic. Hence, Ashbery's decision to collect "the vomit bags from airplanes; unused. I did it," the poet tells the interviewer, "because I thought, 'I never heard of anyone collecting these.' People collect matchbooks, which are gradually disappearing, but not these."[65] No longer signs of evacuations waiting to happen, but not (or not yet) recognized as valuable in themselves, the bags escape the fate of both trash and treasure. *The dump escapes the true scape of its telling and in doing so it is its own scape*. As painful as the prospect of "evacuation" might be to Ashbery, the possibility that nothing of his art might escape being taken up into that "tradition that is catastrophe" is still more so. Somehow, he must believe, there is a way of telling that will enable him to turn his material against itself, as he does here when he takes up a broken-off syllable, "scape," which begins a reminder both of the blasted landscape of the dump and of our urge to escape from it, and transforms it, via Steinian repetition, to a sign of the persistence of "my sweet inner scape self," or as he subsequently terms it, "the permanently me." These last phrases cannot signal the poet's return to a belief in the unified ego, since at this late date, as even the enchanted viewer of Parmigianino's self-portrait admits, we cannot help but see that "The soul is not a soul," that ultimately, "this otherness, this / 'Not-being-us' is all there is to look at / In the mirror" (*JACP* 475, 486). Yet Ashbery still chooses to believe, with Stevens, another poet of the dump, that "[t]here is a substance in us that prevails,"[66] an impulse to resist the de-individuating forces that press on us both from within and without.

In *The Vermont Notebook*, as in "Self-Portrait," that impulse is generated from first to last from the dialectic of literature and visual art; and this struggle between the arts mirrors a tension within each art. Thus, just as in Parmigianino's self-portrait, with its sculpted surface and distorted beauty, Ashbery saw painting turned against itself, in Joe Brainard he saw, I think, a canny representative of the tensions within the contemporary art world. A deliberately minor artist of great charm and humor, Brainard constantly switched back and forth between artistic media and modes, producing junk collages and delicately worked realist gouaches, wall-sized installations and (more often) series of miniatures. Like Cornell, he was a dealer's

nightmare, most of all, in his refusal to develop a signature style. "I don't have a definite commodity," Brainard himself admitted, "and that's the only way to make money."[67] Finally, for the fifteen years preceding his death from AIDS in 1994, at the age of fifty-one, he withdrew from the art market altogether, although he did retain the Cornell-like habit of producing work to give away to friends. In *The Vermont Notebook* Ashbery includes Brainard's name not in the art-world list, but in the list of poets, where the artist seems at home in part because he had in fact begun to write and publish poetry a few years earlier but also because he had been closely allied with poets from the beginning of his career.

When Brainard came to New York from Oklahoma in 1961 with a poet friend from high school, Ron Padgett, the two immediately fell in with the group of young men in Frank O'Hara's orbit. Brainard collaborated with O'Hara on some comic strips, as part of the two volumes of *C Comics*—a project edited by another O'Hara acolyte, Ted Berrigan, that brought Brainard together with virtually all of the poets of the New York School—as well as a series of collages that reveal the close fit between their sensibilities (one is even signed "Brainoharaski"). Like O'Hara, Brainard was a coterie figure, who aimed his work at the "wrong" audience insofar as he was a "painter among poets" and who further limited that audience by his frequent recourse to homoerotic subject matter. In some instances, Brainard's homoerotic images are literally pornographic, either cut out or copied from photographs in gay skin magazines and worked into new compositions in various media,[68] while in others, they are more metaphoric, as in two of the artist's best-known series of works, which turn on those pejorative terms for gay men, "nancy" and "pansy." The "Nancy" images all feature Ernie Bushmiller's comic-strip heroine of the same name, whom Brainard makes the object of jokes whose themes tend to be either art-historical (as when the character's familiar contours emerge from a whirlwind of abstract-expressionist brushwork in "If Nancy Was a de Kooning Painting") or sexual (as when she lifts her skirt to reveal a penis in "If Nancy Was a Boy") (see figures 5.3 and 5.4). These edgy one-liners are thus aimed at the constituents of two overlapping subcultures and designed to mark Brainard as someone who inhabits the borderland between them. The "pansy" pictures, which most often feature the flower as part of a highly decorative all-over composition of colorful blossoms, may seem innocuous by comparison. However, these, too, have the quality of inside jokes, not only because of pansy's connotations but also because in the late 1960s, when cool and withholding styles of art were in vogue, decorativeness and prettiness had a certain shock value, at least when deployed by an artist, and for an audience, who "knew better" than to be attracted by such qualities. Ashbery has described the tone of

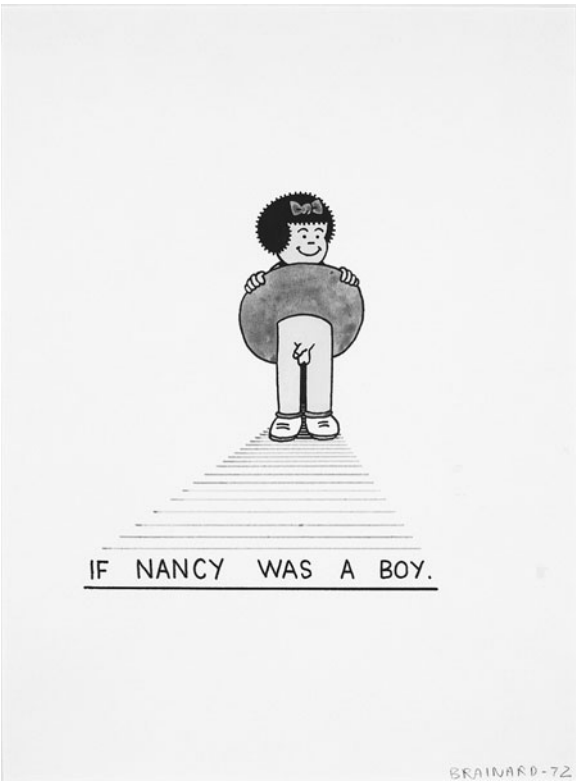

Fig 5.3 Joe Brainard, *If Nancy Was a Boy*, 1972. Gouache and ink on paper: 11 × 8 inches. Courtesy of Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

the pansy pictures as "confrontation without provocation. . . . In the case of Joe, one wants to embrace the pansy, so to speak."[69] One could say the same of O'Hara, although not of Ashbery himself, in whose poems the love of men for men surfaces as rarely as does the love of poetry for painting. Again, though, one may read *The Vermont Notebook* and "Self-Portrait" as exceptions to this rule. In both, a sustained confrontation with a beautiful young painter brings Ashbery as close as he would ever come in his own work to embracing the pansy, so to speak.

If Ashbery had had a confessional bent, this moment in his career might have marked the crisis point at which he admitted the truth about himself and thereafter abandoned his obfuscatory late-modernist style to write, as Moore might say, "in plain American which dogs and cats can read." But Ashbery does not believe in the existence of "the truth" in this sense. The secret of the soul, he says in "Self-Portrait," is that it "has no secret"; what Parmagianino's painting tells us, rather, is that "everything is surface," and yet, that this surface is somehow "not / Superficial but a visible core" (*JACP* 476). Medium is everything to the artist, in other words, and the literalism that breaks the surface of "Self-Portrait" for one startling moment,

Fig 5.4
Joe Brainard, *Untitled* (*Nancy de Kooning*), 1972. Pastel on paper: 14 × 10 inches. Courtesy of Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

and that returns with a vengeance in *The Vermont Notebook*, suggests that if Ashbery is suffering a crisis at this point in his life, it is a crisis of mediation. The threat of the literal, of the possibility that neither word nor image will serve any longer to mediate between "the permanently me" and the social and psychic forces arrayed against it, reaches its height in *The Vermont Notebook* in a prose poem that extends over two pages near the center of the volume. Here, what Bromwich describes as "one of the hugely inauthentic Other People's Voices that interrupt many of [Ashbery's] poems for a line or two"[70] seems to have hijacked the poem altogether. "America is a fun country," this poem's alien monologist begins,

> Still, there are aspects of it which I would prefer not to think about. I am sure, for instance, that the large "chain" stores with their big friendly ads and so-called "discount" prices actually charge higher prices so as to force smaller competitors out of business. This sort of thing has been going on for at least 200 years and is one of the cornerstones on which our mercantile American society is constructed, like it or not. What with all our pious

> expostulations and public declarations of concern for the poor and the elderly, this is a lot of bunk and our own president plays it right into the lap of big business and uses every opportunity he can to fuck the consumer and the little guy. We might as well face up to the fact that this is and always has been a part of our American way of life. (*JACP* 381)

This is nothing if not "plain American," and if we could identify this speaker, a typical citizen of the post-Watergate years who flatly denounces predatory capitalism in general and "our own president," in particular, with the poet, this passage might be adduced as an instance of the kind of explicit political critique that Ashbery generally, and famously, avoids. The refusal to take clear political positions in his poetry has brought Ashbery under fire from more *engagé* writers, particularly during the Vietnam era. In 1966, for example, when the poet wrote admiringly of his late friend O'Hara that "his poetry has no program and therefore cannot be joined," Louis Simpson accused him of "sneering at the conscience of other poets"; and in 1970, a reviewer called him "the Doris Day of modernist poetry," meaning to refer to the poet's political detachment while implying at the same time that it was related to a kind of coldness in his work in general. Inasmuch as Ashbery may be presumed to have shared his fellow citizens' disaffection with their government during and after the war—"All poetry," he replied to Simpson, "is against war and in favor of life, or else it isn't poetry"—the rant cited above might be seen as a direct response to being "'damned by the public for decorum'"—to quote Moore, no stranger to accusations of frigidity herself, quoting someone on Henry James (*BMM* 89). However, insofar as, as Ashbery went on to say in his reply to Simpson, he believes that poetry "stops being poetry when it is forced into the mold of a particular program," this passage may also be read as a satire on the demand that poets toe a party line.[71]

Bromwich offers a useful approach to the difficult question of the place of politics in Ashbery's work in some brief but suggestive remarks on the poet's handling of the idea of "America." Ashbery's long-term preoccupation with the national character is evidenced, to take only the most obvious examples, in such poem titles as "'They Dream Only of America'" and "The One Thing That Can Save America," as well as in his frequent citations of American state and place names (the *echt*-American *Vermont Notebook* is especially thick with these). Still, Bromwich cautions, the idea of America must in some sense remain for Ashbery "an abstract postulate," since once fleshed out, "it would leave nothing personal to be said."[72] "When Ashbery does invoke America," then, he writes, "it appears as a contingent presence that cannot be seized by art."[73] In other words, politics, like

sex, must be visibly negated in the process of writing if Ashbery wants to preserve what remains to him of "personality" in the face of the demand that he function as a public figure, a "personality." His angry citizen's concern about "the large 'chain' stores with their big friendly ads and 'discount' prices" suggests, further, that the demand that the poet strive for greater publicity is closely connected in Ashbery's mind with the pressure to reduce the distance between art and other commodities. Brainard picks up on this latter implication: on the page opposite the citizen's rant, the blank faces of a washer-dryer and a wall clock stare back at the consumer, the obscure objects of his frustrated desire (see figure 5.5). An eroticized approach to the world of commodities is yet another feature that Brainard's art shares with O'Hara's poetry—but again, not with Ashbery's, in which the desire for the commodity is yet one more love that dare not speak its name. Such negation, I have been suggesting, is a matter not merely of personal preference but of necessity for Ashbery, who keeps his art alive by drawing on the energies of those aspects of life

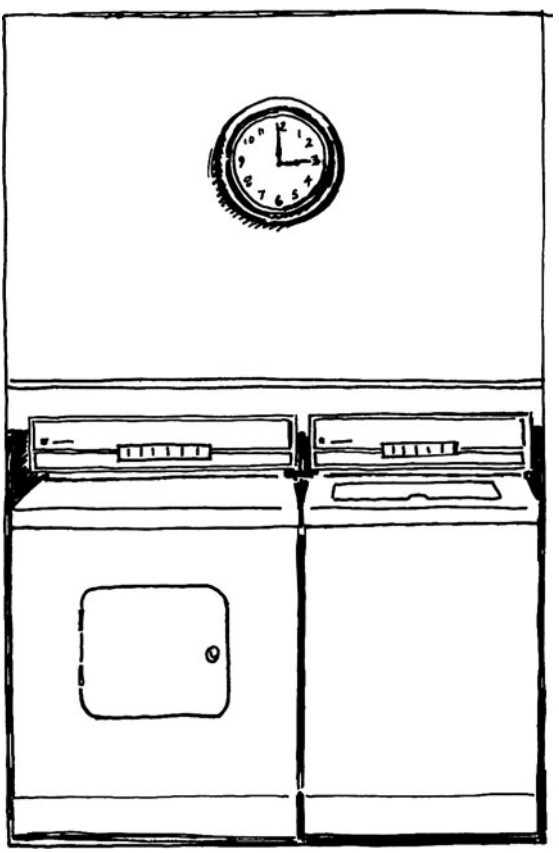

Fig 5.5
Joe Brainard, *Untitled* (washer/dryer), from *The Vermont Notebook*, c.1974. Ink on paper: 9 × 6 inches.

that escape art: politics, sex, even the heedless dynamism of capital. For him, visual art was first and foremost a metaphor for those energies; it was the representation within the realm of art of what must remain outside it. To name these energies in a poem would be to freeze them in their tracks, as in a photograph.

The entrance of Ashbery's lyric persona onto the scene of self-abnegation enacted in "America is a fun country" is therefore signaled by an object set in motion. By the beginning of the second page of his speech (*JACP* 383), the citizen's attitude toward his country has begun to soften—"Nevertheless, there are a lot of people here who are sincerely in love with life and think they are onto something, and they may well be right"—although his language still has the disembodied ring of media-speak, as do his subsequent musings on the brighter side of "our so-called American way of life," with its "retirement communities and people who mow their own lawns and play golf." But then, suddenly, the tone shifts, as the speaker affirms the value of the figurative over the literal, claiming that these pure products of America

> stand for something broader and darker than at first seems to be the case. The silver-painted flagpole in its concrete base surrounded by portulacas, the flag itself straining in the incredibly strong breeze, are signposts toward an infinity of wavering susceptible variables, if one but knew how to read them aright. The horny grocery boy may be the god Pan in disguise.

And through this act of unnaming, through the conversion of "America," first, into what might seem the tritest of national symbols, a waving flag, and then, into "an infinity of wavering susceptible variables," the poet sets into reverse the process of alienation that had turned his speaker into a mouthpiece for political boilerplate.

The flag heralds the arrival of "[t]he horny grocery boy," a pornographic convention, as Brainard knows and shows, from across the unbridgeable distance of the facing page, where he has placed a well-hung hunk, legs spread, face half-erased, straight out of one of his physique magazines (see figure 5.6). Yet, faced with this dehumanized figure, the speaker once again shifts the register from the literal to the metaphoric, suggesting that the boy "may be the god Pan in disguise." Following in this pansy love-god's train, then, are a series of mock-pastoral episodes, which allude, like the lists, to a lost paradise of voluntary associations and innocent amusements. "Example: bearded young driver of pickup truck notes vinyl swimming pool cover is coming undone and stops to ask owner if he can be of assistance. Second example: groups of business people stranded in stalled elevator sing Cole Porter songs to keep their spirits up, helping each other to recall the lyrics." On the horizon of this ideal society, moreover, there hovers (in a book

Fig 5.6
Joe Brainard, *Untitled* (porn Pan), from *The Vermont Notebook*, c.1974. Ink on paper: 9 × 6 inches.

published, we recall, the year after Nixon's impeachment) the possibility of justice: "Third example: a nursing home director convicted of a major swindle goes to the federal penitentiary for a period of not less than five years." The fourth, and final, example, though, speaks of what stands outside and against society, which only seeks once more to discover, against ever-increasing odds, "a medium in which it is possible to recognize oneself." And all at once, there it is, the reflection sacred to, and yet unseizable by, art: "you are looking down into a bottomless well or some kind of deep pool that is very dark with the reflected light so far in the distance it seems like a distant planet, and you see only your own face."

To the degree that art's claim to autonomy depends on our belief in the existence of a world apart from "this nether world which could not be better," that claim has a religious dimension. The poet's task as a skeptic, then, is to strip art of the veil of illusion he himself has drawn over it in a more nostalgic mood. In the citizen's reflection in "America is a fun country," we may see the secular counterpart

of Parmigianino's mirror portrait: the one is fleeting, the other fixed; one gleams out of the profane jumble of the dump, mixed up with the rest of what Stevens calls "the janitor's poems / Of every day,"[74] while the other is suspended in the sacral space of the museum, whose motto is, as Ashbery says, "You can't live there." Or as he has also said, in a related context,

> You can't say it that way anymore.
> Bothered about beauty you have to
> Come out into the open, into a clearing,
> And rest.
>
> (*JACP* 519)

These are the opening lines of "And *Ut Pictura Poesis* is Her Name," the poem most often bracketed with "Self-Portrait," as being the other most direct expression of Ashbery's ambivalent attachment to painting. It is in this poem, which appears in *Houseboat Days* (1977), that the poet gives voice to "the lush, Rousseau-like foliage of its desire to communicate," a desire that, from the poem's title onward, is closely associated with the desire of poetry for painting. "You can't say it that way anymore," is, in fact, most immediately a response to the phrase from Horace contained in the title. *Ut pictura poesis*: "as painting is, so is poetry," which implies that our experiences of painting and poetry may be considered as analogous, although the position of "*pictura*" in the tag suggests that painting has a certain cultural priority. Sweet interprets the title and first line taken together to mean "that in order to make 'it' (poetry, beauty, whatever) new, the avant-garde poet must constantly rethink, restate, resituate his or her poetry in relation to painting, as if painting were poetry's own lover, and thus in need of 'courting.'"[75] This seems to me exactly right, up to a point. However, if we accept Sweet's implicit assumption that painting represents an infinitely renewable resource of energy for the avant-garde poet, we miss the valedictory aspect of *Ut Pictura*'s first line, an aspect that comes into sharper focus if we think of this line as a response also to "Self-Portrait," the only full-blown example of a painting-like poem in Ashbery's oeuvre.

"Self-Portrait," we will recall, was written, together with its "uncanny double," *The Vermont Notebook*, while the poet was between jobs, having left *ArtNews* and not yet taken up the first of what would be a long series of teaching jobs in institutions in and around New York. The anomalous products of this moment in his career thus may be said literally to have emerged in the space between the art world and the academy. "Self-Portrait" represents the poet's good-bye, then, not so much to the art world as such—over the next twenty-plus years, Ashbery would continue to supplement his teaching income with freelance art criticism—as to the

ideal image of art as a self-enclosed "crystal world." In New York circa 1950, the struggle between the arts seemed to promise a shake-up of the old cultural hierarchies, freeing Ashbery and his friends from the Alexandrianism of the "Poem Society," even as it provided them with an aesthetic analogy for social conflict. However, painting's ascent to what seemed to Greenberg and others a position of unrivaled dominance within the institution of art entailed the suppression of its constituents' consciousness of the internecine conflict between visual and verbal art, a conflict that had enabled modern painting and poetry alike to represent art's antagonism to life, without violating art's autonomy. In "Self-Portrait" and *The Vermont Notebook*, we glimpse the window of opportunity that painting seemed to hold open for certain poets at mid-century just as it is at the point of closing: "painting" becomes fully visible in this poet's work for the first and last time, just as it ceases to function as the effective other of poetry.[76]

As visual art has established its dominance in the realm of high art, literature has been put in danger of being written out of the story of modernism as that story played out over the second half of the twentieth century. If we were to allow that to happen, however, we would be deprived of a crucial term of the language in which autonomous art conducts its auto-critique—in which, as Adorno says, it "expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure." Only the possibility of such an auto-critique stays art from becoming merely one more means of justifying what Greenberg, in a particularly combative mood, referred to as "the peace of conscience and the sense of chic with which" certain members of the ruling class "reject arduous disciplines." To the extent that the academy came to be seen during this period as the preserve of the ideals of professionalism, furthermore, it and not the market-driven art world was charged with nurturing the Greenbergian faith in "arduous disciplines." And to the extent that the least marketable branch of literature, poetry, came to represent the supreme value of the culture of professionalism, that is, disinterestedness, the language of professionalism took on a pathos for the poet that a more traditionally expressive lyric language could no longer command.

As Moore and Cornell did, each in their different ways, Ashbery "expresses the idea of harmony negatively" by exploiting the contradiction between the modern ideals of openness and disinterestedness, between the eroticized image of the commodity and the disembodied word of the professional. But because Ashbery sees further into a future in which there will be "no remedy for this 'packaging' which has supplanted the old sensations," in which the culture of the commodity will spread unchecked, he also sees an end to the utopian potential that Moore discovered in "pictures." As Sweet suggests, "And *Ut Pictura Poesis* Is Her Name"

does speak of the long conflict, or as Moore might term it, "marriage," between painting and poetry, but only as a thing of the past. Ashbery has identified that poem as a classroom exercise, written "shortly after I began teaching, which I did relatively late in life, and found that I was constantly being asked what a poem was, and what it wasn't. . . . And I really never thought about that before."[77] In order to say what a poem is, one must say what it is not; and yet, once one has named this "other," one has turned "something proclaimed as 'total' . . . into its limited opposite." And so, having said, at last, flat out, that what poetry sees in the mirror is painting, Ashbery warns his students "You can't say it that way anymore."

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Notes

Introduction

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, prepared on the basis of the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 473.

2. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 255.

3. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harvest/Noonday, 1975), 38.

4. John Ashbery, *Other Traditions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

5. T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Noonday Press, 1974), 34–51.

6. Ibid. 46.

7. T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, in *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909–1950* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1971), 119; Ashbery, "Soonest Mended," *JACP* 185.

8. See the section titled "The space of possibles" in Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 234–39.

9. John Ashbery, foreword to *Joseph Cornell's Theater of the Mind: Selected Diaries, Letters, and Files*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 9.

10. Marianne Moore, "Concerning the Marvelous," typed manuscript (carbon), Marianne Moore Collection, Rosenbach Museum and Library.

11. John Ashbery, *Collages: They Knew What They Wanted* (New York: Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 2008). I discuss some of Ashbery's other writings on and verbal and visual homages to Cornell in chapters 4 and 5.

12. At a centenary celebration of Moore's work at the 92nd Street YMHA in New York in 1987 (which I attended), Ashbery's impressively lucid reading of the famously difficult "Octopus" garnered a standing ovation.

13. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 257–58.

14. Ibid. 256.

15. Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, "Joseph Cornell's Explorations: Art on File," *Joseph Cornell / Marcel Duchamp . . . in resonance*, ed. Polly Koch (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Cantz; and New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1999), 237, 222.

16. Ibid. 221.

17. Jodi Hauptman, *Joseph Cornell: Stargazing in the Cinema* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 40, 38.

18. Joseph Cornell papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution: Series 4.3, Subject Source Files; "GC44," Writing and Notes, 1944–1961 (Box 15, folder 4). The Smithsonian has made the Cornell papers easily accessible through its excellent, user-friendly "collections online" website.

19. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.

20. *BMM* 107. Moore later excised these lines from the poem.

Chapter 1

1. Clement Greenberg, *The Harold Letters, 1928–1943: The Making of an American Intellectual*, ed. Janice Van Horne (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000), 194.

2. Ibid. 195.

3. Lisa M. Steinman, "'So As to Be One Having Some Way of Being One Having Some Way of Working': Marianne Moore and Literary Tradition," in *Gendered Modernisms: American Women Poets and Their Readers*, ed. Margaret Dickie and Thomas Travisano (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 102, 108.

4. For the most detailed account of Moore's dealings with the New York art world, see Linda Leavell's *Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts: Prismatic Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), especially 21–55. As Leavell herself notes, the "indispensable introduction to Moore's use of the visual arts" is Bonnie Costello's chapter on this subject in *Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981). Building on Costello's groundbreaking survey, Leavell, who has an unerring eye for the telling scrap, unearthed material from the Moore archives that for the first time made clear the full extent and range of the poet's involvement with art, artists, and the art world.

5. T. S. Eliot, "Marianne Moore (1923)," in *The Critical Response to Marianne Moore*, ed. Elizabeth Gregory (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 46.

6. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 3–11.

7. Ibid. 38–39.

8. William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1951), 146.

9. John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 134–76; Langdon Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Gail McDonald, *Learning to Be Modern: Pound, Eliot and the American University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

10. Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate*, 10 (his emphasis).

11. Williams, *Autobiography*, 138.

12. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon, 1961), 239. The negative aspect of Greenberg's purism—his hostility to "meaning," i.e. ideology—is emphasized in this revised version of his review of Eliot's *Selected Essays*. In the original review, the equivalent sentence reads, "This is the first critic of whom we can feel sure that the most important question will always be answered—namely, how successful *as art* is the work of art in hand?" (*CE* 3:66).

13. T. J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," *Critical Inquiry* 9:1 (September 1982), 143.

14. As I note in the introduction, I use the word "position" here in the sense given to it by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, a cultural producer's "position" within an artistic field is not so much a given role as a persona in continual development, a location mapped and remapped as the artist (or critic or promoter of art) responds to perceived opportunities and obstacles as they arise within the field.

15. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

16. Ibid. 22.

17. For the fullest elaboration of the autonomy critique, see Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984). Particular aspects of the critique are brought into sharp focus in Adorno's essays on "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1990), 17–34, and "Commitment," trans. Francis McDonagh, in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Urizen, 1978), 300–318.

18. Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, 33. Again, Greenberg has revised the essay, originally titled "The Plight of Our Culture," to reflect his increasingly conservative worldview. In the earlier version, he suggests that "the problem of culture and work" may be "permanently insoluble."

19. Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, 230. This comment does not appear in the first version of this essay, originally titled "New York Painting Only Yesterday" (*CE* 4:19–25).

20. Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 4, 304, and *passim*.

21. Ibid. 63.

22. Ibid. 62.

23. Peter Bürger and Christa Bürger, *The Institutions of Art*, trans. Loren Kruger (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 16 (my emphasis).

24. Steinman, "So As to Be One," 102, 108.

25. One might also mention in this connection that the last item on the list, "Michael taking Adam by the wrist," is identified in Moore's original endnote as a reference to a drawing by William Blake, an early idol of the poet's, whose work may have provided a model for an art situated between word and image (*BMM* 140).

26. John Slatin, *The Savage's Romance: The Poetry of Marianne Moore* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), 112. Slatin also emphasizes the alien character of the savage's desire; to her, he says, the looking-glass is "a bright thing that throws light on *something else*," 111 (his emphasis).

27. In using the phrase "cultures of modernism," I echo Malcolm Bull, who in his review essay "Between the Cultures of Capital" (*New Left Review*, 2nd ser., 11 [2006]: 95–113)

makes an argument that verges on mine at several points. He, too, sees modernist style as shaped by the competition for dominance between two forces, "commodity culture," which he associates with the visual arts, and the more vaguely defined "classical culture" ("tradition" again, but with an emphasis on Western tradition's classicizing and neoclassical phases), which he associates with no art in particular. Like other art historians, that is, Bull tends to write literature out of the story of modernism. Thus, having disposed of the straw man of "classical culture," Bull leaves us, like later Greenberg, in a world in which painting's influence goes unchecked by any counterforce. Unlike Greenberg, though, Bull takes a dark view of this situation: painting in its triumph, he says, has made of modernism "a fully commodified practice, without foundation or metanarrative" (112). As I suggest below, I see this as a possible, but not necessary, outcome of the Greenbergian story.

28. Louis Menand, *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and His Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); see the chapter titled "Literature and Professionalism," 97–132.

29. Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), xv.

30. Ibid. 58.

31. Ibid. 54.

32. Ibid. 59.

33. Menand, *Discovering Modernism*, 114.

34. Ibid.

35. In an essay by Thomas L. Haskell titled "Professionalism versus Capitalism: Tawney, Durkheim, and C. S. Pierce on the Disinterestedness of Professional Communities" (collected in his *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History* [Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998]), Haskell argues that professionals' mixed motives fatally weakened their claims from the beginning; thus professionalization, he writes, could only ever offer at most "a mild antidote against the demoralization and the subordination of social, political, and ethical affairs to economic relations that attended the rise of the market" (113). Although Haskell is clearly right to caution against taking professionalist claims to ideological purity at face value, he does so himself insofar as he presents professionalism as a would-be revolutionary movement, a god that failed, rather than a symptom of an intraclass conflict that, as I argue here and in the following chapters, strongly shaped, even if it could not transform, art and society in the United States in the twentieth century.

36. McDonald, *Learning to Be Modern*, 62.

37. David Lodge, *Small World* (New York: Macmillan, 1984).

38. Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism*, 17.

39. McDonald, *Learning to Be Modern*, 59.

40. Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 165–66.

41. Laurence Veysey, "The Plural Organized Worlds of the Humanities," in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860–1920*, ed. Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 57–58.

42. Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate*, 10.

43. T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Noonday Press, 1961), 38 (his emphasis).

44. Ibid. 37.

45. Ibid. 148.

46. As Vernon Shetley writes in *After the Death of Poetry* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), either postwar poets "could write according to the New Critical prescription and avail themselves of the substantial audience that had been created by the installation of modernism within the academy. Or they could join an antiacademic opposition that had shaped itself as a mirror image of the academic formalism it was rejecting" (14).

Alan Golding provides a sharp-edged historical overview of the relation between poetry and the postwar academy in "American Poet-Teachers and the Academy," in *A Concise Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*, ed. Stephen Fredman (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 55–74, and views this history through the prism of the poetic canon in his book *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

47. John Crowe Ransom, "The Rugged Way of Genius," in *Randall Jarrell, 1914–1965*, ed. Robert Lowell, Peter Taylor, and Robert Penn Warren (New York: Noonday, 1967), 157.

48. Ibid. 156.

49. Ibid. 157.

50. T. S. Eliot, "Professional, Or . . .," *The Egoist* (April 1918), 61. Cited in Menand, *Discovering Modernism*, 125.

51. This conflict internal to the soul of the poet-professor also mirrors the institutional divide between the English department and the creative writing program, a split that grows ever wider toward the end of the period that concerns me here. Mark McGurl tracks this development with wit and precision in *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009). McGurl's book is yet another example of the "institutional turn" in English studies, one which would surely have influenced my thinking had it come out before this book was substantially finished. McGurl's emphasis on fiction highlights a significant lacuna in my argument, for as he observes, "[i]n contrast to poetry, which (as a paying profession at least) has been all but entirely absorbed by institutions of higher education, the situation of fiction remains complex" (29).

McGurl himself, though, focuses for the most part on fiction's relationship to the academy. Moreover, he largely excludes discussion of the role that poets and poetry played in the rise of the creative writing program in the American university and never fully explains his decision to do so. He does remark, however, on the way the program "tends to divide its denizens . . . into either a fiction or poetry or nonfiction 'track,' and the way this bureaucratic convenience ramifies through the postwar literary field" (29). Clearly, to the degree that we each take our monocular focus on a single genre for granted, McGurl and I are insufficiently conscious and critical of this tendency.

52. Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

53. Catherine E. Paul's chapter on Moore in *Poetry in the Museums of Modernism: Yeats, Pound, Moore, Stein* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002) includes much useful discussion of the poet's reading of contemporary museological theory and of her abiding interest in collecting and museums of all sorts. Paul's argument is focused, however, on Moore's relationship to museums of natural history rather than of art, particularly as this relationship manifests itself in her writings of the 1930s.

54. Carol Duncan, *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 170–71.

55. Harrison White and Cynthia White, *Canvasses and Careers* (New York: John Wiley, 1965).

56. It must be noted here as well that philosophical aesthetics has produced a "theory of the art world"; for the debate around this theory, see *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, 2nd edn., ed. George Dickie, Richard Sclafani, and Ronald Roblin (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), 171–217. The theory is most closely associated with Arthur Danto, who argues in his 1964 essay, "The Artworld," that "[t]o see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry—an atmosphere of artistic theory: an artworld" (184). Only a surrounding "atmosphere of artistic theory," he claims, can explain why a Duchampian jest like Andy Warhol's Brillo Box is widely recognized as a work of art. Danto omits to say how he came by his name for this atmosphere; it may be supposed that he has conflated "lifeworld," a philosophical term connoting lived experience of a particular environment, with "art world," a colloquialism he picked up while gallery-going in New York. Nevertheless, although the central examples in his argument are drawn from the world of contemporary visual art, his theory is not designated as being specific to that social sphere.

In "The New Institutional Theory of Art," George Dickie criticizes Danto for focusing on artistic theory to the exclusion of that theory's social framework, that is, "the institutions of art-making" (202). However, Dickie's institution of art, unlike Bürger's, is not a specifically modern creation. Rather, his version of the "artworld" concept encompasses all of the arts throughout history; in his schema, the "artworld" just is the arts' social surround. Dickie entirely misses the pun through which Danto connects the artworld concept to what the latter identifies as "the history of recent New York painting," and Danto fails to make the pun explicit because he is too quick to detach theory from practice, the "atmosphere" of the art world from its institutions.

In short, neither Danto nor Dickie explain how or why the term "art world" has come, some time over the course of the last century, to be the most commonly used name for the social sphere of the visual arts. In *Artworlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), Howard Becker accuses Danto and his fellow aestheticians of being insufficiently "empirical" in their accounts of the institution of art (162), but Becker, too, uses "artworld" to refer to the social surround of the arts in general, without stopping to consider the provenance of the term. In my view, this provenance determines the meaning of the term.

57. As Michael Warner puts it in his seminal article on the professionalization of the literary academy in the United States, "Professionalization and the Rewards of Literature: 1875–1900" (*Criticism* 27.1 [Winter 1985]: 1–28), "we cannot think of literature as the professional's commodity. To the extent that the term 'commodity' makes sense in this context, the professional's commodity is himself" (22).

58. In an essay titled "Conflicting Visions in American Art Museums" (*Theory and Society*, 10.4 [1981]), Vera Zolberg tracks two closely related changes that took place in the organization of American art museums around the mid-century. Museum staffers sought both to make their institutions more autonomous relative to their major funders and to bring a more professionalized approach to their own work. However, Zolberg concludes that although these efforts succeeded to some degree, ultimately, a "lack of insulation from markets and the relative accessibility of non-professionals to [the museum's] information

helps to explain why the parallels between museums and other institutions, such as universities and hospitals, is not more striking" (120).

For a view from the academy of the art world's conflicted relationship with the culture of professionalism, see Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

59. Adorno, "Valery Proust Museum," in *Prisms*, 177. A fine reading of this essay is included in Daniel Sherman's discussion of the development of the ideology of the modern art museum in "Quatremere/Benjamin/Marx: Art Museums, Aura and Commodity Fetishism" (*Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff [London: Routledge, 1994], 123–143).

60. Christoph Grunenberg, "The Politics of Presentation: The Museum of Modern Art, New York," in *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, ed. Emma Barker (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 201.

61. A good place to start in the story of the department store and the museum would be Neil Harris's essay "Museums, Merchandising and Popular Taste: The Struggle for Influence," in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby (New York: Norton, 1978), 140–74. See also William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993); Remy Saisselin, *The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984); Debora Silverman, *Selling Culture: Bloomingdale's, Diana Vreeland and the New Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America* (New York: Pantheon, 1986); and Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998).

62. Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 25.

63. In *The Art Museum: Power, Money, Ethics* (New York: William Morrow, 1979), Karl E. Meyer notes that a "peculiar characteristic of the art museum is its bedevilling link to the marketplace" (163), but adds that it is hard to establish that link for the simple reason that "[t]he art market has a long history but lacks a historian. To fix even the simplest fact requires scavenging in monographs and memoirs—which tells us something about the curtained reticence of the art world" (169). Although to some extent Meyer's complaint still applies, especially where the market for modern art is concerned, certain scholars have begun to bring order to the chaos of "monographs and memoirs"; for a notable example, see Michael Fitzgerald, *Making Modernism: Picasso and the Creation of the Market for Twentieth-Century Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

64. Isabelle Graw, "Beyond Institutional Critique," in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2006), 139, 147.

65. Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2008), 13.

66. Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105–43.

67. Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993).

68. Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," in *Institutional Critique and After*, 131.

69. Fraser's script for the performance, together with photos of her in action, were published in *October* 57 (Summer 1991): 104–22.

70. Jerry Saltz, "Super Theory Woman," *Artnet* <http://www.artnet.com>, July 8, 2004.

71. Andrea Fraser, "What is Institutional Critique," in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2006), 307.

72. Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2006), 133.

73. Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, 7.

74. Ibid. 55.

75. Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art and Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 55.

76. Ibid. (Harrison's emphasis).

77. Ibid. 153.

78. Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, 97.

79. Randall Jarrell, *Kipling, Auden & Co.: Essays and Reviews 1935–1964* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1980), 81.

80. Ibid. 291.

81. Ibid. 288–89.

82. Ibid. 286. In fact, "Against Abstract Expressionism" itself first appeared, under the title "The Age of the Chimpanzee," in an issue of *ArtNews* (Summer 1957) that also included Greenberg's much-cited memoir "New York Painting Only Yesterday" (see n. 18 above).

83. Jarrell, *Kipling*, 291, 292.

84. Thomas Crow, "Fashioning the New York School," in *Modern Art*, 38–48 and T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 302–8.

85. Jarrell, *Kipling*, 290.

86. Such studies are too numerous to cite in toto; but besides those monographic, comparative, and theoretical works on the relations between literature and the visual arts that I cite here and elsewhere in the book, I should mention the names of such significant writers on this topic as Charles Altieri, James Heffernan, Murray Krieger, Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, Michael North, and Garrett Stewart. Again, all of these interarts scholars are (or were) based in literature departments.

87. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 88.

88. W. J. T. Mitchell is now a professor of both English and Art History. The book that first pointed him in the direction of interarts study was his *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978). See also Mitchell's other books: *The Language of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

89. Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

90. Ibid. 93.

91. Ibid. 198.

92. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 89.

93. Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 75.

94. Ibid. 106.
95. Ibid. 39.
96. Richard Ohmann, *Politics of Knowledge: The Commercialization of the University, the Professions and Print Culture* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 111.
97. Ibid. 104–5.
98. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 332.
99. Ibid. 320.
100. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory," 154.
101. Adorno, *Prisms*, 31.
102. Ibid. 32.
103. Eliot, *Prose*, 5.
104. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in *Poems*, 4.

Chapter 2

1. T. S. Eliot, "Marianne Moore (1923)," in *The Critical Response to Marianne Moore*, ed. Elizabeth Gregory (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 46.
2. Betsy Erkilla, *The Wicked Sisters: Women Poets, Literary History, and Discord* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 102.
3. Linda Leavell makes a similar point in an illuminating essay in which she brings Moore's writings on James to bear on the difficult question of Moore's sexuality. Moore, Leavell writes, "refuses to equate celibacy with sexlessness. Henry James provides her best demonstration that bachelorhood need not preclude passion" (235). "Marianne Moore, the James Family, and the Politics of Celibacy," *Twentieth Century Literature* 49.2 (Summer 2003): 219–45.
4. Theodor Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1990), 32.
5. T. S. Eliot, "Introduction to *Selected Poems* by Marianne Moore," in *Critical Response*, 107.
6. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harvest/Noonday, 1975), 43.
7. Richard Howard, "Marianne Moore and the Monkey Business of Modernism," in *Marianne Moore: The Art of a Modernist*, ed. Joseph Parisi (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1990), 10.
8. Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 55.
9. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989 edn., cites this phrase under "enterprise."
10. However, while the *OED* was giving instances of the economic sense of "enterprise" by 1989, it did not include this sense in the general definition of the word until 1993. Perhaps not surprisingly, American dictionaries came earlier to emphasize the economic side of "enterprise"; "a unit of economic organization or activity" is from *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, 1983 edn., while the *American Heritage Dictionary*, also 1983, defines "enterprise" as "a business organization."
11. In *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: Norton, 1976), Burton Bledstein notes that in the United States until the late nineteenth century, "*Private* was a negative notion that appeared only as the contradiction of *public*" (his emphasis).

12. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 332.

13. Randall Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age* (New York: Ecco Press, 1980), 183.

14. Ibid. 203.

15. Jeanne Heuving, *Omissions Are Not Accidents: Gender in the Art of Marianne Moore* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 18.

16. Sabine Sielke, *Fashioning the Female Subject: The Intertextual Networking of Dickinson, Moore and Rich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 70.

17. R. P. Blackmur, *Form and Value in Modern Poetry* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1957), 249.

18. Ibid. 250.

19. John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 152 (his emphasis).

20. Blackmur, *Form and Value*, 249.

21. John Crowe Ransom, "On Being Modern with Distinction," in *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 101–2.

22. Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age*, 183–84.

23. John Crowe Ransom, *The World's Body* (New York and London: Charles Scribner and Sons: 1938), 98.

24. F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1942), 91.

25. T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1900–1950* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971), 52.

26. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry*, 91.

27. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 52.

28. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 42.

29. See the section in Bourdieu, *Distinction*, titled "Cultural Pedigree," especially 65–74.

30. Ibid. 69.

31. Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age*, 199.

32. *Marianne Moore Newsletter* 1.1 (1977): 3.

33. Bonnie Costello devotes a chapter to Moore's "images of sweetened combat" in *Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 108–32. Cristanne Miller examines Moore's evolving ethics in the poems she wrote in the years leading up to America's entry into World War I in "'What is War For?' Moore's Development of an Ethical Poetry," in *Critics and Poets on Marianne Moore: "A Right Good Salvo of Barks*," ed. Linda Leavell, Cristanne Miller, and Robin Schulze (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 56–73. John Slatin reads the "The Fish" as a World War I poem (*The Savage's Romance: The Poetry of Marianne Moore* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986], 71–77), and George Bornstein extends this reading by considering the poem's movement through various publishing contexts in *Material Modernisms: The Politics of the Page* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 93–103.

Following Bornstein's lead, Robin Schulze places Moore's work in the context of the wartime politics of *The Egotist* (*BMM* 438–50). For an incisive discussion of the rather different issues raised by the very public poetic statements Moore made during World War II, see Susan Schweik, "Writing War Poetry Like a Woman," *Critical Inquiry* 13.3 (1987): 532–56.

34. Moore narrated the events of this visit in a series of letters to her brother that she titled "Sojourn in the Whale," which may be seen in part in *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, ed. Bonnie Costello, Celeste Goodridge, and Cristanne Miller (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 438–50.

35. Eliot not only praised "Scalpels" in public (see *Critical Response*, 45) but also spoke of his admiration for the poem to Moore's friend Robert McAlmon, who relayed the compliment to the poet; see Moore's letter to McAlmon dated May 9, 1921 in the *Selected Letters*. For Williams's account of Moore's public reading of "Scalpels," see his *Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1951), 171–72. Robin Schulze does, however, offer convincing evidence in favor of a competing account of this event by Moore's good friend Alfred Kreymborg, who claims that the poem Moore read that night was "England." Schulze attributes Williams's desire to remember it as being "Scalpels" to the fact that the latter was "a poem he eventually printed in [his little magazine] *Contact* with the help of the coeditor he met for the first time at the same party, Robert McAlmon" (*BMM* 424–25).

36. Besides those by Burke, Heuving, Hotelling, and Sielke, whom I cite below, other notable feminist readings of "Scalpels" may be found in Elizabeth W. Joyce, *Cultural Critique and Abstraction: Marianne Moore and the Avant-Garde* (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell University Press, 1998) and Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

37. Kirstin Hotelling Zona, *Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop and May Swenson: The Feminist Poetics of Self-Restraint* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 39.

38. Moore, *Selected Letters*, 140. The first critic to suggest that Loy was the inspiration for "Scalpels" was Carolyn Burke, in "Getting Spliced: Modernism and Sexual Difference," *American Quarterly* 39.1 (1987): 98–121.

39. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), ed. Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), Book II, ll. 318–20.

40. David Trotter, *The Making of the Reader: Language and Subjectivity in Modern American, English and Irish Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's, 1984). This emphatically ostensive use of demonstratives is a particular form of what Trotter calls "external reference"; for his discussion of Eliot's use of demonstratives in *The Waste Land*, see 44–57.

41. Heuving, *Omissions Are Not Accidents*, 40.

42. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977), 4.

43. Ibid. 2.

44. In their readings of "Scalpels," both Heuving and Sielke cite Nancy Vickers's influential essay on the Petrarchan inheritance, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme" (in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982], 92–109). Vickers's reading of the *Rime Sparse* emphasizes the aggressive aspect of Petrarch's poetic, the way the amorous catalogue effects "the neutralization, through descriptive dismemberment, of the threat" (103)—the threat, that is, to masculine bodily integrity, and by extension, to the masculine poet's authority, presented

by the lady. Nevertheless, the poem's power to "neutralize" this threat is explicitly provisional: "[a]t the level of fictive experience which [Petrarch] describes, successes are ephemeral, and failures become a way of life" (105). There is a difference, however, between Petrarch's pained if productive acknowledgment of failure, and the pronounced taste for failure that Vickers evinces, which seems to me a peculiarly modern phenomenon. At those points where the modernist embrace of rhetorical failure and social breakdown can be seen as an assault on a specifically masculine authority, modernist poetics coincide with feminist critique.

45. In *The Poetry of Marianne Moore: A Study in Voice and Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Margaret Holley also compares "Scalpels" to Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady," Pound's "Portrait d'une Femme," and Williams's "Portrait of a Lady," but while Heuving's extended discussion of these poems is central to her argument, Holley's readings are brief and by-the-way.

46. Heuving, *Omissions Are Not Accidents*, 36.

47. Ibid. 31, 32.

48. Sigmund Freud, "Infantile Genital Organization," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1995), 19:145.

49. Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," *Standard Edition*, 7:198–99.

50. As Freud himself acknowledges in the "Three Essays," the term "ambivalence" was coined by his colleague Eugen Bleuler, a Swiss psychologist noted for his writings on schizophrenia. It was Freud's use of the word here, however, that brought it into wider circulation.

51. In Book II of *The Prelude*, the narrator's discovery of his proto-poetic power to perceive difference "where to the common eye, / No difference is," is predicated on his separation from his mother, who embodies "The gravitation and the filial bond / Of nature, that connect him with the world" (ll. 263–64). The breaking of this bond is initially traumatic—"a trouble came into my mind . . . I was left alone, / Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why" (ll. 292–93)—but also crucial for further development—"now to Nature's finer influxes / My mind lay open" (ll. 298–99).

52. Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," *Standard Edition*, 14:139.

53. Costello, *Imaginary Possessions*, 175.

54. See, for example, Pound's "Marianne Moore and Mina Loy," and Eliot's "Observations," both from 1918, in *Critical Response*, 22–23 and 23–24, as well as Williams's tendentious recollection in his *Autobiography* that Moore "was in awed admiration of Mina's long-legged charms" (146) and Robert McAlmon's similarly self-serving juxtaposition of the characters based on Loy ("Gusta") and Moore ("Martha") in his roman à clef *Post-Adolescence* (excerpted in *McAlmon and the Lost Generation: A Self-Portrait*, ed. and with commentary, Robert E. Knoll [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962]).

55. Zona, *Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop and May Swenson*, 39.

56. Langdon Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 169.

57. Hart Crane, "The Broken Tower," *The Complete Poems of Hart Crane*, ed. Marc Simon (New York: Liveright, 2000), 160.

58. Blackmur, *Form and Value in Modern Poetry*, 283.

59. In the years between the writing of "Scalpels" and her mother's death, Moore would write other lyrics of negated sexuality—I am thinking in particular of "Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns" (1924), the intensely sensual "Half-Deity" (1935, but omitted by the poet from both her 1951 *Collected* and 1967 *Complete*), and "Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle" (1935). However, these mid-career poems all take the guise of animal allegory, the poetic form most closely associated with Moore, which served her as a particularly effective type of "armor." By comparison, the subjects of "Scalpels" and the "love" poems of the "fable years" remain enigmatic: it is not so much that they provide clues to the mystery of Moore's sexuality, as that they present it as a mystery with relative directness.

60. Donald Hall, *Marianne Moore: The Cage and the Animal* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), 130.

61. Cristanne Miller, *Marianne Moore: Questions of Authority* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 195.

62. Hall, *Cage and the Animal*, 147.

63. Given his emphasis on the deliberate obscurity of Moore's "love" poems, Hall must have known on some level that his effort to distinguish "mothering love" from the sexual kind in these poems was as destined to fail as his related attempt to assert the poet's preference for "love between the sexes."

64. Moore, *Selected Letters*, 97–98. See also, especially, Marianne's letter to Warner dated October 3, 1915, in which the poet describes how her announcement that her poems are to appear in *Others* "caused Mole's lip to curl" (100).

65. Moore, *Selected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), 108.

66. Charles Molesworth, *Marianne Moore: A Literary Life* (New York: Athenaeum, 1990), 346.

67. Elizabeth Gregory, "Stamps, Money, Pop Culture and Marianne Moore," in *Critical Response*, 235, 243, 245.

68. Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age*, 205.

69. Hall, *Cage and the Animal*, 133.

70. Moore, "Letter to Albert Gelpi," *Marianne Moore Newsletter* 3.1 (Spring 1979): 11.

71. Pamela White Hadas, *Marianne Moore: Poet of Affection* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1977), 177, 186, 192.

72. Howard, "Monkey Business," 11.

73. Holley, *Study in Voice and Value*, 140, 147.

74. Ibid. 150.

75. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 120.

76. William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations*, ed. Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1970), 317–18.

77. Hall, *Cage and the Animal*, 130.

78. Hadas, *Poet of Affection*, 181–85.

79. Ibid. 191–92.

80. Besides the instances cited above, some other examples are the "old Persian velvet" in "People's Surroundings," the "Persian designs of hard stones with enamel" in the list later elided from "An Octopus," and "the / pantomime of Persian thought: the / gilded, too tight undemure / coat of gems" in "Camellia Sabina." And while the Persian nightingale in

"Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle" "that sings / only in pure Sanskrit" is associated with "pure" words rather than luxurious objects, it is linked to the notion of a lost language of love in which the uniquely chaste poet might express her desire.

81. Hadas, *Poet of Affection*, 185.

82. Oscar Ogg, *The 26 Letters* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1948).

83. Ibid. 229–30.

84. Laurence Stapleton, *Marianne Moore: The Poet's Advance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 152.

85. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 276.

86. The remarkable relationship between Moore and Bishop has been, and will no doubt continue to be, the subject of much comment. That Moore also played a small but significant part in Plath's self-conception is less well-known. Their first encounter occurred, according to Steven Axelrod (*Sylvia Plath: The Wound and the Cure of Words* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990]), "in April 1955, when the elder poet served as the judge of a poetry contest in which Plath was a cowinner. Even at that meeting, Plath clearly hoped to elicit the kind of support and friendship Moore had earlier given to Bishop" (128), or as Plath called her in one of many journal entries devoted to sizing up her poetic competition, "the lesbian & fanciful & bejeweled Elizabeth Bishop" (*The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, ed. Karen V. Kukil [London: Faber and Faber, 2000], 322). Plath's hope that Moore might anoint her as the successor to the title of "Poetess of America" (*Journals*, 360) was dashed, though, when, several years later, in search of praise and a fellowship reference Plath sent a packet of poems to Moore and received in response "a queerly ambiguous spiteful letter" (*Journals*, 406). Moore was particularly critical of "Mussel Hunter at Rock Harbor," a poem in syllabics that Plath had conceived as a tribute to her would-be "godmother" (Axelrod, *Wound and the Cure*, 135); although Axelrod remarks that Plath should not have been surprised at Moore's reaction, since in that poem the younger poet may be said to have "subverted all the tenets that make a poem like 'The Pangolin' possible" (136). After this contretemps, Axelrod writes, Plath "crossed Moore off her potential list of fairy godmothers." For another account of this incident, see Vivian R. Pollak, "Moore, Plath, Hughes and 'The Literary Life,'" *American Literary History* 17.1 (2005): 95–115.

Chapter 3

1. *Dance Index* was started by Kirstein as a stand-alone publication in 1941 as part of his effort to create a serious audience for classical dance in America, but he made the magazine part of the subscription package for Ballet Society when he and Balanchine founded that company in 1946.

2. Lincoln Kirstein, "Comment," *Dance Index* 5.6: 135.

3. Kirstein's efforts furthered Cornell's interests on a number of levels. Besides attending performances of various Kirstein-sponsored companies (and befriending several of the ballerinas connected with them) and contributing to *Dance Index* (for which he designed many covers as well as several whole issues), Cornell also spent many hours exploring the Dance Archives at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which were founded in 1939 by Kirstein to house his extensive collection of dance-related materials. This scholar's trove was "the first such resource in America," according to Sandra Leonard

Starr, author of *Joseph Cornell and the Ballet* (New York: Castelli, Feigen, Corcoran, 1983), 12.

4. I discuss the implications of the phrase "completeness and continuity," which occurs in Moore's essay on "miscellany" (*CPr* 182), in chapter 1.

5. Dore Ashton, *A Joseph Cornell Album* (New York: Da Capo, 1974), 23.

6. Kirstein, "Comment," *Dance Index* 3.3: 34. This issue, on the dancer-choreographer Anna Pavlova, consists of pictures of Pavlova together with an essay on her by Moore.

7. See such Lawrence poems as "Elephants in the Circus," "Two Performing Elephants," and "When I Went to the Circus," the last of which Moore selected for publication in the *Dial*. The painter and poet Marsden Hartley was a friend of Moore's, and his *Adventures in the Arts: Informal Chapters on Painters, Vaudeville and Poets* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921) was a particular favorite of Cornell's. The book contains several essays on circus folk, "fascinating people . . . for whom there is not, and probably never will be, a written history; the story of whose origin lies almost as buried as those of primitive peoples" (180).

8. The elephant ballet figures into Balanchine biographer Bernard Taper's account of the decade (roughly 1938–48) "for the better part of which . . . Balanchine spent much of his time being a Broadway and Hollywood dance man." *Balanchine: A Biography* (New York: Times Books, 1984), 177.

9. The quotations in this paragraph are taken from "Diligence Is to Magic as Progress Is to Flight" and "Black Earth" (*BMM* 64 and 8); and "Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle" (*MMCP* 104).

10. Moore, "Ballet des Elephants," *Dance Index* 5.6: 148.

11. Elizabeth Bishop, *The Collected Prose* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1984), 147.

12. As I discuss in chapter 2, Moore's extreme sensitivity to criticism seems to have its roots in her relationship with her mother. Compare the elephants who resist "man's whim to suppose / them ephemera" in the 1915 poem "Diligence Is to Magic as Progress Is to Flight" with this exchange between Marianne and Mrs. Moore, reported in a letter from Moore to her brother, also from 1915:

> I said to Mole [Mrs. Moore's family nickname], "now with what poems I have published and my general well-being, I could publish a book anytime." Mole said "I wouldn't publish." I said, "Never?" Mole said, "After you've changed your style." "Huh!" I said, "you would omit all these things I prize so much?" "Yes," said Mole, "they're ephemeral." [*The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, ed. Bonnie Costello, Celeste Goodridge, and Cristanne Miller (New York: Knopf, 1997), 100]

13. In *Joseph Cornell's Theater of the Mind: Selected Diaries, Letters and Files* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), editor Mary Ann Caws notes that Cornell "took this term from the nineteenth century poet and novelist Gérard de Nerval, who wanted to indicate the supreme importance of the smallest things once the imagination transforms them" (136).

14. Joseph Cornell, diary entry dated May 1947. Caws (ed.), *Theater of the Mind*, 143.

15. Ibid. 122.

16. For a detailed account of Moore's introduction to Cornell and the friendship that ensued, see Dickran Tashjian, *Joseph Cornell: Gifts of Desire* (Miami Beach, Fla.: Grassfield Press, 1992), 65–77.

17. Moore, *Selected Letters*, 431.

18. Deborah Solomon, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* (New York: Noonday, 1997), 98.

19. Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, "Joseph Cornell's Explorations: Art on File," in *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp . . . in resonance*, ed. Polly Koch (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Cantz; and New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1999), 226. Ashton reproduces *Maria* and the *BEL CANTO PET* in *A Joseph Cornell Album*, 135–50. In the four issues of *Dance Index* composed entirely by Cornell (besides the circus issue, there were two devoted to the romantic ballet [*DI* 3.7–8 and 6.9] and one on Hans Christian Anderson [4.9]), the artist edits materials from his files to imitate the format of the scholarly monographs usually published in that magazine.

20. Although I may sometimes seem to suggest here that Cornell's work developed in a straightforward linear fashion, I wish to stress that this is far from the case; that in fact, the artist's "development," whether considered as a psychological or a historical phenomenon, is peculiarly arrested. Thus, one finds relatively abstract works appearing both early and late in his career, and to the end the ballerinas never quite disappear from view. His lifelong obsession with certain themes and forms is reinforced by his working methods: because he draws on the same stock of materials over the course of his career, and works on pieces intermittently for years or even decades, it is difficult to assign definitive dates to many of his works. One may discern, nonetheless, certain developmental tendencies within Cornell's oeuvre as a whole—the greatest concentrations of ballerinas, birds, and dovecotes do appear during successive periods in the artist's working life.

21. Solomon, *Utopia Parkway*, 187.

22. Ibid. 157.

23. Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, "Aviaries," in Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, Walter Hopps, Robert Lehrman, and Richard Vine, *Joseph Cornell: Shadowplay . . . Eterniday* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 126.

24. *RS* 17. I discuss Ashbery's relationship to Cornell at length in chapter 4.

25. Reported by Caws (ed.), *Theater of the Mind*, 42.

26. Ibid. 40.

27. Tashjian, *Gifts of Desire*, 73.

28. See Solomon for an unprurient but frank description of Cornell's late life sexual experiences. In the section of her introduction to *Theater of the Mind* titled "Looking in a Box, or Eros Contained," Caws provides a valuable overview of the changing relationship between aesthetics and sexuality over the course of the artist's career. Michael Moon, in *A Small Boy and Others: Imitation and Initiation in American Culture from Henry James to Andy Warhol* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), applies the lessons of queer theory to the difficult task of defining Cornell's sexual character. And Jodi Hauptman brings out the inherent contradictions in Cornell's ideology of "innocence" in *Joseph Cornell: Stargazing in the Cinema* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 162–99.

29. Moon, *Small Boy and Others*, 137.

30. Cornell, *Dance Index* 5.6: 136. No author is given for the text on this page; but since sources are assigned to all "quoted" texts in the issue, we may assume that these words are Cornell's.

31. Sandra Gilbert, "Marianne Moore as Female Female Impersonator," *Marianne Moore: The Art of a Modernist*, ed. Joseph Parisi (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1990), 32, 43.

32. Tashjian, *Gifts of Desire*, 78.

33. Lehrman, in *Joseph Cornell: Shadowplay . . . Eterniday*, 208.

34. Emily Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (reading edition), ed. R. W. Franklin (Cambridge, Mass. and London, UK: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), #535.

35. Brian O'Doherty, *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth* (New York: Random House, 1973), 257, 281.

36. Hauptman similarly remarks that "Cornell's activities call to mind Walter Benjamin, a figure who similarly turned his attention to history and to the survivors of the past" (*Stargazing in the Cinema*, 37); more particularly, she writes, it is in Benjamin's "methodology—collection, accumulation, and quotation . . . where we can imagine the beginnings of Cornell's own language" (40).

37. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 255.

38. Ibid. 254.

39. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harvest/Noonday, 1975), 39.

40. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 262.

41. The poem's original title, "'He Wrote the History Book,' It Said" (*BMM* 213) gives an extra twist to Moore's critique of the idea of a universal pronoun.

42. Elizabeth Gregory, *Quotation and Modern American Poetry: "Imaginary Gardens with Real Toads"* (Houston, Tex.: Rice University Press, 1996), 132.

43. Hugh Kenner, *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 102.

44. "A little anthology," Moore, *CPr* 551; "just an anthology," Grace Schulman, "Conversation with Marianne Moore," *Quarterly Review of Literature* 15 (1969): 159.

45. *CPr*, 648; see also 504.

46. All citations in this paragraph are from Solomon, *Utopia Parkway*, 169–70.

47. Like "sophistication," "inconceivably arcanic"—a phrase from "My Apish Cousins" (*BMM* 82)—is an epithet for what Moore considers the "wrong" sort of art.

48. Walter Hopps, "Gimme Strength: Joseph Cornell and Marcel Duchamp Remembered," in *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp . . . in resonance*, 70.

49. Cited in Ashton, *A Joseph Cornell Album*, 4.

50. Moore records her first-hand impressions of Oxford as "a Persian garden in terms of modern student life" in a letter to her brother dated July 5, 1911; *Selected Letters*, 89–91. The poet's envy of the undergraduates there—"a very deluxe lot apparently"—colors both her portrait of the swan in "Critics and Connoisseurs," and the poem that marks her first use of quotation, the misogynist "Councell to a Bachelor" (1913) lifted from an Elizabethan trencher she came across in the Bodleian. Moore speaks of herself as "One debarred from

enrollment at Harvard" in "In Lieu of the Lyre" (1965); and Charles Berger thinks it significant that the oppressive father-figure in "Silence" is "a Boston father, perhaps indeed a Harvard father" ("Who Writes the History Book? Moore's Revisionary Poetics," *Western Humanities Review* 53.3: 276). See also Moore's typically double-edged *Dial* "Comment" on Harvard president Charles W. Eliot's list of "our foremost educators" (*CPr* 154–55).

51. Solomon also suggests that if not for "the advent of collage and assemblage . . . Cornell would not have become an artist at all," but would have remained "just another loner in Queens who happened to have a lot of books and oddments lying around his house" (*Utopia Parkway*, 57).

52. T. S. Eliot, "Marianne Moore (1923)," in *The Critical Response to Marianne Moore*, ed. Elizabeth Gregory (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 44, 46.

53. Randall Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age* (New York: Ecco, 1980), 203.

54. O'Doherty, *American Masters*, 273.

55. Ibid. 274.

56. Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age*, 182–83.

57. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 254.

58. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 257–58, 267.

59. Moore narrates this event in one of the series of letters to her brother, which she collectively titled "Inside the Whale"; *Selected Letters*, 103–4. For Moore's dealings with the Stieglitz circle, see Linda Leavell, *Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts: Prismatic Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 18–40. The much-repeated story of Cornell's initial encounter with Julien Levy was first retailed by Levy himself in his *Memoir of an Art Gallery* (New York: Putnam's, 1977); although Solomon, too, repeats Levy's anecdote, she also registers some doubts about its accuracy (*Utopia Parkway*, 60).

60. Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane*, ed. Langdon Hammer and Brom Weber (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997), 207; and Solomon, *Utopia Parkway*, 134. Crane made this remark after Moore attempted to censor a poem he had submitted to the *Dial*.

61. Moore, *CPr* 625–26. The poet's letter was published together with other responses to the editors' request for support against the U.S. Post Office's efforts to classify *View* as obscene material. See *View*, 4.1: 23.

62. See Caws (ed.), *Theater of the Mind*, 31, 267 and Solomon, *Utopia Parkway*, 72.

63. Hopps, "Gimme Strength," 71.

64. Bishop, *Collected Prose*, 137.

65. With this same passage from Moore's "miscellany" essay in mind, Leavell writes that "Moore understood well the subversiveness, the 'byplay' of assemblage, which threatens not only art's traditional role of representation but also its dignity" (*Prismatic Color*, 117).

66. McNeil Lowry, "II—Conversations with Kirstein," *New Yorker*, December 22, 1986: 53.

67. Ibid. 50.

68. Steven Watson presents his account of Kirstein's pre-Balanchine career under the heading, "Lincoln Kirstein Zigzags." Watson, *Prepare for Saints: Gertrude Stein, Virgil Thomson, and the Mainstreaming of American Modernism* (New York: Random House, 1998), 151–55. Martin Duberman gives the most comprehensive account of that career to

date in *The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007). Duberman quotes a letter from Kirstein to his father that shows him at a professional turning point; it is dated 1937, four years after Kirstein convinced Balanchine to come to America and eleven years before the founding of the New York City Ballet. "It is increasingly clear to me," Kirstein writes, "that all I want to do is the work I am now doing. . . . In ten years time I want to be in a position to have had experience and enjoyed the prestige which would entitle me to the power I hope to be able to wield" (340). The strange shifts in tense reflect Kirstein's dynamic sense of his situation at the moment; he was then thirty years old.

69. For an insider's view of the subculture that formed around the NYCB, see *Following Balanchine* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), in which literature professor Robert Garis tells the story of his life as an audience member. In a ground-breaking essay titled "The New York City Ballet and the Worlds of New York Intellect" (*Dance for a City: Fifty Years of the New York City Ballet*, ed. Lynn Garafola with Eric Foner [New York: Columbia University Press, 1999], 53–72), Thomas Bender situates the culture of the NYCB in relation to other cultural developments in post–World War II New York. In particular, he contrasts the aficionados of the NYCB to the *Partisan Review* crowd. Bender identifies the latter with a Greenbergian artistic purism, on the one hand, and a committed political stance, on the other, while he sees the former as more "polymorphous," both aesthetically and politically speaking. That is, he writes, the culture of the NYCB explicitly promoted an "interarts perspective" and implicitly promoted what would now be called an identity politics, "bringing a vital private matter, gender and sexuality, into the domain of public consideration" (68).

70. Robert Gottlieb, *George Balanchine: The Ballet Maker* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 150.

71. Lincoln Kirstein, *Ballet: Bias and Belief*: Three Pamphlets Collected *and Other Dance Writings of Lincoln Kirstein*, introduction and comment by Nancy Reynolds (New York: Dance Horizons, 1983), 118.

72. Cited in Anatole Chujoy, *The New York City Ballet* (New York: Da Capo, 1982), 172.

73. Cited in Duberman, *Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein*, 346.

74. Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: Norton, 1976), 31.

75. Duberman meticulously records Kirstein's parents' and siblings' financial contributions to his various projects from *Hound and Horn* forward; he also details the Kirsteins' repeated efforts to keep Lincoln from breaking into his principal in order to finance his dance companies (see, e.g., *Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein*, 221, 259). The initial list of contributors to the School of the American Ballet, the first of the Kirstein–Balanchine institutions, was dominated by such members of Kirstein's Harvard clique as Philip Johnson, Chick Austin, Jere Abbot, Kirk Askew, and Edward Warburg (Watson, *Prepare for Saints*, 340n). Although the least culturally accomplished of this crowd, Warburg was to prove of all of them the most dependably generous contributor to Kirstein's schemes.

76. Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 58.

77. Louis Menand, *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and His Context*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 124.

78. Alvin Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 87.

79. Larson, *Rise of Professionalism*, 154.

80. I quote the version of "The Student" published in *Poetry* in 1932. The poem did not reappear in print again until 1941, having in the meantime undergone extensive revisions that mute the combative tone of the original. The original "Student" has recently resurfaced in Heather Cass White's variorum edition of Moore's poems of the thirties, *A-Quiver with Significance: Marianne Moore, 1932–1936* (Victoria, BC, Canada: ELS Editions, 2008), 53–57.

81. Cited in Bledstein, *Culture of Professionalism*, 227.

82. "Colubrine" means "snakelike." Moore's description of Adam's "distressing" beauty in "Marriage" includes the quoted phrase "'something feline, something colubrine,'" which, her note informs us, is taken from a review of George Santayana's *Poems*. Insofar as Adam is seen as a thing of beauty, that is, he is associated with Eve, and by extension, with her ally, the serpent; and thus, in a startling shift of position, he becomes (like Santayana, of whom Moore disapproved) both morally and sexually ambiguous.

83. Williams, *Autobiography*, 138. See also chapter 1.

84. Patricia C. Willis, *Marianne Moore: Vision into Verse* (Philadelphia: Rosenbach Museum and Library, 1987), 27; see also Hopps, "Gimme Strength," 76.

85. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, prepared on the basis of the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 263.

86. Ibid. 475.

87. I discuss Benjamin's, Cornell's, and Moore's approaches to "collection" below, but more might be said about Kirstein's thoughts on this subject. I offer here just two exemplary remarks. Of his father's employer, Filene's department store, Kirstein wrote, "Its 'bargain basement,' in due time, let me 'collect.'" And in an obituary of Carl Van Vechten, Kirstein describes Van Vechten in terms that might apply just as well, or better, to himself: "he was too preoccupied with art, life and people to care much whether or not he was called an artist or a journalist or an amateur or a collector. He was, anyway, important, and history will admit it." Kirstein, *By, With, To & From: A Lincoln Kirstein Reader*, ed. Nicholas Jenkins (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991), 4, 37.

88. Benjamin, *Arcades*, 19.

89. Letter to Cornell dated April 11, 1944; Caws (ed.), *Theater of the Mind*, 103.

90. Lisa Steinman, "'So As to Be One Having Some Way of Being One Having Some Way of Working': Marianne Moore and Literary Tradition," in *Gendered Modernisms: American Women Poets and Their Readers*, ed. Margaret Dickie and Thomas Travisano (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 110.

91. Bishop, *Collected Prose*, 135.

92. Caws (ed.), *Theater of the Mind*, 453.

93. Cornell created several boxes on the theme of Taglioni and her jewels, all bearing a label with some version of this legend.

Chapter 4

1. These words appear on the opening plate of *Stones*, a portfolio of limited-edition lithographs by O'Hara and Larry Rivers, published by Tatyana Grossman's Universal Limited Art Editions. For an illuminating discussion of this collaboration between poet and painter, see Marjorie Perloff's *Frank O'Hara: A Poet among Painters* (New York: George

Braziller, 1977), 99–105. Perloff's is still the go-to book-length study on the subject of O'Hara's relation to modern art and the art world. For an art world perspective on this subject, together with a fine collection of O'Hara-related images, see Russell Ferguson, *In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

2. David Trotter, *The Making of the Reader: Language and Subjectivity in Modern American, English and Irish Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's, 1984), 156.

3. See, e.g., Leslie Wolf, "The Brushstroke's Integrity: The Poetry of John Ashbery and the Art of Painting," in *Beyond Amazement: New Essays on John Ashbery*, ed. David Lehman (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), 224–54, and Fred Moramarco, "John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara: The Painterly Poets," *Journal of Modern Literature* 5.3 (September 1976): 436–62. Wolf draws connections between Ashbery's writing and the "radical freedoms" of the Abstract Expressionists, and Moramarco links the poet's work to that of two of his most celebrated contemporaries, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg.

4. Quoted in Richard Kostelanetz, *The Old Poetries and the New* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 92.

5. Essays by Ashbery on all of the "literary" artists I have named here may be found in *Reported Sightings*. One could go on adding names to the list, including, e.g., Jane Hammond, with whom the poet collaborated on a series of rebus-like paintings, and the outsider artist Henry Darger, whose writings and drawings chronicling the adventures of a race of child-warriors known as the Vivian Girls inspired Ashbery's book-length poem *Girls on the Run* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999).

6. See, e.g., John Shoptaw, *On the Outside Looking Out: John Ashbery's Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); Catherine Imbriglio, "'Our Days Put on Such Reticence': The Rhetoric of the Closet in John Ashbery's *Some Trees*," *Contemporary Literature* 36.2 (Summer 1995): 249–88; and Mark Silverberg, "Ashbery, O'Hara and the Neo-Avant-Garde Manifesto," *Arizona Quarterly* 59.1 (Spring 2003): 137–65.

7. Ashbery does, however, quote both Trevor Winkfield and another "retrograde" artist, the figurative painter Fairfield Porter, on the subject of Greenberg; both cast the critic as an ideological opponent (*RS* 288, 210).

8. Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 304.

9. John O'Brian, "Introduction," *CE* 3:xv.

10. Cited in O'Brian, "Introduction," *CE* 3:xv. O'Brian discusses Ashbery's letter in light of "Modernist Painting's" complex publication history.

11. Nicolas Calas, letter to the editors, *View* 1.2 (October 1940): 5.

12. For a compellingly written and comprehensively researched account of the Surrealists' American sojourn, see Monica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

13. Three quite different perspectives on Surrealism's role in the story of what Irving Sandler has dubbed "the triumph of American painting" are offered by Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile*; Peter Wollen, *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); and Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996). The thesis of Sawin's book is that the expatriate surrealists created the conceptual, technical, and institutional conditions that

made Abstract Expressionism possible; she designates a 1951 show at the Museum of Modern Art, "Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America," as a turning point in the "Americanization" of avant-garde art (413–14). In an essay titled "The Triumph of American Painting: 'A Rotten Rebel from Russia,'" Wollen invokes surrealism in the course of his attempt to rescue Jackson Pollock from Greenberg's purism, "which is best seen," he thinks, "simply as a closing off and cancellation of options and possibilities"; and this close-mindedness, he adds, helped to usher in "a triumphalist wave of nationalism and political manipulation of art" (114). Crow, in his essay "Fashioning the New York School," repeats Greenberg's charge that the surrealists were tainted by their associations with the "restless rich" and suggests that this taint spread to Pollock via the dealer Peggy Guggenheim, whose Art of This Century gallery had been a haven for expatriate surrealists. Guggenheim's "advancement of Pollock," Crow writes, "had been the principal gesture of accommodation by a courtly culture toward its temporary, democratic surroundings" (48).

14. Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, 69.

15. As I mention in the introduction, *Other Traditions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000) is the title of a collection of Ashbery's essays on what he calls "certifiably minor poets" (4).

16. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 57.

17. Vernon Shetley, *After the Death of Poetry* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 107.

18. Ibid. 104.

19. David LeHardy Sweet, *Savage Sight/Constructed Noise: Poetic Adaptations of Painterly Techniques in the French and American Avant-Gardes* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 235.

20. Hugh Kenner speculates on the Black Mountain group's relationship to the postwar academy in the chapter titled "Classroom Accuracies" in *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 158–93. Libbie Rifkin works through the paradoxical twists of these poets' anti-institutional institutionalism in *Career Moves: Olson, Creeley, Zukovsky, Berrigan, and the American Avant-Garde* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000); see especially the chapter titled "Charles Olson's 'Queer University': Institutionalizing Postwar Avant-Gardes" (13–31).

21. John Bernard Myers, introduction to *The Poets of the New York School*, ed. John Bernard Myers (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), 7–8.

22. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 257.

23. Shetley, *After the Death of Poetry*, 109.

24. Lytle Shaw, *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2006), 21, 23.

25. Myers, introduction to *The Poets of the New York School*, 8.

26. Myers's memoir *Tracking the Marvelous: A Life in the New York Art World* (New York: Random House, 1981) provides an entertaining but unreliable account of his career. Karen Wilkins's catalogue essay in *Tibor de Nagy Gallery: The First Fifty Years, 1950–2000* (New York: Tibor de Nagy, 2000) offers a useful corrective and is especially clear on the particulars of the poets' relations with the gallery.

27. Myers, introduction to *The Poets of the New York School*, 9.

28. David Lehman's discussion of Ashbery's views on the relationship between politics and poetry in *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999) includes the poet's best-known statement on this subject, from his eulogy for O'Hara: "Frank O'Hara's poetry has no program and therefore it cannot be joined. It does not advocate sex and dope as a panacea for the ills of modern society: it does not speak out against the war in Viet Nam or in favor of civil rights; it does not paint gothic vignettes of the post-atomic age: in a word, it does not attack the establishment. It merely ignores its right to exist, and is thus a source of annoyance to partisans of every stripe" (308).

29. Ashbery's primary reasons for returning to the United States were personal—his father had died in 1964 and his mother needed his help. Nevertheless, it also proved to be a crucial move for his career. Although Ashbery seems to have thought of himself as isolated from the New York cultural scene during his years in Paris, Richard Kostelanetz recalls that "[d]uring Ashbery's absence, he was still a presence in New York," a presence whose reputation grew to the point where, says Kostelanetz, "An unknown poet a decade before, he returned home a conquering hero, sort of" (Kostelanetz, *Old Poetries and the New*, 99–100); see also Lehman, *Last Avant-Garde*, 162–63.

30. Kostelanetz, *Old Poetries and the New*, 100. For another version of this claim, see Peter Stitt, "The Art of Poetry XXXIII: John Ashbery," *Paris Review* 25 (Winter 1983): 34. In this interview, Ashbery suggests that another reason so many poets were hired by *ArtNews* was that "they paid almost nothing and poets are always penurious. Trained art historians [i.e., professionals] would not write reviews for five dollars, which is what they were paying when I began."

31. Cited in Lehman, *Last Avant-Garde*, 28.

32. Shaw notes that when Andre Breton came to the States during World War II, although he publicly welcomed the support of *View*, "he nonetheless privately referred to [the magazine] as 'pederasty international'" (*Poetics of Coterie*, 57).

33. Ford's Toumanova poem appears in *View* 2.4 (January 1943), an issue guest-edited by Joseph Cornell. For more on the connections between the *View* group, the New York School poets, and the NYCB, see Thomas Bender, "The New York City Ballet and the Worlds of New York Intellect," in *Dance for a City: Fifty Years of the New York City Ballet*, ed. Lynn Garafola with Eric Foner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). In the same volume, Lynn Garafola discusses the class makeup of the NYCB audience at City Center in relation to the New York School (6).

34. Vincent Warren, "Frank . . .," in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur (Berkeley, Calif.: Creative Arts Books, 1980), 75.

35. Myers, *Tracking*, 97; unpublished letter from Ashbery to John Warner Moore dated February 14, 1967, Rosenbach Museum and Library.

36. Cited in Perloff, *Frank O'Hara*, 103; for Myers's version of the story, see "Frank O'Hara: A Memoir," in *Homage*, 37. Brad Gooch retells the story largely from Myers's point of view in *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994).

37. Myers, in *Homage*, 43.

38. Waldo Rasmussen, "Frank O'Hara in the Museum," in *Homage*, 86.

39. John Button, "Frank's Grace," in *Homage*, 41.

40. Ashbery, "A Reminiscence," in *Homage*, 22.

41. Ashbery, "In Memory of My Feelings," *ArtNews* 66 (January 1968): 68.

42. James Schuyler, "Frank O'Hara, Poet among Painters," *ArtNews* 73 (May 1974): 45.

43. In "Gay Language as Political Praxis: The Poetry of Frank O'Hara" (*Social Text* 1 [Winter 1979]: 59–92), Bruce Boone suggests that the connections between the art world and the gay subculture were so close during the period when O'Hara worked at MoMA that the language of art-world professionals (which Boone terms "art-talk" or "museum-talk") itself came to be coded as gay (see especially 76).

44. See Lehman, *Last Avant-Garde*, 180 and Ashbery's introduction to O'Hara's *Collected Poems*, vii.

45. Susan Rosenbaum, "Frank O'Hara, *Flâneur* of New York," in *The Scene of My Selves: New Work on New York School Poets*, ed. Terence Diggory and Stephen Paul Miller (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 2001), 170.

46. Trotter, *Making of the Reader*, 156.

47. Ibid.; my emphasis.

48. As Benjamin Friedlander bluntly puts it in "Strange Fruit: O'Hara, Race, and the Color of Time": "Rightly or wrongly, [O'Hara] rejected politics, preferring the much-criticized personal solution" (in *Scene of My Selves*, 129). While I might not go as far as Friedlander does when he speaks of "O'Hara's strange and even vexing treatment of race" as "the deepest preoccupation of his work" (140), his sinuously argued essay seems to me the best treatment so far of the tricky subject of O'Hara and race.

49. O'Hara's *Lunch Poems*, originally published by Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books in 1964, has been kept continuously in print by the press to this day.

50. The use of the term "optical" to describe the "sheerly visual" quality of Pollock's painting was first introduced, however, not by Greenberg but by his follower Michael Fried, in the context of a discussion of *Number 1, 1948*. Fried, curiously, describes the latter as absolutely "devoid both of recognizable objects and of abstract shapes." In other words, Fried represses the traces of bodily presence, those unmistakable "bloody handprints," that Pollock has taken care to leave on the painting, in order to render it fit to serve as his prime example of a mode of painting designed to appeal to "eyesight alone" (also a phrase coined by Fried in the course of this discussion). Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 224.

51. Joe LeSueur, *Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara: A Memoir* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 208.

52. For a different angle on the question of how far O'Hara's peculiarly intimate address can be seen as "public," see Terrell Scott Herring, "Frank O'Hara's Open Closet," *PMLA* 117.3: 414–27. Through the theory and practice of "personism," Herring claims, O'Hara recasts the poem itself as "a self-contained literary public sphere" (417), one which is at once imitative of and competitive with the pseudo-public called into being by the mass media.

53. Rosenbaum, in *Scene of My Selves*, 171.

Chapter 5

1. In *On the Outside Looking Out: John Ashbery's Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), John Shoptaw cites an interview with Ashbery in which he says of *The*

Vermont Notebook, "It's one of the few things I've written that seems to have been influenced by Gertrude Stein" (14). I discuss the implications of Ashbery's claim that Cornell's art aims "to allow us to keep all the stories that art seems to want to cut us off from" (*RS* 17) in chapter 4.

2. Nick Lolordo, "Charting the Flow: Positioning John Ashbery," *Contemporary Literature* 42.4 (Winter 2001): 750.

3. For two relatively nonpartisan accounts of the Ashbery wars, see David Herd, *John Ashbery and American Poetry* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), 71, and Lolordo, "Charting the Flow," 751–53.

4. Marjorie Perloff, "Normalizing John Ashbery," *Jacket* (January 1998) <http://www.jacket.zip.com.au/jacket02/perloff02.html>.

5. Lolordo, "Charting the Flow," 772.

6. David LeHardy Sweet, *Savage Sight/Constructed Noise: Poetic Adaptations of Painterly Techniques in the French and American Avant-Gardes* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 237.

7. Vernon Shetley, *After the Death of Poetry* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 133.

8. Shetley also cites this incident as an example of coterie dynamics (ibid. 109).

9. Mark Ford, *John Ashbery in Conversation with Mark Ford* (London: Between the Lines, 2003), 46.

10. W. H. Auden, "Foreword," John Ashbery, *Some Trees* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1956), 15–16.

11. Frank O'Hara, "Rare Modern," *SS* 76–78.

12. Kenneth Koch, *Selected Poems, 1950–1982* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 37–43.

13. Peter Stitt, "The Art of Poetry XXXIII: John Ashbery," *Paris Review* 25 (1983): 57.

14. Andrew Ross, "Taking the Tennis Court Oath," in *The Tribe of John: Ashbery and Contemporary Poetry*, Susan M. Schultz (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 205.

15. Ford, *John Ashbery in Conversation*, 44.

16. Fred Moramarco, "Coming Full Circle: John Ashbery's Later Poetry," in *Tribe*, 41–42.

17. Richard Kostelanetz, *The Old Poetries and the New* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 99.

18. Richard Howard, *Alone with America: Essays on the Art of Poetry in the United States since 1950* (New York: Atheneum, 1980), 33.

19. David Bromwich, *Skeptical Music: Essays on Modern Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 192.

20. Ibid. 200.

21. Ibid. 201.

22. Shoptaw, *On the Outside Looking Out*, 14.

23. Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997), 99; hereafter *CPP*.

24. Bromwich, *Skeptical Music*, 25.

25. Stevens, *CPP* 99.

26. For the connection between professionalism and abstraction in Greenberg, see Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 62–64.

27. Cited in Kostelanetz, *Old Poetries and the New*, 99.

28. Ibid. 100.

29. In a revealing discussion of Ashbery's "Invisible Avant-Garde" and O'Hara's "Personism" as examples of what he calls the "neo-avant-garde manifesto," Mark Silverberg likewise describes O'Hara's style as "a form that implies incomparable presence (voice, self, personality), but at the same time by foregrounding its own artifice . . . subverts a readerly/consumerist desire for well-packaged, well marketed presence (à la Ginsberg)" ("Ashbery, O'Hara and The Neo-Avant-Garde Manifesto," *Arizona Quarterly* 59.1 [Spring 2003]: 161).

30. *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960*, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1960). In "The *New American Poetry* Revisited, Again" (*Contemporary Literature* 39:2 [Summer 1998]: 180–211), Alan Golding gives a fine-grained account of the political maneuverings among poetic grouplets as Allen's volume took shape.

31. From "City Midnight Junk Strains," Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems, 1947–1997* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 465–67. On O'Hara's friendship with Ginsberg, see Brad Gooch, *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), 317–19.

32. Not surprisingly, "Fresh Air" is one of the three poems by Koch included in *The New American Poetry*.

33. Deborah Nelson, *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 53.

34. Robert Lowell, *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, ed. Saskia Hamilton (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 343.

35. Nelson, *Pursuing Privacy*, 44, 46.

36. Robert Lowell, *Life Studies and For the Union Dead* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987), 89–90.

37. Cf. Nelson: "Lowell's stylistic breakthrough cannot be disentangled from his self-conscious violations of the WASP regard for personal privacy" (*Pursuing Privacy*, 45); "while Lowell's sense of his family's place in history and their impending displacement from it everywhere mark the autobiographical prose . . . *Life Studies* takes great pains to rob his name of its luster" (ibid. 46). See also Langdon Hammer's account of Allen Tate's repudiation of the Lowell of *Life Studies*: stung that Lowell had jettisoned the principled formalism that marked him as Tate's disciple, Tate went so far as to claim "that the loosening of Lowell's prosodic structures and his immersion in family history" were merely symptoms of the latter's psychosis (*Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993], 225).

38. In *From Outlaw to Classic*, Alan Golding discusses John Berryman's oedipal struggle against Eliot in terms of the younger poet's attempts to bring what he called "personality" back into poetic fashion. "Berryman," Golding writes, "returns consistently, almost obsessively, to this point," stating in one interview, for example, his "'strong disagreement with Eliot's line—the impersonality of poetry . . .; it seems to me on the contrary that poetry comes out of personality'" (Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American* Poetry [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995], 67), and in another, exclaiming, in the course of comparing his own *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* to "The Waste Land," "'Narrative! Let's have narrative, and at least one dominant personality, and no fragmentation!'" (ibid. 66).

39. Ashbery presents his impersonal style as a mere matter of disposition in a 1977 interview with Sue Gangel reprinted in *Poets on Their Work*, ed. Joe David Bellamy (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984). Asked by Gangel, "How do you feel your poetry describes your life?" Ashbery replies, "My biography doesn't come into my poetry very much. This is something which many readers find disturbing, since they expect poets to write about their lives, their suffering, their history. My own autobiography has never interested me very much. Whenever I try to think about it, I seem to draw a complete blank" (10).

40. David Herd, *John Ashbery and American Poetry* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), 35.

41. Alvin Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 87.

42. Ibid. 28.

43. George W. S. Trow, *Within the Context of No Context* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997).

44. Gouldner, *Future of Intellectuals*, 29.

45. Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate*, 15–16.

46. Hugh Kenner, *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 98, 114.

47. Ibid. 104; his emphasis.

48. Herd, *John Ashbery and American Poetry*, 163.

49. Richard Stamelman, "Critical Reflections: Poetry and Art Criticism in Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,'" *New Literary History* 15.3 (Spring 1984): 607–30; Lee Edelman, "The Pose of Imposture: Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,'" *Twentieth Century Literature* 32.1 (Spring 1986): 95–114.

50. Barbara K. Fischer, *Museum Mediations: Reframing Ekphrasis in Contemporary American Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 78. Fischer acknowledges Stamelman's and Edelman's essays on "Self-Portrait" in the notes to her chapter on Ashbery (200 n. 17).

51. Ashbery's "Pantoum" and O'Hara's 1955 "Joseph Cornell" were the first poems to be dedicated to the artist, but certainly not the last. Ashton's decision to include a section of such poems (by Ashbery, Stanley Kunitz, Richard Howard, and Octavio Paz [together with a translation by Elizabeth Bishop]) in her monograph seems to have kicked the phenomenon into high gear; since the mid-1970s, dozens of writers have published "Cornell poems." The dreamy prose poems that make up Charles Simic's *Dime-Store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell* (New York: Ecco, 1992) are perhaps the strongest contributions so far to this burgeoning subgenre. Jonathan Safran Foer has edited a more uneven volume, *A Convergence of Birds: Original Fiction and Poetry Inspired by the Work of Joseph Cornell* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2001), whose wide-ranging list of contributors nonetheless shows how far the phenomenon has spread. This literature also includes at least one pulp fiction: William Gibson's *Count Zero* (New York: Arbor House, 1986), in which forged Cornells set the art dealer heroine on the trail of the Cornell of the future.

52. Fischer, *Museum Meditations*, 90.

53. For an earlier, much less melancholy take on this trope, see "Death Paints a Picture," a poem co-authored by Ashbery and Koch for a special section of the September 1958 issue of *ArtNews* titled "Poets on Painting." As far as I know, Fischer is the first critic to

mention this poem, a nice find for those interested in the connections between the New York School poets and the visual arts. Fischer discusses some of the differences between Ashbery and Koch's piece, each line of which features the word "statue" and the name of a famous, or semi-famous, figure from fiction or history, and the more conventional ekphrastic efforts of the other two poets featured in the *ArtNews* section, Louise Bogan and Hayden Carruth. Here too, though, Fischer fails to note the degree to which the poem is shaped by Ashbery and Koch's sense of themselves as art-world insiders. Not only, as I suggest above, does the mere mention of "statues" mark them as dissenters from Greenbergian orthodoxy, the title is also an inside joke, signaling the poets' familiarity with a regular *ArtNews* column titled "—Paints a Picture." Each writer of this column detailed a given artist's progress on a particular painting over the course of a studio visit; the September 1958 "Paints a Picture" article is by Ashbery and Koch's friend James Schuyler.

54. I discuss this remark in chapter 3.

55. Edelman, "Pose of Imposture," 107.

56. Ibid. 108.

57. Ibid. 109.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. See Ashbery's editor Mark Ford's note to the poem, *JACP* 1019.

61. Ford, *John Ashbery in Conversation*, 51.

62. Moramarco, "Coming Full Circle," 41; "messy grab bag" from Ross Labrie, "John Ashbery: An Interview with Ross Labrie," *American Poetry Review* 13.3 (May/June 1984). Moramarco claims that *The Vermont Notebook* was composed immediately before *Self-Portrait* ("Coming Full Circle," 41), but Shoptaw, whose work draws on extensive interviews with Ashbery, says that it was written afterwards (*On the Outside Looking Out*, 14).

63. Shoptaw, *On the Outside Looking Out*, 16.

64. Cited in Constance M. Lewallen, "Acts of Generosity," Constance M. Lewallen, with John Ashbery and Carter Ratcliff, *Joe Brainard: A Retrospective* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley Art Museum, and New York: Granary Books, in association with Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California, San Diego, 2001), 36.

65. David Herd, "John Ashbery in Conversation," *PN Review* 21.1 (September/October 1994): 37.

66. Stevens, *CPP* 99.

67. Lewallen, "Acts of Generosity," 99.

68. See Nathan Kernan's introductory essay to *Joe Brainard: The Erotic Work* (New York: Tibor de Nagy Gallery and Z Press, 2007; unpaginated).

69. Lewallen, "Acts of Generosity," 1.

70. Bromwich, *Skeptical Music*, 196.

71. For an account of the Ashbery-Simpson contratemps, see Herd, *John Ashbery and American Poetry*, 93–96. J. W. Hughes's characterization of Ashbery as "the Doris Day of modernist poetry" is cited in Ford, *John Ashbery in Conversation*, 149.

72. Bromwich, *Skeptical Music*, 191.

73. Ibid. 198.

74. Stevens, *CPP* 185.

75. Sweet, *Savage Sight/Constructed Noise*, 239–40.

76. In "A Muse in the Room, or Poets are Poor" (*Art Journal* 52.4 [Winter 1993]: 67–69) poet and art critic Raphael Rubenstein assesses the state of relations between poetry and painting before and after the transitional moment marked by "'And *Ut Pictura Poesis*'," as epitomized by two 1990 panel discussions on the relations between poetry and painting, one featuring Koch, Ashbery, Jane Frielicher, and Larry Rivers, moderated by poet Ron Padgett, the other poets Robert Creeley and Jorie Graham and painters Brice Marden and Eric Fischl, moderated by philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto. The New York School poets and painters reminisce affectionately about the days of their closest collaboration and friendship, although Koch does observe that "the 'problem for the poet is that painters are always so busy, they have to sell everything they do'" (68). By contrast, poets and painters seem much more "self-contained," as Danto remarks (68), on the other panel, which (the presence of Creeley notwithstanding) exemplifies the late-modern situation in which the artists have moved deeper into the world of money and, says Fischl, "'poets are poor, and when you go out to restaurants . . .' The sentence trails away," reports Rubenstein, "but the insinuation is that in such a life, poets are automatically excluded." The poets' distance from the painters is further exacerbated, Rubenstein notes, by the "dispersal of poets, and writers generally, to the academic archipelago" (69).

77. John Tranter, "John Ashbery Interviewed by John Tranter, May 1988," *Jacket* (January 2, 1998) <http://jacketmagazine.com/02/jaiv1988.html>.

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