

THE PAINTED WIVES CLUB
IDENTITIES DEFERRED IN MODERNIST SPOUSAL PORTRAITURE

by

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The Painted Wives Club: Identities Deferred in Modernist Spousal Portraiture

Thesis directed by Professor Marilyn Brown

Through a social and historical examination of three modernist portraits of women—Paul Cézanne’s *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress*, Henri Matisse’s *The Red Madras Headdress*, and Pablo Picasso’s *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*—this study aims to address the ways in which specific social constructions, in this case the role of “wife,” inform and limit the privilege of interpretation. Positing portraiture as a social discourse, I examine European, and more specifically French, portraiture since the Renaissance, including its prescriptions for the depictions of femininity. In historical portraits of women, their individuality and identities were deferred in favor of the successful representation of their beauty and availability. Though modernism ostensibly broke with the stylistic requirements of historical portraiture, the identity of the sitter/wife was still deferred according to masculinist paradigms of power. This deferral persists in contemporary scholarship, and this project identifies and interrogates the underlying social structures that shape these ongoing deferrals.

For my parents, who never take enough credit,

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In Pablo Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (1905-6, Metropolitan Museum of Art, figure 1), the figure of the American writer seems to possess an autonomous authority, with its monumental slouch and "primitive" mask-like face: her gaze has focus and her earthen-colored form weight. By contrast, Hortense Fiquet Cézanne seems downright awkward as she heels slightly to the right in an unstable space, fidgeting with the flower in her lap in Paul Cézanne's *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress* (1888-90, Metropolitan Museum of Art, figure 2). In Henri Matisse's *The Red Madras Headdress* (1907, The Barnes Foundation, figure 3), Amélie Parayre Matisse might be read as more flirtatious than focused, with the casual drape of her left wrist and the tilt of her head, surrounded by volumetrically flattened, simplified, and bold color patterns. Overall, among these three images, the tone and composition of *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* lends Picasso's work a gravity lacking in the portraits of Cézanne and Matisse's respective wives.

The default mode of inquiry in the traditional as well as modernist practice of art history was to return consistently to the primacy of the artist and the work of art as an autonomous entity unto itself.¹ This is the case in the formal analysis above. Ostensibly, the only source of information used in the description is what is visibly available to the formally trained eye, whose authority is indeed derived from its formal training and the implicit understanding that all valuable evidence may be found in the image itself. But whose eye is this, and how did it come to be trained? What exactly are the parameters of the authority it assigns to an image?

¹ See, for instance, the work of Clement Greenberg.

In truth, the formal visual analysis privileged by traditional and modernist art history is not somehow “purer” for its exclusive focus on the image, or even on the life of the artist who created it. Such analysis rests on disturbing naturalizations: social systems of power determine who gets to view images, analyze them, and arbitrate their meaning, all the while seeming to be business as usual. However, the viewer can never exist in a social vacuum, and neither can the work of art or the artist. Viewer, art, and artist all inhabit complex webs of social hierarchies, naturalized assumptions, and paradigms of power. To ignore these valuable contexts is to strongly and critically limit any analysis, and more troublingly, to perhaps participate in the perpetuation of such limitations.

For in fact, there is nothing intrinsic in Stein’s portrait that could account for her perceived difference. “Formal” elements may often be tracked back to the social systems in which they were derived. For instance, the visual impression of Stein’s authority may stem from her pose, which is typically reserved for masculine portraits, such as Ingres’ iconic image of Louis François Bertin (1832, Musée du Louvre, figure 4). Stein’s authority is therefore not simply visual, but linked to visual expressions of masculine privilege in social hierarchies. Furthermore, Stein’s historical legacy as an artistic agent in her own right shapes the informed viewer’s expectations, reception, and interpretations of her portrait: if one *looks* for authority, one is more likely to find it. Artistic agents, whom history (problematically) genders in the masculine, are interpretively privileged. By contrast, a sitter’s identity is often considered irrelevant or meaningless if the historically recorded role she inhabits is “wife,” most especially wife to the artist. Though Gertrude Stein was in a way wife to Alice B. Toklas and lifelong creative partner to Picasso, the heteronormative role of “wife” is not one we typically assign to

her, and it is precisely this role that obscures the identities of Hortense Fiquet Cézanne and Amélie Parayre Matisse in their portraits.

Designating the sitter in the role of wife historically dismisses the necessity of her identity, even in her own portrait: she becomes more prop than person, a vessel through which the artist's style or "genius" is expressed and read. This phenomenon cannot be explained by viewing the image exclusively as art object. Instead, we must examine images, especially portraits, *as* social constructions and *as representations* of social constructions in order to identify the naturalized discourses that have shaped both the creation and our study of art. As it is, traditional and modernist art history has no language with which to be critical of itself as social practice. Only when we become aware of art and its study as a social activity can we begin to see the elisions and omissions that gendered social hierarchies have produced. Moreover, we might begin to examine areas of study previously overlooked as unimportant or beyond the purview of the discipline and, in doing so, begin to ask different critical questions. This study, which is strongly based in social and historicized readings, asks how a woman's socially constructed role of wife causes her identity to be elided in both artistic practice and art historical scholarship.

My argument here rests on the feminist insistence that the hierarchies and systems of power present in a given society are in no way natural, but instead are culturally constructed.² The idea of "construction" is particularly useful here, since it connotes many small and purposefully shaped components coming together in coordinated support of a larger artifice. In this study, I imagine dominant social paradigms as the larger artifice: a system, made of many parts, that seeks to authorize the power of some over others, such that those in power may

² Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, introduction to *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Post Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 1.

regulate the codes and values of a larger society. These codes and values necessarily validate and reinforce the power of those who assert them in the first place, and often, such power is built on the subordination of difference. For instance, and of great importance to my analysis, the masculinist social paradigm of nineteenth century Republican France was contingent upon the disenfranchisement and circumscription of women. Furthermore, this paradigm was built upon manifold contributing discourses, all of which—as legs to a stool—support the larger ideology: medicine, philosophy, political rhetoric, and art are all social discourses that abide by and reproduce the codes of the paradigm they support. Clearly, the relationship between the dominant paradigm of power and its supporting social discourses is tautologous: without the constructing elements, the artifice would not stand, and without the artifice, the constructing elements would be meaningless.

Framed in this way, I approach portraiture in this study as a constructive social discourse. Though the specific paradigms of power would change in their details, I would argue that European portraiture has supported and reproduced masculinist social structures since the sixteenth century. In chapter two, I provide a general history and brief theorization of portraiture since its reemergence in the Renaissance, at all times understanding the genre through a social lens. Central to the portrait was the necessity of illusionistic likeness, though likeness itself was not an uncomplicated quality; it demanded the elision of the artist's presence and was obliged to bend to the needs of flattery. As Marcia Pointon notes in her scholarship, the portrait also functioned to regulate and codify the visual expression of social codes, which would be legible to its original viewing audience and communicate important values and mores.³ Furthermore, the social coding of the feminine, through ornamentation, beauty, and transparent availability, was

³ See Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

remarkably consistent across time and culture in portraiture, and these attributes in many ways came to stand in for a woman's individuality or identity, which were themselves deferred. This chapter is strongly indebted to Joanna Woodall and Malcolm Warner's scholarship on portraiture, and especially Susan Sidlauskas' trenchant chapter, "Not-Beautiful: A Counter-Theme in the History of Women's Portraiture."⁴

Chapter three narrows the area of focus from European portraiture generally to a specific time and place. This socio-historical context is essential in order to understand the precise systems of power and gendered hierarchies that portraiture reproduced and in which it participated. As the crux of my analysis is an examination of the social role of the bourgeois housewife in fin-de-siècle France (and since both Cézanne and Matisse were arguably members of the bourgeoisie), I account for the construction of this role from the Enlightenment to the turn of the twentieth century. During the Enlightenment, science, medicine, and philosophy reformulated the terms of sexual difference, such that men and women's bodies—and therefore their "natural" place and role in society—were incommensurable; Robert Nye's work on French masculinity of the same period illuminates the interarticulation of these multiple discourses exceptionally well.⁵ The doctrine of separate spheres, which I address critically through the work of Elizabeth Wilson, and the sanctity of motherhood were endorsed by French revolutionaries, ratified in the Napoleonic code, and incorporated into the social systems of the rising bourgeoisie.⁶ In fact, the persistent and stridently maintained role of the bourgeois housewife might be attributed to perceived threats to the social order, which escalated as the

⁴ See Joanna Woodall, introduction to *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) and Malcolm Warner, "Portraits about Portraiture," in *The Mirror & the Mask: Portraiture in the Age of Picasso*, ed. Paloma Alarcó and Malcolm Warner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁵ See Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶ See Elizabeth Wilson, "The Invisible *Flâneur*," in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

nineteenth century progressed. As French bourgeois masculinity came increasingly under fire, the role of the housewife was one of the last means to consolidate the existing order.

In chapter four, having provided both the general history of portraiture and the specific socio-historical context of nineteenth century Republican France, I examine the implications of modernist portraiture's "break" with the historical genre. With the advent of modernism, the traditional elision of the artist was abandoned, as was illusionistic likeness. Instead, the artist's own agency and the surface of the painted canvas were prioritized. Since likeness and social coding were no longer of concern to modernist artists (or, if they were, they were concerns of subversive potential), portraiture no longer contributed to the construction of the dominant social paradigm. It was, effectively, a discourse gone rogue, and its departure seemed to threaten the authority of the paradigm which it had abandoned. As John Klein notes: "The genre of portraiture itself seemed to be under attack, and by implication, the class of people who had their portraits painted."⁷ This was particularly evident in portraits of women, whose demanded beauty and accessibility were denied in the stylistic language of modernism.⁸ However, I argue that though modernist portraiture broke with society as a constructing discourse, it still participated in and was accountable to gendered social systems, so that women's identities were still deferred in modernist portraits.

Chapter five returns specifically to the three modernist portraits at the heart of my study: *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress*, *The Red Madras Headdress*, and *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*. In keeping with the theme of modernism, the subjects of each painting—Hortense Fiquet Cézanne, Amèlie Parayre Matisse, and Gertrude Stein—are to a certain degree stylistically abstracted or removed from their individuality, but of the greatest interest to me is how

⁷ John Klein, *Matisse Portraits* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 76.

⁸ See my discussion of Tamar Garb in chapter 3.

contemporary scholarship on these works often continues the process of deferral. In their respective examinations of *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress* and *The Red Madras Headdress*, Susan Sidlauskas and John Klein consistently privilege the agency of the artist/husband over his sitter/wife. Their analyses provide little social contextualization to account for these wives' subordination to their husbands, and moreover, by not accounting for this subordination, they show the persistence of the same gender hierarchies in the contemporary practice of art history. By comparing Sidlauskas' *Cézanne's Other: The Portraits of Hortense* and John Klein's *Matisse Portraits* to Robert S. Lubar's "Unmasking Pablo's Gertrude: Queer Desire and the Subject of Portraiture," I hope to illustrate how the latter article's interpretation is strengthened through its strong social contextualization. More specifically, I show that without an acknowledgement and examination of portraiture as a social activity and discourse, critical avenues are foreclosed and some subjects of portraits continue to remain interpretively invisible.

The studies critiqued here are not the only works that deal with these three paintings; on the contrary, these images are canonical, and many scholars have analyzed them in the century or more since their creation. However, Sidlauskas' and Klein's studies are especially important to my examination because they are exceptionally thoughtful and because they seek to address previous studies' omissions (this is especially true of Sidlauskas). This is essential to my analysis, because I understand my own contribution as digging even deeper to address more systemic, disciplinary problems through the use of academic case studies. If even these works inadvertently perpetuate gender hierarchies in the study of art history, there seems to be a larger problem in our core methods.

My own analysis, including the images I discuss, are circumscribed by my objective to interrogate social constructions that apply to canonical, painted representations of middle-class,

white European women in fin-de-siècle France. These historical social constructions were largely framed in heteronormative terms, and therefore while I examine constructions of masculinity and femininity, it is beyond the scope of my study to interrogate that binary directly.⁹ I also work within an understanding of “identity” as being an individual’s conception of self, which, of course, is socially informed and performed. Clearly, this analysis excludes more than it includes, but I believe that the critical methods I identify here have use outside of the study of modernist portraiture. Intersectionality is key: these sitters are subordinated by multiple gendered discourses, and therefore we must examine the ways in which they are multiply elided. In other words, subordinating social discourses have a greater potential to be naturalized if they are layered and mutually constitutive. We might use this method, then, to examine the effect of social constructions on the study of almost any representation of an individual who is subordinated in a dominant paradigm.

For my own work, the issue ultimately returns to finding the language to ask the most responsible questions of our material. By understanding portraiture through a social lens, I hope to address selective invisibilities—that is, why some women are absented in their own portraits—to understand better how systems of power inform the ways that we see.

⁹ The exception here is my specific examination of Gertrude Stein’s performed sexual and gender identities. See chapter five.

Chapter 2

European Portraiture since the Sixteenth Century

As a genre of artistic production, portraiture—perhaps more than any other genre—sits at a complex intersection of expectations and requirements: the necessity of likeness, the negotiation of the artist's presence, the demand for both realism and flattery, and the visual production of an individual's social identity, among others. This chapter will address all of these factors but focuses primarily on the last: it is essential to recognize that portraiture cannot be understood as an artistic practice in isolation from a broader social context. Indeed, portraiture is intimately enmeshed with both the production of individual social identity and the perpetuation of larger social systems. This is particularly pertinent as it concerns portraits of women, whose identity, as we shall see, is in many cases secondary to the successful visual representation of their gender.

Full of contradictions and historically dismissed as a lesser artistic genre, portraiture is a contentious subject. In its most basic definition, portraiture concerns the visual representation of a person or persons.¹⁰ These representations, however, must abide by the social and artistic doctrines of their time and culture; there is no consistent style that universally characterizes portraiture. Instead, from the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century in Europe, what typifies portraiture is not the style in which an image is produced, but what the image itself aims to produce: a convincing likeness, which is coded with readable indications of personal and social character.

¹⁰ For further definitions, please see Woodall, McPherson, or Brilliant.

Portraiture: Parameters and Requirements

Though the practice of creating portraits has been extant in the visual record since the fifth century BCE in Greece, the reemergence of portraiture in the Renaissance set the precedent for the genre for roughly the next three hundred years.¹¹ The genre's reemergence is strongly linked to the rise of Humanism in Europe: the philosophical power of human agency could be expressed in a portrait, visually specifying that agency to a unique individual. This agency, though, was strongly coded as both masculine and affluent. As Joanna Woodall notes: "More precisely, the early fifteenth century saw the adoption of intensely illusionistic, closely observed facial likenesses, including idiosyncrasies and imperfections, to represent elite figures, including artists themselves."¹² Portraiture, in terms of contemporary philosophy and actual attainability, was by no means democratic.

The illusionistic likeness to which Woodall refers was to remain one of the central expectations of portraiture until the beginning of the twentieth century, but likeness was also the means of portraiture's denigration in traditional artistic hierarchies. The realism of a mimetic portrait seemed to preclude any creativity or invention on the artist's part.¹³ The portrait, therefore, fell well below biblical, mythological, or historicizing images by academic estimations. Viewed from a different perspective, it is an impressive artistic feat for the artist's presence to be so thoroughly elided that the only identity readily available for consumption is the

¹¹ Francisco Calvo Serraller, "The Spirit Behind the Mask," in *The Mirror & the Mask: Portraiture in the Age of Picasso*, ed. Paloma Alarcó and Malcolm Warner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 3.

¹² Woodall, 1.

¹³ Joanna Woodall (*Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, 5), Malcolm Warner ("Portraits about Portraiture," 17), and Susan Sidlauskas (*Cézanne's Other: The Portraits of Hortense*, 9) all comment on the historical necessity of the portraitist's elision, but David Summers differentiates between *ritrarre*, "the transcription of appearances" and *imitare*, "reality perfected by art." (Summers, 279). In *imitare*, the artist's presence is detectable in the act of "perfecting." In this specific case, Summers uses Michelangelo as an example, but Michelangelo may not be a useful example of a portraitist, though, for his reputation then and canonicity now virtually preclude the possibility of his elision.

sitter's.¹⁴ Though superficially counterintuitive, it could be argued that transparency itself is a form of virtuosity.

The perceived realism of portraiture, and the artist's supposed lack of imaginative intervention, traditionally lends the portrait the authority of a faithful document. John Klein finds this authority even in the word itself: "Portrait—'pour trait'—carries the connotation of exact copying after an object ('trait pour trait'). This etymology is the basis of nearly all definitions of the portrait."¹⁵ A portrait's convincing mimesis of its subject gives the image what Klein elsewhere refers to as "truth value."¹⁶ Likeness, then, which is only one part of a portrait, gives credibility to the portrait's other elements, such as social signifiers; truth value spreads by association.

The value of likeness is indicative of one of portraiture's central goals, as well as one of its fundamental dialectics. Woodall comments: "The desire which lies at the heart of naturalistic portraiture is to overcome separation: to render a subject distant in time, space, spirit, eternally present. It assumed that a 'good' likeness will perpetually unite the identities to which it refers."¹⁷ The truth value of a portrait might therefore be measured, at least in part, by how effectively it overcomes literal or metaphorical distance between a portrait and its sitter. However, a portrait can never overcome this distance completely. As Richard Brilliant points out: "Even the notion of *likeness* itself presupposes some degree of difference between the things compared, otherwise they would be identical and no question of likeness would arise."¹⁸ Unlike Pygmalion's Galatea in the myth, a portrait will never become its referent. The inherent distance

¹⁴ See Warner, 17.

¹⁵ John Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 3.

¹⁶ John Klein, "The Mask as Image and Strategy," in *The Mirror & the Mask: Portraiture in the Age of Picasso*, ed. Paloma Alarcó and Malcolm Warner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 25.

¹⁷ Woodall, 8.

¹⁸ Richard Brilliant, "Editor's Statement: Portraits: The limitations of Likeness," *Art Journal* 46, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 171.

between the portrait and the portrayed reveals the instability at the heart of realism, especially as it relates to the representation of an individual.

The demands of likeness do not stop at straightforward physical resemblance. Instead, as Heather McPherson notes: “From the Renaissance on it has been widely assumed that a portrait ought to convey more than mere physical likeness, that it should also possess a moral or psychological dimension.”¹⁹ Many scholars have observed that a portrait was historically expected to evoke not only the appearance of the individual, but also some essential element of his or her character. Precisely what this “character” was, however, and how it was expressed varies significantly across time and culture. For instance, in the early modern period, the character of the sitter was indicated by accoutrements and setting, which could be read and translated by a contemporary viewer into qualities or attributes. Later, such accoutrements were replaced by emotional expression and physiognomy, which, as Woodall observes, “was predicated upon a ‘symptomatic’ relationship between external appearance and an invisible, internal self.”²⁰ What we might deduce is that expectation of duality—between physical likeness and some additional element of identity—is historically consistent in portraiture.²¹ However, the valuable elements of identity, which merit representation in a portrait, vary across time and culture, and the successful representation of character, soul, or psychology might be measured by its legibility to its contemporary audience. Duality, though, regardless of its component parts, contains the potential for tension. As Francisco Calvo Serraller remarks: “The idea that a pretty face is not always the mirror of the soul presents us with the whole drama of the issue together in one sentence: the lurking contradiction between the exterior and the interior of a human being,

¹⁹ Heather McPherson, *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.

²⁰ Woodall, 7.

²¹ Woodall tracks dualism historically to both the Protestant Reformation and René Descartes; for a more detailed discussion, see Woodall, 10.

between the ineluctable body and the adventitious soul.”²² Among external appearance, internal life, and the representations that aim to capture both, the possibility of duplicity is ever-present.

In addition to the loftier, dialectical concerns of copies versus originals and body versus soul, portraiture is complicated by more mundane concerns and foibles as well. In spite of the ostensible value of realism in a portrait, likeness in practice is a relative virtue. Malcolm Warner comments: “In the eyes of the sitter and his or her loved ones, the good likeness normally had to be a feel-good likeness, one that flattered as much as possible short of implausibility. Portraiture dealt... with actual living people and their vanity.”²³ The artist therefore managed two potentially conflicting tasks in the creation of a portrait: to persuasively and simultaneously conjure and flatter an individual. If an artist was under commission or in the service of a royal court, the successful resolution of likeness and flattery was professionally crucial. Furthermore, the manner of depiction had to coincide with socially prescribed visual codes. As Woodall observes: “Recognized positions, such as the high-ranking cleric, the military leader, the prince, the scholar and the beautiful woman, became associated with distinctive portrait formats, attributes and even pictorial languages.”²⁴ Likeness functioned *within* a specific visual context, which was defined by the social.

McPherson astutely summarizes the complex and at times contradictory nature of portraiture: “Ultimately, the portrait must be perceived in dialectical terms as occupying the spaces between art and society, fact and fiction, surface and underlying ‘truth’.”²⁵ These competing factors do not exist in equilibrium, but instead shift in importance and meaning with each successive cultural formulation of “the portrait.” It is important to keep in mind, though,

²² Serraller, 3.

²³ Warner, 11.

²⁴ Woodall, 2.

²⁵ McPherson, 8.

that these dialectics, perceived as purely oppositional and mutually exclusive, are in fact intricately interwoven with one another, and in many cases, portraiture is the medium in which the mutual construction of art and society is most evident.

Portraiture and/as Social Construction

What we take for granted when we refer to portraiture as the representation of a person or persons is the idea that any person could be an autonomous and static entity. Allison Blizzard, for example, has noted that portraiture is dependent upon a culture's conception of the self, and Marcia Pointon argues that "the self is historically specific."²⁶ Both the individual represented and the representation itself are products of historically located social systems. Consequently, as Pointon asserts: "The portrait has no unproblematic referent; it cannot be explained as a correlative to the text of a subject's life."²⁷ Instead, the self, the portrait, and social systems are mutually constitutive of one another. In fact, Klein interprets portraiture as a social transaction, in which character is produced; by this theory, the portrait does not "capture" character or soul in likeness, but actually creates it as a social act.²⁸

Neither a portrait nor an individual can be separated from the social context in which they are created. As a result, it is imperative to move beyond isolated interpretations and identifications, since the portrait is not a self-contained artifact. Pointon states plainly: "It is necessary not only to look closely at individual portraits but also to excavate portraiture as a

²⁶ Allison Blizzard, *Portraits of the 20th Century Self: An Interartistic Study of Gertrude Stein's Literary Portraits and Early Modern Portraits by Paul Cézanne, Paul Matisse and Pablo Picasso*, vol. 406 of *Anglo-Saxon Language and Literature XIV* (Fankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), 33; Pointon, 1.

²⁷ Pointon, 4.

²⁸ Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 7.

system, as a shaping and defining mechanism in terms of class, rank, and gender.”²⁹

Representation, especially in portraiture, is not simply an inert mirror reflection of a society.

Rather, it is a form of regulation, organization, and identity: an image is created according to the codes of a culture or nation, and in turn that image reinforces and supplements those codes

visually.³⁰ Norms and values, when represented, perpetuate themselves back within the culture.

One need only think of national portrait galleries as an example: individuals who were considered agents in the formation of national identity come to represent, almost synecdochally,

that very identity.³¹ Portrait and culture therefore relate to one another in a sort of positive

feedback loop. Pointon agrees: “The relationship between portraiture and the age is thus a

tautologous one.”³² When viewed in this fashion, it becomes easier to see the ways in which a

portrait may be read not just in terms of likeness at an individual level, but for visually coded

social norms and mores, data which allow the viewer to place the individual in a larger social

context and understand how “social groups and individuals (collectively and individually)

represent themselves to themselves.”³³

As discussed above, the naturalism expected of portraiture elides the identity of the artist, such that a portrait is imagined as a faithful (moreover, “true”) representation of reality. The

believable likeness of the individual thus authorizes the believability of other signifiers also

present in the portrait. For instance, a convincing likeness of a king may lend an element of

realism to the suit of armor he wears, even if that king had never been involved in military

action. Taken at an individual level, such naturalism might to a certain extent suspend the

disbelief of a viewer concerning a sitter’s character or attributes. On a broader social level,

²⁹ Pointon, 4.

³⁰ Ibid., 4.

³¹ Woodall, 5.

³² Pointon, 8.

³³ McPherson, 7; Pointon, 4.

realism naturalizes the cultural coding present in portraits; that is, the concrete, realistic visualization of social norms gives those norms the authority of truth. Therefore, the armor of the king signifies his own military power (whether this power is factual or fictive), and simultaneously functions to bolster his authority according to a cultural language in which masculinity and martial prowess are highly valued. At the same time, this cultural language is reinforced and solidified through the realism of its representation. Realism in portraiture therefore naturalizes and enhances discourses and production of socio-cultural power. In this way, portraiture itself must be understood as a dynamic social discourse.

Portraiture and the Construction of Femininity

Up to this point, we have spoken very generally about the theories and social functions of portraiture. However, portraiture as a social discourse does not describe and prescribe a uniform cultural code for an entire population. Instead, cultural codes are visually articulated in very particular ways for certain social groups—as Woodall observes, the way in which an individual was depicted was specific to his or her position.³⁴ This position was qualified by many factors, including race, gender, wealth, and social status. The focus of this section is portraits of middle- to upper-class French women since the Renaissance, and how these portraits may be read for the social signifiers that indicate women’s socio-cultural roles and the expectations to which they were subject.³⁵ These social signifiers, however, were not simply visual texts to be read, but

³⁴ Woodall, 2.

³⁵ These class boundaries are, however, more fluid than their labels would suggest, particularly in terms of representation. For instance, aristocratic representation strategies were often adopted (even co-opted) by members of lower social strata. For more on this topic, specifically in the case of Rococo use of cosmetics, see Melissa Hyde, “The ‘Makeup’ of the Marquise: Boucher’s Portrait of Pompadour at her Toilette,” *Art Bulletin* 82, no. 3 (September 2000): 453-475.

worked reflexively to construct a specifically classed and raced feminine identity. Ironically, a portrait's successful representation and coding of a woman's femininity came to stand in for her individual identity.

The social roles and expectations of women in Europe were not perfectly consistent across almost three hundred years of artistic production. However, there are certain thematic, rather than stylistic, consistencies that qualify not only portraits of women, but also their social roles across numerous times and cultures. Gender-indicative ornaments, beauty, and the ability to please or seduce are all generally present—and strongly interarticulated—in canonical portraits of women. To understand these elements as a consequence of femininity is to misunderstand portraiture's formative role in the construction of the feminine: ornaments, beauty, and seduction are not indications or consequences of the feminine, but rather the constitutive elements of the European formulation of femininity itself. The successful demonstration of female identity depended on the execution of these social codes. Therefore, it becomes clear how portraiture as a *visual* social discourse produces and naturalizes the formulation of ideal femininity, according to the stylistic requirements of a time and culture.

One way to indicate femininity was to show not just female physiology, but to display a coded inventory of objects as well, which singularly or more often in conjunction indicated the securely feminine gender of the sitter with whom they were associated.³⁶ For instance, certain accessories carry gender significance. In Boucher's image of *Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour* (1750, Harvard Art Museum/Fogg Art Museum, figure 5), there is a preponderance of trinkets: brushes, ribbons, elaborate cosmetic containers, jewelry, and a mirror. The mirror in particular refers to the supposed vanity of women, a visual trope present in many

³⁶ Susan Sidlauskas, *Cézanne's Other: The Portraits of Hortense* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 17.

images of Venus. Also present in the image is a small bouquet of flowers, which have an exceptionally long Euro-Christian tradition of signifying the feminine and romantic desire.³⁷ . These elements are artfully strewn on the Marquise de Pompadour's imagined vanity: the ribbons crumple and trail loosely, and the lid of her powder pot balances precariously on its edge.³⁸ Again, the realism of the image naturalizes it: the accessories show casual use, and indicate that they are part of womanly practice. In actual fact, though, the accessories are not a consequence of femininity but part of femininity's very construction.

Flowers and mirrors are coded objects, which function as signifiers of the feminine. A broader and more fraught signifier is the idea of beauty. As Susan Sidlauskas accurately comments: "Beauty has been implicated in the portraiture of women since the origin of the portrait."³⁹ Beauty is not simply a fortunate trait in a female sitter, but is strongly bound to the very formulation of the feminine: as likeness is expected of portraiture, beauty is expected of women. This goes beyond even the flattery of Warner's "feel-good likeness" and into the very cultural construction of what it means to be a woman at all. This demand of beauty has manifold consequences. Sidlauskas elucidates one: "The stubborn expectation that women, when portrayed, *should* be beautiful has profoundly affected the way their portraits have been imagined, produced, and received."⁴⁰ What Sidlauskas reveals here is that beauty is not an inherent and inert quality, which is passively appreciated, but is in fact a stigmatizing

³⁷ James M. Córdoba, *The Art of Professing in Bourbon Mexico* (Austin, University of Texas Press), 75-6. Córdoba elaborates on the specific significance and meanings of specific types of flowers (lilies, carnations, roses, etc.) in his third chapter, "Euro-Christian Precedents in the Crowned-Nun Image."

³⁸ For further discussion of this image and an alternative reading of the Marquise's cosmetics, see conclusion.

³⁹ Susan Sidlauskas, "Not-Beautiful: A Counter-Theme in the History of Women's Portraiture," in *Re-framing Representations of Women: Figuring, Fashioning, Portraiture, and Telling in the 'Picturing' Women Project*, ed. Susan Shifrin (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 181.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 184.

expectation: the presence or absence of beauty changes the way an image is seen and the way the female sitter is judged.⁴¹

For a woman, it was not enough to be of sufficient affluence to afford to have her portrait created. Instead, beauty above all else was “historically the arbiter as to whether a woman was worthy of being painted.”⁴² As a result, supposedly unattractive women of stature were visually reimagined and reinterpreted in such a way that either emphasized attractive qualities or made them up entirely.⁴³ Sidlauskas uses John Singer Sargent’s *Portrait of Isabella Stewart Gardner* (1888, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, figure 6) as the perfect example of this phenomenon because, as she notes, Gardner’s supposed homeliness was one of her most famous attributes, along with her money.⁴⁴ Therefore, in order to create a “satisfying” portrait of his patroness, Sargent blurs Gardner’s face and uses ornament, posture, and background to emphasize the appealing smallness of her waist. This example demonstrates plainly how a woman’s beauty was of greater consequence than her wealth or social status; this might be contrasted most pointedly with portraits of men, whose physical flaws were less damnable in light of position or resources.⁴⁵ Clearly, beauty was of paramount importance to a woman’s representation and social value.

Naturalism, as well, functions differently in portraits of women from portraits of men. While the realistic depiction of the sitter was still valued (though, in women, sometimes creatively mediated to stave off the accusation of ugliness), the value of naturalistic representation was not limited to convincing mimesis of a female individual. Instead, such

⁴¹ Ibid., 184.

⁴² Ibid., 192.

⁴³ Ibid., 183-4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 188.

⁴⁵ There are, of course, exceptions to this trend. For a fascinating discussion, see Susan Sidlauskas’ “Not-Beautiful: A Counter-Theme in the History of Women’s Portraiture.”

naturalism in many ways functioned to persuade the viewer of likeness *and* availability. After all, beauty is not a self-contained quality, but rather a quality to be consumed by a (heterosexual male) viewer.⁴⁶ Essential to this consumption was illusionistic transparency: through the occlusion of “the disjunction between paint and flesh,” the distance between the painted woman and her living referent was minimized, as was the distance between the male viewer and the attractive object of his gaze. As a consequence of this gaze and the dialectical distance inherent in portraiture, Tamar Garb points out: “[The] viewer was suspended in the state of heightened and deferred pleasure that goes by the name of desire.”⁴⁷ Both the woman and her portrait, then, were expected to elicit this desire—to seduce—not only with their beauty but through pose, gesture, and expression. Returning briefly to Boucher’s image, we see that Madame de Pompadour lightly grasps her beauty implements and addresses the viewer’s gaze frontally and openly, her gestures and expression generally passive. She does not seem to confront, but to invite, both gaze and desire.

It is absolutely essential at this juncture to emphasize that it is not necessarily the Marquise de Pompadour who invites, but her socially dictated representation: here the elision between an individual and her culturally regulated image can become very dangerous in assigning universal seductive agency to women who have been represented. This is especially important considering the often contradictory expectations of women: while they were expected to seduce, they were also expected to remain modest and generally chaste. How were women meant to meet these contradictory demands? The answer to this question remains unclear, but

⁴⁶ As noted in chapter one, we are functioning within a strongly heteronormative discourse, which is unfortunately necessary when speaking broadly of the history of portraiture as a dominant and governing social discourse. It is also beyond the current purview of this study to go into depth regarding the theorizing of the male gaze; for more on this subject, please see Griselda Pollock, “The Male Gaze,” in *Gender: The Key Concepts*, ed. Mary Evans and Carolyn Williams (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁴⁷ Tamar Garb, *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France 1814-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 145.

the question itself underscores the distance between portrait and sitter, ideal social construction and society in practice.

Since beauty was considered an essential characteristic of a woman's representation, and even of her very identity *as* a woman, it is perhaps unsurprising that a woman's identity as an individual was secondary to the secure representation of her femininity. Ironically, feminine identity obscures individual identity. Sidlauskas observes of beauty in particular: "Beauty can be a limited, pre-emptive category—in painting as well as life—and can foreclose searching and sustained acts of seeing."⁴⁸ In other words, if the expectation of beauty is met, if she pleases and invites, a woman has effectively succeeded in demonstrating her gender: no further analysis is deemed necessary. This is not to say that men are not expected to demonstrate their gender as well. Rather, the point is that the visual expression of masculinity authorizes a man's individuality and the representation of his unique character. Conversely, the visual expression of femininity—through ornaments, beauty, and seduction—forecloses the search for a woman's character, as her (supposedly) most essential characteristics are already evident. While some resemblance to the female sitter is necessary (it would not do for Boucher's image not to at least resemble the Marquise de Pompadour), likeness in portraits of women is of less importance than the sitter's secure gendering as feminine. It would seem, then, that beauty's foreclosure of analysis may be symptomatic of the social construction of the feminine: the overdetermination of femininity through secure visual codes seemingly renders a woman's identity moot.

Clearly, portraiture cannot be understood as an art form in isolation, nor can it be understood as a simple matter of likeness captured. Since its reemergence in the Renaissance, Western portraits have played a significant role in the visualization of social structures, both representing them and simultaneously constructing them. As Pointon perceptively argues, there

⁴⁸ Sidlauskas, "Not-Beautiful," 184.

is a tautologous relationship between an age and the portraits it produces.⁴⁹ This point is especially important when we examine portraits of women: that women's femininity was valued over their individuality is a *social* phenomenon, expressed in the visual medium of portraiture. Therefore, in the study of portraiture it is essential to place the portrait in the specific social and historical context of its creation, in order to understand the ways in which social forces manifest themselves in an image.

⁴⁹ Pointon, 8.

Chapter 3

Fin-de-Siècle France and Femininity

As stated in the preceding chapter, portraiture does not exist in a vacuum; it is a social discourse through which social roles and identity have been visualized and constructed since the sixteenth century in Europe. This time frame, however, is exceptionally broad, and while it is necessary to acknowledge portraiture as a social discourse in general, it is also imperative to place it in historically specific context alongside the manifold other governing social discourses of a particular period in history. In doing so, we deny the idea that the genre is ahistorical and specify its discursive agency. It is negligent to examine modernist portraits of women (and more specifically, wives) without first accounting for the contextually relevant social constructions to which those women and wives, partially through their portraits, were held accountable. Beauty, though paramount, was only one of these constructions, and the purpose of this chapter is to contextualize portraits of bourgeois women within the socio-political discourses of nineteenth-century France.

In any examination of bourgeois femininity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in France, the concept of “separate spheres” will inevitably arise. Recent feminist scholarship has contested that the acceptance of the binary division of the female and male, private and public, ignores essential historical instabilities and contradictions within the very system that sought such clean divisions. Elizabeth Wilson, for example, criticizes the work of Griselda Pollock and Janet Wolff who, she argues, though intensely critical from a feminist standpoint, implicitly accept the ideological construction of separate spheres as it is.⁵⁰ Moreover,

⁵⁰ See Griselda Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,” in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York, NY: Icon Editions, 1992); and Janet Wolff, “The

Wilson takes aim at Wolff for drawing a strange distinction between ideology and reality, and thereby implying that the two have to do with one another very little, if at all. In doing so, Williams observes: “Ideology thus becomes a rigid and monolithic monument of thought.”⁵¹ Wilson argues further: “This approach is unhelpful to the political cause of feminism, since it creates such an all-powerful and seamless ideological system ranged against women, and one upon which they can never make an impact.”⁵²

While I agree with Wilson that an artificial division should not be drawn between ideology and reality, I would venture a slightly different interpretation, in the middle-ground between Wolff and Wilson.⁵³ It is not my intention to leave the categories of public and private unquestioned; there are, of course, inconsistencies in the system that are valuable to examine. However, it does seem irresponsible to discount the idea of separate spheres entirely; it was, after all, a very powerful governing ideology of the nineteenth century in France. I would argue that the strict construction and regulation of the “separate spheres,” rather than existing somehow separately from reality in practice, was an ideological means of regulating shifting social forces, which endangered the existing social order and threatened those whose dominance was dependent upon it. Neither purely ideology nor purely social practice, the doctrine of separate spheres was the means by which dominant social paradigms sought to consolidate themselves against what they perceived as the undermining forces of modernity, urbanization, and feminism. The issue, therefore, is not to understand ideology and reality as mutually exclusive or absolute, but to read the one through the other and discover how both ideological and practiced systems of

Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity,” in *The Polity Reader in Cultural Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994). For further critical views of the doctrine of separate spheres, see also Ruth Iskin, “Selling, Seduction, and Soliciting the Eye: Manet’s *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*,” in *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁵¹ Wilson, 66.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁵³ Though exceptionally insightful, some of Wilson’s rereadings do seem in some cases extreme.

power interacted. In this way, it is possible to acknowledge and utilize “separate spheres” without endorsing them or leaving them undisputed. In this chapter, I assert that the increasing rigidity and strict legislation of such a doctrine in fact belies its instability and, when studying bourgeois femininity, can be read subversively for signs of its potential weakness.

Codifying Sexual Difference

Like portraiture, bourgeois femininity was not an isolated phenomenon. Rather, it was the result of more than two hundred years of political, medical, and social discourses and negotiations. These machinations, working in accordance with a masculinist agenda to support dominant social ideologies, effectively elided the concept of middle-class femininity with the role of “housewife.” This role existed in a dense social matrix, which included masculinity, national identity, Revolution, socio-economics, and modernity. Robert Nye argues of masculinity in particular: “Because French culture in this period continued to conceptualize male and female as a binary opposition, women are always in the field of focus as the ‘other’ sex with which male sexual identity was in a persistent state of complementary equilibrium.”⁵⁴ I would extend Nye’s idea of equilibrium beyond the binary of male and female to argue that the role of the housewife existed in an uneasy equilibrium with many forces and factors, and that the conscientious construction of the housewife’s role not only regulated femininity, but was also meant to regulate and bolster a diverse inventory of social constructions.

The role of the bourgeois housewife in late nineteenth century France tracks its origins to the intertwined medical and political discourses of the Enlightenment, particularly the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, concerning the separation of genders into “spheres.” However,

⁵⁴ Nye, 7.

Rousseau's gendered spheres were not original to the eighteenth century. Claire Goldberg Moses points out that French social patterns drew from strongly patriarchal traditions, including Greco-Latin, Judaic, and Germanic.⁵⁵ James F. McMillan adds: "In this regard, the eighteenth century was the inheritor of a misogynistic tradition which had come down from the ancient and medieval worlds and which, in a body of texts about women (all of them written by men), defined women as 'other' and affirmed their subordination."⁵⁶ An official doctrine of scientifically supported patriarchal social structures therefore had fertile ideological ground in which to grow in the eighteenth century in France.

During the Enlightenment, the terms of separate spheres and women's subordination were formulated in a novel way. Previously, women's bodies were seen as physiologically similar (if inferior) to men's bodies. Additionally, women were seen as the inheritors of Eve's sin, therefore their subordinate gender status was in large part informed by Judeo-Christian ideology.⁵⁷ In the Enlightenment, however, as faith was ostensibly replaced with science, women's bodies were reformulated as being fundamentally distinct from men's, almost as though they were another species entirely. Nye observes: "In both anatomical structure and physiological function, medicine in the late eighteenth century substituted a regime of sexual 'incommensurability' for the older metaphysics of hierarchy in which women were merely lesser, unperfected versions of men."⁵⁸ This shift provided an anatomical basis for the social prescriptions of perceived sexual difference.

⁵⁵ Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 1.

⁵⁶ James F. McMillan, *France and Women 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁸ Nye, 51.

Scientific and medical opinion also asserted that the human body was governed by “vital forces,” in which an individual had a zero-sum system of energies in his or her body.⁵⁹ As women’s physiological difference was strongly based in their reproductive capacity, their vital forces were therefore viewed as primarily occupied in their reproductive organs. Women’s brains and bodies were consequently thought weak due to the constant use of their vital energies in reproduction.⁶⁰ As a result of this perceived weakness, it was thought to be necessary to sequester women to the safety of the home: their “natural” weakness therefore designated their “natural” domain. As Nye suggests: “In a system where form and function were in such direct relation, it is easy to understand how strong ideological inclinations could shape acceptable ‘natural’ explanations of women’s place in society and their relation to men.”⁶¹ In this way, Michelle Perrot asserts that biological sex became a social marker, and “the uterus defined the place of women in society.”⁶²

Clearly, the medical discourses of the Enlightenment had broader implications than simply those in biology. Especially where the role of the housewife was concerned, medical discourse served to naturalize political discourse, and each mutually reinforced the other to the point of being inextricable. One of the best examples of this intimate inseparability is the work of Rousseau.⁶³ Rousseau argued strongly for the freedom of men, but simultaneously advocated the subordination of women: “This was so because Rousseau had discovered that women’s sexual capacity was considerably greater than that of men. Though they are the weaker sex, lascivious women could dominate and exhaust men by sexual manipulations, thereby reversing

⁵⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁶¹ Ibid., 52.

⁶² Michelle Perrot, ed., and Arthur Goldhammer, trans., *From the Fires of the Revolution to the Great War*, vol. 4 of *A History of Private Life* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1990), 44.

⁶³ Nye, 48.

the ‘natural’ relations of power.”⁶⁴ This was particularly true if women were allowed to participate in public activities, such as politics, outside of their “natural” domain. It was believed that violations of this social (read: gender) order had in the past caused disaster. As McMillan notes, Marie-Antoinette was held up as an infamous example of what would happen if women were not kept away from politics, safely within the home.⁶⁵ This gender rhetoric was enthusiastically employed by the French Revolutionaries, who saw themselves as heirs of Rousseau and the Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century.⁶⁶

National/Family Order and Republican Mothers

Charles Sowerwine, in his chapter “Revising the Sexual Contract: Women’s Citizenship and Republicanism in France, 1789-1944,” argues persuasively that the citizen, who became the basic organizing unit of the French Revolution, was gendered specifically as masculine. This is poignantly ironic, by today’s standards, given the fact that the revolution was based on supposedly egalitarian principles and that there were indeed women on the barricades in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, as Nye observes: “...In the parlance of the day, citizens played ‘active’ roles in the commonwealth and citizenesses ‘passive’ ones, a distinction which reflected and justified a male monopoly on political rights in the early stages of the Revolution.”⁶⁷

Although the revolutionaries wished to dismantle the dominant political system, the dominant gender relations did not just remain in place but were actively maintained. This did not mean that women were excluded entirely from the newly imagined order, but that their contributions

⁶⁴ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁵ McMillan, 27.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁷ Nye, 53.

were necessarily set in the social terms of separate spheres: their republican work must be done in their “natural” domain. They were, theoretically, the guardians of republicanism in the home. McMillan points out: “Though they should not themselves be active citizens, they were the mothers of future citizens. They had a duty to be patriot mothers, instilling in their children a love of country and rewarding their patriot husbands for their efforts in the struggle to build the new order.”⁶⁸ As Sowerwine notes, Rousseau and his later political inheritors imagined this Republican Motherhood as a satisfactory compensation for women, in exchange for their exclusion from public life.⁶⁹ In spite of republican rhetoric, it is important to realize that women’s contributions as Republican Mothers were by no means considered equal to the public work of men. Though Alexandre Dumas *observed* that motherhood was a woman’s patriotism, a woman’s patriotism was never as highly valued as a man’s.⁷⁰

Oddly, the separate spheres, which were based on both medical and political constructions of women as inferior or subordinate, were conceived within a rhetoric of complementarity.⁷¹ Karen Offen observes: “The family ideal envisioned by the Solidarist republicans was composed of two mutually complementary (and ostensibly equivalent) spheres... The political analogy they liked to invoke was that of the minister of foreign affairs and the minister of the interior.”⁷² This theoretical equality (“separate but equal” comes to mind;

⁶⁸ McMillan, 29.

⁶⁹ Charles Sowerwine, “Revising the Sexual Contract: Women’s Citizenship and Republicanism in France, 1789-1944,” in *Confronting Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle France: Bodies, Minds and Gender*, ed. Christopher E. Forth and Elinor Accampo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2010), 22.

⁷⁰ Dumas, quoted in Karen Offen, “Feminism, Antifeminism, and National Family Politics in Early Third Republic France,” in *Connecting Spheres: European Women in a Globalizing World, 1500 to Present*, ed. Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert (New York: Oxford, 2000), 209.

⁷¹ Though most scholarship on the nineteenth century uses the word ‘complementarity’ (see Nye and Offen, for example), Latin American scholarship often applies the concept of parallelism as well, denoting parallel lines of authority held by men and women, similarly to the ideological conception of separate spheres (Kellogg, 7). I use complementarity here to remain consistent with other nineteenth century scholars’ usage. For more on parallelism, please see Susan Kellogg’s introduction (particularly page 7) to *Weaving the Past: A History of Latin America’s Indigenous Women from the Prehispanic Period to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁷² Offen, 209.

a fraught concept in any context) seems to contradict the doctrine of women's supposed inferiority. It is possible that this complementarity is in fact evidence of slippage, an uneasiness concerning the disenfranchisement of women from the public sphere, though contemporary politicians would scarcely have phrased it thus. There is, especially in the construction of the Republican Mother, the possibility of female agency, and thus a rhetoric had to be constructed to simultaneously appease and contain a potentially powerful female segment of the French population. Though complementarity is best understood as applied in principle, rather than practice, the very necessity of this rhetoric is telling insofar as it indicates how solid its informing gender ideology was *not*. As Nye astutely comments: "We are thus reminded that the doctrine of 'the separate spheres' was an ideological construct designed to conceal the weakness of male claims to a monopoly of power."⁷³

Though touted as a system of complementarity, the separate spheres were in fact not so neatly separate, and the balance of power often, though not surprisingly, came down in favor of men. Complementarity in practice was strongly subordinated to ongoing systems of patriarchy. After the fall of the monarchy in France, the king's patriarchy—in which French citizens were formulated as his children—was destroyed, and the citizen became theoretically an equal in a "band of brothers" in the fraternity of the Republic.⁷⁴ Clearly, there was no place for women in such a gendered design. Moreover, the only remaining domain of the patriarch was now the home. Even within the home, though, the patriarch was threatened by shifting politics that could potentially undermine his authority. Political decrees regarding marriage, adoption, and divorce intruded into the home. Perrot remarks: "Public authority was now taking an active part in the

⁷³ Nye, 49.

⁷⁴ Sowerwine, 21.

formation of the family.”⁷⁵ To bolster the destabilized *paterfamilias*, then, the role of the housewife had to be further consolidated and solidified: her rigid subservience guarded his claim to authority. Women’s subordination was codified into law with the Napoleonic Civil Code of 1804. Though the code was ostensibly libertarian, it was strongly based in the patriarchal model and, some scholars suppose, Napoleon’s own misogynistic leanings.⁷⁶

As the nineteenth century progressed, it became clear that any threat to the social or gender order, which was legally codified and socially enforced, was perceived as a threat to the nation. Jean Elisabeth Pedersen examines how these practices played out, using the stage and theater as a gauge for the acceptable level of dramatic deviance stage wives were allowed. She notes, for instance, that in Paul Hervieu’s play, *Les tenailles* (1895), the female protagonist reveals her infidelity to her husband and her son’s paternity in a dramatic denouement, much to the audience’s pleasure.⁷⁷ By contrast, in Henrik Ibsen’s *Doll House* (1879), the female protagonist leaves her husband and children to pursue her own dreams and identity. Her departure, with the stage direction of a door slamming shut, was greeted with chilly disapproval.⁷⁸ Pedersen observes: “Her actions provoked so much discomfort that Ibsen’s contemporaries regularly rewrote the ending or provided their own reconciling sequels to the play.”⁷⁹ It would seem, then, that while infidelity was not a mortal sin on the stage, motherhood in fiction, performance, and life was non-negotiable. The subsequent accusation that such abandonment was the result of the values of a “Germanic” playwright (Ibsen was in fact

⁷⁵ Perrot 29. See also Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (New York: Pantheon, 1979), especially chapter three: “Government through the Family,” for his discussion of the uneasy alignment between patriarchal and governmental control and responsibility.

⁷⁶ McMillan, 36-7.

⁷⁷ Jean Elisabeth Pedersen, introduction to *Legislating the French Family: Feminism, Theater, and Republican Politics, 1870-1920* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003): 53.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

Norwegian) only further solidified the link between the social and the nation: French motherhood was not only a social role but also a significant part of national identity.

During Napoleon's reign and after, the bourgeoisie came to occupy the roles of the political elite vacated by the aristocracy following the Revolution. The bourgeoisie, more than any other social group, tied its socio-economic destiny to the fate of the nation, and it therefore rigidly reinforced the (gender) norms of the previous generations.⁸⁰ By the Third Republic late in the century, the chaos of the Revolution was being blamed retroactively on (at least in part) the outrageous presence of women in public (*citoyennes*) and on the barricades, similar to the way that Marie-Antoinette's public presence had been blamed for the faults of the monarchy. Furthermore, models of femininity were inseparable from the rising class consciousness that characterized the bourgeoisie, "who sought to substitute their own middle-class values for the aristocratic codes which had governed conduct and social relations in the past."⁸¹

Family and patriarchy were the central organizing principle of the bourgeois social order. Motherhood was still essential to the class identity, but for unique reasons. Nye points out: "Because their fortunes were dependent not simply upon inheritance, but viable and talented *inheritors*, there was much more at stake in marriages and reproduction for bourgeois families than there had been for Old Regime nobles."⁸² Motherhood was therefore implicated in the survival of not only the family but also the class order: through her reproductive and nurturing functions, she would produce competent heirs, as Republican mothers had been expected to produce good republicans. To further ensure social and economic legacies, arranged marriages were common, and, as she had been since the Enlightenment, a woman's role in a marriage was to perform her duties as a mother and subordinate keeper of the hearth above all else.

⁸⁰ Nye, 72.

⁸¹ McMillan, 44.

⁸² Nye, 9.

Masculinity at Risk

The consistent subordination of women and the continuity of the housewife's role owe much to the perceived threats to masculinity in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Complementarity, as discussed previously, was conceived in rhetorical terms, but the practice of it remained flawed, in part due to the ongoing instability of men's claim to power, especially during times of great political upheaval.⁸³ The threats increased as the nineteenth century continued. Feminism, for instance, which was present from the time of the Revolution, began to gain ground. Feminists rejected the idea of female inferiority as a natural phenomenon, arguing instead that it was culturally constructed, and simultaneously endorsed better education for women.⁸⁴ Reformers even reappropriated the principle of motherhood. Offen observes: "They argued for women's rights based squarely on women's claims on the nation as mothers of its citizens. This was not an argument that men in power could overlook."⁸⁵ However, Offen also points out that even the demand for equality based on dominant social rhetoric was rejected: "Antifeminist men... were not ready to admit a partnership of equals; in their view of the world, if men were not in charge, women would be 'on top.'"⁸⁶ Such an absolutist approach was increasingly under fire, especially during the Third Republic, in which freedom of press and freedom of association were restored, and feminists had stronger and more public methods by which to advocate their cause.⁸⁷

⁸³ See Nye.

⁸⁴ Karen Offen, "Is the 'Woman Question' Really the 'Man Problem'?" in *Confronting Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle France: Bodies, Minds and Gender*, ed. Christopher E. Forth and Elinor Accampo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 44.

⁸⁵ Offen, "Feminism, Antifeminism, and National Family Politics," 209.

⁸⁶ Offen, "Woman Question," 46.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

Critics of feminism asserted that the movement was fundamentally un-French, an “import from England and America,” in spite of the fact that feminism’s ideological language was based almost entirely on French principles of egalitarianism and used French Revolutionary rhetoric.⁸⁸ The most potent accusation against feminism was that it threatened the sanctity of the family, since women fighting for rights (publically, no less) could not be tending to their duties in the home.⁸⁹ This point was dramatically supplemented with the critical assertion that indifferent (read: feminist) mothers led to high infant mortality.⁹⁰ In addition, the rise of industrialization led many women to seek employment outside of the home, creating the necessity for outsourced childcare.⁹¹ Critics framed feminism as potentially catastrophic to the existing cultural order and indeed national identity: if women were no longer confined within the home or obliged as mothers, society threatened to break down completely.

Another domestic menace—both in the sense of the home and within the nation—was the ongoing campaign for divorce. Interestingly, feminists and antifeminists fell on both sides of the debate. On the one hand, reformers such as the Margueritte brothers invoked the language of the Revolution to do away with the sanctity of Catholic marriage and to offer marriage rights to both men and women equally.⁹² At the same time, however, “even secular figures worried that legalizing divorce at the will of one partner [divorce by mutual consent] could amount to giving husbands a dangerous right, a right to repudiate their wives at will.”⁹³ In either case, the existence of the debate itself again shined a political light onto the previously sanctified inner workings of the home, and men’s patriarchal authority was again displaced by public debate.

⁸⁸ Offen, “Feminism, Antifeminism, and National Family Politics,” 208.

⁸⁹ While the political climate of nineteenth-century France (especially the Revolution) was ostensibly secular, I believe that the religious charge of such language as “sacred” or “sanctity” accurately captures the fervor with which the institution of the home was defended.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁹² Pedersen, 64.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 66.

Threats to French masculinity emerged from outside of France as well. In 1870, the French were soundly defeated in the Franco-Prussian War. This defeat paved the way for Germany's first steps towards becoming a unified state, and for the first time in memory, France had to adjust its perception of not only itself, but also the power of its enemies abroad.⁹⁴ The French sought the reason for their military defeat and found it in their nation's depopulation: birthrate was linked to a nation's vitality, and France's birthrate was declining rapidly.⁹⁵ More importantly, the rate of marriage was not declining, therefore the issue seemed to be marital fertility, one of the primary missions of a bourgeois union.⁹⁶ Since medically men were believed to bring active fertilization to the reproductive act, men's fertility was implicated and French masculinity impugned.

These internal and external factors were further enhanced by the encroachment of modernity. The romantic Western ideal of a martial, adventurous, masculine hero, which had been in cultural circulation since the Middle Ages, was increasingly at odds with the reality of life in an urban, industrialized nation.⁹⁷ Christopher Forth argues that the rise of sedentary and cerebral professions eroded traditional bases of male power, effectively feminizing the nation's elite. A popular medical diagnosis for bourgeois business men in the late nineteenth century was neurasthenia: essentially succumbing to nervous exhaustion, men's minds were overworked and frenetically stimulated from their business dealings and urban life.⁹⁸ Interestingly, women were traditionally more often associated with this nervous affliction. A housewife was tasked to remain in her home to avoid the excitements that would elicit such an episode, while

⁹⁴ Nye, 78.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁹⁷ Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 11-12.

⁹⁸ Joyce Henri Robinson, "'Hi Honey, I'm Home': Weary (Neurasthenic) Business Men and the Formulation of a Serenely Modern Aesthetic," in *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 99.

simultaneously providing a serene and restful retreat for her husband, who potentially suffered from the same condition. Nervous exhaustion and a need for domestic peace hardly seem in keeping with the role of the dominant patriarch: modernity seemed to force him into the supposedly female realm. By contrast, women were in fact venturing outside of the home more and more, into the semi-public venues of cafes, boulevards, and stores, which catered to the growth of spectacle and commodity in bourgeois culture.⁹⁹ The divisions of gender, space, and spheres were thus increasingly blurred.

The lack of activity and physical strength, and the loss of dominance in both home and in public, resulted in a crisis of secure gender identity for men. Men perceived their degeneracy as physical, moral, and spiritual. Forth notes: “In many cases, masculinity was explicitly cast as being more of a personal project than an anatomical guarantee, the cumulative effect of the everyday measures one took to maintain health, willpower, and character.”¹⁰⁰ A significant blow to this active pursuit of the masculine was the scandal of the Dreyfus affair, which expanded localized anxieties of masculinity to national proportions: Dreyfus, a soldier and therefore supposedly a paragon of manhood, had (it was accused) acted dishonorably and therefore not performed his gender acceptably.¹⁰¹ That Dreyfus was Jewish only fueled anxiety further, as race, class, nation, and gender were interarticulated in what Forth terms “the crisis of French manhood.”¹⁰² Unsurprisingly, then, masculinity needed to bolster its instability with the firm consolidation of the feminine: the more men’s roles (and their masculinity as a consequence) changed, the more women’s needed to remain the same to maintain the dominant social paradigm.

⁹⁹ Wilson, 63.

¹⁰⁰ Forth, 9.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰² See Forth.

Through the Enlightenment, the Revolution, the Napoleonic era, and into the Republican modernity of the late nineteenth century, the construction of French middle-class feminine identity was remarkably consistent. It would be inaccurate, however, to equate consistency with stability. The role of the bourgeois housewife was meticulously built on mutually naturalizing discourses of disenfranchisement. However, this construction was so ardently maintained exactly because its own instability, as well as the instability of national, economic, and masculine discourses, which all contributed to the formation of the role of housewife. In a way, the ongoing importance of the housewife might be seen in direct proportion to the cultural volatility that characterized much of the nineteenth century. Ironically, for a nation so invested in its masculinity, it seems that the last bastion and stronghold of French identity is in fact the supposedly subordinate role of the bourgeois housewife.

Chapter 4

Modernist Portraiture

Thus far we have examined portraiture as one social discourse among many, which contributed to the construction of femininity, specifically in nineteenth-century French bourgeois culture. During this time, portraiture's goals were in keeping with the broader social discourses of femininity: both beauty and the strongly prescribed role of the bourgeois housewife essentially sought to foreclose the necessity of individual female identity or agency. In other words, a woman's supposed social function—the expectations she met and the duties she performed—met the requirements of identity, and her individuality was perceived to be of little to no importance. As discussed in the preceding chapter, constructions of French bourgeois femininity bolstered bourgeois masculinity, which was increasingly destabilized towards the end of the nineteenth century. These instabilities were by no means resolved as the twentieth century approached, and instead, modernism dealt it another significant blow when modernist portraiture broke with the accepted social function of the portrait. This shift in the priorities of the genre removed a significant social discourse from supporting the dominant cultural ideologies, and unsurprisingly, this had profound consequences for not only how portraits were understood in relation to the social body, but also how portraits of women were perceived. Because modernism seemed to impugn the very social structures which it had traditionally supported, modernist portraiture was expelled as a constructing discourse of the French bourgeoisie. However, though they were no longer socially constructive, we may read modernist portraits of women as proof that modernism still participated in gendered hegemonies, and that the male artist continued to enjoy the privileges of a masculinist paradigm.

The “Subvertible” Genre

There is disagreement among scholars as to the identity of the specific “founder” of modernism. Clement Greenberg, for instance, asserts: “Manet’s paintings became the first Modernist ones by virtue of the frankness with which they declared the surfaces on which they were painted.”¹⁰³ Tamar Garb argues in contrast: “It was Cézanne... whose work came to be identified with a revolutionary reconfiguration of the relationship between body and space, subject and object, figure and ground.”¹⁰⁴ Sidlauskas, as well, argues that the break occurred with Cézanne, though William Rubin claims the credit for Picasso.¹⁰⁵ Regardless of whose work or style brought about what we now know as modernism, it seems generally clear that modernism is understood as an artistic about-face; words such as “revolution” or “break” are often employed to describe modernism’s relationship to the artistic traditions from which it sprung. It is also generally agreed upon that modernism began sometime in the mid- to late-nineteenth century in France. Interestingly, many scholars (including Sidlauskas and Rubin) find evidence of the most profound modernist “break” in the genre of portraiture. Though modernism would influence artistic production from still lives to architecture and beyond, it is in portraiture that modernism’s innovations are exceptionally clear.

As discussed previously, European portraits from the Renaissance to the advent of modernism had strong thematic commonalities, expressed in varying styles. Mimetic likeness of

¹⁰³ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 6.

¹⁰⁴ Garb, 152.

¹⁰⁵ Sidlauskas, *Cézanne’s Other*, 8; William Rubin, “Reflections on Picasso and Portraiture,” in *Picasso and Portraiture: Representation and Transformation*, ed. William Rubin (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996), 16.

an individual was a central tenet of portraiture: it was through likeness that the sitter was evoked and made present, while the artist's identity was elided in the supposed transparency and "truth value" of naturalism. Complicating likeness, however, was the necessity for flattery and the need for the sitter's representation to abide by the formats and visual codes dictated by his or her social position. Through these visual codes, portraiture bolstered and reproduced systems of socio-cultural value and power. In essence, the genre functioned as a means of representing and constructing identity: external and internal, individual and social. Necessarily, then, changes in a society's understanding of identity and the individual would have a significant impact on portraiture as both an artistic and a social discourse.

The crisis of nineteenth century French masculinity was indicative of a broader phenomenon of uncertainty brought about by the tumultuous and radical conditions of modernity. Under these shifting circumstances, it is unsurprising that the concept of identity would become unmoored as well. As with masculinity specifically, identity generally came to be viewed more as "situational and performed" than "innate and static."¹⁰⁶ This instability and fluctuation had substantial ramifications for an artistic genre built around identity, resulting in a "fundamental shift in the representative function of the modern portrait."¹⁰⁷ Closely bound in mutual construction, the ontological crisis of nineteenth century identity became an ontological crisis for portraiture as well.¹⁰⁸

The primacy of the sitter's identity in traditional portraiture was expressed visually through likeness and the transparency of naturalism, which occluded the presence of the artist. However, as Malcolm Warner observes: "The attitude most characteristic of the modern portraitist—arising perhaps from doubts about identity as an integral and fixed thing, perhaps

¹⁰⁶ Klein, "The Mask as Image and Strategy," 27.

¹⁰⁷ McPherson, 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

from a lack of interest in other people's souls—has been that to delve into the sitter's inner being is either impossible or not especially desirable."¹⁰⁹ Portraiture's historical priorities, then, are inverted: mimetic likeness is no longer valued as evoking both exterior and interior character, and the sitter is no longer presented transparently. Instead, the artist's presence is asserted in the opacity of the work's surface and materiality. As Garb notes: "Where transparency presupposes the occlusion of the subjectivity of the artist... opacity inscribes the artist's presence in the fabric and facture of the painted surface."¹¹⁰ The artist is now a visible agent who, once as transparent as the illusionistic picture plane, is inescapable in the materiality of the paint on the canvas. As a result, and in keeping with the newly perceived instability of identity, the line between the artist and the sitter as discreet entities becomes unclear, and the depiction of a distinct inner self becomes unimportant, and moreover, impossible.¹¹¹

Though modernists discarded transparency and mimesis, they had no interest in discarding portraiture as a genre. On the contrary, as Warner suggests: "For artists looking to challenge the conventions of representation in art, what better arena could there be than portraiture, which for most people was all about likeness? It was the most subvertible of the genres."¹¹² The previously indispensable visual demands of portraiture were no longer imperative, and were instead issues "on which to take a position," ideas with which to work.¹¹³ The artist's agency and self-expression, therefore, were now privileged above the accepted codes of representation, and by extension, above the social codes those representations were meant to supplement and uphold. A very concrete example of this stylistic inversion and social subversion was Henri Matisse's controversial exhibition of the portrait of his wife, entitled *La*

¹⁰⁹ Warner, 18.

¹¹⁰ Garb, 151.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 151; Woodall, 7.

¹¹² Warner, 11-12.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 11, 14.

Femme au chapeau (1905, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, figure 7) at the third Salon d'Automne. The outrage with which this portrait was received was based not only on the artist's Fauvist use of extreme color and facture, but also more importantly on the fact that he used these disruptive techniques in a genre in which the bourgeoisie had invested a significant portion of their identity: the essential signifiers of class and gender were denied in favor of the artist's own style. According to Klein: "Thus, through the portrait and its exhibition Matisse had not only taken on a genre deeply ingrained with social meaning, he had also used the occasion to assert the artist's freedom of self-expression."¹¹⁴ Effectively, as Warner observes, modernist portraiture had ceased to toe the social line, and subsequent art history and collecting practices have observed and adjusted to this break. Warner comments: "With only some rare exceptions, collectors and museums think of [modernist portraits] as works of art first and likeness second (or not at all), and display them in ways that make sense as art history rather than dynastic or social history."¹¹⁵ The move from the national portrait gallery to the art museum is especially telling, as this indicates that portraiture could no longer be depended upon to represent and reinforce national or cultural identity, and therefore jeopardized its own status as a social discourse.

Beauty Lost in Translation

Warner remarks of modernists' use of portraiture: "When artists couched a painting or sculpture in portraitlike form, or merely used a title containing the word 'Portrait,' they could count on

¹¹⁴ Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 149.

¹¹⁵ Warner, 17.

firm expectations on the part of the viewer and flout them to effect.”¹¹⁶ These expectations were never firmer than they were in portraits of women. As noted before, many of the primary gender roles associated with femininity were strongly tied to the visual; consequently, portraiture was one of the crucial discourses that contributed to the social construction of the feminine. In traditional portraiture, a woman’s femininity was coded through gendered objects and her beauty, which was transparently available—through both the woman’s seductive gesture and expression, and the naturalism of the depiction—for consumption by a male viewer. Modernist portraiture largely abandoned these codes, a move which had significant consequences for the genre and femininity.

Beauty is an abstract concept, and, like portraiture, varies in its style across time and culture. However, in its most basic and Western definition, beauty is the combination of visual qualities that are aesthetically pleasing. As we have seen, this aesthetic pleasure is inextricable from its availability to the viewer, and modernism denies both. Coded accessories, typical beauty, and illusionistic transparency, previously fundamental to a portrait of a woman, are summarily dismissed. Compare, for instance, Ingres’ *Portrait of Madame Moitessier Sitting* (1856, National Gallery, London, figure 8) to Cézanne’s *Woman with Green Hat (Madame Cézanne)* (1891-2, The Barnes Foundation, figure 9). Madame Moitessier gazes calmly at the viewer and leans comfortably in a pink brocade chaise lounge, which contrasts the bold floral pattern of her dress. She rests the index finger of her right hand casually against her temple, and holds a folded fan loosely in her left. Another Orientalized, paddle-like fan balances against the vase at her right. Her skin is smoothly white and her features rounded with delicate chiaroscuro. Her jewelry—bracelets, a ring, and a long necklace—are ornate, as is the enormous, gold framed mirror behind her, in which she (especially the expanse of her bare shoulders) is reflected.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 11-12.

Interestingly, Sarah Betzer reads into this image Ingres' own struggle between portraiture and history paintings, noting how Madame Moitessier's features have been generalized towards monumentality and modeled on a classical image of Arcadia.¹¹⁷ Moreover, Betzer notes that the mirror in which Moitessier is reflected is a method by which Ingres denies portraiture's insistent contemporaneity and "freezes" the image into timelessness.¹¹⁸ What is of interest here, though, are the contemporaneous details on the near side of the mirror to which Ingres grudgingly yields, since this image was in fact a portrait of a living woman. All of these details—the dress, the jewelry, the accessories, and the crowd of *objects d'art*—assertively code Madame Moitessier in the feminine, according to Second Empire bourgeois prescriptions of femininity.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, in spite of the monumental idealization of Madame Moitessier herself, Ingres still renders her as beautiful, and the image itself is naturalistically transparent. It seems, then, that in spite of Ingres' concerns with the historical genre, his concessions to portraiture abide by the demands of traditional portraits of women: Madame Moitessier may be idealized and in some senses a classical goddess, but Ingres' naturalistic and transparent treatment of the living referent still makes her available and inviting to the desiring (male) viewer.¹²⁰

By contrast, in Cézanne's *Woman with Green Hat (Madame Cézanne)* (figure 9), space, texture, and the figure of Madame Cézanne herself refuses the viewer any invitation into image. Madame Cézanne does not address the viewer at all, but instead gazes anxiously to her left with rather empty eyes. She leans forward slightly and seems to be almost forced out of her chair, which is perspectively skewed and emphasizes the unstable tilt of her spine and shoulders. Her

¹¹⁷ Sarah Betzer, "Ingres's Second *Madame Moitessier*: 'Le Brevet du Peintre d'Histoire,'" in *Fingering Ingres*, ed. Susan Siegfried and Adrian Rifkin (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 48.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹²⁰ One might argue that in this case, Ingres' generalizing of Madame Moitessier into the model of Arcadia is itself a kind of deferral of the sitter's identity.

hands hold neither flower nor fan, but instead are placed tentatively in her lap. The hands themselves seem unfinished, as if in motion, and are more convincing as interlaced strokes of paint than fingers: they cannot be depended upon as anatomy, much less expected to grasp any feminizing accessories. The coloring of her face, the only other instance of her flesh in the painting, is similarly unblended, and her splotched complexion echoes the mottled wall-coloring behind her. Her hat, normally a signifier of feminine bourgeois style, is a conical pile of sketchy leaves, balanced upon an awkward, nearly rectangular brim.¹²¹ The vertical shadow just above her right shoulder seems to indicate the joining of two walls, but the horizontal stripes of wainscoting visually conflict with such an impression of depth. Likewise, the confused perspective of her hat and the strange angle of the chair arms confound any attempt at understanding a rational space. While we try to reconcile Madame Cézanne as the tense inhabitant of a dankly colored room, we are simultaneously aware of the image as an impenetrable object.

In the image of Madame Cézanne, the gaze is diffused from the objectified woman, as with Madame Moitessier, to the objectified canvas. Comparing Cézanne's facture to Ingres' idealized naturalism, Garb states, "Cézanne's touch denudes the bodies and spaces alike of their material specificity—the gleam of metal, the grain of wood and veneer of wallpaper are of no interest to him—while rendering them viable only in the language of paint."¹²² Illusionistic beauty depends upon the elision of medium and the suspension of belief that allows the viewer to believe that he truly sees silk or skin, rather than paint.¹²³ Arguably, then, accessible beauty is

¹²¹ T.J. Clark offers an alternative interpretation of the feminine bourgeois hat, specifically regarding Matisse's *La Femme au chapeau* (figure 7). He points out that Amélie Parayre Matisse was herself a hat maker, and therefore her hat might be indicative of her own financial agency and her husband's dependency on her. For his detailed discussion see T.J. Clark, "Madame Matisse's Hat," *London Review of Books* 30, no. 16 (August 14, 2008): 29-32.

¹²² Garb, 153

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 157. I purposefully use the male pronoun here as a comment on the viewer's presumed masculinity, not to naturalize the masculine pronoun.

only viable in the language of naturalism (to adapt Garb's phrasing); therefore typical female beauty is itself not viable in the modernist "language of paint." The tactility of paint and surface deny or sublimate the desiring gaze, which depends upon the illusionistic possibility of entry into an image and possession of its referent.

A Modernist Break?

The social consequences of modernism's appropriation of portraiture, particularly female portraiture, produce a kind of ripple effect that proves how deeply portraiture was embedded in the formulation and regulation of social order. Garb observes of portraits of Hortense Fiquet Cézanne specifically, though her comments might be accurately extrapolated to modernist portraits of women in general: "Devoid of the artifice associated with her sex, or of any gratuitous soliciting of the spectator through gesture, glance or attitude, the figure of Madame Cézanne is not securely gendered in the feminine."¹²⁴ If a woman was neither securely gendered nor transparently available, the visual hegemony of the male viewer was interrupted and his authority implicitly impugned. Moreover, as we have seen, in bourgeois France the secure gendering of women was not just reflexive insofar as it constructed femininity, but functioned relatively to bolster the construction of the masculine. Portraiture's abandonment of traditional systems of female representation therefore destabilized already uneasy bases of masculinity's claim to social dominance.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 171. Sidlauskas also examines Hortense Fiquet's ambiguous gendering at length in *Cézanne's Other*; see her fourth chapter specifically (147-8, 180-95) for her discussion of *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress* (1888-90) and *Madame Cézanne in the Conservatory* (1891).

If femininity was endangered, then masculinity was as well; and if the bourgeois social and gender order were destabilized, as Nye argues, then nation itself was in jeopardy.¹²⁵ Though these conditional statements may seem like an over-dramatized extrapolation of the relation between portraits of women and the French nation, it in fact goes to show how strongly gender, social systems, and the nation were interarticulated with one another, not to mention how unstable that system was if one constructing element posed such a threat to the whole artifice. To protect already frail concepts of gender and class, then, modernist portraiture was rejected and theoretically expelled from the bourgeoisie's construction of itself, as it had essentially become a rogue discourse. One need only think of the outraged rejection of Matisse's *La femme au chapeau* (figure 7) as an example. However, I would call into question the clean expulsion of modernist portraiture from social systems, as though they could be neatly extricated, and the idea that there could, under any circumstances, be such a thing as "art for art's sake."

The social condemnation of modernist portraits of women provides a fascinating look into what was in fact an ongoing relationship between social systems of power and the genre of portraiture: society did not break from portraiture any more than portraiture broke from society. To imagine them as fundamentally separate is to miss many subtleties of their continuing interaction. For instance, rather than blame the artist's modernist style for the radical refusal of beauty in a woman's portrait, critics often held the woman herself as culpable in her perceived unattractiveness. Sidlauskas notes of Cézanne's portraits of his wife: "Cézanne's refusal to conform to the type of the adoring helpmate has been routinely understood not to be a result of the artist's own pictorial decisions, but rather as the failure of the woman who inspired them: her failure to ingratiate, to entertain, and, above all, to seduce."¹²⁶ It is *her* failure as a woman, not

¹²⁵ Nye, 72.

¹²⁶ Sidlauskas, "Not-Beautiful," 193.

her husband's as an artist. Madame Cézanne is still held accountable to her perceived feminine duties, even though these duties literally do not translate into the visual language of modernism. Though ostensibly expelled, modernist portraiture is still understood and blame dispensed according to the dominant gender paradigm of the bourgeoisie.

Likewise, portraiture did not suddenly enter a social vacuum when it began to subvert the historical requirements of the genre. On the one hand, it would be appealing to believe that stylistic subversions of historical portraiture might indicate subversions of the social systems of power on which the genre was built. For instance, Tamar Garb explores the possibility that Cézanne's refusal of transparency and naturalistic "beauty" in portraits of his wife might be read as a simultaneous refusal of masculinist subject/object hierarchies. Garb links the importance of touch in Cézanne's work (expounded upon at length by Maurice Merleau-Ponty) to the feminist rejection of ocularcentric male mastery, particularly Luce Irigaray's emphasis on the tactile and the reciprocity of touch "that is at the core of the female bodily experience."¹²⁷ Garb also includes the work of Julia Kristeva, which stresses the tactile in her reconfiguration of the pre-Oedipal as "semiotic," in which touch and the maternal are given primacy.¹²⁸ Citing tactility in both Cézanne's work as well as its importance to feminist theory, Garb argues it might be tempting to read the artist's rejection of transparency as a rejection of its foundational masculinist ocularcentrism. However, she accurately notes that such a reading would be distinctly dehistoricized and observes that such dehistoricization strips feminism of its critical acuity.¹²⁹ Ultimately, the author concludes:

¹²⁷ Garb, 163. See also Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993) and Richard Shiff, "Cézanne's Physicality: The Politics of Touch," in *The Language of Art History*, ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹²⁸ Garb, 163.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

For all his radical refusal of traditional female portraiture's gratuitous flattery, its visual clichés, flirtatious forms of address and seamless pictorial harmonies, Cézanne's portraits of his wife... remain the product of a patriarchal artist working within a culture that is permeated by social and sexual hierarchies and distinctions, and something of the effort and strain of functioning within these strictures registers in his practice.¹³⁰

In spite of their break with the historical visual depiction of gender, most modernist artists continued to participate in dominant gender discourses, which included the tradition of the male artist's presumed mastery in his practice.¹³¹ Richard Shiff astutely observes: "Within the modernist tradition, the indexical function has been privileged over the iconic: a mark refers to its maker... more emphatically than it refers to some detached object."¹³² It seems, then, that masculine hegemony survives robustly in modernist portraiture. Now, instead of the privilege residing with the presumed male viewer, who possesses by means of transparency, the privilege resides with the individual male "maker," who possesses by means of touch and artistic agency. As Shiff comments on Cézanne's work: "Here touch ultimately serves as the subjective self in its mastery of objective things."¹³³ For this reason, there can be no such thing as "art for art's sake," since the artists themselves were never separate from their social context and, if male, enjoyed the benefits of gendered hierarchies.

The most congruent feature between historical and modernist portraiture is the stubborn deferral of the female sitter's individual identity. This persistent phenomenon is a direct result of the fact that though modernist portraitists may have broken with the social demands of the historical genre, in doing so they were *not* simultaneously removed from society. Consequently, though the deferral of a woman's identity was accomplished by very different means, the fact

¹³⁰ Ibid., 164.

¹³¹ See Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2003). See also the concluding chapter of this study regarding feminist practice in art history.

¹³² Shiff, 139.

¹³³ Ibid., 149.

remains that modernist portraiture continued to produce and participate in gender hierarchies in which a woman's personal identity was unimportant. Modernism was a stylistic, not a social, revolution, and continued to maintain the systems of gender subordination essential to the society from which is supposedly broke.

Chapter 5

Identities Deferred

The deferral of female identity remained remarkably consistent in portraits of women both before and after modernism's stylistic break with the historical genre. This phenomenon may be read as a result of the fact that though portraiture could no longer be depended upon as a constructive social discourse—that is, a discourse which contributed to the dominant social paradigm according to the terms of that paradigm—it still functioned within the paradigm itself: the modernist break was not, as Garb has shown, simultaneously a feminist one.¹³⁴ Modernist portraiture continued to reproduce gender hierarchies, though not in ways that the bourgeoisie recognized or acknowledged.

Though women's individual identities were still deferred in modernist portraits, the terms of this deferral had been reframed. Now, instead of a woman's identity being subordinate to her social function (i.e., her beauty or appeal), her identity was subordinate to the artist himself: his stylistic choices, his agency, his biography. This is especially true of spousal portraits, since a wife's subservient position to her husband was already encoded in nineteenth-century French domestic hierarchies. Referring to Matisse's use of his family as sitters, whose availability was dictated by the artist's role as the *paterfamilias*, John Klein succinctly notes: "He wanted them to sit, and they sat."¹³⁵ Both Klein and Susan Sidlauskas observe that members of artists' families were in a unique position as sitters, since they were closer to the artist—genetically or intimately—than any outsider, and yet were at the same time inescapably *other*.¹³⁶ A wife as sitter, then, afforded the artist a novel opportunity: to discard the respect and responsibility

¹³⁴ Garb, 164.

¹³⁵ Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 64.

¹³⁶ See Sidlauskas, *Cézanne's Other*, 9 or Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 64.

theoretically owed to a non-familial sitter; to have unprecedented access to and socially sanctioned dominance over the subject; and to explore the modern fluidity of self through an intimate other. In this scenario, a wife's identity is secondary to both the artist's modernist style and her husband's domestic authority.

It is tempting to view these constructions as relics of nineteenth-century social structures and to imagine that female identity now had a more privileged position in responsible critical inquiry. However, much contemporary scholarship on modernist portraiture continues to reproduce the seemingly unalienable agency of the artist/husband over his sitter/wife. While it is generally impossible to recover much historical information regarding the lived experiences of artists' wives in the late nineteenth century, critical readings of the social structures that obscured these women's identities in the first place are largely absent in discussions of the resulting portraits.¹³⁷ In other words, scholars seem content to work with the information that is extant, rather than question the systems of power that would preserve and privilege some types of information over others. This seems particularly ironic when dealing with portraits: we are ostensibly viewing the visual trace of a woman's presence, but the artist/husband's agency and subjectivity, rather than his sitter/wife's, are more often read into the image and given interpretive precedence. More than one hundred years on, the female sitter's identity is still deferred.

It would be overly simplistic to assert that these ongoing deferrals are purely a function of a lack of historical evidence. As modernist portraiture remained within dominant social paradigms, so art historical inquiry remains a social practice as well, informed by gender hierarchies, among other things, as discussed further in the following chapter. The persistent and

¹³⁷ Ruth Butler's work, *Hidden in the Shadow of the Master: The Model Wives of Cézanne, Monet, and Rodin*, is a rare exception, and her exhaustive account of the details of Hortense Fiquet's life is admirable. Nevertheless, outside of brief thoughts in her introduction, hers is not a structural or sociological interrogation.

multiple deferral of the sitter/wife's identity is rooted not only in gendered social hierarchies broadly, but also in art history's specific expression of these hierarchies in the construction of the male artistic genius. Though famously critiqued by Linda Nochlin in 1971, the myth of the male artist as genius is, I would argue, embedded to a significant degree in the very foundations of the discipline, and as a result has become naturalized in art historical practice.¹³⁸ The traces of this myth remain present in the consistent interpretive privileging of the male artist. Troublingly, this "business as usual" practice of art history simultaneously denies the importance of social critique while perpetuating and naturalizing masculinist systems of social power.

This is not to say that all works of scholarship set out with chauvinist agendas or endorse the myth of the male artist; quite the contrary, Marcia Pointon, for example, explicitly states her feminist purpose in "writing against the patriarchal account" in *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth Century England*.¹³⁹ The stated purpose of her work, however, which examines the intersection between portraiture and society, begs an interesting question: particularly when it comes to portraiture, which as we have seen can never be divorced from its social context, how thorough is a study if it does not address the structures of social power in which a portrait was produced? And, moreover, do such studies inadvertently reproduce these systems of power by leaving them unexamined?

In order to attempt to answer these questions, or at least provide a starting point for dialogue, I will in this chapter analyze three influential works of contemporary scholarship and their respective discussions of three modernist portraits of women: Paul Cézanne's *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress* (figure 2), Henri Matisse's *The Red Madras Headdress* (figure 3), and Pablo Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (figure 1). There is, of course, no dearth of

¹³⁸ See Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2003).

¹³⁹ Pointon, 9.

scholarship on any of these works, much less these artists, but I have purposefully narrowed my scope to studies which were published in the last twenty years and which concentrate exclusively on portraiture. In doing so, I ensure that these works are roughly contemporaneous and have a similar critical focus. It would be remiss, however, to use works with identical academic goals. Therefore, I have chosen to compare Susan Sidlauskas' *Cézanne's Other: The Portraits of Hortense* and John Klein's *Matisse Portraits*. In the former, Sidlauskas studies portraits of Cézanne's wife, Hortense Fiquet, and argues that through these portraits, Cézanne was able to break with the mimetic demands of traditional portraiture.¹⁴⁰ In the latter, Klein examines Matisse's portraits as records of the artist's struggle between the competing forces of representation and self-expression.¹⁴¹ Both of these works are academically significant not only because they were written by noted specialists—Sidlauskas on Cézanne, and Klein on Matisse—but also because of the sustained focus of their inquiries concerning the intersection of modernism and portraits.

Sidlauskas and Klein utilize very different approaches to the topic of portraiture: one through the artist's wife and the other through the artist's evolving style. Nevertheless, what these works have in common is that they both privilege the artist's own subjectivity and agency far above that of his sitter/wife, whom they both address: though models, these wives are never truly agents, and their subordination is given little socio-historical context. This phenomenon becomes exceptionally clear when these scholars' works are compared to Robert S. Lubar's "Unmasking Pablo's Gertrude: Queer Desire and the Subject of Portraiture." In his article, Lubar demonstrates how the modernist deferral of female identity is in the case of *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (figure 1) not the result of the sitter's subordinate femininity, but instead of her

¹⁴⁰ Sidlauskas, *Cézanne's Other*, 8.

¹⁴¹ Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 6.

threatening, non-heteronormative, and radical agency in fin-de-siècle France. Stein's identity is deferred precisely because she threatens the artist's masculine power, not because she is subservient to it. I argue, then, that the pivotal concept that divides the readings of Cézanne and Matisse's works from that of Picasso is the construction of wife and a proper contextualization of that role. When a female sitter is the artist's wife, her identity is doubly deferred according to two intertwined masculinist systems of subordination—that of the artist as genius, and that of the artist as husband—and contemporary scholarship largely, though perhaps unintentionally, reproduces these systems. As Lubar's study of Stein's portrait shows, it is not the fact of being female that denies a woman agency, but rather her role within a specific, historical social matrix that makes her invisible to interpretation.

Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress: Wife as Cipher

Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress (figure 2) is one of roughly two-dozen portraits in oil that Cézanne painted of his wife, Hortense Fiquet.¹⁴² Sidlauskas refers to the painting as “a virtuoso performance in pictorial grace wrought out of profound spatial instability,” and reads into the instability of the image Cézanne's own attempt to merge himself into the dually-gendered figure of his wife.¹⁴³

In the image, Hortense Fiquet—recognizable by her long, ovoid face and severely parted hair—sits centrally in a yellow chair in what is a mostly vertical composition. This vertical, however, which the viewer tracks in the central, blocky ruffle of Fiquet's gown, tilts slightly to

¹⁴² As Sidlauskas observes in her footnotes: “Estimates of the number of oil paintings of Fiquet Cézanne range from twenty-four to thirty, and the artist did scores of drawings and several important watercolors.” (*Cézanne's Other*, 219).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 178, 180.

the right. Instead of Fiquet leaning, though, as in *Woman with Green Hat* (figure 9), it is the composition that seems to list, emphasized by the downward angle of the wainscoting behind her. Though apparently seated, judging from the richly toned chair at her back, there is no stabilizing depth or recession to Fiquet's lap. Likewise, the coloring of her dress lightens from the collar to the lower skirt, giving the impression of a pyramidal fading of cool red, rather than a realistically shadowed body in space. The highlights in her skirt are not transparent patches of canvas but are in fact patches of gray paint. Her fading, frontal form is strongly contrasted by the curtain to her proper left: the dark blues, greens, yellows, and oranges are densely rich. Indeed, the apple in the curtain's pattern immediately to the right of her left wrist is more believably modeled as a three-dimensional object than Fiquet is herself, what Tamar Garb refers to as a "painterly pun."¹⁴⁴

Fiquet's flesh is coolly toned, similar to the grey and bluish reds of her dress, and is unevenly treated across the central axis of her body. While the left side of her face is animated by shadow, yellow tones, and the arch of her eyebrow, the right is almost completely uniform, save for a four-pronged slash of blush on her cheekbone. Additionally, the absence of one ear is odd, not explained by the frontal orientation of her face. This disjunction appears in her hands as well: the fingers of her proper right hand are articulated separately, but her proper left, which grasps a leafy abstraction of a rose, is blurred. Tracking Fiquet's hands in multiple portraits, Sidlauskas comments: "In a recurring complication of Fiquet Cézanne's portraits, the hands within them often verge on the grotesque: fingers are truncated or fused together, hands are

¹⁴⁴ Garb, 146. Garb is also cleverly referring to D. H. Lawrence's assertion that Fiquet was "appley" in her husband's representations of her. Garb comments: "Far from diminishing and objectifying the sitter—reducing her to a humble fruit—Lawrence used the metaphor in order to invoke what he saw as the unique and unassailable presence, rather than the superficial appearance, of the subject." (Garb, 161.)

misshapen—paw- or pincerlike.”¹⁴⁵ The presence of the flower does not mediate the awkwardness of the hands in this image, and Sidlauskas asserts that, even with the flower: “The expected allusions to the feminine are far from being straightforward.”¹⁴⁶ In fact, the author reads the image’s lack of compositional balance and the disjointedness of Fiquet’s body as Cézanne’s exploration of gender instability. She argues: “In *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress*, Cézanne effects a visual conjoining of the masculine and the feminine without grace, elegance, or subtlety: the seams show.”¹⁴⁷

Sidlauskas’ study, *Cézanne’s Other*, is in fact the first full-length study of the portraits of Hortense Fiquet, and as a result, Fiquet is given a more prominent position and admittedly kinder treatment than in previous studies of Cézanne.¹⁴⁸ Historically, scholars seem to take Paul Alexis’ and Émile Zola’s disdain for Fiquet as objective evaluations of her character; their less than flattering nickname for her, “La Boule” (the ball), has certainly stood the test of time.¹⁴⁹ To her credit, Sidlauskas is wary of these judgments and attempts to move beyond the inherited caricatures of Fiquet as an inexpressive, shallow, and unattractive impediment to Cézanne’s work. Nevertheless, though Sidlauskas grants Fiquet the dignity of subjecthood, she is never an agent. Instead, the artist’s wife is essentially the medium through which Cézanne—the *écorché* (the skinless one)—grapples with his personal ambivalence towards touch, sexuality, and self.¹⁵⁰

It is Cézanne that Sidlauskas reads into the images of Fiquet, including *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress*. In this image, the divided gender the author sees in the unevenly treated body is not generic, but is in fact Cézanne’s own masculinity grafted onto his wife. For instance,

¹⁴⁵ Sidlauskas, *Cézanne’s Other*, 135.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁴⁸ One recalls Roger Fry’s referring to Fiquet as a “sour-looking bitch” in a 1925 letter (quoted in Sidlauskas, *Cézanne’s Other*, 125), or even John Rewald’s dismissive comment as recently as 1986: “Hortense’s only contribution to her husband’s life as an artist was in posing for him repeatedly without moving or talking.”

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

Sidlauskas tracks the similarities between Cézanne's pointed eyebrows in his *Self-Portrait* (1873-6, Musée d'Orsay, figure 10) and the arch of Fiquet's right eyebrow; she also reads the shadow on the right side of Fiquet's face as "almost beardlike."¹⁵¹ From these visual clues, Sidlauskas concludes: "For the artist who painted her, she is certainly not simply a reflection of him, but she is not entirely herself either. Perhaps she is both: she is other, and she is also self."¹⁵² Fiquet's "otherness" to Cézanne, rather than her own individuality, is what matters here. In this reading, the image is less a portrait than it is "a more subtle variation on the same theme of gender instability that plays out so starkly in the *Bathers*, here exercised within the less forgiving framework of portraiture."¹⁵³ Though Hortense Fiquet is the referent here, her identity has little, if any, place in the interpretation of the image. Elsewhere, Sidlauskas argues that the mutable form Fiquet takes across Cézanne's many portraits of her speaks to the fluidity of identity, including Fiquet's, but in the end, she observes: "Fiquet Cézanne... was a shifting force against which Cézanne could measure his mutating self."¹⁵⁴ Indeed, though Sidlauskas addresses medical, literary, and sociological philosophy contemporary with Cézanne—arguably an opportunity to interrogate the profound role gender played in these formulations and their effects on Fiquet—she only deploys these theories in regard to Cézanne himself. Fiquet's intimacy with Cézanne as his wife becomes the means by which her identity is elided: though Sidlauskas attempts to make her a subject, Fiquet is still primarily a cipher through which the artist's subjectivity, rather his wife's, is read.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 180.

¹⁵² Ibid., 185.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 183.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 41, 17.

The Red Madras Headdress: Wife as Vessel

John Klein is less interested in the search for Henri Matisse's representations of himself in portraits than he is in the progression of the artist's style. In Klein's own words: "[Matisse] did not so much project his personality on his sitters... as project his values on them."¹⁵⁵ These values, which we can take to mean the artist's style and self-expression, are what Klein sees in Matisse's images of his wife, including *The Red Madras Headdress* (figure 3).¹⁵⁶ Evidence of the individuality of Amélie Parayre Matisse is never sought, since here she is in the critical shadow of her artistic genius husband.

Where *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress* is a work of heeling lines and fading tones, *The Red Madras Headdress* is composed of a bold and reductive palette, dominated by primary colors: blue, red, and accents of yellow. Though these colors are also present in the painting of Hortense Fiquet Cézanne, here they are bright and saturated. The overall rhythm of lines in the image is curving: the crescent of the proper right side of Parayre's face is echoed in the slope of her right shoulder and the roll of her right hip and leg. The delicate narrowing of her chin is repeated in the greenish-yellow lines that sketch in her neck, the neckline of her gown, and is then mirrored inversely in the bend of her left wrist. There is little depth here, as in the image of Fiquet, but the uniform richness of color assertively anchors the image: the surface is saturated and stable.

Pattern is essential here. There are three distinct patterns of fabric in the image, and they are all flatly rendered, as though to act as decoration for the surface of the canvas rather than

¹⁵⁵ Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 33.

¹⁵⁶ For the sake of consistency, I will refer to Amélie Parayre Matisse by her maiden name, Parayre, in order to differentiate her from her husband, Henri Matisse, and to avoid the first-name familiarity from which male artists are generally exempt.

clothing for the woman portrayed. Where the top of Fiquet's unpatterned dress is modeled lightly with shadow on her torso and fades vertically to her skirt, Parayre's is only modeled with line; the pattern seems to overwhelm any tailored elements, such as the central ruffle of Fiquet's garment. The dress's fabric is a deep, inky blue, outlined in black and strongly contrasted with the flat aqua-blue background, which is inflected with light green and lavender. The pattern of abstracted, rust-red flowers against the blue dress seems almost to recall the South Sea patterns utilized by Gauguin, and in fact, only the one large design in the painting's lower left corner resembles a true flower at all. The dark dress is trimmed at the neck, waist, and wrists with a white border, spotted with black and shaded with teals and greens. The impression of the white and black is not unlike ermine, but the flatness of the trim denies any of the lushness or depth of fur. Parayre's thick, blocky lower eyelashes seem to mimic the trim's pattern of black dashes. The red headdress of the title shows no knots and little shadowing, again emphasizing flatness, and is a bright, tomato red, contrasting the brownish red pattern on the dress. The vibrating yellow design meanders against the red fabric, following no repeating pattern; the only other instance of pure yellow in the image is the simplified side-view of the chair back against which Parayre leans. Like the fabric, Parayre's flesh is flattened and simplified. Her eyes, eyebrows, and nose are articulated in single lines of paint, with little shading, and her left ear is an undifferentiated crescent of light peach paint. Her hands, as well, in spite of the shading of her fingers, are more like paws and abstracted similarly to Fiquet's "pincerlike" hands. The green shadows against the skin of Parayre's arms do little to deny the persistent flatness of both flesh and fabric.

Klein's initial assessment of Amélie Parayre Matisse is a positive if passive one: "By most accounts, Amélie Matisse was a model wife of an artist."¹⁵⁷ Ironically, this assessment does more to elide Parayre than to emphasize her individuality: she performs exceptionally well a role whose primary responsibility is subservience and historical invisibility. Furthermore, Klein does not note the telling pun in his assessment: that she is a model, a wife, and a model wife. This word play perhaps goes unnoticed because her successful execution of so many roles is seemingly unremarkable, as the only viable agent in the myth of the male artist is the artist himself. Indeed, Klein notes: "Her individuality suppressed, Amélie is presented by Matisse in these pictures as the passive effect of his emotions and mentality, not their cause or the vehicle of her own."¹⁵⁸ Her identity is entirely subordinate to the artist's prerogative to use his wife for his own creative purposes.

Matisse would eventually move almost exclusively to hired models (women who were essentially paid not to have an identity), but Klein does not address how disturbing it is that the artist first used his wife, whose agency and business acumen strongly contributed to his own success, as his primary model and continually emptied her of her individuality in his art.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, her role *as* his wife enabled this process. There is, in some ways, a kind of violence in the artist's repeated effacement of his wife's identity. Klein acknowledges Parayre's "crucial" contributions to Matisse's work, but ultimately understands their erasure in terms of the artist's creative struggles and genius: "In one sense, there should be no surprise in this: Matisse's formal concerns in this period of stylistic invention were paramount, and he seemed willing to ignore the real human content of these works."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 66.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 72, 70.

Klein tracks *The Red Madras Headdress* as a shift in Matisse's style: "Altogether the painting is bold in color, simplified in drawing and design, and flatly painted—in a word, decorative, in the positive sense toward which Matisse was moving in his work at this time."¹⁶¹ Understood this way, the work is an artifact of style, and in later works, such as *Large Decorations with Masks* (1953, National Gallery of Art, figure 11), we might see the streamlined features of the masks as descendants of Parayre's simplified face in *The Red Madras Headdress*. However, Klein also marks this work as the beginning of Parayre's "progressive denaturing" by Matisse, which would increase in the second decade of the twentieth century.¹⁶² Her deferral is a function of decoration and stylistic evolution, and is therefore seamlessly woven into the artist's own creative history, which is his by virtue of his status as a male artistic genius.

Troublingly, Klein seems to consider this work—and Matisse's creative evolution—in a historical vacuum. He does not, for instance, explicitly comment on Matisse's appropriation of the decorative, which had previously been denigrated as a feminine pursuit practiced within private spaces, though he does qualify Matisse's use of the decorative as "positive" (one wonders if a "negative" use of decoration is synonymous with the feminine).¹⁶³ When masculinized through the myth of the artist as genius, however, decoration becomes stylistically valid, and the history of the decorative effectively rewritten. Klein also omits any mention of the Orientalist elements in *The Red Madras Headdress*, or indeed in Matisse's works more generally. Instead, he seems to consider such works to be "costume pieces."¹⁶⁴ Klein does not remark on the madras headdress of the work's title, in spite of the fact that its very presence attests to the

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 82.

¹⁶² Ibid., 84.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 82. See also Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York, NY: Icon Editions, 1992).

¹⁶⁴ Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 68. See also, for example, Matisse's *Madame Matisse en japonaise (Japanese Lady)* (1901, private collection), *The Guitarist* (1902-3, private collection), or *Woman in a Japanese Robe beside the Water* (1905, Museum of Modern Art, New York).

European colonial enterprise.¹⁶⁵ This omission is particularly glaring because Matisse in fact travelled to North Africa in 1906, 1912, and 1913.¹⁶⁶ As Roger Benjamin astutely points out, to detach a modernist artist from history “is to give aesthetic activity a utopian reading, to believe that art can proceed without mounting up any debt in the political sphere.”¹⁶⁷ Moreover, in a feminist reading of *The Red Madras Headdress*, it is essential to note that the racist and xenophobic discourses that structured Orientalism were also strongly gendered; the exoticizing of Parayre could function as yet another means by which her identity is made unimportant in a European masculinist paradigm.¹⁶⁸ Such a dehistoricized reading continues to naturalize the white male artistic genius’s authority on multiple levels.

Towards the end of his study, it is noteworthy that Klein is critical of Matisse’s treatment of women, including Parayre: “He... could not reconcile the opposition of portraiture and decoration. Instead, he could evade it. He was able to do this by painting women.”¹⁶⁹ There is a note of censure in this comment, but it seems attenuated when understood in the context of Klein’s work as a whole: Matisse’s dismissal of women’s identity is not solely a function of the artist’s ego or isolated creative genius. The gendered social hierarchies in which Matisse lived and worked enabled and authorized his treatment of women. By not addressing these structures, Klein privileges Matisse as an artist separate from social systems of power, and understands *The Red Madras Headdress* as the visual trace of the artist’s own creative trajectory. It is, however, also a social artifact, and in ignoring the social context of Matisse’s misogyny, Klein minimizes

¹⁶⁵ Madras fabric is typically associated with India (Madras was in fact the name of a southern Indian city, now called Chennai), and the wrapping technique evokes Orientalist European fantasies of the turban, such as those worn in Ingres’ and Delacroix’s harem scenes.

¹⁶⁶ Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 159.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁶⁸ For a further discussion of gendering and Orientalism, see chapter three, “The Imaginary Orient,” in Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

¹⁶⁹ Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 231.

the deferral of Parayre's identity: her disenfranchisement is only meaningful in terms of the artist's life, not as part of a broader, historical phenomenon. As Matisse's wife, and therefore a character in his personal and creative narrative, Parayre's individuality is the collateral damage of the artist's life and "genius."

Portrait of Gertrude Stein: Author and Agent

The origin story of Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (figure 1) has been well-rehearsed, in scholarship and in Stein's own work and letters. Of note here are not the particulars of the painting's creation—for instance, the exact numbers of sittings between 1905 and 1906—but the fact that there is an origin story at all: that the creation of this work, and the work itself, participate in the myth-making of both Picasso *and* his sitter, the American author Gertrude Stein. Already, the academic approach to this work is fundamentally different from approaches to Cézanne or Matisse's portraits, and I would argue that a significant portion of the contemporary scholarship on *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* takes this route—namely, that the story of Picasso and Stein's interaction is essential to any analysis of the work itself.¹⁷⁰ But how is this story different from any other story of a portrait's creation, and why does it matter?

Central to the origin story of Stein's portrait is the battle of wills between artist and sitter. Klein refers to this battle generally as "the same old story, told through countless tales of conflict between artist and sitter for control of how the sitter should be represented."¹⁷¹ This story,

¹⁷⁰ See also John Klein's "The Mask as Image and Strategy," Vincent Giroud's "Picasso and Gertrude Stein," Pierre Daix's "Portraiture in Picasso's Primitivism and Cubism," or Cécile Debray's "Gertrude Stein and Painting: From Picasso to Picabia." There are, of course, many Picasso studies that ignore or dismiss Stein's role in the portrait's creation (Lubar cites John Richardson's as an example of this phenomenon), but I would argue that the general trend—particularly in the last twenty years—is to include Stein as a significant actor in the work's narrative.

¹⁷¹ Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, 1.

however, is unique, not only because of its actors, but also because of the way that those actors related to one another and to the social context in which they lived, and consequently the ways in which they are understood now. As we have seen, the identities of Hortense Fiquet Cézanne and Amélie Parayre Matisse are subordinated as wives to their husbands and as models to artistic agents. Gertrude Stein, by contrast, was wife to no husband and an artistic agent in her own right. I would assert that it is for all purposes impossible to separate the Gertrude Stein we see in her portrait from the Gertrude Stein of literary legacy: she is never simply a sitter, but always in some sense a creator as well. As a result of this, the eliding binaries to which Fiquet and Parayre are subject actually work in Stein's favor: though she is a woman, as a creator she functions in a masculine role and thereby denies elision in gendered social binaries. As Lubar argues, it is Stein's skillful manipulation and frequent rejection of the heteronormative that challenges Picasso, and in the end, the artist's deferral of Stein's identity speaks more to her power than any lack of it.

The palette of *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* primarily uses warm earth tones: browns, creams, and subtle reds. Stein sits at an angle in a chair that is lightly sketched in behind her: the patterning, in which a few faint blue flowers can be made out, seems to merge with the wall and has no weight. This pattern is almost the exact opposite of that on Parayre's gown, which upstages its wearer; here the subject is primary, and pattern is faint in the background. Likewise, the walls behind Stein are flat and blurrily shadowed. The vagueness of the background strongly intensifies the focus on Stein herself, whose body, particularly her face, dominates the composition. Stein slouches comfortably forward, bracing her weight on her right forearm against her knee and resting her left hand against her left thigh. The confidence of her pose, her body's pyramidal composition, and the richness of her brown suit against the lighter background

give her an air of profound stability, which is most pronounced in comparison to the image of Fiquet. Where Stein's form anchors her image, Fiquet's form tilts and blends with her setting. While stable, though, Stein's body is unevenly treated. Her right hand, for instance, is volumetrically modeled with shadow and highlights, while her left hand is distinctly rougher; her left fourth finger bleeds into her cuff.¹⁷² Her hair and ear, as well, are handled summarily, contrasting the sculptural and focused representation of her face.

Stein's face is effectively, as Lubar and many others observe, a mask. In fact, the composition of her face strongly resembles Picasso's sketch "*Death Mask*" of Josep Fontdevila (1906, Musée Picasso, figure 12) from the summer of 1906 when the painter encountered "primitive" Iberian sculpture, with the differently sized eyes, dominant nose, and strong cheekbones. Stein's face is the focus of the imagined light source and is brighter than any other element of the image, including her dingy white cravat. The paint, too, is thicker here than anywhere else on the canvas. Stein's left eye is distinctly smaller than her right, and they both seem to focus fiercely but independently of one another. Intensifying her gaze are two highlights just above her eyebrows: these, rather than any lines in her skin, furrow her brow and focus her gaze. The shading of her right cheek and temple is exceptionally soft, tempering the sculptural intensity of her nose, eyes, and mouth, though the viewer's eye continuously returns to her severe and slightly incongruous features.

Robert S. Lubar understands *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* as the visual trace of the "contest of wills" between Pablo Picasso and Gertrude Stein.¹⁷³ However, instead of simply authorizing this battle of wills in the dehistoricized domain of artistic geniuses, he insists on grounding his

¹⁷² For a more thorough investigation of Stein's hands, and their potential phallic significance, see Robert S. Lubar, "Unmasking Pablo's Gertrude: Queer Desire and the Subject of Portraiture," *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 1 (March 1997): 61.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 63.

analysis in historical a socio-sexual context. He states: “I...want to maintain the historical specificity of Pablo’s encounter with Gertrude, and Gertrude’s encounter with Pablo, within the phallic economy of fin de siècle France and the institutional structures that sustained it.”¹⁷⁴ In asserting this context, Lubar gives his interpretation a compelling multidimensionality: rather than conducting his analysis in a social vacuum, Lubar links social constructions and subversions causally to the portrait’s creation. For the author, it was Picasso and Stein’s lived (and performed) socio-sexual identities that account for the battle of wills and the resulting portrait.

When he began *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, Picasso was twenty-four years old and a recent Spanish émigré to Paris. The gender hierarchies in which he had been raised were strongly patriarchal, and Stein, a charismatic and affluent lesbian, must have confused his learned views of homosexuality as deviant.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, Stein did not simply fall outside of Picasso’s understanding of sexual economy but at times slyly enacted what Lubar refers to as “a strategic form of mimicry, first with Leo [Stein, her brother] and Pablo, and then in her coupling with Alice [Toklas, her partner].”¹⁷⁶ These pairings were ostensibly based on the familiar male/female binary, but Stein’s mimicry of the trope was, as Lubar points out, inherently subversive.¹⁷⁷ Stein’s challenge, then, was not simply *against* traditional, patriarchal relationship models but was often issued from *within* those very models. In painting her portrait, Picasso was literally faced with the captivating subversions of the gender and sexual models on which he built his own concept of self, and Lubar asserts that the artist’s masking of Stein was his attempt to contain these threats to his own gendered identity.¹⁷⁸ Picasso could not truly *see* Stein because to do so he would be forced to acknowledge the fallibility (indeed, the inadequacy) of his own

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 60.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 67.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 69.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 73.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 59.

socio-sexual system of values. Therefore he effaced her and masked her as a means of containing her.¹⁷⁹

A significant strength in Lubar's argument lies in the fact that he qualifies, historically and theoretically, his claim of Stein's agency. Stein was not threatening to Picasso simply because she was homosexual, but because she performed in and manipulated the social structures designed to subordinate her (as a woman) or exclude her entirely (as a lesbian). Without acknowledging these structures, as Lubar does, Stein's radical subversions are denied their urgency. Her agency is remarkable *because* of its historical context, and was in fact so remarkable that Picasso had to defer her identity in her own portrait.

Seeing the Sitters

Both Sidlauskas and Klein comment on *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* in their respective studies, each noting Stein's agency and the strength of her personality, and how these factors influenced the portrait's production. Why, then, do both scholars read images of Hortense Fiquet Cézanne and Amélie Parayre Matisse almost exclusively for traces of their artist/husbands and not the women themselves? What privilege does Stein enjoy that Fiquet and Parayre do not?

The answer to these questions cannot be explained in purely art historical terms, but must be understood socially, since art history is at all times a social activity. As an author, as an agent, Stein established herself in the early twentieth century as a creator, which is a strongly

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 73, 75. Furthermore, Sidlauskas notes that Picasso was haunted not only by Stein's own gender subversion, but also the insecure gendering of Madame Cézanne in *Portrait of Madame Cézanne with a Fan* (1881, Bührle Collection), which hung (along with Matisse's *Femme au chapeau*, 1905, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, figure 7) in Stein's apartment. It seems that Picasso was tormented on all sides: by Stein's gender subversion, by Madame Cézanne's insecure gendering, and by his own competition with Cézanne and Matisse. See Sidlauskas, *Cézanne's Other*, 149 and Lubar, 60.

(though problematically) gendered role; Stein herself associated genius with the masculine.¹⁸⁰

As a result, scholarship is willing to grant Stein, complex though she may be, the male right of interpretation. In fact, it is entirely possible that her non-normative sexual and gender identities enhance her ability to be cast in the role of the masculine artist/genius and thereby given interpretive priority. Fiquet and Parayre, by contrast, are effectively invisible, typically only meaningful in the context of their husband's lives. Their identities and contributions are elided under multiple, interarticulated masculinist paradigms of power: they are subordinate as wives to their husbands, as feminine non-agents to masculine geniuses, and as women to men. As wives, Fiquet and Parayre were bound—in life and in history—in an unequal pairing to their artist husbands and their identities subsequently deferred.

Because art historical scholarship has not identified and acknowledged these deferrals, these women continue to be ignored. Even scholarship as thoughtful as Susan Sidlauskas', which aims to address the neglected portraits of Fiquet, in many ways still perpetuate these systems of power by continuing to endorse the hegemony of the male artist. Lubar's article, on the other hand, opens an interesting avenue of academic investigation: he acknowledges the pictorial deferral of Stein's identity through the strategy of masking, but he looks to both the artist and the sitter for the cause of this deferral. Stein's identity is essential to his argument. I believe that scholarship has the same responsibility to women whose identities history has not recorded. It is not my intention to "rescue" Fiquet and Parayre—as Linda Nochlin observes of "rehabilitating" female artists, to do so would in fact be counter-productive. Instead, I believe that in acknowledging these women as individuals whom history has elided, we give their elision shape and thereby name the lacuna. In doing so, we also acknowledge and can be critical of the historical forces and differentials of power that absented them in the first place, while

¹⁸⁰ Klein, "The Mask as Image and Strategy," 25.

simultaneously recognizing how these hierarchies continue to influence the practice of both art and art history. Only by identifying and naming these systems can we hope to read against them, so that all female sitters may be visible as individuals in their own portraits.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

European portraiture, since its reemergence in the Renaissance, cannot be understood as an art form separate from society. Instead, portraiture is a social discourse, which reproduces and supports dominant cultural ideologies and paradigms of power. Portraits were never simply mirror representations of their sitters, but representations of their sitters according to specific visual languages, which were dictated not only by style, but also by sitters' class, gender, race, and position. Necessarily, then, any study of portraiture must account for the socio-historical context in which the portraits of study were produced. In this way, we not only historicize the image, acknowledging the specific visual codes expected of a portrait at a given time in history, but also place it within the particular social matrix of which it was a part and which it produced. For this reason, I have provided both a social history of portraiture broadly and a narrower socio-historical examination of fin-de-siècle bourgeois France. In doing so, I hope to have provided a thorough critical background for my examination of modernist spousal portraits, tracking the deferral of women's identity in portraits from the historical genre, through modernism, and even reflexively into the contemporary scholarship that examines modernist portraits of wives.

In the study of a genre committed to the representation of socially-coded individuals, I find it disconcerting that, particularly in the study of modernism, examinations of social structures and hierarchies are unevenly applied in scholarship; that is, social examinations tend to account for the masculine artist's experience, but not for the experience his female sitter, unless that female sitter (as in the case of Gertrude Stein) actively subverts the expectations of her socio-historical context. The social subordination of wives to their husbands, and the traditional

art historical privileging of the male artist, have made women like Hortense Fiquet Cézanne and Amélie Parayre Matisse critically invisible, even as we examine the portraits that depict them.

How can we account for this?

In many ways, the issue has already long been named but, again, unevenly addressed. As early as 1988, Griselda Pollock spoke specifically to the practice of modernist art history: “It is not so much that [modernist art history] is defective but that it can be shown to work ideologically to constrain what can and cannot be discussed in relation to the creation and reception of art.”¹⁸¹ The ideological work of art history is a direct consequence of the fact that art history is unavoidably a social practice, which through structural sexism works in service of “the production and perpetuation of a gender hierarchy.”¹⁸² Pollock does not mince words when she identifies the discipline of art history as a masculinist discourse, which, as she notes, “is secured around the primary figure of the [male] artist as individual creator.”¹⁸³ Within this paradigm, there is no place for the wife of the artist: gender subordination is embedded in the masculinist social practice of art history.¹⁸⁴ Pollock demands that, rather than being expelled as beyond the purview of the discipline, feminism and gender as a central analytical tool need to be incorporated into art historical practice.¹⁸⁵ Her work, then, explains at least in part the elision of Fiquet and Parayre. However, in the twenty-six years since its publication, the demands of her “Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art” have remained largely unmet.

In 2011, Mary Sheriff provided a sort of “state of the union” address concerning feminism and gender in art history in her chapter “Seeing Beyond the Norm: Interpreting Gender

¹⁸¹ Griselda Pollock, “Feminist Interventions in the History of Art,” in *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Eric Fernie (London: Phaidon, 1995), 301.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 308.

¹⁸⁴ The idea of “muse” falls outside of the scope of this study, and I would assert that the idea of “muse” still in fact adheres to sexist tropes and remains in service to the primacy of the male artist.

¹⁸⁵ Pollock, 305 and 307.

in the Visual Arts,” which in many ways speaks directly to Pollock’s “Feminist Interventions.”

In her chapter, Sheriff states: “In trying to locate the current position of gender studies [in art history], I can only say that it is neither at the center of the discipline, nor at its forefront.”¹⁸⁶

Though she accounts for multiple reasons why this may be the case, Sheriff focuses primarily on the idea of novelty: that the results of feminist studies are simply no longer “new” or provocative, and that scholarly interest follows only the newest (one might even say most fashionable) research pursuits.¹⁸⁷ She wonders if feminism’s lack of “newness” stems from the repetitious nature of oppression throughout history.¹⁸⁸ Understandably, though, Sheriff finds this phenomenon extremely alarming:

The idea that we have heard it all before seems to me particularly pernicious especially when we consider how short a time we have been studying gender, and how long a time we have heard the mantras of traditional art history repeated by noted and not so noted scholars, scholars who again and again talk about the same artists, use the same methods and invoke the same categories of analysis.¹⁸⁹

In order to counteract this dangerous apathy, and also to address what she sees as the problematic political correctness judgments of feminist art history, Sheriff advocates strongly historicized readings in order to creatively and subversively “reread” works of art, effectively reclaiming for marginalized groups the right to interpret.¹⁹⁰

Following Sheriff’s recommendation, then, we might return to Boucher’s *Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour* (figure 5). Though this image does adhere to the ornamental and transparent prescriptions of female representation, in a historicized reading, the Marquise’s own political and cultural influence might enable a subversive reading. Melissa

¹⁸⁶ Mary D. Sheriff, “Seeing Beyond the Norm: Interpreting Gender in the Visual Arts,” in *The Question of Gender: Joan W. Scott’s Critical Feminism*, ed. Judith Butler and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 164.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 164. Sheriff also implies that postcolonial studies have replaced feminist studies as the new “it” analysis.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

Hyde, for instance, places Poisson's makeup accoutrements in the historical context of eighteenth-century France, during which time cosmetics were less a signifier of gender than they were of class, and in fact came to be a subversive means of self-fashioning.¹⁹¹ Hyde argues that Poisson's toilette was not only the location of her own "de facto court," but that it was at this toilette that she skillfully created and performed her identity, not simply as royal mistress, but as artist and patron as well.¹⁹² In Hyde's reading, the constructing instruments of Poisson's femininity become simultaneously signifiers of her power.

Amelia Jones, as well, subversively interprets another of Boucher's images of Poisson, *Toilet of Venus* (1751, Metropolitan Museum of Art, figure 13). Jones asserts that the image of the Marquise paradoxically meets and subverts the demands of female representation, especially those put forth in Kant's theories of aesthetics: "While being raised to the level of 'goddess of love,' Pompadour is also arguably disempowered as beautiful object; at the same time... she is also deified and given devastating potency through the very sexual power that Kant's aesthetics labors to contain."¹⁹³ Through a historicized reading, and a reclamation of sexual agency, Jones complicates the image of Poisson and allows an interpretation against the patriarchal grain. I would point out that Jones' reading is ultimately more persuasive than Hyde's because she explicitly addresses the perpetual tension between agency and subordination, resistance and capitulation, in the representation and performance of gender: the subversion is more compelling when contextualized with that which it subverts.

Mary Sheriff maintains that historicizing images is the key to enabling subversive, feminist readings of historical works of art. She also points out: "No matter how subversive, one

¹⁹¹ Hyde, 458.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 462.

¹⁹³ Amelia Jones, "'Every Man Knows Where and How Beauty Gives Him Pleasure': Beauty Discourse and the Logic of Aesthetics," in *The Art of Art History*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 383.

single instance of a reinterpretation will not change how a painting is experienced in the future, but a collective effort... could have important consequences, and might even create a new history of art.”¹⁹⁴ Her strategy, then, might be framed as change by critical mass: that enough historicized and creative art historical reinterpretations will create a gender-conscious, feasible alternative to traditional and modernist masculinist art history.

Sheriff’s strategic feminist reinterpretations seem to address the fact that the massive paradigm shift Pollock demanded has not occurred, and that episodic intervention may in fact be more viable. However, the necessity of reinterpretation presumes prejudices or injustices that need correction. This is perhaps the entire basis of feminist art history: if feminism is the pursuit of gender justice—that is, the need to identify, address, and rectify injustices based on gender or sexual difference—then logically feminist art history is the pursuit of gender justice in and through the study of art.¹⁹⁵ While I believe that Sheriff’s strategy is exceptionally thoughtful and partially viable, I question some of the central assumptions on which Sheriff builds her argument, especially as they pertain to my own study of modernist spousal portraiture.

While Sheriff insists on historicizing the image as an object of inquiry, she does not simultaneously insist on historicizing the inquiry itself. She seems to presume a kind of good faith feminism, which would be reflexively critical of both the scholar as embedded in social context and the work of art history as social practice. As she observes, systems of oppression are often repetitive, and I believe it is remiss not to address the fact that as social individuals and especially as art historians, we and our practice exist within social systems of power. This is not to say that we are consistently unaware or uncritical of those systems, but I believe it is essential

¹⁹⁴ Sheriff, 171.

¹⁹⁵ My definition of feminism derives from Alison Jaggar’s lectures in her course “Feminist Methodologies,” fall semester 2013, University of Colorado, Boulder.

to acknowledge them as influential at both ends of the analysis, for the object and the scholar.¹⁹⁶ Again, I strongly assert that I do not believe that Susan Sidlauskas or John Klein set out with chauvinist agendas, but their work on the portraits of Fiquet and Parayre continue to privilege the central role of the male artist, which Pollock identified as symptomatic of art history as a masculinist discourse. Nevertheless, it seems very possible to me that these inadvertent reproductions are perhaps the most pernicious: they exist because the masculinist underpinnings of art history are so deeply embedded in the discipline itself that they become naturalized. But, as feminist scholars across disciplines strive to maintain, social systems of power are not in any way natural but culturally constructed.¹⁹⁷

If we are to be accountable to persistent systems of social power and gender hierarchies, in works of art and in our studies of them, it seems we need to move beyond the artificial boundaries of our own discipline and move one step further beyond historicization. By this I mean that it is not enough to claim the right to reinterpret episodically, hoping to shift paradigms of power by means of attrition. Instead, I believe it is necessary to interrogate the theoretical underpinnings of these systems of power themselves, not just their consequences, since, again, oppression is repetitive. To say that the gender hierarchies of fin-de-siècle France bear no similarities to our own is to ignore many alarming continuities, not least of which is the continued elision of women who are historically identified in the role of wife. The Marquise de Pompadour and Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun, whom Sheriff studies and reinterprets, both fill roles historically associated with agency, even if their filling them was subversive: Poisson was an intellectual and the powerful mistress of a king, and Vigée-Lebrun was an artist. Like Gertrude Stein as a creator herself, our studies are trained to identify and examine such agencies. Norma

¹⁹⁶ This analysis is indebted to Foucault's concept of genealogy. See *A History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, or for an excellent summary of genealogy, see Jae Emerling's *Theory for Art History*.

¹⁹⁷ Broude and Garrard, 1.

Broude and Mary D. Garrard comment that these agencies, claimed by women and therefore in conflict with the masculinist status quo, were actively resisted, denigrated, and dismissed in order to maintain the status quo; in fact, we might measure the strength of a woman's subversion by the rigor with which such subversion was historically repressed.¹⁹⁸ But what of the women who do *not* subvert but exist within such structures—structures that still exist and subsequently continue to elide, for instance, women who were wives?

In order to counteract these elisions, we must examine the power dynamics that underlie these histories—historical periods, the contemporary era, and the histories of art. This of course necessitates a departure from the traditional methods of (masculinist) art history. For instance, of particular interest to my study is Patricia Hill Collins' examination of the phenomenon she calls "dichotomous oppositional difference" in her work "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought."¹⁹⁹ She theorizes that dualistic thinking and the construction of binaries are central to Western systems of domination.²⁰⁰ These binaries are built in terms of difference and opposition, with neither component enhancing the other in any form of complementarity.²⁰¹ Furthermore, the binaries are fundamentally unsteady, and Hill Collins notes: "Since such dualities rarely represent different but equal relationships, the inherently unstable relationship is resolved by subordinating one half of each pair to the other."²⁰² Slowly, with this analytical tool, we start to make out the shape of absences: Fiquet and Parayre begin to materialize when we identify the systems by which they were first made invisible and continue to be made invisible, even in portraits of them. We only look for the

¹⁹⁸ Broude and Garrard, 7.

¹⁹⁹ Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," in *Just Methods: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader*, ed. Alison M. Jaggar (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2014), 311.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 311. See also bell hooks' *From Margin to Center*.

²⁰¹ Hill Collins lists examples of such binaries: "Black/white, male/female, reason/emotion, fact/opinion, and subject/object." (*Ibid.*, 311.)

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 311.

subordinated half of the binary when we become aware it exists. Hill Collins continues, and concludes: “Dichotomous oppositional differences invariably imply relationships of superiority and inferiority, hierarchical relationships that mesh with political economies of domination and subordination.”²⁰³ Framed in this way, it becomes clear that the supposed distance between the beginning of the twenty-first century and the end of the nineteenth may not be so vast. Systems of dichotomous oppositional difference are continuously in play, in the periods we study, in the periods in which we live, and in the discipline in which we work.

By incorporating social theory, like Hill Collins’, into art historical analysis, and by accepting that art history is itself a social practice, we might begin at least to glimpse the blind spots in both history and our studies. Essential here is the recognition that art history does not have within its own self-demarcated disciplinary boundaries the language with which to make these interrogations: founded as we know it now in the Enlightenment, art history was built on white male hegemonies. This is not to say that art history is monolithic or impenetrable, but that in order to address and redress harmful social hierarchies still present in the discipline, it is necessary to bring additional and external methods into our analyses. In the case of modernist spousal portraiture, Hill Collins’ theory of dichotomous oppositional difference provides a mechanism through which to understand the elision of Hortense Fiquet Cézanne and Amélie Parayre Matisse’s identities, especially in contemporary scholarship.²⁰⁴ Historicizing alone is not enough, because it does not account for persistent systems of subordination that potentially color our own work.

I cannot make unsubstantiated claims about the agencies of Fiquet or Parayre: history simply does not provide sufficient evidence about their lives, and art history has certainly not

²⁰³ Ibid., 311.

²⁰⁴ Ruth Butler’s *Hidden in the Shadow of the Master: The Model Wives of Cézanne, Monet, and Rodin* is an example of the occasional exception, though this work is more biographical and less theoretical.

accounted for their presence (or lack of it) even when looking directly at them. But by searching for the invisible, by naming elisions, and by recognizing the systems by which these women are absented, I submit a new kind of art historical subversion, one that is broader than Sheriff's. Though we cannot recover them as well as we might hope, we can recognize these wives—and indeed, perhaps women in portraiture more generally—and give shape to their absence. And most importantly, we can name the social forces that naturalize these elisions, calling them out and expelling them from our own work. The issue of gender injustice in art history and in general is not episodic, but systemic. Therefore to maximize the effectiveness of our efforts, our interventions must be systemic as well, such that we can see beyond socially dictated invisibility to the individual within the portrait.

FIGURES



Figure 1 Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, 1905-6, oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 32 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (image courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art).



Figure 2 Paul Cézanne, *Madame Cézanne in A Red Dress*, ca. 1890, oil on canvas, 47 7/8 x 35 1/4 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (image courtesy of ArtStor).



Figure 3 Henri Matisse, *The Red Madras Headdress* (*Le Madras Rouge*), 1907, oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 31 7/8 in. The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia (image courtesy of ArtStor).

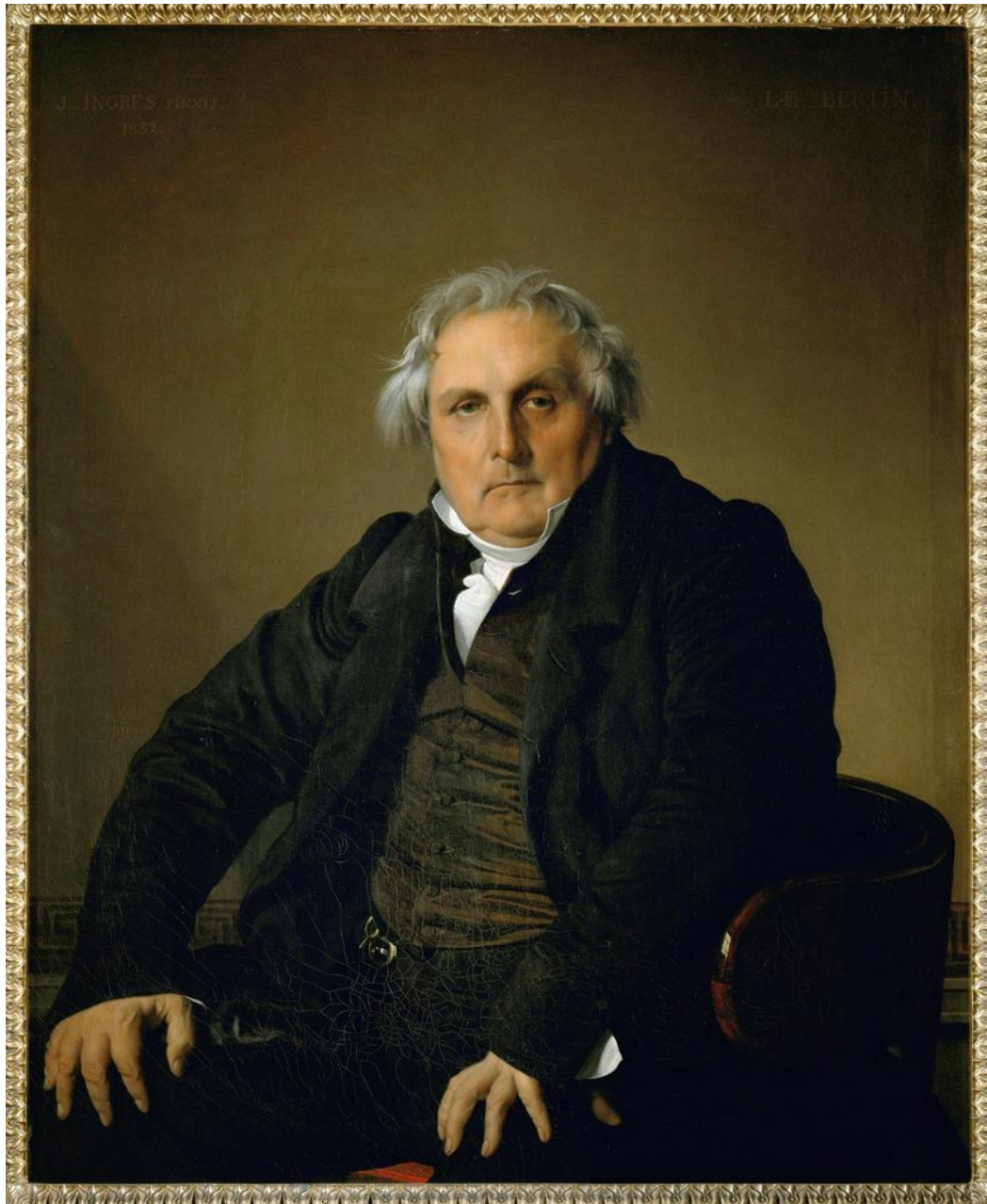


Figure 4 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Publisher Louis François Bertin*, 1832, oil on canvas, 45 5/8 x 37 3/8. Musée du Louvre, Paris (image courtesy of ArtStor).



Figure 5 François Boucher, *Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour*, 1750, oil on canvas, 31 15/16 x 25 9/16 in. Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge (image courtesy of the President and Fellows of Harvard College).



Figure 6 John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of Isabella Stewart Gardner*, 1888, oil on canvas, 74 13/16 x 31 1/2 in. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston (image courtesy ArtStor).

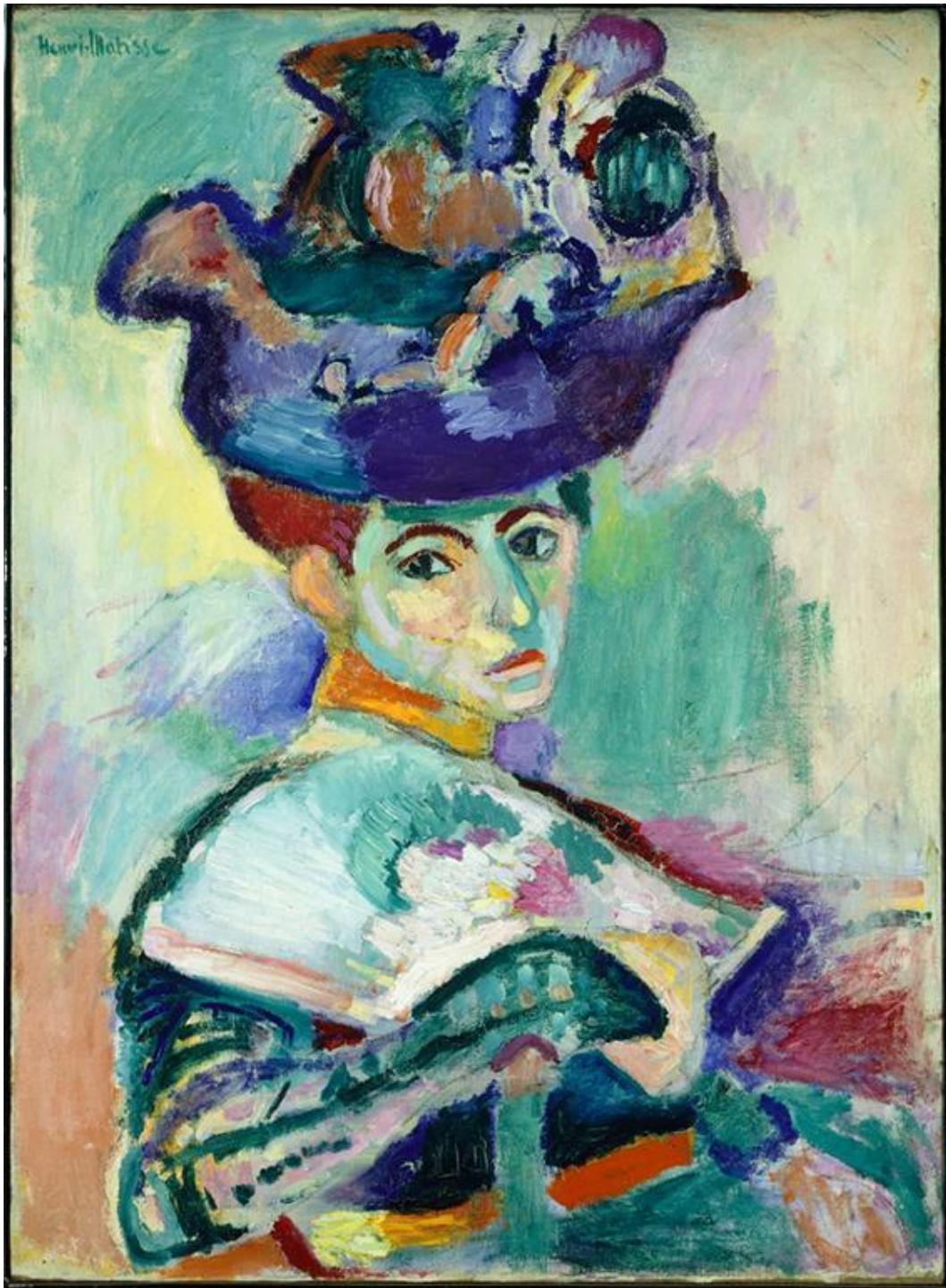


Figure 7 Henri Matisse, *Femme au chapeau* (*Woman with a Hat*), 1905, oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (image courtesy of ArtStor).



Figure 8 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Madame Moitessier*, 1856, oil on canvas, 47 ¼ x 36 ¼ in. National Gallery, London (image courtesy of ArtStor).



Figure 9 Paul Cézanne, *Madame Cézanne with Green Hat (Madame Cézanne au chapeau vert)*, 1891-2, oil on canvas, 39 ½ x 32 in. Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia (image courtesy of ArtStor).



Figure 10 Paul Cézanne, *Self Portrait*, 1873-6, oil on canvas, 25 ¼ x 20 1/8 in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris (image courtesy ArtStor).



Figure 11 Henri Matisse, *Large Composition with Masks*, 1953, gouache on paper, cut and pasted on white paper, mounted on canvas, 139 3/16 x 392 5/16 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington (image from John Klein, *Matisse Portraits*, figure 206).

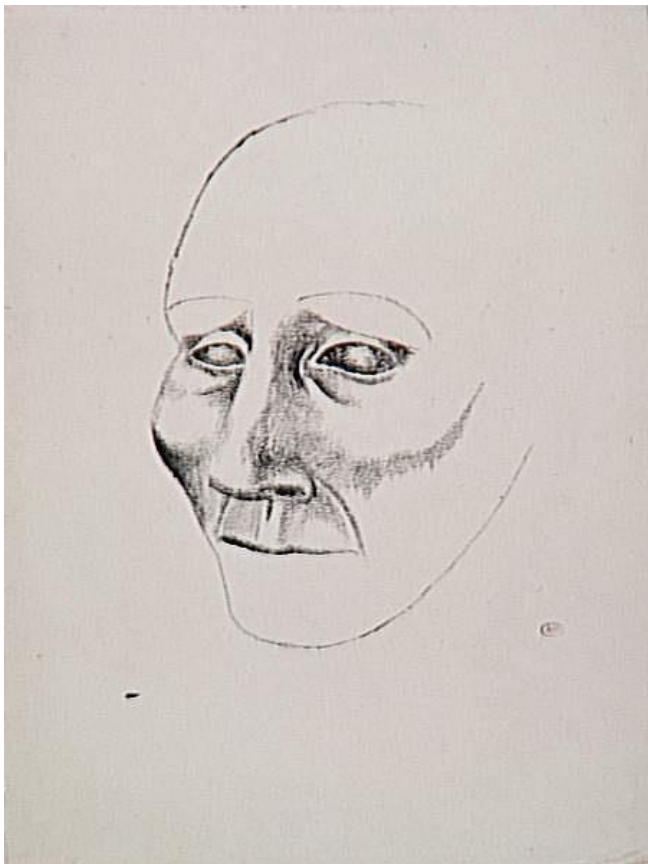


Figure 12 Pablo Picasso, "Death Mask" of Josep Fontdevila (*Visage-masque de Josep Fontdevila*, 1906, reed and ink on laid paper, 12 7/16 x 9 5/8 in. Musée Picasso, Paris (image courtesy of Musée Picasso online collection).



Figure 13 François Boucher, *The Toilet of Venus*, 1751, oil on canvas, 42 5/8 x 33 1/2 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (image courtesy of ArtStor).

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