



Paris Revisited: The Overlooked Aesthetics
of the Nineteen Twenties

André Rafael G. Vieira

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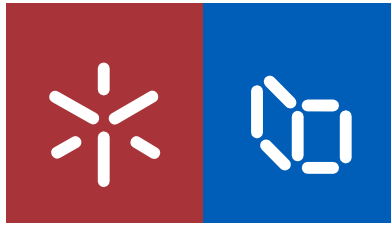


Universidade do Minho
Instituto de Letras e Ciências Humanas

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Aesthetics of the Nineteen Twenties

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The Overlooked Aesthetics
of the Nineteen Twenties**

Master Thesis in English Language,
Literature and Culture

Supervised by
Professor Jaime Costa

Julho de 2020

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“These are the days that must happen to you”

- Walt Whitman

Statement of Integrity

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration. I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Code of Ethical Conduct of the University of Minho.

Resumo

Esta dissertação tem como objectivo contextualizar a estética da década de 1920 relativamente à sua importância na arte e na sociedade. Propõe-se, também, a descrever o ambiente artístico conciso que nasceu em Paris durante o período, motivado por vários factores históricos.

As problemáticas abordadas referem-se às conexões entre diferentes artistas e movimentos, assim como, a possibilidade de a Geração Perdida de autores constituir um arquétipo em vez de ser apenas um subgrupo da literatura Americana. Com isto, levantaram-se matérias relacionadas com dois países intrinsecamente envolvidos: França e Estados Unidos da América. Ambos vivendo realidades excepcionalmente diferentes na primeira metade do século XX.

Como objetivo secundário, ainda que igualmente importante, este trabalho anseia elevar algumas linhas de comparação entre a era escolhida e o tempo presente, na esperança que um melhor entendimento desta época fértil e inexausta possa-se tornar, mais uma vez, enraizada no foro académico das instituições de educação superior e ser salva do aparente esquecimento.

Com o anterior em mente, a metodologia escolhida envolveu uma base suportada pela contextualização da época, seguida por um foco em três formas de arte distintas – pintura, poesia e prosa. Ao estruturar a dissertação desta forma foi possível realçar um número coeso e fechado de figuras e movimentos artísticos, facilitando assim a exemplificação das duradouras inovações que os mesmos trouxeram ao meio artístico visual ou literário.

Após o desenrolar deste estudo foi possível identificar várias razões pelas quais a geração dos retornados Americanos do pós-guerra, possam ser considerados um grupo paralelo ao modernismo Americano, embora sob a condição de terem abandonado o seu país de origem e tenham tido contacto subsequente com a vanguarda Europeia.

Finalmente, com o término deste estudo, é possível concluir que é imperativo que a comunidade académica olhe de forma actualizada para este período devido, distintamente, aos seus princípios inovativos, estética singular e o circundante ambiente político-social.

Palavras-chave: 1920's, avant-garde, Estética, Geração Perdida, modernismo, Paris, pós-guerra

Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to conceptualize the aesthetics of the 1920's in relation to their role amid the art and society of the time. It also strives to describe the concise artistic environment that was born in Paris during the period motivated by several historical factors.

The issues addressed refer to the interconnection between the different artists and movements and also to whether there is a reason to consider the writers of the Lost Generation as an archetype or a mere subgroup within modern American literature. This, thus, brought up matters related to the two majorly involved countries: France and the United States of America. Both of which living exceptionally different realities at the first half of the twentieth century.

As a secondary objective, this work wishes to draw a few lines of comparison between the chosen era and the present day, in hopes that a better understanding of this fertile and inexhaustible period can become, once again, rooted into academic focus in higher education institutions and be removed from apparent oblivion.

With the above in mind, the chosen methodology involved a baseline supported by the era's contextualization, followed by a focus on three distinct art forms – painting, poetry and prose. By structuring the dissertation in this manner, it was possible to highlight a closed number of influential figures, as well as artistic movements, as to better exemplify the enduring innovations they brought to the visual or literary art medium.

Following the pull of this study, it was possible to identify several reasons why, parallel to modernism, the post-war generation of American expatriates could be considered as singular American literary subgroup of American Modernism albeit, admittedly, at the condition having departed from their homeland and consequently having contacted with the European avant-garde.

Finally, with the termination of this study, we can conclude that it is imperative for the academic community to take a renewed look at this era, particularly given its innovative principles, singular aesthetic and surrounding social and political climate.

Keywords: 1920's, Aesthetics, avant-garde, Lost Generation, modernism, Paris, post-war

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Introduction

In the first year of this master's degree, we were directed towards the exploration of the intertextuality of works and the interconnectedness of different art forms – thus, making aesthetics the perfect meeting point for all the different artistic expression. This work emerges out of interest, as well as intrinsic will, of deconstructing an era (and generation) that was built upon foundations of joint learning and an immense drive to make a new imprint. The dichotomous nature of the era also strengthened its appeal. Since the typical modernist appears considerate of the inner workings of Man, one can be quick to judge these artistic movements as born out of pure individuality and self-reflection. Much of the challenge resides in turning these notions off and finding the link between overlooked contexts or philosophies and the raw factual data. Only then can the outcome help us portray the ethos of the era in question.

Our analysis should thus follow the chain of events of the turn of the century, all the while highlighting the most impactful happenings of the time such as World War I or the standardization of the use of electricity in the cityscape, for instance. By doing so, we can begin to ponder how could these circumstances, that vary in influence, alter the perception of the work of art.

Although not exclusively, the nature of this dissertation implies a large focus on American influence, be it social or literary. Because of this, it is expected of this work to shed light on the American viewpoint, using European notable figures and occurrences as a steppingstone. This is represented by the emphasis on the Lost Generation group of writers. Effectively, this is what allows this work to maintain a line of focus, so not to deviate from its global objective.

Admittedly, there is enough content within one artist, or even a single painting or poem, to develop an entire dissertation on. However, for the purposes of constructing a wholesome picture of a period, one feels very much enticed to enrich the work with as many contributors as possible. For that reason, the direction followed by this dissertation implies a reference to several painters, poets and writers along with their innovative techniques or movements. This proves crucial not only for the structure of the work itself, but also for the comprehension of the interactions between these figures – both in timeline and content. A good example of this situation is the impact of Cubism in other art forms, since its development paved the way, not solely in approach, but also in timing.

An important aspect that may help justify the making of this study revolves around its comparability with the present day. Or rather, its similarities and contrasts, which might be able to help us understand what can be expected of the art medium in the present-day version of the twenties – one hundred years after these subjects of study propelled modern art. It should serve, then, as a reflecting exercise to balance

how a generation acts, feels and expresses itself after a war, versus how one reacts to its absence clouded in imminence. This, along with some quite relevant social phenomena, like the Prohibition or the acknowledgement of women's rights, can further reinforce the belief that the study of this epoch should be prioritized in the academic setting.

The chosen bibliography supports itself on the work developed in several academic writings – such as essays and dissertations – along with news articles, published works, paintings, photographs and other types of relevant content.

I – Contextualization

1. Aesthetics

1.1. Origin

Aesthetics, or the way we conceive and appreciate beauty, can be seen differently depending on which era one is focusing on. Indeed, the patterns by which we define what is pleasant to the eye differ geographically, temporally and even personally. To conceptualize, or even simply draw the outline, of something that is inherently made to satisfy a large group of people is no simple task. Most of the times, an artist will argue that that is not the point of their artwork and in fact it probably is not. What one can be sure of is that what is aesthetically well seen by a large group of people is rarely so by chance.

Art, as we know, was initially seen as a means of deception, either by not representing the real accurately, or by doing it so well, and in such manner, that the observer would be fooled to mistake it with reality itself – which pointed out art’s dangerous nature. This is better described as Plato’s stance. It is also during his time that the English root word “art” came from to describe something apart from nature, made by Man (e.g. “artificial”). (Blocker & Jeffers, 1999: 2). On the other hand, we have Aristotle’s assessment, which seemed to tilt towards a more encompassing notion of art and, thus – abandoning the more precise demands of his teacher. For Aristotle, there needed to be at least some kind of separation between art and politics or philosophy – letting out a shout for autonomy. But in his merit, Plato seemed well intended.¹ He fully recognized the power in art that his student later acknowledged, only the former chose to be cautious of it, since admittedly it had such a strong potential for social impact. What seemed crucial for Plato and indifferent for Aristotle were its boundaries. While the first insisted that art should follow clear ideals of morality – usually pressing on harmony, balance and proportion to ensure society would trail the same lines –, the latter found that art should live separate of pure rationality and science, elevated above those notions in a cloud of its own. More importantly, however, is how both stances can be said to have defined our own outlook on the notion of aesthetics, one that remains forever tied with the good, the beautiful and the cathartic. (Blocker & Jeffers, 1999: 3 and 4)

¹ “We all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth” (Picasso, 1923). This statement stands as proof of the timelessness of Plato’s train of thought.

1.2. Approach

The aesthetic elements highlighted in a product of art, be it a poem or a painting for instance, can be identified through analysis of its blueprint, its structure, its color, shape or rhyme scheme. Being a mostly subjective notion, much of it is relative; however, here the main goal will be to take note of what the authors of said works included as a base of their art that might be suggestive of aesthetic elements and not what readers might consider pleasant or, by contrast, horrible.

Since aesthetic feedback depends so much on the audience's personal experience, it is easy to tell why studying the 1920's and the so-called Lost Generation² might be a trail worth pursuing. Not only does this era entail a plethora of authors and movements whose primary objective was to break the mold, it also brings forth a sense of relatability associated with an indefinite future and continuous mutation of the American Dream when living as a young man or woman in the modern world.

"For a like reason, we are more pleased, in the course of our reading, with pictures and characters that resemble objects which are found in our own age or country, than with those which describe a different set of customs." (Hume, 1757/1910, p.231)

2. Shifting the Point of View

"But though all the general rules of art are founded only on experience, and on the observation of the common sentiments of human nature, we must not imagine, that, on every occasion, the feelings of men will be conformable to these rules" (Hume, 1757, p.220)

One should first contemplate, from one's privileged position, the historical and social status of the Western World in the nineteen twenties. What may have been a motivator to change the population in such a way that it thirsted for a change, a new way of grasping the reality surrounding them?

² The term refers to the generation of people who reached adulthood during or immediately following World War I. It is also specifically used for the generation of American writers of the same origin.

2.1. Youth, the Casualty - World War I

The war destroyed kings, Kaisers, czars and sultans; it demolished empires; it introduced chemical weapons, tanks and airborne bombing; it brought millions of women into the work force, hastening their legal right to vote. It gave independence to nations like Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic countries and created new nations in the Middle East with often arbitrary borders; it brought about major cultural changes, including a new understanding of the psychology of war, of “shell shock” and post-traumatic stress. (Erlanger 2014)

World War I appears as the obvious motivator, since it was the first conflict in such a global scale and one of the worst, most casualty-filled military movements in history. To have suffered the consequences, both by being in the trenches or witnessing the devastation as it occurred, must have been terrifying and life-changing in more ways than one. When death is nigh, human nature makes one backtrack and rethinks what was previously set in stone. Art and self-expression demand innovation to advance as much as a tank demands fuel to run and, therefore, it was unavoidable that surviving a war would result in fresh ideas and movements that defied the preconceived order of the world.

Visual arts, especially, although not exclusively, can be pointed out as having a deep and long-lasting connection with war, conflicts and battles – being that a clash of ideologies portrayed by the raw, animalesque and socially impactful actions of men offer several artistic premises that should not be ignored.

Perhaps the biggest outcome of the war, excluding political results, human casualties and overall destruction caused (and suffered) by its participants, was the change of mentality that turned the glory of war and the besting of the other nation into a desolating, pointless affair. Defending the interests of your country, at the beginning of World War I, represented the major goal of all young men who had volunteered. The nature of war had been distorted over time, bent in all directions by heroic tales of the past and wartime propaganda, creating a feeling of guilt in all those who did not offer to put their life at stake. In the aftermath, at the trenches, putrid and wet, nothing seemed to matter anymore.

At the turn of the century, modern ways came sweeping through the land. The outcome of the horrible battle brought along great findings and changes of mindset at the expense of human lives. Previously undiscussed consequences of sending troops to battle, such as individual traumatic repercussions, became a subject to be considered. It now demanded a question: Can a man truly come back unscathed from war? Or rather: Can these men be expected to come back from an outdoor slaughterhouse and

restart their lives as if they had not seen the horrible things they clearly had? This was a feeling perpetuated by T.S. Elliot's *The Waste Land*: "And the dead tree gives no shelter / the cricket no relief, / And the dry stone no sound of water." (1922) A generation lost in an arid land which offered no shelter and, above all, no relief.

To better analyze this matter, one may resort to photography given its objectivity in documenting history. August Sander was a renowned German portrait and documentary photographer known to depict the way of life of his home country, both in rural and urban settings. Appropriately, his subject theme was noteworthy for its ability to display the transition period between the countryside and the cityscape.

In *Young Farmers*, a photograph dating to 1914, Sander depicts three young men (who were in fact not farmers, but workers of an ore mine) in their twenties on their way to a dance. The clothes they wore are relevant since a few decades before, it would have been unthinkable for a farmer, or even a mine worker, to have access to such an attire – highlighting the beginning of a stir in the class system, manufacturing industry and consumerism. (Berger, John. 1980: 34) Yet, more prominently, this portrait's execution allows it to be a kind of ode to the generation that would be struck by a world war shortly after the picture was taken. Their forward-facing position and the manner they look at the camera over the shoulder is reminiscent of youthful impatience. Moreover, their overall posture of vanity seems to indicate the feeling of pride of going towards a special event, well-dressed and accompanied by friends. But then, the picture also exerts some very clear pressure, perhaps because of elements such as the canes they carry or the cigarette one of them holds in his mouth – both reminiscent of higher class, or at least showing a urban lifestyle that does not harmonize with the countryside of the time. Or perhaps, it is rather in the way they are framed that we find this tension, this odd atmosphere. By focusing on their heads in the clouds and feet on the mud, as well as the line of the horizon stubbornly cutting through each one of their heads, one is left with a heavy image of young doubt. An image that would later prove to be an omen, since a few months afterwards, the three boys were drafted to the German Armed Forces to fight in the war, tragically resulting in the death of Auguste Klein, the young man in the middle, and the wounding of Otto Krieger and Ewald Klein. This portrait must be one of many representing the lives of a generation lost amid a conflict they did not chose to feed or much less begin. As John Green expertly put it: "(...) a picture is not a life. The young farmers photograph is about what those boys don't know, but it is also about what we don't know, and a reminder of what a picture cannot show us." (Green, 2019)



Figure 1 - *Young Farmers* (Sander, 1914)

2.2. Through Vibrant Lenses - **Photography**

Technological breakthroughs also open creative doors. Though, before they are accepted by a given society, they go through an understandable phase of scrutiny. If something threatens one's way of life, even slightly, the result is a questioning of its very purpose – not to simply put something down, but rather to prevent what negative outcome may arise from any such change. Perhaps, here it is relevant to mention the appearance of photography as a major motivator for traditional arts' abandonment of the exact and the real, of depicting what is seen the way it is seen. If there was a simpler, more faithful way of producing a picture mimicking what we pick up with our eyesight, why should art bother to do the same? Why not depict what is felt or a personal, less thought of interpretation? These questions made it possible for another approach to arise, one that yearned for experimentation – motivating attempts to visit and represent previously uncharted places, such as the complete human psyche (mind, conscious and

subconscious). Moreover, with traditional art's modern outlook, photography might have gained an advantage as well, allowing it to branch out and be accepted as its own artform, even after a prolonged skepticism of its use of "machinery" to express and convey elements of the human condition.

2.3. The New Dawn - Electricity

"Is it a fact — or have I dreamt it — that, by means of electricity, the world of matter has become a great nerve, vibrating thousands of miles in a breathless point of time?"
(Hawthorne, 1851/2008, p. 229)

Our time is engulfed in technology, which seems to limit the absorption of the imaginary and of artistic expression in general. In a different, but still revolutionary way, so were the people of early 20th century. They too had to deal with the extension of the day, for instance. The introduction of gas lighting to substitute oil lamps in late 19th century, as well as the arrival of electricity in the 20th century (as to replace gas lighting) swept away and left the population of the major western cities in awe (Hodara, 2016). This newly found brightness offered several possibilities as how to live one's life or what business to invest in. This is one example of an aspect that is, presently, taken for granted but that was once revolutionary in ways which then seemed near impossible to fathom. From the moment the hours of the night became useful, the population began adapting to the shifting reality. This, along with social and political tranquility, ended up being one of the crucial reasons why the French Belle Époque (1871-1914), is remembered as beautiful.

But where does electricity stand out in comparison with Paris of prior years, under the gas lights? In a sense, we should have to consider a process of turning Paris into the city of lights, we have to concede, that it started around the eighteen seventies and culminated in the nineteen twenties. It inevitably led to a change bringing about a more vivid nightlife (in cafes, restaurants and bars alike). This welcomed the standardization of electricity allowed the decade to reach its full potential and coin terms such as "Années Folles"³. Indeed, this "investment" on the later part of the day— along with the recent end of a terrifying war — contributed heavily to the fame and wonder around these years, especially so in Paris.

³ Meaning "crazy years" in French. Common terminologies for the decade in American soil include "Roaring Twenties" and "Jazz Age".

Because of the multiplicity of subjects in the theme of this dissertation, the use of different art mediums can be beneficial to better situate oneself. In a scene from Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, the main character Gil (portrayed by Owen Wilson), who travels back in time to Paris in the 1920's states: "Because you look around and every street, every boulevard, is its own special art form and when you think that in the cold, violent, meaningless universe that Paris exists, these lights (...)" (Aronson & Allen, 2011)

In this film, which was served to viewers among a tray of romantic comedy mixed with magical realism, Woody Allen opted for a warm color palette for the night and indoor scenes to capture the nostalgic aesthetic created by the yellow lights that would have fed Paris. (Fig.2)



Figure 2 - Still from *Midnight in Paris* (37:51)

It appears obvious, then, that much of what one knows about the decade was promoted by the standardization of electricity and, consequently, the lights that lit up the cityscape and, more specifically, the households. Even Jazz music could be said to be electric at heart. The ambient mood captured in this, willingly highlighted by Woody Allen in his film, allows us to imagine how this revolutionary technological innovation might have been seen by Parisians. It also delineates a very particular aesthetic associated with the time, be it in clothing, lighting or decoration.

2.4. Dry Season - Prohibition

“Understand now, I'm purely a fiction writer and do not profess to be an earnest student of political science, but I believe strongly that such a law as one prohibiting liquor is foolish, and all the writers, keenly interested in human welfare whom I know, laugh at the prohibition law.”
(Fitzgerald, 1928)

For quite some time in the United States, as well as in most of the world, alcohol played an important role in the everyday life of the population. This was not only the case for the working class – that took it as a stimulant in hopes of a supposed increase in productivity – but also in all the steps in the social ladder. Typical use was not only recreational, it was also seen as a means of fighting illnesses, something that doctors themselves would recommend. It is obvious that misinformation about alcohol and its side-effects and consequences was a great problem by itself, but it was not quite the reason why the 18th Amendment of 1917 (later ratified on 1919) was implemented in the first place. It was thought to make sense politically in the progressive era, easy to defend in the post-war, but proved highly complicated to implement since, not surprisingly, the population had grown accustomed to alcohol's enticing spell. Furthermore, according to Peter Sasso: “It allowed reformers to assault big liquor while advocating for a moral cleansing that would strengthen the nation. Prohibition also encouraged early dry advocates to condemn urban decay and crime caused by drunken debauchery.” (2010, p. 5)

Indirectly, this contributed to two major social consequences: firstly and more evidently, the rise of organized crime, which now had the green light to sell a commodity everyone was already used to consuming and paying for, while being able to define where and at which flow it was sold, resulting in a monopoly on a substance that for many constituted part of the daily routine as much as food or water. Life in the major cities of the United States became increasingly unsafe with the rapid growth of these criminal organizations (e.g. the Italian American mafia). This motivated literary depictions, most famously, Hemingway's short story *The Killers* which described how one's fate was sealed if one would become a target for these new age criminals. (Hemingway, 1927)

What also ended up happening, after alcohol was made into the new forbidden fruit, was that a sudden migration of intellectuals, mostly, towards the European landscape which for a while, took the place of the United States as the land for freethinkers. Paris, specifically, brought to the table the feeling of an American speakeasy, without the dangers and illegality associated with it – and this was far from the only thing it imported, mimicked or made better and that consequently attracted young Americans.

For example, in the watercolor composition by Palmer Hayden shown below, the central characters belong to a social minority that found (hedonic) comfort in a French capital that chose not to prohibit the consumption of liquor while showing substantial glimpses of racial acceptance, both of which unthinkable America at the time. Interestingly, these characters also display a degree of worry, with all their heads looking over their shoulders. (Fig.3) This might have been an indication by the Hayden, referring to an underlying remnant of the uneasiness faced in American soil that was transposed to the Parisian setting. In other words, this sense of restlessness was carried over when they crossed the Atlantic.



Figure 3 - *Nous Quatre à Paris (We Four in Paris)*. (Hayden, 1930)

2.5. Altering Spatial Perception

Distance had always been a limiting factor for people to move around or contact one another. This was facilitated with the invention and mass-production of the car. What this effectively meant was that there would be a move from animal powered vehicles, to actual petrol engines – from the simple and the natural to the intricate and mechanical in a sudden sweep. Taxis, especially for those taking advantage of the exchange rates, were cheap and bountiful allowing no one the excuse of missing a rendezvous. Noise pollution rose significantly helping to further implement the image of the modern cityscape, now more mechanical than ever, while at the same time getting rid of the waste left behind by the carriages and

their horses. Since the beginning, the car was a symbol of independence and escape and these two words are synonymous with the era. The line that separated the rural and the urban since the industrial revolution grew thinner and thinner and the suburbs arose as a decent possibility for the regular family to live in.

In 1800, it is estimated that the world's population reached its first billion. Agreeably, it took a long time to get to this point, however, by 1900 the population was already closer to the second billion. The world had almost the same amount of population growth in one century as it did in the thousands of years prior. Because of this, when bell of the turn of the century tolled, there was an interest of going farther than ever before. Not only figuratively but also literally (by traveling and/or mixing influences). Therefore, one can deduce that this change in how distance was perceived was important for the development of modern society and, further down the line, its relationship with art.

The normalization of the candlestick phone also allowed for more long-distance communication, which facilitated the spread of information. Not surprisingly, this affected the mentality of those who were born or lived around those years and, predictably, made it so people directed both their amazement and their skepticism to this new age of technology. Much of what needed to be said about the matter came in the form of modernist art. If not in its themes – such as speaking about the rumbling of machinery, oil or factories – art followed the idea of innovation and chose to abandon old ideals of truthful reenactment of the real and the palpable. Making it new, for all intents and purposes, and turning art into a murmur from within that made its way towards the outside rather than a depiction of the exterior the artist chose to transpose to a canvas. Even if, at times, the artist took inspiration from a peripheral object, it would never progress to the blank page before it was filtered through and shaped by his inner self.

2.6. A Spotlight on Black Culture in the United States: The Harlem Renaissance

The New York neighborhood of Harlem had been planned in the second half of the nineteenth century to become a kind of upper-class haven for wealthy white people. The sheer scale of residency turned out to be too extensive to fill in and soon black families from a nearby neighborhood moved there, upsetting the original residents and eventually resulting in most of them abandoning the area all together. This period coincided with the Great Migration (where millions of African Americans moved from the rural south to the cities of the north) and Harlem became one of the most densely populated neighborhoods for this reason. With such a great concentration of families of similar background it is no wonder that culture rose to the surface and flooded the premises with music, performative arts such as dance, poetry

and all manners of self-expression. The generally accepted date of the so-called Harlem Renaissance is between 1920 and mid 1930's and it helped secure the beginning of the century as one of globalized taste, not limited to the culture of the old continent. Another characteristic that helped Harlem achieve a remarkable notoriety during this period were the speakeasies that found their way into the neighborhood and allowed Jazz, Blues and the Charleston to proliferate. Since these cultural phenomena attracted whites to the neighborhood, the bohemian ambience led to a clash between whites and blacks and as in many other cultural clashes, this ended up being less than positively interpreted. As described by Langston Hughes in *The Big Sea*:

“Nor did ordinary Negroes like the growing influx of whites toward Harlem after sundown, flooding the little cabarets and bars where formerly only colored people laughed and sang, and where now the strangers were given the best ringside tables to sit and stare at the Negro customers—like amusing animals in a zoo”.
(Hughes, p. 176)

As we know, what goes up, usually ends up coming down. The swollen economic boom was no different. After the crash of the stock market (1929) and the end of the Prohibition (1933), many had to look elsewhere for income, resulting in a departure from Harlem and the north of the US – both in investment and in the number of people residing/maintaining businesses. The Renaissance was over but the voices of those that emerged from it would still echo for years to come.

But was it as magical, to the locals, as many seem to believe? According to yet another passage of Hughes biography, the “ordinary Negroes hadn't heard of the Negro Renaissance. And if they had, it hadn't raised their wages any.” Even then, the idea of a black Renaissance was likely to have been thought of by black intellectuals and/or upper-class whites, who chose to romanticize the epoch because they had been allowed to be part of it. But the general population of Harlem was not included in their own home's entertainment – they had been turned into extras for this metaphorical play, allowed to be around the main actors, but never so close as to become one of them. Or as Hughes put it: “As for all those white folks in the speakeasies and night clubs of Harlem—well, maybe a colored man could find some place to have a drink that the tourists hadn't yet discovered.” (Hughes, p.178)

Of the many notable figures, Langston Hughes stands out as one of the most influential. His style of poetry had never been seen before, it took advantage of the way black people spoke and the musicality of Jazz and Blues, while taking pride of all that their culture achieved, did or knew. Curiously, Hughes spent much of the period of activity of the Harlem Renaissance traveling – well aware of its ephemeral nature – and even remained in Paris halfway through the Jazz Age. It was there that he found another

instance of racist inclinations when he was denied jobs, multiple times, losing them to his white counterparts. (Hughes, p. 130) This is one of the instances he took inspiration from to write *I, too*, a poem that starts with the verse: “I, too, sing America” (referring to the national anthem and the patriotic feeling of a black American) and that finishes with the equally self-explanatory verse: “I, too, am America.” (1926)

Another well-known figure of the Harlem Renaissance was Aaron Douglas, a painter known for his modernist style that blended together African American and modernist art. His work was especially appreciated as an illustrator, even more so before the nineteen thirties (decade where he went on to produce his best works). The products of his imagination transcribed to the blank page resulted in compelling images composed by black shadows, often part of a type of performance. The use of Art Deco stylistics fueled Douglas’ intention of making his compositions act as a reminder of how blacks were seen in society, always as shadows that in one way or another had to hide but that struggled with many of the same issues – and more – than any white man or woman. Additionally, and perhaps more distinctive is “the rendering of an all-black world in which whiteness is not a point of reference.” (Thompson, 2000). The use of color in his works prior to 1930 seemed to be limited to a pale palette, darkening the tone of the illustration. The shapes are reminiscent of human figures but more geometrical rather than preoccupied with the faithfulness of the real. In *Charleston*, Douglas opted a satirical approach regarding the newly embraced interest in black culture. (Fig. 4) In it, the protagonist bathes in the limelight while a similar bright colored rope hangs from the ceiling. This rope seems to act as a reminder of gloomier intents behind the sudden change of perception towards black people. With this simplistic yet polished style, Aaron Douglas found a way to break the norm.

Finally, where Douglas also stood out was in his preferred means of exposition, choosing to publish his works in public media such as newspapers, magazines and books. Because of this, he would, more often than not, contribute to a collaboration between literature and painting, creating a rather complete composition of liberal intentions that could reach all walks of life, while describing the role of African Americans in the everyday life of the United States. (Earle, 2007, p.12)



Figure 4 - *Charleston* (Douglas, 1928)

2.7. A Spotlight on Black Culture in Europe: 1920's Paris and the Concept of *Negrophilia*

At first glance, and to the untrained eye, the way black culture jumped to the spotlight in early 20th century Europe and, specifically, the nineteen twenties looks like a sign of progress, of overcoming and leaving behind old racial stereotypes that had long been tainting the western way of living. From the long, elongated African face masks serving as inspiration for various painters and sculptors to the musical phenomenon of Jazz and the seemingly offensive use of African American individuals in advertisements, the appropriation of black culture became an obsession to the point that one would be less in vogue, less fashionable if uneducated about the matter. *Négrophilie* (in French), or *Negrophilia* (i.e. love for black culture), became a kind of rebel status symbol in nineteen twenties Paris, where it had a fairly liberal connotation. (Archer-Straw, 2000)

Artistically, the importation of black culture into mainstream Parisian vanguard happened gradually over the years following the start of the twentieth century. Years prior to the events and the twists and turns that made young Americans become part of the Lost Generation in the first place, Paris was already thriving with artists. According to Fisun Güner, a small African figurine purchased by Henry Matisse in

1906 was shown to Picasso in Gertrude Stein's home letting off a spark that would define modernist art forever – equally so overseas, with Max Weber. Güner further explains Picasso's interest by stating that he “had already absorbed all that European art had to offer” and described him as being “hungry for something radically different” and “new to the Western gaze”. (Güner, 2017)

This seemed to represent a turning point in Paris, one that would come to resonate for years and that would then mark a definite departure from the old Western values and encourage creative endeavors that focused on being spontaneous and impulsive. Perhaps it is fair to say that this became the greatest contribution to all artists that came after, not only to focus on black art forms or other cultures' art but to attempt what had yet to be attempted. This is the heritage that artists from the Lost Generation got and soon passed down once they stepped in Paris – a heritage that made them to look beyond Western Civilization.

It is also only when one steps away from the artistic standpoint of the era, the one that demanded innovation and an endless search for humanity's identity and origin, that one starts questioning the true intention of the Parisian vanguard. The recurrent use of terms such as “primitive”, indicated that there was still underlying discriminatory behavior in the mouths of the avant-garde. As stated by Archer-Straw: “for members of the Parisian avant-garde the ‘primitive’ was an antidote to a stifling and civilizing bourgeois modernity; but their positive use of the word could not avoid the negative connotations that it had acquired. (2000, p. 2)

What this stance entailed was that the idea of a superior white race was still being enforced at this time and place, only it was being shadowed by the supposed amazement and interest in black culture. These ideals began flourishing between the 1900 and the years following 1920 – decade where they became even more central – during a time where standing out among the crowd and rebelling against the norm was the only way to live. For blacks, and according to Petrine Archer-Straw, the attraction for whites “was equally strong” since it “valued their sense of worth” and “gave them a sense of power”. In sum, there was indeed a bond created between whites and blacks, but it was one of highlighting differences and being fascinated by them, never quite attempting to find a common ground like in all other interpersonal relationships. In other words, a false start, but a start, nonetheless.

2.8. State of Affairs - Economics

“And the closer the impending catastrophe approached, the more a striking acceleration of luxury and high living could be observed.” (Chaney, 2011, p. 10)

In economic terms, France and America were far from being in the same situation – which helped the cause of migration. Paris, for instance, was a cheap destination and only became cheaper along the decade, with its national currency becoming increasingly low compared to the dollar – a war had just ravaged Europe, after all. America, on the other hand, was amid an economic boom that came about after the end of the war, moved by capitalist intentions that resulted in the creation of a consumerist United States. With the due advertisements and technological innovations, the bait was set for the population of a positive, post-war rejoicing country. Not only that, with new methods of production such as Henry Ford's assembly line, the task of managing supply and demand became much easier to accomplish. Indeed, these were times of great wealth and even greater excess and everyone seemed to want to take part in it. So much so that in the United States, much of the rural population had already migrated to the cities around 1920, in search of better opportunities. The issue, one can easily deduce, was that everyone left the countryside to reach heights in terms of lifestyle and general income that would otherwise be impossible to achieve. This, of course, proved to be unsustainable and resulted in the fall of production, agricultural and otherwise, and a rise in unemployment. By the end of the decade, the scale had tipped, bringing down the stock market and all those involved in it – or just affected by it – back down to earth. In October 1929, the market crashed after years of reckless speculation and a weakened agricultural sector, among other miscalculated ordeals.

Until its inevitable end, however, life in the nineteen twenties (for those that could afford it) was not much more than a giant celebration of sorts, lasting for around 9 years, these were times where everyone seemed inclined to pursue a hedonist lifestyle, in one way or another. The booming economy was the cherry on top that allowed pleasurable excess to become an affordable commodity, especially so if you traveled and took advantage of the strength provided by the American dollar.

2.9. The Politics of Leaving the Land of the Free

First and foremost, why did so many young men and women decide to move out of the United States in the first place? Were there greater political reasons behind the choice of moving out?

To answer these questions, one needs to first shift the attention to Warren G. Harding, who before being elected in 1921, had given a speech on what his vision for post-war America would look like. In the speech, usually titled “Return to Normalcy”, the republican presidential candidate calls for the exact opposite of the philosophy of the Roaring Twenties – exalting the need to slow down and take a step back. He proceeds to use antagonistic terms to describe what the American people should look for now that the war was over and what they should leave behind. The terms he spoke positively about reflected his traditionalist ideology, referring to a need for “serenity”, “restoration” and “normalcy” and an obligation to leave behind “revolution”, “agitation” and “the dramatic” (Harding, 1920). Yet, this is where a problem emerged, right amid these highlighted words, and it happened simply because this was not what people had yearned for in a post-war scenario. Much less with the, then recent, implementation of the Prohibition and the rise of Puritanism. Agitation was what the new generation had hoped for (artistically and otherwise), moved by the end of a war and a new understanding of the concept of warfare, the population did not want to slow down, they wanted to live up to all that they almost did not have a chance to. And living up is what they did.

At the end of his speech, President Harding states: “Let us stop to consider that tranquility at home is more precious than peace abroad” in quite a nationalistic fashion, this seems to have had the opposite effect. Regrettably for Harding, tranquility was too tedious for the young, resulting in them leaving the country in search of all that had been denied to them – even if that something were the pleasures of life and the open-mindedness of Europe, this shows the nonconformity of a reasonable percentage of the population of the time. This somewhat conservative stance would continue even after the sudden death of president Harding (1923) with Calvin Coolidge taking his place from 1923 until 1929. As a sign of the times, we can also point out the resurgence of the KKK in 1925 (Ku Klux Klan) as an American attempt at Fascism, which entails an ever-deeper commitment to the right wing, albeit a radical one. At the very least, this certainly did not help the unstable political climate of the time and proved imperative in some minority’s decision of leaving the United States.

In sum, the American post-war political stance became one of control and government-induced tranquility, which for many was just not an option – especially with a booming economy. The world was changing, and people wanted to change with it, to be at the forefront. The United States stopped to look to the past for answers and that ultimately sealed the deal for many who wanted to be intoxicated by the near future instead.

To further justify the outward inclination that took so many Americans overseas, one must consider the state of the arts and define whether or not certain political inclinations limited the aesthetics of artists and writers alike.

In the United States, more to the end of the 1920's and the beginning of the following decade, there seems to have been an increase in realist depiction of rural America, with the movement of Regionalism⁴ that aimed to depict these areas in colorful yet lifelike fashion. Much of it served as an answer to the Great Depression, something that would please much of the population that, as mentioned above, had to return to the south and the Midwest and whose government promoted a doctrine of recycled social values. In these paintings of conservative nature, the authors seem to detail a similar image as that of the past and invoke traditional values of family, hard-work and escape from modern urban issues. The best instances of these ideas that gained life in a canvas are found in Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Stuart Curry, all of which studied in Paris but came back to the United States to distance themselves of the breakthroughs of modern art and focus on what they considered to be the true American identity. This explains why those with creative endeavors failed to accept the post-war artistic scenario found in America and attempted their luck elsewhere. After all, the difference between Regionalism and anything that emerged from Parisian art around the same time is already significant by itself, but it is further made worse when one considers that this type of American art only fell out of favor after the second World War had ended in 1945. The United States, if one excludes those that made their name in Europe, can be said to have fallen into an aesthetic standstill for at least 25 years.

Another relevant instance comes in the form of the first American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, awarded in 1930 to Sinclair Lewis, a writer with an innate ability to create witty comedic yet socially relevant stories such as *Babbitt* (1922) – a satirical novel that critiqued the hollowness of the middle-class way of life. In Lewis' case, he was still following the rhythm of his country's politics, although with the intent of picking it apart and attacking small-town America's contradictions and hypocrisies. Where he fell short, however, was in his writing style that did not impose anything different, innovative or definitely characteristic – relegating Lewis to a position where he is still considered important, certainly; but only so for his socially relevant content, never for his aesthetics, which is where those who sought Paris excelled at. In a sense, indicating once more, that aesthetic progress was not to be found in America.

⁴ American realist modern art movement that aimed to depict scenes of rural or small-town America in accordance to conservative ideals and a rejection of European progressive artistic principles (1928-1943).

2.10. Scene: Feminine

The existence of the concept of social minorities in the first place, is one of human society's greatest shortfalls. From race and ethnicity to gender and sexuality, there was probably never a point where such small differences were reasoned as truly insignificant by humanity as a whole in an exercise of unanimous agreement. In the nineteen twenties, women caught one of the first glimpses of what that seemingly Utopian scenario could look like.

Right in the beginning of the decade, in August 18 of the year 1920, the 19th amendment was approved, giving men and women an equal right to vote. This unique landmark had taken a long time to come, after the rallying and campaigns for women had actually been going on since the second part of the 19th century. The service provided by women during World War I in the industrial sector, the so-called home front made more evident than ever the need to integrate women into mainstream American society. Indeed, the culmination of this movement and the application of the amendment could not have arrived in a better time, giving women a chance at deciding their own fate and role in this modern society, while gaining some leeway to explore and express themselves at a personal level.

Perhaps the answer lies in the idea that in appearing liberated through what one wore, it gradually became a genuine aspect of personal emancipation. Wearing short hair and short dresses, women were able to project a fantasy of their ideal, liberated selves moving freely in society. (Chaney, 2011, p. 30)

Starting with the obvious, the power finally entrusted to women meant more to them than just the right to vote in the next elections. It meant having a voice and opinion, it meant having a choice. And choices had not been abundant until then, a fact that explains why the first revolution started in the wardrobe. Flappers, as they were often called, were young women who proclaimed their newly-attained freedom by adopting a certain lifestyle, one that included a certain way to act and quite a few fashion accessories all of which culminated in the same old idea – freedom. Their dresses were usually not too long – nor was their hair – but wide and comfortable, combating the old insistence in a slim figure induced by corsets. Smoking became part of the image as well, especially so with the use of a cigarette holder, which prevented the scent of tobacco to stick to their hands, making the act seem more elegant by consequence. These women would, intentionally or not, define the aesthetic of the time by displaying a style that screamed freedom, sensuality and a certain elegance that defied reason – not so many years earlier, after all, “worthy” women would only be described as pure and innocent. The flapper represented herself in ways that would make that description more complex and at times unthinkable, thus, breaking

apart from the stereotypes. Paris, then, acted as an extension of this newly found freedom for “American women [who] enthusiastically adopted more public roles in the capital, foregoing the chaperones and rigid gender roles of old.” (Blower, 2011, p. 33).

Perhaps one of the most known examples of a woman that adopted the flapper lifestyle came in the form of Scott Fitzgerald’s wife, Zelda. Not only was she born in an arguably difficult place to be an emancipated woman – Montgomery, Alabama – she was also the daughter of a well-known judge. It is likely that what makes Zelda Fitzgerald such a good representative of the flapper was her life story, which could have ended up with her spending the rest of her life under her father’s wings, and doing men’s bidding, but that instead resulted in her adventurous lifestyle in both the United States and in Europe. Much of the contributions made at this time regarding the so-called “Jazz Age” came from Zelda’s husband, Scott, which in turn makes her as much of an aesthetic symbol as it makes him a “painter” of the era.

For Paris, the one woman who took the city by storm was Josephine Baker. Born in Missouri in 1906, the then soon-to-be icon was exposed to show-business all her life through her parents’ performative acts. Success was met quickly in her teenage years and so, aged nineteen, Josephine got her chance to travel to Paris and give the French crowd a show they would never forget. By using bold outfits and bringing to the stage a type of dance never before seen, which mixed scenes of eroticism and a seemingly infinite amount of vigor, Baker was an instant hit. Soon she would star in several films and shows all over France and Europe and become the most successful American entertainer in the old continent. With this level of fame, it is not surprising that she created fashion trends and had tremendous social influence – becoming a role model and a muse for writers and artists alike. However, her appeal was far from superficial. Eventually, Josephine resigned from being American altogether and became solely French. She then helped France in World War II and went on fighting, all her life, against racist principles as an activist. More than a symbol for the flapper, Baker – who devoted her life to the rights of women and African Americans – was, in all honesty, a symbol of freedom and individual courage. (Caravantes, 2015)

To find the true epitome of the flapper through America’s eyes, however, one has to direct the attention to Lois Long, whose pseudonymous “Lipstick” served a column in *The New Yorker* for years, with telltales of going out to dance all night, mentions of speakeasies and alcohol consumption, and an enormous variety of subjects that would interest the “modern woman” and bother the more traditionalist individuals. With this public space to vent her opinions and thoughts, Lois was able to spread a clear message that showed women all over the United States that times were changing and that if it was a celebratory occasion for men, so it had to be for women as well.

It was a decade of fast living and not even the image of the flapper was left aside in advertisement. Indeed, it is easy to understand why publicity companies caught on the fashionable side of being an emancipated woman, especially so for the traditional housewife that now the chance to rethink what was previously set in stone. Anything from cosmetics to cigarette holders were publicized with the “new woman” as a target, and if one was not yet a part of the flapper “movement”, one would quickly start pondering or fantasizing ways to be closer to that idealized image, thus, resulting in successful sales of a said product. As immoral as it might be to play with people’s dreams for a profit, this was part of the consolidation of the flapper as a symbol of the twenties’ popular culture, along with certain novels and films.

Womanhood, as far as literature was concerned, took new turns that went beyond the image of the flapper. Many women characters in some of the most successful novels of the time, were strong-willed and complex without the expected flourishing. In Hemingway’s body of work, for instance, it is common to dismiss his female characters as two typed, dichotomous in the simplest of ways – either angelical or twisted – when in reality one can find many traits in each of these fictional women that would turn them into entities of a complex multi-dimensional nature, alike a real person. Many of which, were androgynous in looks, progressive in thought and emotionally complex. A good example is Brett, the character found in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), who considered herself to be part of the men in celebratory occasions, had the habit of swearing and drinking in excess but maintained an emotional literary appeal due to her suffering in the hands of past lovers – that directed her to attempt to erase the pain with other men, albeit, unsuccessfully. Her actions regarding these masculine characters are arguably a secondary, consequent trait, and should result in dismissing her as a “twisted woman” that hurt others. In other words, Brett had her own justifications, her own reasoning to act and all things considered, this kind of modern, morally tangled woman would not have been written about years prior. (Brillhart, 1994, p.13)

It was then a defining era for women, both in common life and in fiction, showing that little to no effort had been applied in understanding the feminine struggles and longings beforehand. Alas, in a way, this seems to have been more like a momentary flash of light, much like the 1920’s themselves, than an actual light bulb that was turned on in people’s minds. What it did turn out to be, however, was a better development of women characters, along with a more accurate and precise defining role in the aesthetics of the time.

2.11. The Tune of the Decade - Jazz

If there is a product of culture that still manages to characterize Paris during this time, it was music – more specifically Jazz and Blues. The general embrace of this cultural phenomenon came originally as an importation from the black quarters of the United States. Helped by a rise in popularity of the capital of France in the eyes of outsiders, who saw it as a Mecca of all arts and a progressive place where black artists could thrive more easily than on American soil. According to Blower: “For [Aaron] Copland, jazz had seemed pedestrian back in his hometown of Brooklyn, but rediscovering it in Europe, haunting the Paris cafés where it played, was like hearing it for the first time” (Blower, 2011, p. 39). This seems to indicate that this transatlantic migration of music made Jazz grow stronger as a music genre, wider in range and of significantly more complete influences.

The upbeat tunes of Jazz, along with the mellow rhythm of Blues, designed the soundtrack of Paris in the twenties, coexisting in the same way dichotomous emotions did in people’s minds. Jazz was bohemian, joyful and celebratory. Blues represented the introspective modernity, slower and more focused on melody. Together they pointed firmly at a new age of experimentation and acceptance.

Scott Fitzgerald coined the term “Jazz Age” to characterize the times according its most defining characteristic. Jazz did not just sound like the twenties; the twenties were its very embodiment. No other type of music had ever incited so much contact and interaction with the public. Jazz was about electrifying people and paving the floor for the crowd to dance in stimulating fashion – and considering the big celebratory occasion that the twenties were, no other arrangement of notes and passion could have done it equal justice. This offered Jazz numerous honorable mentions in all sectors of art which resulted in its acquired recognition as an iconic music genre and the official tune of the nineteen twenties, both aesthetically and politically.

2.12. Religion and the Modernist’s Spiritual Descent

“Religion that has become established appears as law. A new religious vision is unlawful.”

(Townsend, 2001, p.174)

After the publication of what might have been one of the world’s most scientifically relevant books – Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859) –, Western Civilization faced changes that put in danger

deep rooted beliefs taken for granted by mankind ever since religion came to be a central part of human action. This spread out into global recognition with the passing of time and, by the end of the century, there was another answer to the eternal query of human origin; thus, defying the status quo of the last two millennia.

When modernism came around in the beginning of the twentieth century, it built up a considerable momentum with statements backing atheism and agnosticism, religious defiance and a type of spiritual abandonment that would have been attributed to devil worshipers in the past. As a matter of fact, it kept being treated as such. The traditionalist standpoint was that the typical modernist were automatically atheists and if that were true, it could only mean they would end up in the fiery depths of “hell”. In the war novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, the character of the Major, simply states that “all thinking men are atheists” (Hemingway, 1929/1997, p. 3). This view, albeit from literature or because of literature, on war and faith did not come by chance. World War I and its philosophy were essential in the making of the modernist, scenes of death and desperation caused many to consider that “God” was perhaps only “god”, almost like an old tale that allowed children to sleep at night without the fear of being consumed by evil. These men of war, however, had seen evil, had even smelled it, and evil began to look more and more like death – inglorious and unromantic. And what seemed more antagonistic with this terrible consequence, was life. Not an almighty deity, but mere life. The scale and ruthlessness of the war did not do much to help the case of religion, and it sure left a wound.

The anti-evolution act of 1925, named “The Butler Act”, was a law passed by the State of Tennessee in order to prevent state school teachings of the new theories of human origins. In other words, the formal education of students could not include these new scientific findings, under the reasoning that it would contrast with the study of religion in those same educational institutes. These were times of great political tension between modernists and traditionalists, especially so in the United States. Many of the freethinkers, including authors and artists, embraced these new discoveries and softly exposed them in their works, but that did not turn the tables completely. It was still a taboo, more than anything else and authors such as the above mentioned, were aware of the atheist phenomenon but did not abandon religion in their own life – albeit they might have reflected on it. Rather they opened a new window (of thought and insight) in a previously windowless house, one where religion had served as the sole door to.

Aesthetically speaking, the contributions of religion to art around the nineteen twenties were scarce, to say the least. Religion as an art subject was instead thrown into works as a defining characteristic of a certain character or, perhaps, a modern approach to faith – the latter did not stir the waters too much either. Indeed, the change of styling and motifs did not help its cause, but aside from being used

symbolically, it would rarely ever be used as a base for any kind of art, be it written, painted or played. Some exceptions can be found in T.S. Eliot's poems (e.g. *Gerontion*), Hemingway's analogies, Joyce's home bound depictions and Faulkner's southern tales. Some paintings by Dali, Picasso and Cezanne invoke this imagery but none made it their focus. Modernism, and whoever lived both inside the circle and at its limiting line, denied the need for more religious referencing, not by simply repudiating it of its importance but rather to shift the attention to previously unexplored or marginalized concepts. When religious belief was indeed mentioned in this period, it was usually to display faith being torn away from one's body by the terrors of war.

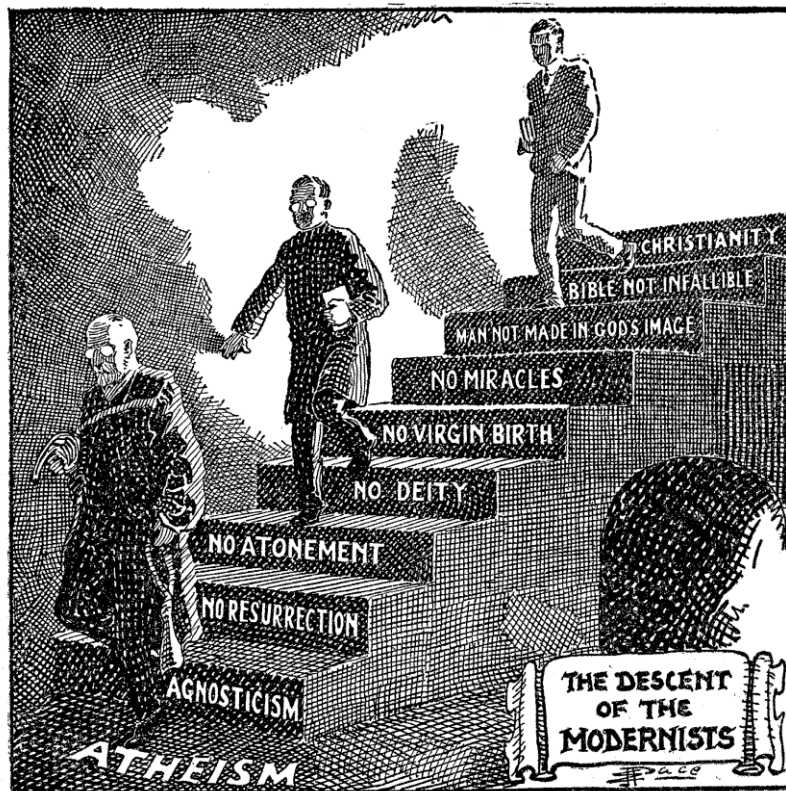


Figure 5 – *The Descent of the Modernists* (Pace, 1924)

II – Modern Aesthetics

Poetry, Prose and Painting were selected as the most favorable art forms to develop aesthetically in this written medium.

1. - The coexisting of subjectivity and objectivity in aesthetic scrutiny

To speak about aesthetics and measure the origin of worth in art, one is usually obliged to decide between two possible entry points. On one hand, there is the reflex of evaluating aesthetics in its purest form, contextualized by what allowed it to be sensed as in the first place. Emotion, the heartfelt stutter when in front of a truly timeless piece of art; whatever cryptic occurrence that allowed the wheels to start turning – the subjective. On the other hand, there is the practical sense, the numbers, range of influence and opinions, the personal and the public, the political and above all, the palpable – the objective.

Where the two meet and mingle, is in the denial of the decomposition of the artwork for means of analysis. The route to achieve an aesthetic experience might be a never-ending theorist's frenzy, however, many find agreement in the fact that criticism by means of dissecting the work of art is futile. The aesthetic experience, then, should reside somewhere outside the spectrum of labels (i.e. artistic movements or origin of inspiration). Both the objective and the subjective stance insist on aesthetic experience/emotion as special or limited by constraints – otherwise there would be no distinguishing between a regular experience and an aesthetic one.

When approached from a subjective standpoint, the appreciation of art, especially in the case painting, should be to achieve enlightenment that would otherwise be inaccessible. The artist's everlasting quest is to take use of the vulgar and the common and turn it into something extraordinary in order to allow the viewer a way in, a door to somewhere previously unknown, off-limits to the individual, uncharted even. Why and how the artist has access to this otherworldly region is the first question that arises and rightfully so. According to Clive Bell (only regarding the visual arts), the difference relies on artistic sensibility and the consequent feeling of "ecstasy" in relation to the work of art, a trait some have in abundance and others lack it in equal scale. Artists, then, are alike appreciators of art but own and have developed skills that other artistically sensitive people did not; thus, the latter can only experience what was digested and recreated by the artist. But what is and is not art if one follows the subjective

interpretation of aesthetics? For Bell, it is “significant form” – the junction of colors and shapes that in one way or another moves with our aesthetic emotions and allows them to manifest. This clearly paved the way for a more accepting view of art, less literal and more experimental as one knows modern art attempted to be. The colors and shapes described by Bell do not own their worth or recognition to the real, but rather to the emotion that they cause. Or better, as stated by Clive Bell himself: “We have no other means of recognizing a work of art other than our feeling for it. The objects that provoke aesthetic emotion vary with each individual. Aesthetic judgments are, as the saying goes, matters of taste...” (Townsend, 2001, p.260)

For the objective stance, one is inclined to look elsewhere for answers. Usually towards visible or palpable real-life occurrences that might have an impact in art as we know it. Even the more rule-defying or “psychic” of artists tend to comment or express themselves according to the reality that surrounds them. This effectively means that authors can never quite abandon or forget aspects such as their roots, education, place or year of birth when writing or painting, for instance. They will therefore end up leaving glimpses of the world they lived in, in their work, regardless of their intention. It is here that one modern, literal and above all objective interpretation of art can be found – the Marxist take. “As a political and cultural philosophy, Marxism belongs to the tradition of historical analysis that tries to infer larger patterns in the development of society” (Townsend, 2001, p.281)

In Walter Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, the authority of the author is questioned by new developments in the way art could be reproduced, copied and almost recycled. Perhaps one of Benjamin’s most interesting views, however, consists in his reference to the Industrial Revolution as a turning point for art. Since the methods of production themselves changed, artists could vent off and become entrepreneurs, producing and selling their “goods” at their own pace, price and profit – no more was the artist automatically bound by patrons. The very basis for artmaking changed and this, to an extent, created an opening that allowed art to widen its public exponentially. But it changed also, and perhaps more relevantly, in terms of distribution. Benjamin believed in the idea that without mechanical reproduction, cult art would never have turned into mass art and that in of itself radically changed the course and nature of artistic expression forever. Art, admittedly or not, wants to reach out and please at least one person in the world; however, in the age of mechanical reproduction, the audience became larger than ever before and aspirations could follow. Aesthetics, then, had to change accordingly, not only with the passing of time but also with the sheer range of people “involved” in it.

To further prove that this was relevant during the time period discussed in this paper, one can highlight how artists of the era branched out to find aesthetic enrichment in other cultures. From

Modigliani and Picasso's use of the African mask, to E.E. Cummings and Ezra Pound's obsession with the Japanese poetic form and imagery, the first few decades of the twentieth century took the first steps toward the globalized market that Walter Benjamin described in his essay.

For all intents and purposes, it seems to be more plausible to define aesthetics in a both objective and subjective sense simultaneously, especially when talking about the nineteen twenties. While subjectivity permitted the artist to explore other means of inducing an aesthetic experience to the receptor, objectivity allowed artists to widen its influence range and think about previously unreachable ideas and approaches, thus, enriching their work of art. In other words, the two stances cannot fully abandon the other, the aesthetic of a work of art is dependent on objective and subjective factors and there is yet to be a full, all-embracing definition of the concept.

2 - Early twentieth century visual art

2.1. The American Artistic Standpoint

The beginning of the 20th century, as tumultuous as one recognizes it to have been, also presented opportunities in the form of a vast array of modern subjects and new artistic pathways. American Realism, in Literature, had previously gained the contributions of Mark Twain, Henry James and Stephen Crane, for example. But with the turn of the century, all art was expected to start mutating and while some exceptions can be found, much of American Literature progressed overseas. Painting, however, seemed to be less willing to change and transform. Much of the focus of American visual artists was fixated in the development of the image of the day-to-day. Typically, scenes of the cityscape and its people's routine were seen as a stimulating subject – especially when considering the swift growth of some metropolises.

One way of organizing the early twentieth century American artistic situation is to counterpose those from Ashcan School of Painting with artists such as Arthur Dove and Georgia O'Keeffe. The former, known as The Eight, were heavily invested in enforcing the connection between art and the real whereas the latter had the conviction that there was more to convey, more to journey into.

2.1.1. The Ashcan School

“It is this ethos, first of all, that defined the Ashcan school of art. As everyone who has ever loved New York—or London, or Paris—understands in their soul, the city is an exciting place to be, and in that excitement, there is beauty.”

(Slayton, 2017, p.40)

The Ashcan School was never an organized movement. Members would seldom admit to a higher, centralized purpose; however, all seemed to strive for a kind of realist art more akin to journalism than bourgeois celebrations of grandeur. Realist painting, until then, had been focusing on the accomplishments of the few – and their strolls in Central Park –, instead of the struggles of many – working to survive. This, along with a rejection by the conservative National Academy, motivated Robert Henri and friends such as John Sloan and George Bellows to start focusing on overlooked scenes of metropolitan life. Take, for instance, Bellows's *Stag at Sharkey's*, a painting from 1909, from when boxing was still practiced in illegal Athletic Clubs. It is a gritty, violent and restless painting with increased emphasis on the boxer's movement and overall presence. As a viewer, one becomes part of the audience, inclined to look at the fight due to the vignette effect employed by Bellows. This seemingly served as a tease to the more traditionalist schools of painting. Not only were they seeing a representation of lower-class entertainment, dark and morally wicked for the time, but they would become part of the audience solely by looking at it. Aesthetically, the high contrast and saturation that is present here represents a recurrent detail of the Ashcan School painters, and rightfully so, since it tried to distant itself from pale impressionism (which would many times avoid darker earth colors).



Figure 6 - *Stag at Sharkey's* (Bellows, 1909)

As for John Sloan's paintings, perhaps the best example of what the Ashcan School sought after, one denotes they are wider in nature, more preoccupied by feeling and the pressure exerted by a truly great metropole on its residents. The movement of the everyday, either starting or finishing work amid an ocean of people. In *Six O'clock Winter*, the movement of the masses is perpetuated in a still image. As stated by Robert Slayton:

"Everything is movement and power. Yet this is not the force depicted in a portrait of a monarch in royal garb, but rather the rumble of a city, and a working city at that. There is no genteel soul strolling here in fashionable clothing. Instead, the people depicted here wear middle-class garments and are pressed together in the rush hour after work. There are masses of them as well; their strength truly is in the infinite number of human threads twisted into the urban fiber. This is an epic painting, in a metropolitan setting. Overhead bellows a subway train, a monster of modern industry, not heroic myth; it is held up by pillars and bracing of iron and steel, not the bones of a dragon's skeleton." (Slayton, 2017, p.40)

This was the face of a modern city. Not only the enjoyable moments the city presented, or its admittedly upper-class areas, but also the exiting sense of confusion the entirety of its citizens were made to bear and end up becoming dependent of.

John Sloan did not simply prosper in the controlled chaos of the cityscape; instead, he looked thoroughly for the varied moments that could be captured within it. After all, a city with the scale of New York allows one to find beauty in an array of sceneries, combination of lighting and activities. Besides scenes of the common working class, Sloan also depicted less acceptable activities for women, such as prostitution – or other displays of feminine independence and self-will. It did not take long for Sloan to want to expand towards the limits that define a great city – the upper bounds of its buildings. A place that was not exempt of the obligations of the day-to-day, such as hanging clothes, but served a secondary purpose of contemplating a growing, fascinating scenery that would now start rivaling those of past rural portrayals of prairies, hills or mountain ranges. In a way, Sloan and the Ashcan School projected the new American landscape, as darker, less natural and green than it had been in the past, surely, but more importantly, realistic and compliant with the foreseeable and overpowering conditioning of the passing of time.



Figure 7 - *Six O'clock Winter* (Sloan, 1912)



Figure 8 - Sunset, West Twenty-Third Street (Sloan, 1906)

There is an open debate on whether or not Edward Hopper should be included in this school of painting, especially because his style is comparable in terms of subject matter and execution. Though this might be accurate, Hopper approached the themes more subjectively, less worried with the intrinsic truth and realness. The philosophical and psychological weight of a big city in the individual was, seemingly, more of a preoccupation. His pictures seem as relatable as otherworldly and that sense of distress when presented with an otherwise calm-inducing painting is what makes Hopper stand out as a painter of modern solitude and one that was out of touch with any definite artistic movement.

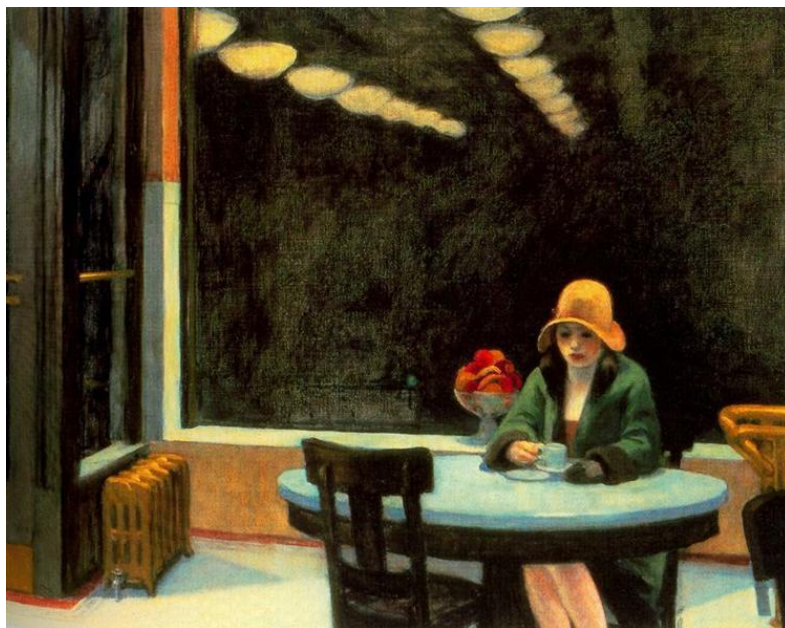


Figure 9 - Automat (Hopper, 1927)

2.1.2. Dove and O'Keeffe

While the noise and confusion of the new American urban setting felt like home for a great number of American artists focusing on its unpolished reality, some painters strived to abandon that path and perhaps set aside much of the admiration towards it, as well. Arthur Dove is renowned as America's first abstract painter. His timely interest in European art (having moved to France in 1907) allowed him to acquire such denomination. In a way, his interests hovered more into the invisible and spiritual forces instead of the concrete. With Matisse as his earliest of influences, Dove tried, from an early stage, to pull fundamental shapes from nature and translate them into simple form onto the canvas. An example of this can be found in *Nature Symbolized No.2*, (Fig. 10) in which the author explores shapes reminiscent of the movement a plant or tree would leave trace of when rustling in the wind or growing into a spiral. It is a return to the core, as most modern art tried to achieve in some way, through some technique. Besides this, he also became known for collages, well before some of his contemporaries. This is where one becomes sure of how Dove managed to elevate American art to the heights of the European avant-garde, while maintaining a quintessential American outlook on his surrounding and experiences. Especially considering how his later works proved he shared a special connection with the natural sceneries of the world, something that became a vital characteristic of his and that Cubists, Dadaists and Surrealists shifted away from, at least from a contemplative point of view. Though the abstract paintings of Dove reflect otherworldly imagery and abstract figures, much like some Picasso's or Dali's, the difference lies on his relationship with the natural environment, using external backdrops and the sun or the moon to mirror his internal emotions. In other words, Dove attempted to express the inner workings of Man through its reflected image on nature. (Fig. 11) Not only that, these would be created from musical stimulus and translated into heartfelt landscapes – emotions translated into sceneries, as if a person carried a multitude of landscapes within, waiting to be revealed. It was music, then, that spoke to Dove, who was attracted by its invisible effect, flowing through the air up until the moment it fed sentiment to the listener. This explains why in perhaps one of his most relevant works, Dove turns the notes and instruments of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* – a truly unique and essential music piece that seamlessly broke down American urban life in the nineteen twenties by creatively mixing Jazz with Classical music – into an equally impressive emotional depiction on the canvas. (Fig. 12)



Figure 30 - *Nature Symbolized No.2* (Dove, 1911)

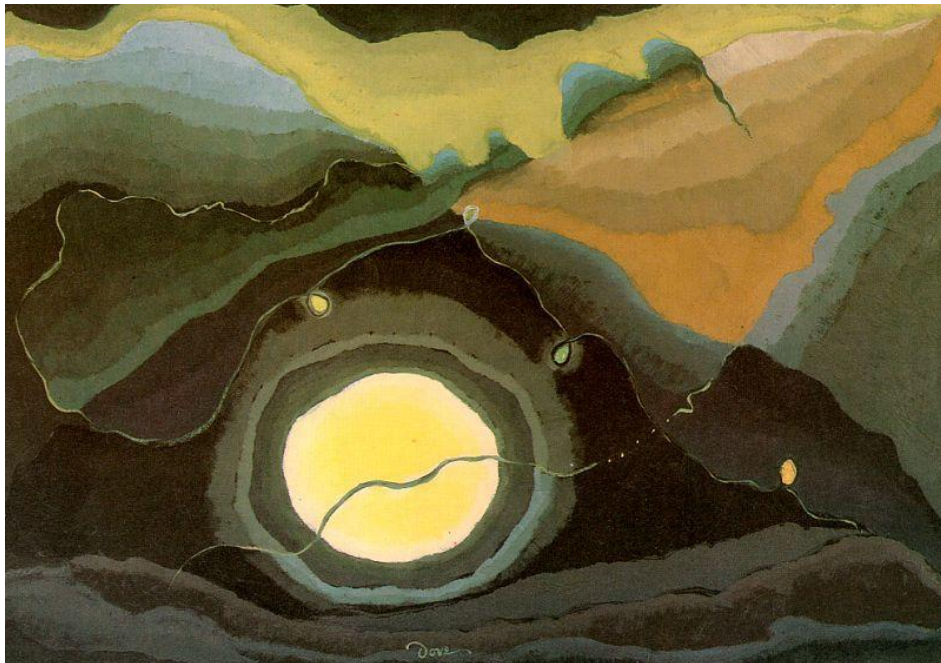


Figure 11 - *Me and the Moon* (Dove, 1937)



Figure 12 - George Gershwin- "Rhapsody in Blue," Part I (Dove, 1927)

Aside from Arthur Dove, only one other American modernist painter can be said to have abandoned realism altogether in search of a fresh and more subjective approach – Georgia O’Keeffe. Having been born in the Wisconsin countryside, O’Keeffe maintained a close connection with nature, even though her art studies took her to Chicago and New York. Her subject themes evolved with time, but much of what she produced perpetuated certain stylistic devices. Her earlier works focused on a quest for shape with watercolor or, more typically, charcoal drawings. There was definitely an inherent aesthetic a young O’Keeffe was trying to brew. In *Out of my Head* (1915), for instance, she used folds, alike those commonly seen in fabric or a thin veil, as if carefully revealing what lied beneath the stem of a flower. By the early nineteen twenties her paintings of flower close-ups had brought her to the limelight. These were often called sensual in nature, though the artist herself continuously denied it. The truth is, if a viewer looks for a sensual image in her paintings, he or she might find it, but there is an inherent beauty to them in terms of shades of color and movement of shape that invites one to stop and appreciate a living flower from a previously ignored angle. (fig.14) The inspiration seems to have come from O’Keeffe’s admiration of

photography. Moreover, it is relevant to note that by this time, Georgia had found a similar creative release in the depiction of music in the canvas alike Dove. It is stimulating to compare her approach with his to highlight the differences in both these modernist's technique and style. Though their motif was similar, their representation was rather unique. (fig. 15)

Before moving to New Mexico and adapting her aesthetic to the surrounding landscapes and hues, O'Keeffe produced a number of Precisionism⁵ artworks, which help to further elevate the artist to the modernist standpoint. This stylized artistic movement was one that did not have a proper leader or manifesto, but one that carried recognizable and distinct identity with Futurist and Cubist roots. These works are usually reminiscent of an industrialized, highly structured view of the world, with geometric outlines and urban subjects. O'Keeffe's, in particular, refer to her understandings of the metropolises while there studying and, shortly afterward, beginning her career.



Figure 13 – *Second, Out of My Head* (O'Keeffe, 1915)

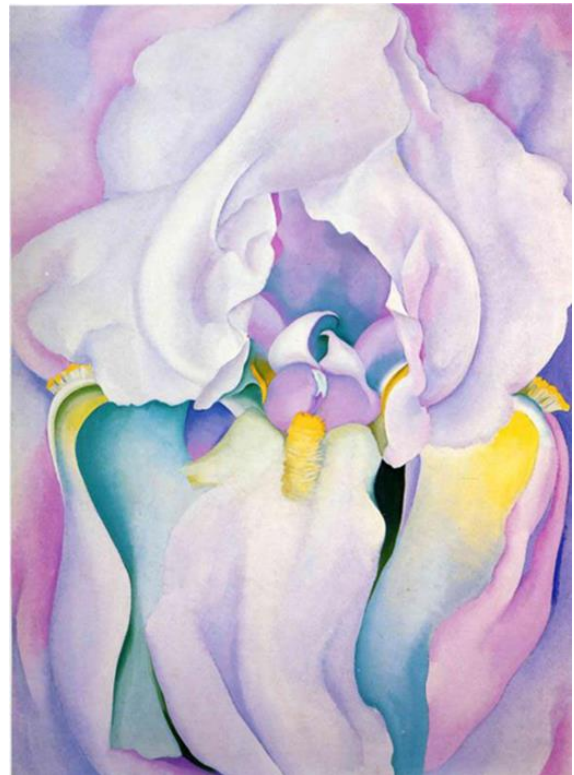


Figure 14 – *Light of Iris* (O'Keeffe, 1924)

⁵ Precisionism was a smooth, sharply defined painting style used by several American artists in representational canvases executed primarily during the 1920s. It was mainly inspired by Cubism and Futurism.



Figure 15 - *Blue and Green Music* (O'Keeffe, 1921)



Figure 16 – *New York, Night* (O'Keeffe, 1928/9)

2.1.3. The Armory Show

The year was 1913 and what could have been a simply another exhibition became generation-defining. The International Exhibition of Modern Art carried art from hundreds of painters through New York, Chicago and Boston and was seen by nearly a quarter of a million people in a plethora of ways. In a March 1st rendition of *American Art News*, there was a clear intent of distinguishing Manet, Monet, Renoir and Degas as “masters” while also calling Duchamp a “carpenter” and Cubists and Futurists “jokers of the brush”, predicting also that New York’s laugh would “bury the new apostles of art in oblivion” (Merrick, 1913, p.2). For many others, the show defined their careers, whether by making them move to Europe or simply changing their artistic direction. It was the important moment in which abstraction and the idea of an avant-garde was introduced to America. Lately it is common to re-analyze the show’s effect as minimal; however, this only hold true in terms of immediate impact – due to the cultural limitations imposed by following year’s World War. Instead, the show seems to have originated a

ripple effect that resonated well beyond the duration of the confrontations. It was also not only a show that exalted new European art, leaving the American counterpart to dust; rather, it represented the approximation towards and the inclusion of other ways of perceiving.

Perhaps the greatest, hard-swallowing lesson that the show and its modern art brought to the American crowd was that “new” art was not required to be classically beautiful or morally abiding. Though resistance was undoubtedly found, the process was greatly aided by the mutating cityscape that called for a fresh new approach. After all, if the world transformed in such haste and in such scale across one hundred years, how could artists be expected to not change along with it?

2.2. The European Artistic Standpoint

From early on in the twentieth century, Europe’s artistic modus operandi implied that there was artistic worth to be imported from abroad – if not in methodology, in thematic. Thus, ideas found manners to spread like wildfire much due to a type of innovation mentality that left visual artists in search of the next big aesthetic.

2.2.1. Enter the Age of Cubic Momentum - Cubism

“Modern man lives more and more in preponderantly geometric order. All human creation mechanical or industrial is dependent upon geometric intentions.”
(Léger, 1924/1968, p.277)

For many the most influential avant-garde art movement of the twentieth century, Cubism appeared some years prior to 1910 and had its most influential period between that year and 1920. It came as an answer to old ideals or, better put, “an implicit rejection of traditional standards” (Chipp, 1968, p.193). With its sudden occurrence and radical aesthetic, opinions divided, and many critics and writers would attack or defend this new visual style. The leaders of the movement, Picasso and Braque, were perhaps two of the only artists that did not try to shed light upon the style, leaving it to the public to appreciate it and hopefully find the hidden value that it brought to the table. The movement was divided in two phases, an Analytical and one Synthetical but its influence arose from Cezanne’s later work which featured African sculptures, with very raw appeal – adapted by Cubists into even simpler shapes.

In its most basic form, the idea behind Cubism was to depict the three-dimensional in a flat surface, making the necessary arrangements which might include various perspectives, angles and fragments that would ideally allow to see most of said “object” in a still, flat painting, thus, adding complexity to the composition. Color use would be limited, with a fair bet on the monochromatic.

If not Picasso or Braque, “who will demonstrate the necessity, the superior aesthetic reason to paint beings and things such as they are and not at all as our eye recognized them in the past, perhaps not always, but since man has meditated upon his image?” (Chipp, 1968, p.204) A question that serves as well as an answer to why Cubism appeared. Any object and, most importantly, any person has different shades to it, him or her. What defines a person is very seldom able to be defined by a standard portrait, such as a photograph, in which there is a subject, a background and a pose. The dimensions involved are far too great to fit in a painting, unless, of course, one takes the time to decompose the image, or collection of images defining of the subject and presents it in a sort of composition or collage of sides and angles; personality, thoughts and appearance.

And yet, with all the richness it implies in regard to experimentation with new visual stimuli, Cubism was more of a steppingstone or a training ground, helping artists of the time give form to new ways of looking forward, toward new artistic horizons. This new outlook implied diminishing art’s bond with the academies that, according to them, had stagnated the crafts. André Salmon said it best when comparing other cubists to Picasso and Braque: “They think they have been in the Academy, but they come out of the Gymnasium.” (André Salmon, 1912/1968, p.199)

2.2.2. Analytical Cubism (1908-1912)

The first phase of cubism which focused deeply on form and tried to convey its intent in a clear, usually centered manner, so not to distract the viewer from the structure. Color, as well, would usually be of a limited palette, monochromatic even, for the same reason. The density of the painted subject is directed to a single point in the canvas, usually the center, since form was the substance and the very reason for this new experimental aesthetic. The designation comes from its very analytical and cold approach which decomposed the object in different viewpoints and angles, giving relevance to what the painter saw fit.

In Georges Braque’s *Girl with a Cross* (Fig. 17), the author starts with a fragmented head whose facial features are few and presented amid shaded facets. The two aspects given more relevance and detail are the cross the woman wears on her neck and the ceramic pot taking the place of the woman’s

shoulder, both more detailed than the subject itself. It is here that we can see how early cubism attempted a very radical fusion between time and space, joining various instances of the two in a composition. The geometrical shapes present in the painting also seem to direct us from the disembodied facial attributes to the more clear, lighter colored objects – which seem to be the real focus, almost as if one had seen a person but only remembered an impersonal detail, such as an accessory, leaving the person itself as a blurry memory.

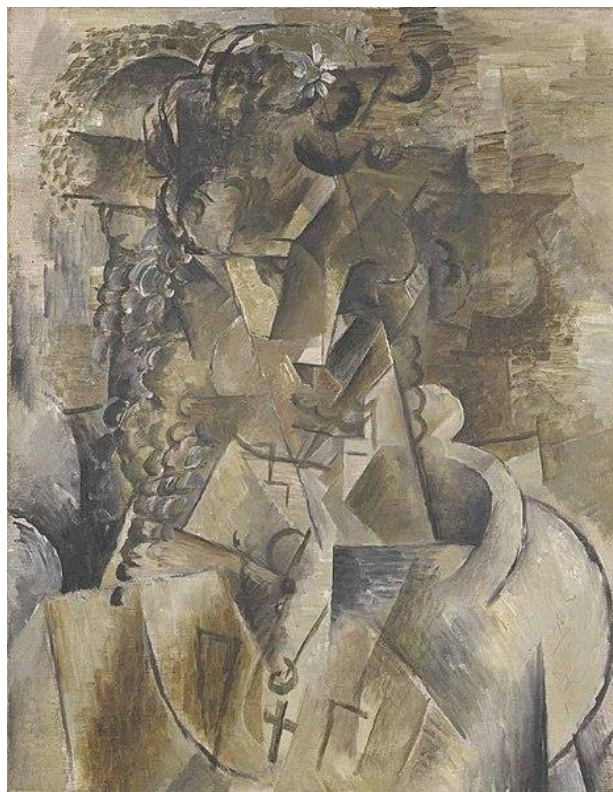


Figure 17 - *Girl with a Cross* (Georges Braque, 1911-12)

2.2.3. Synthetic Cubism (1912-1914)

“The painter who wished to make a circle would only draw a curve. Its appearance might satisfy him, but he would doubt it. The compass would give him certitude. The pasted papers [*papiers collés*] in my drawings also gave me certitude” (Braque, 1917/1968, p.260)

The naming behind this later phase of cubism intended to explain how the movement turned more into a construction of artificial nature, using techniques that made compositions look less academic and serious in favor of the whimsical and the colorful. Paradoxically, by trying less to demonstrate the three-dimensional and by starting off with an established object (by interpolating real life objects) instead of its imagined fragments, the Synthetic cubist painting came closer to reality than those of the initial phase. With the intelligent use of the collage, layers and elements like sand, painters such as Picasso, Braque and Juan Gris unveiled new ways of displaying depth and texture in their works. The use of wording in paintings also appeared during this time, which would approximate high art with advertisement for the first time. By using mundane bits of everyday material leftovers, the cubist attacked the established elitism behind the fine arts (Fig. 18). This is relevant following the above-mentioned opinions of Walter Benjamin, who saw the shift from cult art to mass art as inevitable.

In sum, Synthetic cubism flattened the objects the former phase attempted to depict with variable angles. By trying less, it achieved more and one can easily arrive at this conclusion by directing the attention to Juan Gris' *The Sunblind* (Fig. 19), in which the author not only used a real newspaper as a collage material, to further connect art with the real, but also inventively depicted light and shadow play with textures provided by chalk and charcoal – creating a clearer composition. This inclines us to think that these new approaches to painting would later be transposed to other art forms, celebrating experimentation and a deeper understanding of the real, less superficial and suggestive of higher preoccupation with the inner workings of the human condition. Cubism went on to influence other visual art movements, along with music and literature – for its goal was to depict various subjects at once and lay the foundation for a modern-fueled tear of old artistic tradition.



Figure 18 - *Bowl of Fruit, Violin and Bottle* (Picasso, 1914)



Figure 19 - *Sunblind* (Gris, 1914)

2.2.4. The Cube is Closed - Closing input

Let us not pretend that Cubism, with all its merits and achievements, was the first contributor of turn-of-the-century art. It was not; however, aesthetically speaking, it seemed to represent a more mature and “modern” phase of the vanguard, a more polished and form-invested art type, aware of the sharp edges that threatened perceived reality. The connection between all of them is inevitable and seemingly all these new movements were tied in one manner or the other, but Cubists were received in apotheosis, or at least rode the wave already sailed by the Impressionists before them. In many ways, Braque and Picasso’s ideology appeared in just the right time to triumph. That is because by the time Paris had started to magnetize an entire generation of writers, poets and painters alike, a whole new relevance was given to Cubism, a whole new globalized relevance. This represents the true origin of the range of influence of a new aesthetic, one that swept modern artists off their feet – and made them stand up and try more, promptly.

The choice of using Cubism as a starting point, then, relates to the fact that it represented a change of course in terms of aesthetics, public reception and involved personalities. Because of how Picasso, then well and alive, influenced other art mediums; not only by painting, but by mingling with the group of “imported” artists that found their way to the French capital.

In conclusion, Cubism is representative of a transition, surely, but more of its recognition as official than anything else. It is the culmination of the process envisioned by some of the greatest French artists decades before. It is the symbol of both the beginning and the middle point of the complex representation of the self in modern art. It is the logical outcome of a modernist taking a look at the Eiffel Tower, and opting to break it open, deconstruct it, make it flat and rearrange its limits along with the entire city that it overviews.

2.3. An Artist’s Guide to Denial - Dadaism

“None of us suspected what Dada might really become (...) Art just was – there were arts and bourgeois. You had to love one and hate the other...” (Huelsenbeck, 1920/1968, p.379)

Most of all, the Dada anti-art, anarchic movement appeared as an answer to the structural and social havoc caused by nationalistic ideals and, consequently, World War I. It was born at the Cabaret Voltaire, in Zurich, at the hands of Hugo Ball and a few other artists from three distinct countries (Germany, France

and Romania) under the agreement that the war had been unnecessary and a by-product of governmental materialistic interests that in no way regarded the populations of the involved countries. This group of artists, unified by the disappointment towards the war and the status quo, decided to become the embodiment of a “new art”, much of it based on notions surrounding the abstract. The word Dada is claimed by Richard Huelsenbeck, one of the founding members, to have been found by him and Hugo Ball in a German-French dictionary as they were looking for a nickname for a singer of their acquaintance. They thought the French word used by children to represent a wooden horse had the necessary “brevity and suggestiveness” for the newly created artistic movement. (Huelsenbeck, 1920/1968, p.377)

Nothing in the Dada movement was designed to be easily understood, and there was barely any explanation given by its members. There was no proper theory. To the audience, and even perhaps the artists themselves, undefinition paved the way. A few years before Dada became Dada, Marcel Duchamp, however, was already taking the first steps towards the unnamed, unrecognized movement. With his readymades⁶, Duchamp took ordinary objects and modified them at will, at times more significantly than others, yet always supported by his satirical or humorous intentions. It is, then, important to note that when Hugo Ball and the rest started the actual movement years later, the whimsical nature of these early Duchamp works was dropped in favor of a more serious attitude, instead – due to the more political stance and motivations of the Zurich artists. It seems as though Dadaism could not have had a more appropriate beginning than having the mold broken by a humorous take of an artist that grew genuinely bored of the art that encircled him – especially when one considers that most of what is instantly pointed out as Dadaism nowadays is not so much the political nature of a piece, but its satire, which Duchamp was more keen to introduce. In other words, the movement enriched itself unknowingly in separate instances but with similar goals. The denial of (art) tradition and the refusal of established bourgeois ideals.

The interest in highlighting the Dada movement’s aesthetic can seem, at first glance, very much like a fruitless endeavor. Ultimately, the intention of the members of the Cabaret Voltaire was to convey meaning with the use of the nonsensical, made up words and anything that defied the establishment – including the decomposition of language, which they saw as an obligatory target given its nationalistic nature. In not trying to create an aesthetic at all, certain patterns emerged, and elements similar to those of an aesthetic become visible. The repurpose of common, everyday objects was a usual occurrence because it created the idea that Dada was against the elaborate and the bourgeois – art which ordinary

⁶ A term established by Marcel Duchamp in 1915 to describe prefabricated, often mass-produced objects isolated from their intended use and elevated to the status of art by the artist choosing and designating them as such.

people might not fathom or even have access to. By taking into account Duchamp's early works as examples of Dada, one can be introduced to some of the traits that turned previously mass manufactured objects into art. *Bicycle Wheel* by Duchamp is simply the conjunction of two materials, a wheel and a stool, put together in a way they not only merge into one, but also keep their previous distinct, identifiable elements. It can also be seen as his first kinetic sculpture, since its perception can be altered by the movement it is able to execute – the rotation of the wheel. In other words, in this apparently simple composition, Duchamp is able to represent three stages of this dysfunctional “machine” – the objects' individual identity, their joint identity and their moving identity. The two first versions of this were created, and lost soon after, in 1913 and 1916 respectively. To further diminish old concepts of artistic value, Duchamp stated that his last version of *Bicycle Wheel* (Fig. 9) was as original as the other two, thus, taking away the weight that the “aura” of the original work should technically maintain – according to Clive Bell's *Art* assertions, for instance.

The simplicity of the materials used, then, would serve a purpose. It called great public attention to this “new art” of seemingly elementary intentions, utterly dichotomous with the traditions of high art and even higher education whilst, at the same time, defending a stance of content over appearance. The insistence in the destruction of all that was certain until then could also be pointed out as a characteristic, since it fit the idea that the war had devalued human culture greatly. In retrospect, the denial of traditional aesthetics can be considered Dadaism's very own aesthetic identification, for it rules out several elements in favor of others, usually with new metaphysical conceptualization about art by means of interchanging between mockery and seriousness, non-art and the mundane.



Figure 20 - *Bicycle Wheel* (Marcel Duchamp, 1951, Third Version)

2.3.1. The Poetics of the Nonsensical - Dada poetry

“Bruitism is a kind of return to nature. It is the music produced by the circuits of atoms; death ceases to be an escape of the soul from earthly misery and becomes a vomiting, screaming, and choking (...) basically they desired the opposite: calming the soul, an endless lullaby, art, abstract art.”
(Huelsenbeck, 1920/1968, p.379)

It is only when one considers the poetry ideas of the Cabaret Voltaire that the full potential of the movement is revealed. Sound poems, as the name suggests, supported itself in the actual sounds of poetry rather than syntax or semantic. In a way, it represents an attempt to link literary and musical compositions together by focusing solely on the phonetics of human oral expression. Dadaists categorized two different forms of sound poems, both of which with their own take on the matter but sharing the same base goal of setting up an artistic performance.

The bruitist poem (Fig. 21) was a sort of formal attempt of disconnecting with recognizable language, a way to stand against the post-war world. Said to have been invented by Richard Huelsenbeck and Hugo Ball (supposedly inspired by Italian Futurists), the point was to perform the poem with use of

onomatopoeia and any sound human speech was able to produce, with absolutely no ties to any worldly language. This way, the utilitarian function of language was broken from within, denied of its proud structure and yet, a poem still emerged from it – a representation of the rush fed by the pursuit of order amid chaos. Awfully similar to the post-war situation at hand, and most likely not by chance. The costume used by Hugo Ball in a reading of this abstract poem is estranged, too. (Fig.11) Coincidence or not, it made him resemble the Tin Man from Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* – the robot-like character of the hearty quest. Moreover, by breaking poetry apart into sounds, with no ties to a language, syntax or any complex human construction, this type of poem had the ability of crossing borders and get to anyone who might be receptive towards it. Relevant, considering the shaping of a modern, globalized world.

On the other hand, Tristan Tzara, the member who ended up taking over as the leader of the group, invented the simultaneous poem. The focus was still to play around with sound albeit, this time, in a more encompassing fashion. By using between three or four different people at the same time, each with their own different language poem in hand, reading, singing, whistling even, a melody of tonal and rhythmic confusion would arise and evolve until it become a true abstract performance.

These attempts in finding truth amid abstract poetry acted, for the artists of the Cabaret Voltaire, as a reset button, a refresh of the most basic elements with which humans could relate to. A radical removal of the flourishing that needlessly decorated art for centuries. Due to this, in many ways, this movement seemed to follow a strict, contradictory doctrine of taking two steps back before even taking one step forward– in a true Dadaist manner.

KARAWANE

jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla

grossiga m'pfa habla horem

égiga goramen

higo bloiko russula huju

hollaka hollala

anlogo bung

blago bung

blago bung

bossò fataka

ü üü ü

schampa wulla wussa ólobo

hej tatta gôrem

eschige zunbada

wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu

tumba ba- umf

kusagauma

ba - umf

Figure 21 - *Karawane* (Ball, 1917)



Figure 22 - Ball reading *Karawane* (1916)

2.3.2. Dada's Curtain Call - Closing input

"These artists do not wish to copy nature. They do not wish to reproduce but to produce. They wish to produce as a plant produces a fruit and is unable to reproduce a still life, a landscape, or a nude. They wish to produce directly and not through an interpreter" (Arp, 1942/1968, p.390)

Much of modern art's development can be traced back to a deceptively simple paradigm shift, which artists endorsed by will or repercussion. Although nature remained the same object of admiration it had always been, art grew towards its own branch; and if art is mankind's creation and nature is not, why then should one copy from it? After all, perfection has long been known as unattainable. Is it not more innovative to create from within, from what humanity knows and thinks, feels and experiences along the time frame that it is allowed to? Modern art's answer then, is a humble one, for it readily admits the defects of the "superior" race and accepts them as an inevitable part of the human condition.

In this sphere, Dadaism appeared with the most extremist approach of the era, for it tried to break down hundreds of years of artistic development and questioned every single right and left turn made in the past. It is not by chance that the main question this movement brought up consisted in asking: "Can this be art?" My understanding is that all the artists from Cabaret Voltaire, as well as Duchamp a few

years before, knew this to be the case and directed their artistic experiences to this state of continuous headscratching.

With the swiftness provided by the all new more globalized world, aesthetic tendencies crossed borders almost instantly and that is one of the reasons the Dada movement was able to emerge in Switzerland – and the Futurist movement in Italy, and any other artistic school of thought of vanguard intentions at the time – even though the progress towards a new aesthetic is accredited to the French; Impressionists (e.g. Claude Monet), Post-Impressionists (e.g. Paul Cézanne), Fauvists (e.g. Henri Matisse) and Cubists (e.g. Georges Braque). Not only that, it represented the beginning of the western world's artistic hub: Paris. One speaks, therefore, of a chain reaction started by Monet's insistence in color and sunlight surfaces; an insistence that fueled modern Europe's artistic epiphany.

“The basis of my own work (...) was a desire to break up forms – to “decompose” them much along the lines the cubists had done. But I wanted to go further – much further – in fact in quite another direction altogether.” (Duchamp, 1946/1968, p.392)

It seems unsurprising that when a breakthrough of any kind is made, the first reaction of those in the audience relates to, not the new finding, but its consequent future ones. “How far can we go?” or “What else is there?”. This, of course, is as relevant in the sciences as it is in the humanities and the arts. Endlessly striving for more is an undeniable constituent, as well as heavy burden, of simply being human. It is the very thing Dadaists proposed themselves to scrutinize.

2.4. Requiem for a Dream - Surrealism

To speak of Surrealism is to speak of the imaginative, the behind the scenes and most of all, the dream. It is a twist supported by a spark left by Dadaism, more positive in nature, the Surrealist tries to fuse together the subconscious and the conscious to counter the excessive rationalism that, according to them, defined the course of history and climaxed in a World War.

In 1924, André Breton wrote *The Surrealist Manifesto*, where he explained the theoretical backbone of this new movement. In it, he announces the definition of the word “Surrealism” as:

“Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.” (Breton, 1934/1968, p.412)

What one can take away from the manifesto and the definition itself, is that this movement was much more organized and planned than its Dada counterpart – at least comparing both instances' early stages. This might also be why it gained significantly more track. But it is likewise in the conceptualization and the idea of exploring the subconscious that Surrealism achieved recognition, since it found significant scientific backing coming from the father of Psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud – albeit the interpretation of these studies by the Surrealists might be considered simplistic. Ultimately, the point was to attain an “absolute reality”, a meeting point between the physical reality, which one is constantly aware of, and the subjective, unconscious, untapped realness found in dreams. Boundaries were nonexistent, and an aesthetic is challenging to point out, since dreams are cryptic and made up of personal experience. But besides this, in terms of methodology, a certain automation was required and to achieve it there ought to first have an unlocking or cleansing of oneself. Essentially, all previous acquired notions, obligatorily, had to be left behind in the making of a Surrealist painting or poem, for example. The calling to let loose and have the mind wander to one's own psyche and back out, and in again, free of social and personal restraints. But more than avoiding these shackles, the author had to resist them and the temptations it came associated with in a way that allowed the flow between the real and the imaginative to happen uninterruptedly and without influence of one's “aegis of thought”. (Breton, 1934/1968, p.415)

2.4.1. The Key's in the Recipe - Methodological analysis

Logically, in a movement such as Surrealism, which concocts together two worlds long seen as immiscible, the need to create solid principles and methods arose. To allow themselves to connect their conscious to their unconscious, artists came up with a panoply of useful techniques for the development of writing, painting and even sculpturing skills.

Recreational activities such as playing games became, in the nineteen twenties, became a staple training method for the apprentice Surrealist. Of course, these games involved not the moving of pieces on top of a board, but instead the joint creativity of individuals and, usually, a paper and a pen. The two more recognized examples are the Exquisite Corpse and the Time Traveler's Potlatch.

The first consisted in the creation of either a drawing, a sentence or a complete text with the people involved contributing one at the time to achieve a final product. Normally, the players knew only the word or drawing that came directly before the full picture or written piece would, however, only be revealed at the end. By doing so, Surrealists attempted to create a composition outside the spectrum of one single entity that exalted moments of uncertainty and culminated in the production of an arrangement that had

both unrecognizable and recognizable elements to it; as if part conscious and part unconscious – only in this case the unconscious was another person’s take on the matter. Nevertheless, it served as an introduction to the concepts of the movement. (Fig. 23)

Secondly, the Time Traveler’s Potlatch was a game that involved the naming of a gift one would give to a fictional, historical or mythological figure and the reason behind it. This, in turn, served the purpose of intertwining worlds or realities, as well as past (receptors of said gift) and present (givers) to create anecdotal and surreal interpretations unbound by the limitations time and space usually constitute.

Automatism, in Psychology, describes any movement which one body executes without thinking or processing. By borrowing the term (as seen in the aforementioned definition given by André Breton), Surrealists thought they could standardize art making in a way that, ideally, would end up being as natural for the artist to paint or write, as for a common man to breath. The first experiments started with writing, by doing it as fast as possible and as unconsciously as possible. Then came the collage, inspired by Braque and Picasso, but with the necessary surreal twists. Finally, the actual, purely surreal methods came by the hands of Max Ernst⁷ around 1925. *Frottage*⁸ and *grattage*⁹, were techniques which consisted in getting a randomized “blueprint” to get a rough basis from which to follow and progress from. For example, if a physical element such as a wall had a certain texture given to it by the passing of time, these surrealist methods were able to capture and transpose it to the canvas, only to then follow its uncontrolled, unrationalized “indications” until the composition (and the artist’s subconscious) was able to make sense of the shapes and tactile properties and turn it into something recognizable. (Fig. 24)

By entering the realm of Salvador Dali, perhaps Surrealism’s most famous individual, one quickly realizes how vast his range of influence in the movement was. Although known for outshining his own works with his flamboyant behavior, the creator of the movement himself, André Breton, held Dali in high regard: “Salvador Dali, whose exceptional interior boiling had been, for Surrealism, during the whole of this period, an invaluable ferment.” (Breton, 1934/1968, p.415)

The major technique that will be given relevance to is the Paranoiac Critical Method. (Fig. 25) It was with the *Paranoiac Critical Method* that Dali gained true recognition in the movement, mostly because it provided a powerful tool for the artist to create connections between unthinkable elements. Its goal was to “help discredit completely the world of reality” (Breton, 1934/1968, p.415) and, by doing so, it marked the start of the second phase of Surrealism. The process, then, meant the artist had to enter a state similar to that of paranoia, where the subconscious is able to justify for any seemingly irrational

⁷ Max Ernst was a German painter, sculptor, graphic artist, poet and a pioneer of the Dada and the Surrealist movement.

⁸ French for “rubbing”.

⁹ French for “scraping”.

interpretation of the real world, thus, denying any reasonable or rational notions and substituting them for a kind of mind-shaped realness. In other words, just as a paranoiac person believes in some abstract concept and tunnels down an endless spiral of justification to why it must be true, the Surrealist artist ought to try the same in order to trick the subconscious out of hiding. This, in turn, helped create imagery that would otherwise be inaccessible to the artist, by making associations between objects, people and situations that were not justifiable in a day-to-day basis, remaining only accessible to those who took the time to embody a paranoiac's train of thought.



Figure 23 - *Landscape*

(collaboration work with Valentine Hugo, André Breton, Tristan Tzara, Greta Knutson, 1933)



Figure 24 - *La forêt* (Max Ernst, 1927)

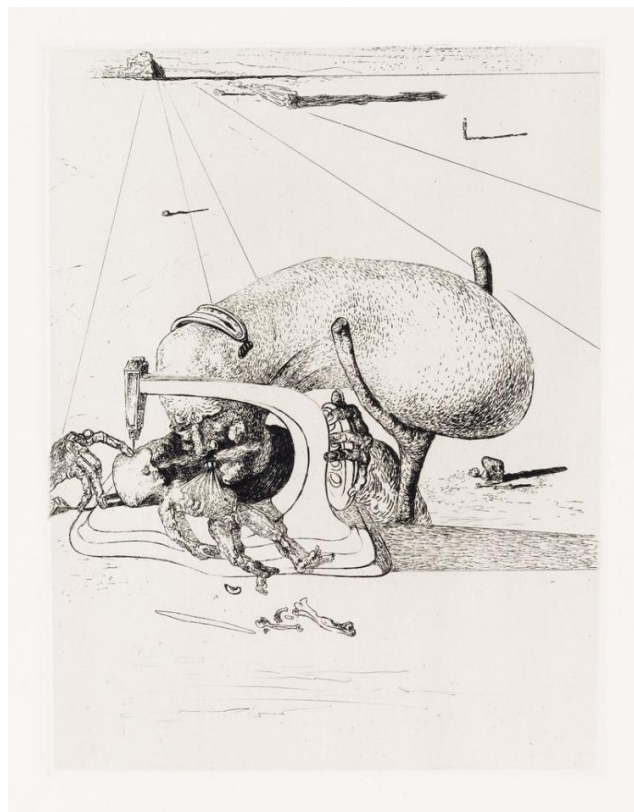


Figure 25 - Untitled (Dali, 1934)

2.4.2. As the Clockwork Melted - Closing input

If Dada was the strange offspring of Cubism and political discontentment, then it is only fair to see Surrealism as Dada's younger sibling, who, certainly, followed some of its footsteps but went towards its own direction, more positively and less socially incisive. This seems to establish a line, an order that began with the new aesthetics of the turn of the century, solidified itself in Cubism, passing by Dada's voyage to the root of art and language, until finally arriving to a point where this world, this reality, as a subject, did not suffice. Surrealism is the product of the human ambition to understand what is around us by diving into the unknown depths of the subconscious. But how does it fit with the era's status quo? And why?

For one, modernism. If there is an innate characteristic of the modern artist, it is the displacement towards the inner self. Until a few decades prior to the 1920's, before Paris and the western world lit up as bright as the sky above, humankind looked toward the outside, and ideally, the grassland landscapes of the rural world. Not that industrialization began here, but rather that it established itself in the beginning of the 20th century, with artistic movements that, as mentioned before, started walking away from the more straightforward representations of life. Thus, it comes as no outstanding surprise that the minds of those that devoted their lives to the making of art at this stage of civilization, did so focusing on the individual rather than the outwardly. It is but the consequence of an urbanized society to grow inwards and live from, and for themselves. This will further on be developed regarding writers and poets of the same generation.

Moreover, the increasing interest in studying the mind by following the teachings and calling of Sigmund Freud, along with every other very palpable occurrence that made up the era, made it so in a way that questions surfaced quickly and, as we know, innovation lives off interrogating. "What are we missing?" – the main perpetrator of creation. Surrealists followed this doctrine in a way that could only be fathomed as predictable, yet ingenious. Not only did they develop a vast number of techniques that would change modern art forever, they also made the era justice by genuinely taking the modern motto of inner focus literally.

In addition, it is important to note how, for example for the Cubist, African art was about cultural exchange, bringing another aesthetic across the ocean and making western art more encompassing; while for the Dadaists and the Surrealists, it was about celebrating types of creative expression that were "untouched" by the modernity implicit in the western world. How, on the other hand, Cubism and Dadaists, shared a mutual scorn for high art that was less of an objective for the Surrealist. This triangle

that forms should help see these movements as interrelated, though at the same time, independent from each other. Paris, yet again, served as the physical connector for the three, working as the locale of “death” for the Dadaists, and a place of birth for both Cubists (who inspired Dada) and Surrealists (who inherited from Dada).

Finally, it must be noted that Surrealism, along with Dadaism partially, had more use for both film and photography than previous movements. This shows how fast modern art moved, how it developed in a matter of years and seemingly tried to exhaust all options of conception. It seems much of what art was trying to obtain was a balance that permitted it to keep up with the idiosyncrasies of the time in question. While Picasso and Braque tried their best to “combat” these new art media, Surrealist-inclined artists such as American painter Man Ray¹⁰ saw photography (and several other mediums) as an opportunity to, yet again, create extraordinary narratives within its composition. The nature of the photograph, the fact that it captures a moment forever instantly to be stored in what is, effectively, a piece of paper, gave him a whole new medium to explore the evocative works of his friend, Duchamp. He was then able to bring forth constructed dream scenarios, haunting placement of bodies and objects or other puzzling compositions that tilted the audience towards restlessness. Merging different objects between themselves or, more radically, with human features proved the most effective way of achieving that. Take one of his rayographs¹¹, for instance (Fig. 26). In this photo, Man Ray includes barely anything more than hands in the composition, but a demonic figure of sorts emerges in the middle and the structure, especially due to its medium, becomes somewhat eerie and mysterious. A quality most of his similar works share. In other rayographs, one can detect both influences from Duchamp (e.g. depicting objects in an uncommon manner) and cubism (e.g. qualities of geometric focus). In the end, Man Ray, who is said to have become a portrait photographer out of need, jumpstarted his career with these notable, yet defiant, works of art and got a seat somewhere in the middle of Surrealism and Dadaism, without ever succumbing to a definite label.

Much of why Surrealism fits the period it is inserted in, relates to its antecedents, both in art and in the developments in the study of Psychology. But it served itself more of curiosity and mystery than anything else. It is interesting that, in a sense, the very thing that made Surrealists thrive, was the human characteristic of being fascinated by the “otherworldly” and the inexplicable, which coincided with a time where one would be applauded for being experimental and discovering new frontiers. Until André Breton

¹⁰ American visual artist who spent most of his career in Paris and can be therefore included in the set of artists from the Lost Generation (1890-1976). Informally related with both Surrealism and the Dada movement.

¹¹ Term used by Man Ray to describe photographic prints made by placing objects and other elements on photosensitive paper and exposing it to light, without the use of a camera.

and his followers showed up, no one had thought that the greatest bewitching tale of them all was already being carried by each and every one of us. Inside our own heads lay, to this day, unfathomable elements, patiently waiting to be revealed in a Surrealist's desk.



Figure 26 - *Rayograph* (Man Ray, 1925)

2.5. Post-analysis - **Final remarks**

All art is born from dissatisfaction. What I propose is a structure that is inspired by the characteristics pointed out above. This being a subjective process, does not expect the artist to acknowledge or rationalize it. It is but a subconscious, step-by-step consequence of progress.

To start there is a component of enlightenment, the moment at which a person or group realizes that the state of art is either obsolete or paralyzed. This is what forces one to move on and insist in a metamorphosis of some kind. It is the realization that states “this cannot be all there is”.

The next phase involves the identification of the establishment and consequent decomposition of the standard methods to which the general public is accustomed to. The things it does right are barely of any importance, since the idea is to find out where it fails at. Lack of depth, insufficient light representation

or a deficiency in the relevancy of color are all examples of elements that might be explored by an artist of a “young” movement.

Lastly, it is of the utmost importance that the artist finds a focus, preferably one marginalized in the past, or never thought of at all, and opts to enrich said constituent by considering any source that might help their mental quest to materialize. As the wingspan of civilization broadened, so did the spectrum of possibilities.

Enlightening (perhaps more adequately named “Epiphany”), decomposition and enrichment are the three steps, voluntary or otherwise, that define change. What becomes clear quickly is that these steps do not differ from those taken by other human endeavors such as the exact sciences, for instance. And indeed, they do not, since both the arts and the sciences have the same ultimate goal of widening human comprehension – with most divergences being found in their methodology. How then, was this relevant for modern art specifically?

In modern art, limits and walls were torn and broken down because personal and social dissatisfaction ruled over the three base steps. This is the missing ingredient that makes modern art, modern: The fact that it obtained “global” status and fed itself on the dissatisfaction of a vast number of people who could now communicate more easily and push forward as a group or groups. The loss of patrons and subsequent increase in artistic freedom of expression found the perfect companion in a troublesome, war-scarred world. Misery, as we know, loves company. Yet I suggest instead that misery needs company in order to outlast itself. The turn of the century, then, was not simply defined by the amusement caused by Jazz, or the beauty of night-lit Paris, or the creative experiments of Surrealists – all of which wonderful reminders of the epoch – but rather the power behind art when it is not made elitist, nor played down, but driven, boiled to its utmost degree and allowed to burst and rain over a blank canvas.

The process of aesthetic renewal then, seems to have supported itself in enlightening, decomposition, enrichment and a western world that had yet to chain its population with the full extent of capitalism and demagoguery. There will never be another time where the conditions align as well as they did in the beginning of the twentieth century and that is why early modern art was able to dive so deep – it had just the right amount of oxygen to do so.

3 - Poetic renewal - Early twentieth century poetry

3.1. Cultivating the Image - Imagism

“Visual meanings can only be transferred by the new bowl of metaphor; prose is an old pot that lets them leak out. Images in verse are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language.” (T.E. Hulme, 2003, p.78)

For the sake of symmetry, there seems to be no more appropriate way to begin than to depict Imagism – a movement whose occurrence was to poetry, what Cubism had been to painting. While it began in London, England, following a disappointed outlook relative to Edwardian principles, the participation of Ezra Pound (as well as Hilda Doolittle, Ford Madox Ford and other American poets) makes this an ideal subject to aid the geographical and temporal connection this paper exalts – America and Europe in the beginning of the twentieth century.

This movement devoted itself to meet the expectations of its founder and inspiration, T.E. Hulme, who in his essay *Romanticism and Classicism* (1912) stated the importance of imagery in poetics. By highlighting such aspect, the author seems to be clearly against excessive flourishing present in many prior works of Victorian literature. The primary objective, then, was to strengthen imagery, only after the movement gained track and developed did it formalize the methods that would allow that to happen. Not too long after, Ezra Pound published *A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste* (1913), where he defines image as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time”. This definition describes the image as a momentary happening with intellectual and emotional weight, whose depiction should be equally faithful when appearing in a poem. Not only that, Pound makes sure to clarify that the word “complex” as used in his quote refers to the Psychology term, popularized by Carl Jung and S. Freud¹². Although Pound admits he might be using the word incorrectly, this seems to entail that for the poet, this “image” can represent a vast array of unconscious emotions – which in turn redirects us to the mentioned goals of Surrealism and the multifaceted depictions of Cubism. The Imagist, then, seems to commit itself to describe not an image *per se*, but a momentarily mental construction of sorts that can include both the object of visualization and the reason and feelings of the person who is seeing or living it.

¹² A complex is a core pattern of emotions, memories, perceptions, and wishes in the personal unconscious organized around a common theme, such as power or status.

To achieve this ambitious task, three pieces of advice were given by Pound and F.S. Flint in *Imagisme* (1913). Firstly, one should treat “the thing” directly, whether it is subjective, or objective is irrelevant. Secondly, and most importantly, one should not use one single word that does not contribute fully to the result – a careful economy of words. Finally, the abandonment of certain poetic patterns and the sole acceptance of the free verse that follows only “the musical phrase” and never a specific metric. These guidelines make it easy to conclude that this new movement wanted to alleviate a similar pressure to that felt by the Cubists – and Impressionists before them – exerted by stagnated high art or academic ideals. Moreover, one is inclined to point out yet another similarity with the intentions of Picasso – the focus on trimming the excess. In other words, the action of directing the process by only focusing on what is of true importance for the artwork to convey its meaning: “Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something (...) “Use either no ornament or good ornament” – Ezra Pound’s *A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste* concludes.

The movement was never as stable in progress as the others covered in this work. Divergence between Pound and some of the other prominent poets of Imagism such as Amy Lowell, created an opening for a second anthology of the movement’s poetry (after Pound’s *Des Imagistes*). In 1915, *Some Imagist Poets* was published and in it, a new, broader and less radical definition of Imagist poetry arose, with considerable differences. For instance, free verse stopped being considered a requirement and became an option instead – as to highlight the “free” portion. The main objective of presenting a “hard and clear” image stayed the same, though it is easy to wonder and speculate if a harder stance, like the one Pound initially imposed, would have produced longer lasting results. After all, from all the different artistic styles that appeared during this time, this seems to be one of the few that was simply absorbed into “mainstream” modernism right after it seized being a movement all together. Regardless, the genetic material of Imagism was never lost, and in this 1915 anthology, one can find great examples of poems that abide by the inspirational characteristics of the Japanese haiku – something made possible by this new culture of the masses, with international, cross-cultural interests. Take H.D.’s (Hilda Doolittle) *The Pool*, for example. Even though it does not follow the traditional syllabic form, it is surely inspired by haiku poetry, given it does not rhyme and it emphasizes a natural element – an animal – as haiku often did. If one takes out the first and last verse, both of which interrogative, one is left with a seventeen-syllable poem (albeit not following the usual 5-7-5 format): “Are you alive? / I touch you. / You quiver like a sea-fish. / I cover you with my net. / What are you – banded one?”. It is therefore an important example of the intentions of Imagists, who were in favor of clearly identifiable elements and conciseness – a conciseness that did not oblige the poem to be short, but direct and straightforward, nonetheless.

To conclude, the Imagist movement cannot be considered a standalone revolutionary act, but it has its merits in the form of experimentation and objectives, and in the fact that it jump-started Anglo-American modernism. It sinned mostly in terms of duration and cohesion, but its contributions leave no doubts, as even the participants that grew out of it, did so with Imagism's ideals in mind.

3.2. the unofficial imagist – e e cummings

One of the less associated poets of the group of the Lost Generation is E. E. Cummings (or e e cummings as he preferred). Born in Massachusetts in 1894, the poet visited Paris many times, although the two most relevant of which were during the war in 1917 and then the two-year period, he lived in the French capital between 1921 and 1923. For his nationality and participation in the war, along with his time in Paris, one can consider that he qualifies as being part of this lost group of young artists. Another aspect that adds to this is his experimental visual poetry style, was his modern approach on form that created works idealized to be read rather than heard.

Although a poet at heart, his first work was an autobiographical novel about his temporary imprisonment in France titled *The Enormous Room*. One year later, in 1923, the author began his poetic endeavors with the publication of *Tulips and Chimneys* and with it came the first attempts at breaking the mold. By being inventive and defying grammar and syntax, the author served himself of words by rearranging them in ways previously unthinkable – sometimes for the sake of creating a visual image with the shape of the poem at hand. The uniqueness of his use of punctuation also called him into prominence. In the poem *!blac* (Fig. 27) for instance, the author takes use of punctuation not to delimit the phrases, but to create movement that still serves the poem in ways that fall short in the grammatical sense but help picture the intended action as it is described. The author seems to take inspiration from the Japanese haiku and the vertical nature of traditional Japanese writing – another example of the period's curiosity, whose writers became interested in other culture's take on literature and art. In *!blac*, cummings describes an Autumnal scene of a falling leaf and tries to give visual feedback to the reader, including the slow rhythm at which it whirls downward, by using whatever tools were available to him as a writer (i.e. punctuation, division of words into letters etc.)

The idea behind this structural creations becomes much clearer when once one analyzes *//a* – (Fig.28) along with *blac!*. This time, by fitting “a leaf falls” between “I” and “oneliness”, the author provides a serene imagery of a falling leaf as well but morphs the picture into a lonely setting. By contrast, in *blac!* the seemingly soothing imagery of a leaf falling is disrupted by chaos-inducing punctuation,

making the reader unable to feel the calm that the words would otherwise provide. This shows just how invested the poet was in conveying emotion and meaning by innovating the poetic structure's core aesthetic. It is extremely supported on visual and rhythmic feedback, but it is able, nevertheless, to surprise the reader and make it wonder what the next verse or poem will uncover.

If nothing else, e e cummings is a rather interesting example of an American who, at the time, inherited an array of influences and developed his artistic endeavors around them – much like most of those included in the Lost Generation. For cummings, however, the initial method seems to have consisted on juxtaposing two of his interests: painting and writing. This, along with his experience in Harvard where he got acquainted with Imagist Amy Lowell early on, the letters exchanged with Ezra Pound, and his visits to “surrealist” Paris, surely helped make possible his intentions of approximating the visual with the written medium. Take Lowell's *Autumn*, for example: “All day I have watched the purple vine leaves / Fall into the water. / And now in the moonlight they still fall, / But each leaf is fringed with silver”. She describes a clear autumnal image of leaves falling as time passes. The image is offered as is, but the degree of interpretation depends on the reader almost completely. She simply shares an image that, when reproduced in the readers mind, may gain a meaning separate from the author's will. Only cummings, with his audacious vision, took the conceptualization of “the image” literally by including typography and radical spacing in his works in a way that would display a rich visual manifestation. For all intents and purposes, it seems like a fair assumption to consider cummings, a poet that, at some point, represented a kind of radical deviation of Imagism – even though technically the author was never part of any movement.

In retrospect, it seems that ee cummings brought with him, to Europe, an immense will to comprehend what was being done around him. This, of course, is much of what Paris offered: a window towards a patio of creativity. By paying attention to all the artistic findings of the epoch, he quickly realized that this age demanded the artist to find new manners of expression, new shapes and colors outside the known spectrum. Indeed, most poems of his authorship do not fit in the category of the examples given, but poems such as *blac!* do display one of his most innate characteristics, which appears in most of his creative products – a fearless disregard for the established order. With syntax and grammar as his “victims”, ee cummings attacked language as dynamically as he did life and poetry, constantly reinventing himself while defying the very limits that, at some point, confine all of us.

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Figure 27 - *blac!* (e.e cummings, 1940)

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Figure 28 - *l(a* (e.e cummings, 1958)

3.3. Lost Amid the Waste – T.S. Eliot

It is difficult to measure exactly how much Thomas Stearns Eliot influenced modern American poetry or American writing, but he is often considered one of its moving forces. His valuable contributions can be fathomed more easily with Ruth Nevo's statement in mind: "*The Waste Land*, that seminal modernist poem of 1922, can now be read as a postmodernist poem of 1982: as a deconstructionist Ur-text, and even as a Deconstructionist Manifesto" (Nevo, 1982, p.445). Meaning that Eliot created the foundation for the decomposition of content into parts so that to nurture and understand the relationship between text and meaning. Eliot, who was fond of decomposing structure, left his poems without a specific rope to hold on to and follow. Often, time, space and even speakers appear mingled together without proper warning and still end up constructing the rich image left by his poems. The deconstructionist concept, by itself, would only be developed in the nineteen sixties by Jacques Derrida, however, some traits of Eliot's work earlier already showed signs of accepting the outright uncertainty of his present, and projected future, world. This should serve as a respectable introduction to the contributions of Thomas Stearns Eliot, a man well beyond its time, who greatly aided the progress of modern poetics.

With roots in the Midwest, Eliot was born into an upper-class traditionalist family. With that in mind, along with some physical problems since an early age, the poet had enough reasons and conditions to embark in the wonder of literature. After all, life at the end of the 19th century in St. Louis Missouri, and even the beginning of the next, was still rather slow paced and with inherent physical limitations and a stable financial household, literature was a very possible path to take. With degrees in Arts, English and Philosophy, the author quickly started writing against the traditionalist foundation of his family. His first publication was *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* in 1915, achieved with the help of Ezra Pound who had been keen enough to see the potential in Eliot's writings. Structurally reminiscent of a variation of known rhyme schemes, albeit inconsistently so, the utmost modernist characteristics this poem holds refer first to the theme – a middle-aged man undecided as to his place in the world; and thus, isolated by modernity. Secondly, the heavy use of irony and lastly, the adoption of the stream of consciousness technique – which allowed the author to render the train of thought of the interior monologue narrator almost purely. It is a poem on individual fragmentation amid a world of equal social division, overflowing with indecisiveness, questions (“Do I dare / Disturb the universe?”), previously unthinkable words made poetic (“Like a patient etherized upon a table”), obvious nods to urbanization (“I have gone at dusk through narrow streets / And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes”) – making it one of the first truly modernist poems.

Years later, as the twenties roared, with the publication of *The Waste Land* (1922), Eliot achieved uncontested recognition as the poem described an entire generation of men and women scarred by the recent war, and lost in a world that now resembled more a barren land, devoid of direction, rather than the prosperous natural wonder celebrated by the Romantics. If the previous poem shed light on individual doubts, *The Waste Land* committed itself to give image to the void left by the struggles and pain of an entire generation. Following Ruth Nevo's article, in it, 'there is no narrative, there is no time, and no place'. It lacks a protagonist and it contains 'no drama, no epic, no lyric'. All the typical constituents of a poem that usually allow the reader to identify and consequently classify it, are not present. It also has 'no beginning or end'. (Nevo, 1982, p.455) The absence of a supporting structure, rational line, even ground to step on and feel secure makes the reader get lost and then find itself, only to then get lost again. “*The Waste Land* reader is virtually trapped within the poem to experience what is told” (Lewis, 2010, p.148). Emotionally, this could be associated to a feeling of purposelessness, of not having anything to hold on to – empty and barren as a wasteland implies: “A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, / And the dry stone no sound of water.”. Its cultural references are of enormous span, including mentions from Greek mythology, Dante, Shakespeare,

Baudelaire and even Buddha's sermons. By using such a variety of influences, the impending questions on modernity grew stronger, as if to balance the past and put pressure on this wasteland, which ends up paying resemblance to the limbo, a place between heaven and hell, between life and death.

As much as *The Waste Land* seemed interested in depicting the then present state of the world, much of it sounds rather prophetic and cryptic. In many ways, this land of waste might be our own time, the modernity one faces today. It is quite well applied to the current state of the arts, for instance, close to one century after T.S. Eliot published his poem on nothingness and staleness: "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?" Can one really expect to, once more, be part of a society that values art?; Or have we grown accustomed to the paralyzed world moved by all but the arts?; Is there even a point of producing it? I would put us at the radical outcome of the wave of progress the author felt coming, surely, yet never completely got swept by as we, people of the twenty first century, did. We are now, far from the uncertain ocean of possibilities he faced, to instead being in possession of all tools needed to sit next to a virtual pond and gaze at our reflection, simply waiting on the day we look too hard and fall in, never to emerge from ever again. Eliot was apparently aware of this although the gears themselves had barely started turning, which speaks as one more of his many accomplishments.

If one had to characterize Eliot more fully, one should probably put him in the middle of Symbolist and Imagist poetry, regarding major influences. According to Ethan Lewis:

"...we can speak of Eliot as an Imagist only in a qualified though revealing sense, regarding his attempts to approximate 'immediate experience'; to convey that "precise instant" when subject and object, or discrete objects (often, emotion and thing) are disclosed as a single phenomenon." (Lewis, 2010, p.113)

In conclusion, the feats achieved by T.S. Eliot are insurmountable, the aesthetics of poetry advanced more with him and Pound in a decade than ever thought possible. In many ways, the episodic nature of *The Waste Land*, and the loose line that it was mounted on reflects the modern spirit of confusion and restlessness without ever giving answers – after all, not even the author had them, he limited himself to posing the right questions. This land, then, is an allegory of a delusional landscape testing the psychological, spiritual and cultural boundaries of humankind – much alike modernity itself. It was the aesthetic realization of nothing, bringing with it all the expectation of what had yet to come and leaving the door open for anyone who dared to fill up this empty wasteland.

3.4. The Last Verse – Closing input

The way poetry developed in the turn of the century was quite similar to the way painting did. By starting with Imagism, the objective was to link the two, for it cannot be underestimated how much painting influenced other genres of modern art. The “image”, then, was the first to encounter a revolution and the letters found a way to follow – even in terms of depiction of said image. Aesthetically, then, the first of the metamorphosis came with the adjustments of the relationship of between “image” and subject, where the various artistic mediums accepted differences in perception of the same object by different or equal subjects, depending on factors that did not belong to the arts until, in a sudden sweep, they did.

As in the visual media there were those that went the extra mile to deconstruct the very basis of art making (e.g. Dadaists), so did e e cummings and T.S. Eliot help deconstruct a tilting tower of deeply rooted concepts that ruled over poetry for a long time. With cummings, long solidified notions around the use of punctuation, grammar and syntax were defied and liquefied; while with Eliot, acceptable vocabulary, themes and, most importantly, poetic structure was rethought and recreated from the ground up – when they were not abandoned all together.

Moreover, it is relevant to remind the American influence while abroad in Europe, since it mainly began with their innovations in poetry and, as will be covered in this paper, prose. Painting found its new voice by the hands of mainly French and even Spanish artists, at the same time Americans were suffering from some kind of artistic stagnation. Only with these precursor movements and the emigration to Europe did America catch up and begin evolving again, resulting in new aesthetic techniques for the written medium – in which Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway, for instance, thrived at.

Going back to Ezra Pound, who did not get a personal window of development in this work, one must ponder about his influence and perhaps conclude this section with it. As someone who had his touch on a great number of modernist figures (Cummings, Eliot etc.) much can be argued to consider him the most influential of all. Firstly, can Ezra Pound, with all his innovative splendor, really be appointed as American in anything other than his birthplace? His direct influences, at least those mentioned more frequently, seem to always refer back to classic European literature.

“The irony, of course, is that Pound certainly sounds American, but not the kind of American with which American readers were familiar, a bumpkin out of Mark Twain. In other moments he sounds closer to Homer, Villon, Dante even when he is not translating them to Emerson, Whitman, James, or even his ancestor Longfellow. **Criticism's evident complicity with Pound's desire to be rid of an uninspiring native literature demonstrates how thoroughly American that desire is**” (Kuberski, 1992, p.23)

[My stress]

In many ways, this contributes to Ezra Pound's "refreshing" image of a true modernist, available to learn with the classics of the old continent in order to fuel his own endeavors. By opting to stray away from what had been produced in his own country, Pound was able to project a future, based on specificities of foreign literature, ultimately allowing American poetry to evolve. This is, in fact, more humbling and "modern" than to focus on idle or expired conceptions simply because it is of national origin. He was certainly not comparable to the typical American Realist poet, worried only in depicting an unavoidably shifting reality; he strove for more. Most of all, he was an American who knew where America should be at artistically but could not motivate such a change from within the then limited scope of his home country. When many seemed to come to Europe with a dream, Pound arrived with a vision: "The apparition of these faces in the crowd: / Petals on a wet, black bough."

In a Station of the Metro, above, was published in 1913 and is considered a quintessential imagist poem which takes clear influences from the haiku Japanese poem and might be one of the first examples of such in the English language. Although it falls short syllabically for it to be a traditional haiku, it achieves an imagistic description of the very moment Pound arrived in Paris, without the use of verbs. Fitting nicely along his claims that an imagist poem should be straightforward and supported in economy of words. But he also brought the traditional form to life and to the English language when he wrote, for instance, *A Fan-piece for her Imperial Lord*:

"O fan of white silk,
clear as frost on the grass-blade,
You also are laid aside."

As in other poems of the kind, the title aids the poem greatly. Here, we find out the subject is a woman who's being compared to a fan (the use of "her"), but not a common one, since in the first verse we hear it is made of white silk (perhaps from nobility), hinting at its beauty and gentle touch. In the second verse the reader is told that the woman is fair colored, so white she is clear as frost on grass. This hints at her fragility, since frost tends to melt easily. Finally, in the last verse we understand the woman, like perhaps other before her (hinted by the use of "also"), is laid aside, abandoned. Incredibly, this poem is a translation from Mandarin Chinese, although not quite the only western attempt. Herbert Giles, a former sinologist and professor of mandarin in Cambridge University, translated said poem within the Victorian tradition and form to appeal to the British audience. The result was this:

“O fair white silk, fresh from the weaver’s loom,
Clear as the frost, bright as the winter snow
See! friendship fashions out of thee a fan,
Round as the round moon shines in heaven above,
At home, abroad, a close companion thou,
Stirring at every move the grateful gale.
And yet I fear, ah me! that autumn chills,
Cooling the dying summer’s torrid rage,
Will see thee laid neglected on the shelf,
All thought of bygone days, like them bygone”

Of course, both attempts were notable in their own right. But certain details, such as erasing the use of personal pronouns to approximate the reader and the writer’s perspective, might give Pound’s version the edge since: “The repression of the first person singular – to be more truthful, all personal pronouns – is a tradition in Classical Chinese poetry.” (Jang, 2011). This serves as a valid example of how Pound’s intentions stormed into the otherwise stale world of western poetics. In his *Canto LXXXI* it is the expatriate himself that states: “To break the pentameter, that was the first heaven”. He seemingly knew what was halting progress. All he had to do then was make it new.

His help structuring one of the great American poems seems to have been a culmination of his prior Imagist objectives – movement which he abandoned in but whose goals never left his mind. As stated by Ethan Lewis: “More essentially, *The Waste Land* approaches the Imagist, or rather ‘Imagist’ long poem, via repeated presentation of the same ‘Image,’ “enforced by movement and music” that carry this repeated presentation over an extended medium” (Lewis, 2010, p.113). In other words, the backbone of Eliot’s work, not the poem as a whole, reflects Ezra’s portrayal of the “image” in *A Few Dents by an Imagiste* as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time”. After all, Pound did have intentions of spreading his Imagist inclination, but he found that he could achieve it by elevating fellow writers, for ideals are better off propelled by a group rather than the individual – that is why there are traces of him in many highly relevant writings of the time. Ezra Pound was as much of a modernist as he was not. His position and role seemed to watch over the movement rather than being down there in the trenches with it. Pound was more alike a general than a foot soldier of modernism; overlooking the battlefield, tracing the scheme with which to move forward with, moving the necessary

pieces along the tabletop, drafting war heroes until finally attaining glory without a sole metaphorical casualty.

Ultimately, poetry followed the path lit by painting a few years before, following concepts of thinning down the work by investing in word efficiency, simplifying language and freeing the poetic form without abdicating the overall complexity. Subjectivity became an ally and the inner self rose to the surface by enhancing the relation between the object and the subject who experienced it.

4. Fiction as Fine Art – Fiction and Prose

“...before the day of [Henry] James’s early novels (...) people did not tend to put fiction on a par with poetry, music, or painting. Those were serious arts; the novel, by contrast, was something less – entertaining, and edifying in its way, but not art.” (Matz, 2004, p.15)

Since the dawn of fiction, the purpose of the novel had been to entertain and excite. With some exceptions found along the 19th century, in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) or in Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857), for instance. The light was passing through the cracks, but the established notion still revolved around writing fiction as a lesser extent of literature. Gradually this reality started shifting, much with the help of Henry James early novels (e.g. *The Portrait of a Lady*) and subsequent lecture and essay named *The Art of Fiction*. In the lecture, James raises crucial questions and poses critical arguments to why the novel is also part of “noblest forms of Art” equal to “Poetry, Painting, and Music”. He goes on to argue “this Art of Fiction is the most ancient of all Arts and the most popular” and compares paintings and the novel, whose products are both evaluated according to the “fidelity” they present, thus leaving the viewer or reader unaware of the technical qualities that went into the making of said art. Further on he speaks of fiction writing’s innate characteristics (e.g. character development), requirements (e.g. high sense of observation) and inspiration (e.g. society and personal experience) and finishes by stating how important it would be for the art of fiction to be part of future students’ subjects. Ultimately, what Henry James intended was to give the novel “aesthetic” status and call for a larger involvement in the “consciousness” of the novel.

The interest in the inner workings of the human mind had been presented by William James, Henry’s brother (and Gertrude’s Stein’s teacher), in his own publication titled *Principles of Psychology* (Matz, 2004, p.13-14). This fits the frame built up until this section of the paper since it describes a turning

point, not only for the modernist novel, but all the modern ventures of art. If it had not been for Psychology's advancements and achieved importance, changes in the artistic spectrum would have been significantly slowed down. It is not distasteful to state, then, that modern art owes much of its accomplishments and perhaps very existence, to the appearance and consequent study of Psychology (starting around 1879).

4.1. That which lies under the surface – Hemingway, the Iceberg Theory and a “new prose”

“What Hemingway went for was that direct pictorial contact between eye and object, between object and reader. To get it he cut out a whole forest of verbosity. He got back to clean fundamental growth. He trimmed off explanation, discussion, even comment; he hacked off all metaphorical floweriness; he pruned off the dead, sacred clichés; until finally, through the sparse trained words, there was a view.” (Bates, 1941, p.169)

To consider modern American literature is to consider Ernest Hemingway – one of the strongest connections between America and Paris during the 1920's. A war-shaped journalist and writer whose career cannot be, not even loosely, described in full by the attainment of the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1954. His historical relationships with artists, writers and poets such as Picasso, Fitzgerald and Pound shaped him without ever deterring him from finding his stylistics. As far as poetry is concerned, which was his first artistic endeavor, he was never more than subpar. It was by the hand of Ezra Pound who told him to opt towards prose that Hemingway found his true calling – novels and short stories. More than direct him, the poet supposedly defined an important characteristic of his: “[Pound] taught me to distrust adjectives as I would later learn to distrust certain people in certain situations.” (Hemingway, 1964/2011, p.134). With Gertrude Stein as another piece of the puzzle, all of the untapped talent inside Hemingway was able to pour out and by 1923, a new theory had risen to the surface – the *Iceberg Theory*. In a famous interview with George Plimpton in 1958, the American author stated:

“I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show. If a writer omits something because he does not know it then there is a hole in the story.” (Plimpton, G. (1958, Spring, 18). Personal interview with Ernest Hemingway.)

This theory, also referred to as theory of omission, tries to conceal knowledge from the reader, albeit, never completely so. One is always free to check under water for the rest of the iceberg, it is but an option and a matter of will. However, the point was to only show its tip, and by doing so, to improve the comprehension of the story at hand, in turn giving a certain pro-activity to the reader, who had to find these hints and learn with the subtext. More than omission, this is a technique of suggestiveness. Irony, for instance, is included in omission tactics because it depends on the viewer's interpretation of the figure of speech. According to Robert P. Lamb, there are "four kinds of minor omissions" in Hemingway's stories. Firstly, his stories usually begin with "condensed formal exposition" or none at all (i.e. no setting or presented time frame in relation to the story itself). Secondly, when the exposition does come, it does so indirectly – by means of implying something. It is up to the reader, from then on, to construct the "image". Cases of technical language are also not explained so that the character or speaker is able to act as naturally as someone who simply knows the subject at hand. (i.e. if a technical term is used by a character, it will only be described or talked about, never quite explained, as to not break the story's truthful flow). Thirdly, Hemingway juxtaposed sentences in a way that leaves the reader fully aware of their correlation without ever connecting the two. (i.e. a description of a place following a description of a character looking out of a window, implicating it is looking at the place that was described). Lastly, the act of omitting the unnecessary steps between action "A" and action "B" in order to speed up the plot as needed and get to the next relevant sequence. In sum, Hemingway's theory revolved around concealment of certain aspects in order to present his intended moments of action in the impactful manner possible: Condensed or non-existent formal exposition; unexpected exposition by means of implying; juxtaposition of sentences without direct connection; and fast-forwarding between otherwise inactive or uninteresting actions. (Lamb, 2010, p.45-46)

Hemingway, however, cannot be fully defined by the application of the theory of omission, especially considering that this referred more to his short stories than his novels. His writing style has other innate characteristics, such a radical economy of words (as brought up by the poets of Imagism). Not only he focused on sparing the reader's eyes by leaving out the flourish, the vocabulary itself is superficially simple to grasp. Much of what Hemingway intended, after all, was to approximate the realness of life with the written medium. "You see I'm trying in all my stories to get the feeling of the actual life across – not to just depict life – or criticize it – but to actually make it alive." (Baker, 1981, p.153). Thematically, Hemingway often spoke about relationships, but it is far from being his only focus. His lens tried to usually include shifting paradigms that would then serve as obstacles to his characters; nature and animals were often called upon to depict beauty or strength, even in death, which is another of his recurring themes.

More than any of those, however, he is often seen as an author of masculinity and fatal heroism – especially given his time in the war and the repeated utterance, even among academics, of his supposed hate towards women. Now, fatal heroism might have been born out of his own fears and experiences, watching the young get slaughtered in a pointless war without ever getting a chance of redemption. Redemption is what Hemingway offers to his heroes, nevertheless in exchange for their lives at the end, they usually find closure among friends, lovers or their own along the pages of the story, allowing these fictional characters to achieve peace in matters the real ones did not. Yet death, death is as unavoidable in his fiction as it is in life – and Hemingway made sure to get that message across (e.g. *Across the River and Into the Trees*). To what regards women and their depiction, it comes down directly dependent on the “recognition of how central the feminine is in Hemingway's short stories “acting as “the beginning of a more balanced reading of the entire Hemingway canon” (O'Sullivan, 1986, p.7). As I exemplified above with the character of Brett from *The Sun Also Rises*, the sheer importance of the role and depth to which Hemingway described women characters proves there existed a respect toward the feminine that is often forgotten or overlooked. This, along with novel *The Garden of Eden* where he explores the reversal of gender roles, should serve to demystify his long-misjudged purpose once and for all.

4.1.1. Follow the Eye - Hemingway's descriptive technique

The existence of a link, or lack thereof, between the external world and personal conscious is what artistic movements usually rely on to shape the consciousness of the narrative. Indeed, it is this very relation between objectiveness (external; real) and subjectiveness (internal; mind) that first distinguishes one artistic era from the next. Robert P. Lamb created a diagram to simplify how modernists saw this connection between external and internal (fig.29). He further distinguishes the first as “impressionism” and the second as “expressionism” as to explain how some writers of the time relied more on giving impressions of the actions right away – leaving the emotional response of the character or narrator to the reader (“impressionists”) – while others, dichotomously, revealed their character or narrator's emotions instead, in order to make the reader guess the objective, the real and the palpable which preceded the sentiment. (“expressionists”). According to Lamb, Hemingway is much keener to give away the objective data and letting the emotional, subjective response fall to the shadow of the work (i.e. its subtext). For this reason, he calls Hemingway's style “impressionist” in nature and states that he is able to focus on objects and strip “them down to one striking visual detail each (as Cézanne did with color and shape)”.

A good example can be found in most novels of his authorship and this paragraph from *Across the River and into the Trees* is no exception:

“He was at home in his small house in Treviso , close to the fast flowing river under the old walls. The weeds waved in the current and the fish hung in the shelter of the weeds and rose to insects that touched the water in the dusk. He was at home too, in all operations that did not involve more than a company and understood them as clearly as he understood the proper serving of a small dining room; or a large dining room.” (*Across the River and into the Trees*, Hemingway p.64)

In this excerpt one is able to find Hemingway's timeless aesthetic descriptive theory, coined by novelist Russel Banks as “the logic of the eye”. The way the narration follows a descriptive logic that can be played around with. Usually there is a descriptive order based on distance (i.e. most distant object moving towards the closest object) but it does not exclusively rely on that. In this quote, one first gets the picture of a small house (usually pictured externally), followed by the river – which is nearby and probably fits the frame of one’s initial thought – where it begins to “zoom in” towards that body of water until one is able to observe, not only the weeds, which were there on first glance, but also the fish that hid itself in them and the very “insects that touched the water in the dusk”. In other words, the way Hemingway chose to depict this scene is almost film-like, for it shifts the attention of the reader within a frame carefully built by the author with “camera angles” and “close ups” that the reader reproduces and interprets in his/her mind. Additionally, he is able to tell us this sequence happens during dusk, without ever describing the actual setting, only hinting at the fact that the visible bugs appeared at that time of the day. This could also mean that the day reached dusk while the setting was being described, while the reader read through the paragraph. This presents a shallow yet valid example of what his Iceberg Theory entailed. The last comment might be a simple nod to Italian cuisine, but it could likewise mean, for the reader, that the character has modest roots (“small dining room”) and is now in a more comfortable position (“large dining room”), without ever letting that fact spoil him and make him prideful.

Lastly, it is worthy to note that besides these two techniques, Hemingway also abandoned old fashioned endings that would otherwise provide readers a sense of catharsis. Most of his books can be considered tragedies but none offer the necessary type of closure (or even build-up in some instances) to consider it an “Aristotelian tragedy”. By doing this, not only does the author break apart from classical thinking but it also helps the story by adding a sense of truthfulness and realness to it, which as mentioned before, was Hemingway’s major goal. (Kromi, 1974)



Figure 49 – Robert P. Lamb (p.52)

4.2. A Writer of Heights (and falls) - Scott Fitzgerald

“Fitzgerald’s land and cityscapes are rarely inert backdrops – more often they are animated, in some cases dramatizing the poetry of vivacity, in others the poetry of melancholy, but always insisting that the world is fundamentally alive.” (Mangum, 2013 p.42)

To fully comprise, within a figurative frame, the aesthetics of the 1920’s one cannot underestimate the contributions of the author of *The Great Gatsby* to what regards the visuals and relevant themes of the era. Not only did he help fuse European and American influences, he was also one of the few authors of the same spectrum to achieve respect and recognition by maintaining a number of elements reminiscent of past types of novels. A notable figure in real life, as well, Fitzgerald wrote as he lived and by doing so defined his time with an effusive and escalating writing style – one that was only overshadowed by his own talents in content and thematic. The quintessential read to understand the era, or at least the extent of its essence, might very well be him. The sheer excitement which his prose is known for acting like a spring whose upward movement has already begun.

To start, his themes and settings have mostly the same basis, revolving around the attainment of the American Dream or dealing with the immense success, wealth and importance provided by it. With this, Fitzgerald shed light on the class system that provided Americans a way to achieve their utmost dreams but whose mechanism was all but certain. More than anything, the American Dream is the ethos of a country that celebrates individual accomplishments, establishing that everyone has the freedom and equal opportunities to get to their objectives. This is demonstrated and questioned in the plot of *This Side of Paradise*, *Tender is the Night* and *The Great Gatsby*, for instance. In the former, coincidentally the

author's debut novel, the feeling of being left out of the promise of equal opportunity and individual achievement, is highlighted the following way:

“We want to believe. Young students try to believe in older authors, constituents try to believe in their Congressmen, countries try to believe in their statesmen, but they can't. Too many voices, too much scattered, illogical, ill-considered criticism. It's worse in the case of newspapers. Any rich, unprogressive old party with that particularly grasping, acquisitive form of mentality known as financial genius can own a paper that is the intellectual meat and drink of thousands of tired, hurried men, men too involved in the business of modern living to swallow anything but predigested food. For two cents the voter buys his politics, prejudices, and philosophy(...)” (Fitzgerald, 1920, p.164)

Money, morality, decadence and love are subjects that appear in most of his stories and Fitzgerald portrays them in complex ways that make one question if wealth is not an impediment to loving when dubious morality and selfishness come by so often tied to luxury and riches. Another theme he seemed to have a natural inclination for was time and its ephemeral nature (e.g. “aging backwards” in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*). Not only did his writing depict fast living; it is as intense as the brief moments of feeling he called upon. Although born in a financially stable middle-class home, during his education, particularly in Princeton, his family was never as moneyed as most of his schoolmates', certainly resulting in some dormant issues regarding the relationship between individual and money, thus, inclining Fitzgerald towards depicting these realities – often critically. The class gap is rather relevant here due to the fact that Scott's characters are always middle upper class or higher. Mostly, he was interested in a first-person view basis with third-person tone, where the narrator was either a main character or someone within its circle, hence the insistence in the upper class – whose dreams, both fulfilled and shattered, he wanted to highlight. Nick Carraway, the narrator of *The Great Gatsby* exemplifies Scott's narrative tendency best: “his role as the partially involved narrator provides the immediacy of first-person narration with the authorial perspective that is more common in third-person narration.” (Tate, 1998, p.91)

Much of the problems when analyzing Fitzgerald come when one thinks of technique. The natural gifted writer was never quite interested in following this new shape of art that was forming, instead, wanting to do it his own way. There is then, no theory of omission present and even the use of the stream of consciousness technique is sparse. Economy of words was also never imposed by him when writing since, in many ways, Fitzgerald saw the 1920's differently and dare I say more positively – with the exception of *Tender is the Night*. The social rumble he excelled living in moves the vibrancy of his

depictions and what was transposed to the page was the “splendor” of the moment, but never was it presented before a crescendo and perhaps a few dichotomous descriptions of settings or people. In other words, what Fitzgerald’s style has of contradictory with its time, was also what made him great. Most of the characteristics of the modernist writer were thrown out of the window with Scott, especially given his treatment of emotions in general – which modernists mostly refused, ignored or turned to stoicism. He differed in the fact that his “pomposity” fit the settings and social circles he described – he did not picture luxury, he personified it. In other words, as stated by Donald Monk: “Even the gloss and glamor of much of the surface is directed as a commentary on a period and a world infatuated with the superficial”. (Monk, 1983, p.94)

4.2.1. A Suit, a Tie and a Rhythm – **Style and technique**

“Along the walls on the village side all was dusty, the wriggling vines, the lemon and eucalyptus trees, the casual wheel-barrow, left only a moment since, but already grown into the path, atrophied and faintly rotten. Nicole was invariably somewhat surprised that by turning in the other direction past a bed of peonies she walked into an area so green and cool that the leaves and petals were curled with tender damp.” (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.38)

Stylistically, Scott had a rhythm of Jazz performer, teasing the reader until achieving a climatic musical note representative of what he wanted to convey. Fitzgerald’s style involves putting the poetic over the imagistic and pressing on the musicality of prose to convey the character’s analysis of the situation or visual stimuli they are facing. This comes at the expense of his adoration of poetry, especially that of John Keats. It is a prose of ecstasy and despair, in the sense that both can coexist in one paragraph or the entirety of the novel and both will be delivered with equal intensity and charm. As for stylistic devices, Fitzgerald insisted in the use of synesthesia to mix sensorial elements such as color and sound giving him the reputation of having a kind of colorful storytelling: “A bank of lights went off with a savage hiss (...)” (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.35). Objects would often be personified and turned into “actors” that could jump or run, in order to better describe its length or size. Unusual combinations of “nouns and adjectives (...) for evocative effect” were another of his habits, providing us unreal imagery, in almost dreamlike fashion. (Monk, p.92) For instance, in *Tender is the Night*, we are presented with a garden that “flows” and “runs”: “The garden was bounded on one side by the house, from which it flowed and into which it ran,

on two sides by the old village, and on the last by the cliff falling by ledges to the sea.” (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.38). The examples are vast, varied and appear throughout in the author’s last work: “A false dawn sent the sky pressing through the tall French windows” (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.60). Clearly, the false dawn did not order the sky to exert pressure on the window of Rosemary. It is rather Fitzgerald’s way of describing the struggle felt by the character while dealing with conflicting emotions and thoughts that would not let her sleep. “In the square, as they came out, a suspended mass of gasoline exhaust cooked slowly in the July sun. (...) unlike pure heat it held no promise of rural escape but suggested only roads choked with the same foul asthma” (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.129). Roads do not choke or care about the smell and pollution given off by gasoline. By personifying the road, he was able to describe a matter that did not only affect the individual (i.e. one of the characters) but rather a whole area where a crowd would linger – voicing an all-encompassing issue.

This is where it becomes challenging to characterize Fitzgerald. His magical, over-exaggerated settings and over the top exhuming of feelings can paint him easily as a Romantic Decadent, heavily supported on the fall that follows the prime. However, this is also someone who cited Conrad, one of his other greatest inspirations by defending that “the purpose of a work of fiction is to appeal to the lingering after-effects in the reader’s mind as differing from, say, the purpose of oratory or philosophy which respectively leave people in a fighting or thoughtful mood” (Baker, 1981, p. 309). Therefore, albeit preoccupied with the subconscious as were regular modernist writers, his execution contrasted deeply. It is mostly because of sheer content that he can be called a modernist, much more so than language use. The multifaceted aspect of Cubism is taken advantage of in *The Great Gatsby*, even if perhaps indirectly and not in the same way Imagists dedicated themselves to doing. A multitude of aspects would be transposed to the Poundian poem or single stanza, creating one image – working as a funnel, in a way. In contrast, in the Fitzgerald prose, a multitude of aspects are built from the ground up until they form a pattern that elevates the main subject – a spiderweb raised, simultaneously, from all sides. According to Donald Monk: “The obviously aligned image-patterns in the book – those of water, sports, couples, riches, class, family and self-image – are not independent and disparate tendencies. They overlap, interrelate, fuel and adjust each other’s meanings” even going as further as to call it the “muscle tissue of the novel” (Monk, p.82). In other words, related themes form connections throughout the novel in order to reinforce the overall solidity of its goal. Moreover, Fitzgerald’s take on duality, better known as double vision, strengthened him. In a 1936 article named *The Crack-Up*, he states:

“...let me make a general observation—the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.”
(Fitzgerald, 1936)

Fitzgerald would then transpose this to the page either by inserting different degrees of, for instance, hopefulness and hopelessness into different characters or, most commonly, by showing the hopeful character's struggle to continue believing in an illusory, yet more positive reality. Not only were his narrators both “in and out” of the circle (as the above-mentioned Nick Carraway), Fitzgerald himself embraced this double-vision in order to control how much of himself he would transpose to the page – an important aspect given his tendency to include himself in fictional constructs. After all, according to the author, it should take “half a dozen people to make a synthesis strong enough to create a fiction character”. (Baker, 1981, p. 309).

“Above all, Fitzgerald's style conveys a sensitivity or receptiveness to emotion that suggests a pining for the sublime elevation of art. For him, language was neither a tool of incitement nor a form of containment. It was a means to rhapsody, and like the titular nightingale of the Keats poem he adored so much, he wanted his words to sing.” (Mangum, 2013 p.43)

4.2.2. Reality-fueled Fiction - Closing input

It seems as though the author of one of America's greatest modern novels did not follow the train of thought and domino-effect highlighted in this dissertation. A modernist of content, not so much of language, whose contributions in technical innovations seem more like a blend of (then) past and present influences, not as worried about what they could originate in the future. But is this condemnable? What he lacked in sheer innovation regarding the vanguard stylistics of modernism, he seemingly compensated by elevating the nineteen twenties to a degree of legendary status. He balanced the bright and the dim almost equally and created competent plots to develop the celebratory, yet dichotomous atmosphere of the post-war. Besides this, he was the embodiment of youth in that confusing scenario, disillusioned by a dream promised to them, yet clouded in shades of uncertainty. Scott Fitzgerald's very life, along with his works, are so tightly connected that one must never separate the two completely. Both exist individually but it is within the fusion of the two that we find his aesthetic contributions. He poetically reported on the

lifestyle of a generation – or part of it – along with the, at times, invisible difficulties they faced, proving that tragedy picks its victims indiscriminately; and that a sense of failure can be utterly life-consuming.

One great example of the kind of couple Fitzgerald would often describe in his novels and stories can be found in the Gerald and Sara Murphy – one of the many wealthy American couple who migrated to Europe in the twenties. What makes this couple special, however, resides in the fact that both were often mentioned, in one way or another, by all the members of the Lost Generation and a number of relevant members of the European avant-garde. They lived in the periphery of all notable occurrences of the time and had the same kind of socioeconomic background the author of *Tender is the Night* preferred to focus on. So much so that the mentioned novel's main characters, Dick and Nicole Diver, are said to have been inspired by this American couple. With a comfortable financial backbone, the Murphy's were able to pursue any endeavors they might have feel enticed by, and for Gerald, shortly after arriving in Paris in 1921, from the moment he laid eyes on a Picasso painting, he knew he had to paint (Vaill, 1998, p.104). And paint he did. Although many of his paintings were lost, enough remained to make Gerald one of the few American painters to have shared Paris with the writers of the Lost Generation. His take on perspective and all things mechanical, along with the clear influences of Russian Cubo-Futurism¹³, passed down to him by his choice of teacher, Natalia Goncharova. The paintings "Watch" (fig. 30) and "Cocktail" (fig. 31), especially, have all the necessary elements and general aesthetic to relate with Fitzgerald's writings and the era's Art Deco.

Among the many notable relationships Gerald and Sara formed, including Dos Passos, Archibald MacLeish, Pablo Picasso and many others, the Fitzgerald's saw the more mature couple as parent figures that they could look up to. With two novels under his belt when they met, Fitzgerald had already built up a reputation in America but, faithful to his personality, he was as unsure as to the direction of his next novel – *The Great Gatsby* – as he always had been. It was with this in mind that the Murphy's invited the young couple to spend the summer away from the noise and distractions of the capital. However, much of what haunted the Murphy's throughout their enviable lives first in Paris and then in the French Riviera, had been the ease with which most acquaintances fell in love with Sara. Fitzgerald, Picasso and MacLeish all fell under her seeming spell. For Scott specifically, she represented "both [the] nurturer and object of desire". (Vaill, 1998, p.156). This attention was not reciprocal, which meant that between the two everything would remain platonic, and so it did. His wife Zelda, on the other hand, acted out her desires that same summer with a pilot. A short while after that, still during that same hot season of 1924, Zelda

¹³ Russian avant-garde art movement in the 1910s that emerged as an offshoot of European Futurism and Cubism. It consisted on a blend that used strong shapes and colors in energetic semi-abstract compositions.

attempted suicide by ingesting a great quantity of sleeping pills and was saved by the Murphy's. With their lives intrinsically connected it is obvious they held each other in great esteem: "The two couples, outwardly so unlike, were instantly attracted to each other. Gerald saw their relationship as a kind of mystical symbiosis". (Vaill, 1998, p.139). Sadly, this season had scarred Fitzgerald far too much and not long after the publication of his most famous book, his decadence by means of alcoholism started and Zelda's health condition worsened resulting in scarcer and scarcer meetings between the four. This represented another strain in Fitzgerald's life, having his "second parents" become more and more distant, just as his first ones had. This, added to the fact that his relationship with Hemingway soured and Zelda became increasingly hard to cope with, transformed this tale of dreams and success into a tragedy of classic proportions – awfully similar to his narratives.

The inclusion of the Murphy's served as a way to reiterate the above-mentioned idea that Fitzgerald's aesthetics and themes, when writing, were heavily drawn from real life and real people as much as Hemingway's stories were. The artistic ecosystem that was present in the era, usually revolving around Paris or France in general, is what allows one to connect the different entities. The approach made them radically different yet both writer's prose came from types of disillusionment: the first thinly balanced the wonders and tragedies of youth, love and wealth by augmenting the sentiment to a beautiful, yet unreal scale; while the other opted to display the naked truth in all its simplistic, undermined nature and upheld feelings. In many ways, the two were opposites, but what then distinguishes a man from the other, other than what they did in life and how they died? Not a whole lot. They limited themselves to live according to their exhausting, all-consuming mission. Both thirsted for a sip of immortality and both got a nice, tall glass full of it.



Figure 30 – *Watch* (Murphy, 1925)



Fig. 31 - *Cocktail* (Murphy, 1927)

4.3. A Matriarch Without Equal - Gertrude Stein

Gertrude Stein embodied a new age of respect towards women artists, one that let her take the motherly role of a generation of lost young creatives, American and otherwise. Stein, who had been afraid, in youth, of the possibility of having to fill the role society expected her to, of wife and mother, found in Paris a great number of “genius children” to take care of – albeit luckily more so as a mentor – along with a type of freedom long thought to be inaccessible. The quantity of works she had her hands on, including those of her own and those improved or advised on is uncountable, yet, one knows it must have been even greater than those helped fuel by Ezra Pound – who she also fraternized with. Gertrude and her house in 27 rue de Fleurs, in Paris, were essential for the generation of young restless expatriates since they represented an artistic hub, a safe place to which one could always resort to for help. These relationships proved positive for all entities since, with Stein’s advice, betterment seemed almost a guarantee and, by doing so, she could acquire great pieces of art cheaply before the artists themselves gained fame and recognition. “There was no permanent gallery where people could see Matisse and Picasso at this time, other than the Steins’ living room;” (Daniel, 2009, p. 58). More than anything, Stein represented a meeting place, a common ground between America and Paris whose first pillar she put up in 1903, the moment she arrived in the European capital – giving her enough time to consolidate her reputation and fall in love with the city she would call home until her death in 1946. If there had been a missing link until now, Stein personifies that link.

Having studied under William James, brother of Henry James and father of American Psychology, Stein quickly grew fond of related concepts and gained interest in depicting the flow of the conscious mind (i.e. stream of consciousness). Not only that, she was interested in cutting down the distance between literature and the inner self. So much so that in 1925 she would publish a book she had finished writing in 1911, whose content is as confusing as it is mesmerizing: *The Making of Americans*. It is an enormous book, ranging close to the thousand pages, that describes Gertrude Stein’s life as much as it describes America as a whole. A frustration towards uncertainty and possible consequent incompleteness that would go on to resonate so well with the post-war generation a decade later. It is often regarded as complicated and even pointless or nonsensical, but its aesthetic is purposeful. In the incredible amount of repetition that it is renowned for having, *The Making of Americans* is representing a cultural staleness that the country was facing and would continue to face until the mid-thirties. It was meant to make one weary of the future and frustrated with the repeated mantras, as much as Stein herself was. Even when it is not repeating itself, the book whose base family thematic was far from avant-garde, becomes one with its era

when, continuously throughout the story, “hollow promises” are made to the reader, as if guaranteeing a closure that would never come to be (Daniel, 2009, p. 86). Yet, it is in the nervousness of the narrator that language truly steps in and out of the author’s mind. Letting the unease and solitude she felt inside come to light amid the narrative “led her to stumble on a meta-fiction before any other writer was doing anything remotely as daring or strange”. After this, “aloneness and self-reliance, in the absence of secure knowledge, became for her a vital part of the author’s state of mind.” (Daniel, 2009, p. 87).

4.3.1. The Making of the Avant-Garde Woman – Stein’s *Three Lives* and other notable works

It was as if her alternative lifestyle had freed her up to create alternative art. (...) The fact that she so ostentatiously proclaimed herself an artist and an avant-gardist – in her dress, her talk, her writing – also gave her the license to live that alternative life without censure, exempting her from ordinary rules. This included producing an alternative to the masculine literary culture within which she worked, which became more deliberate and self-conscious as time went on, and her writing about women became more elaborate. (Daniel, 2009, p. 101)

Interested in defining avant-garde in writing as well as in living, Stein was compelled to tell the tales of women of her time, but not necessarily of her status. Even considering all the suffering she endured referent to her sexuality and gender, Gertrude Stein knew she had been lucky to have been born the youngest child in a comfortable, wealthy family, which had allowed her to study and pursue feats unimaginable in a recent past when women had lacked the freedom to express themselves on par with men. In a sense, her first published book *Three Lives* (1909) is an homage to those that had not been as serendipitous, an homage to the mundane and the women of the working class whose lives were far from catching the new winds of modernity and feminist accomplishments. But other than focusing on these women, Stein attempted to present them vividly to the reader with special attention given to the rhythm with which an American would speak English – proving, once more, that American progress had been, at least in the beginning, one of her interests and intended goals. To further explain this notion, one should redirect the attention to Harvey Eagleson’s *Gertrude Stein: Method in Madness* (1936) where the author states that, to fully grasp Stein’s writings, one should always read out loud justifying it by saying “they are the rhythms of America, of American speech.”. He also states that her peculiar punctuation, forceful repetitions, split infinitives and dangling pronouns all serve that exact same purpose, of faithfully representing the American manner of speech in writing. (Eagleson, 1936, p. 167)

Considering, once again, Stein's *Three Lives*, one must ponder about its second story named "Melanctha". It gives shape to a tale about the trail towards acceptance in a world full of contradictions, induction of inner struggle and confusing emotions portrayed by a character symbolic of social minorities, both woman and of black ascendance. In her quest for self-betterment, Melanctha is haunted by physical pain and mental distress and is mostly unable to get people to see her how she wishes to be seen. Having appeared so early in Stein's career, it might be referring to fears of acceptance of the author herself. More relevant, however, is how its language was adapted to fit Melanctha's origins, much in the same way it was for Anna and Lena's stories (the other two "lives" in the book).

"That certainly does explain to me Dr. Campbell what I been thinking about you this long time. I certainly did wonder how you could be so live, and knowing everything, and everybody, and talking so big always about everything, and everybody always liking you so much, and you always looking as if you was thinking, and yet you really was never knowing about anybody and certainly not being really very understanding" (Stein, 1936, p. 124)

The way she portrayed Americans that had specific backgrounds is stating loud and clear that America contains many assorted shades of people, be it in race, gender or sexuality. A message as relevant to reiterate and reminisce on then as, alas, now.

Another good example of her early works is *Tender Buttons* (1914), which the author decided to divide in another three sections: "Objects", "Food" and "Rooms". The idea then was to take to the written medium what Cubism had done for the visual arts. Gertrude Stein's poetry on the matter came around the same time as the Imagists poets' approach but differed greatly. To put it simply, *Tender Buttons* was the author's way of re-imagining the descriptions of everyday "things" without the backbone of syntax, grammar or conventional logic. For example, under *Water Raining*, Stein wrote: "Water astonishing and difficult altogether makes a meadow and a stroke" (Stein, 1914, p.24) While "Objects" and "Food" exist for this, "Rooms" seems to entail a greater interest in understanding the world around Stein and not so much focus on details of said "things". Nothing in the collection of poems is alive or owner of a pulse *per se* and its value is intrinsically connected to the reader's comprehension of the careful tip-toeing Stein executed between words of a dictionary or encyclopedia. In *Tender Buttons*, Stein was preoccupied in experimenting with our perception of meaning. By associating another a scrambled rhythmic choice of words to a known object, the reader feels naturally restless. But if read enough times, an illusion forms that shrouds this known object in a new, nonsensical meaning. One can appreciate Steins quest for

rhythm, since otherwise the effect might not have been possible. In the poem named *A Feather*, Stein seems to be searching for a way to enumerate aspects without losing musicality: “A feather is trimmed, it is trimmed by the light and the bug and the post, it is trimmed by little leaning and by all sorts of mounted reserves and loud volumes. It is surely cohesive” (Stein, 1914, p.25). In sum, it is an odd attempt at figuring out the neural pathways of readers; however, it likewise serves to show how experimenting with language was a priority for the mother of the Lost Generation.

In *Gertrude Stein and the Essence of What Happens*, Dana Watson explains this puzzling work by referring back to Stein’s studies with William James (especially regarding his *Principles of Psychology*) and unveiling the author’s intent. According to her: “Stein redesigns her readers’ neural pathways, developing in us a greater number of associational paths leading out from each stimulus. Her words elicit expectant attention; they mildly prime the reader to interpret other words in certain ways (or productively uncertain ways)” (Watson, 2005, p.37). In other words, this was a tool of complex thinking that intended the reader to have a participant outlook towards the work. Although it came from associations made in the author’s mind, the point was to communicate these associations with different individuals and see the outcome – making some poems nonsensical to some and understandable to others. It is, more than anything, a literary yet psychological production that speaks of the author’s academic past, innovative flame and will to write what was yet to be written, as well as finding a new, fresh voice that was able to take into account the contents of the human inner psyche.

Lastly, to counterbalance with the early works and ponder on the author’s progress, comes Stein’s most famous book *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). This is a publication that arrived four years after the stock market crash that made so many of those young willful Americans return to their homeland or simply leave Paris – leaving Stein to outlast them in the French capital. It is, thus, a publication that comprises all which the author learned amid the Parisian artistic apotheosis, after living within close circle of all major painters, writers and poets. It is this that was portrayed in great detail this book that, although whimsically called that, is not an autobiography. Alice B. Toklas was Gertrude Stein’s life partner, housekeeper, cook, muse, lover... Alice B. Toklas was Stein’s everything. And it is through her forgivable eyes that Gertrude was able to speak her own mind, hiding in the backstage and playing the role of her companion who was a “pleasant, gentle, interested, but decidedly naive individual”. And by doing so, Stein had to face the unusual hard tasks that arise from impersonating another entities’ observatory tendencies and personality (Eagleson, 1936, p. 177). The book bounds itself to act as a weird mingle of fiction and non-fiction that adds to its appeal, since no one knows where the fictional starts or

ceases. The same real/unreal ambiguity can be found in, for example, Hemingway's posthumously published *A Moveable Feast* (1964).

The interest here comes not in the analysis of its style, which is easier on the eye than most of Stein's work, but rather in the intent behind said work. This is, after all, a commercial work of comedic, anecdotal and overall ironic tone that fit Stein's insecurity that she would never be recognized as a major American author. The book went on to contain gossip and comedic opinions and supposed revelations about the most renowned artists of the generation including the likes of Hemingway, Braque, Pound, Picasso and many more. The greatest plot had been Stein's own life all along and, as soon as she gave in to that fact, she found a way to twist the concept of an autobiography to establish it in paper. It might have occurred to Stein after a reading of Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) which also distorted the idea of a biography and portrays the life of a main protagonist who managed to meet great historical figures in the past – as Stein herself did in her present.

In a way, then, this was the culmination of years of work, not only in techniques (such as the countless repetitions that defined her) which is displayed in glimpses here and there in the *The Autobiography*, but also and most notably, the immense aid she provided for a number of artists mentioned in those pages and the respect earned among them, symbolizing a great feat for an American woman of the turn of the century.

This was her dream: to find herself among male artists and intellectuals – and conquer them. It was a reversal of the salon hostess's traditional role, to enhance the men's conversation and advertise their achievements. Stein's work was on a separate track from male modernism, and above it, in her own mind. (Daniel, 2009, p. 133)

After the glorious reception of *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in the United States, Stein returned to her home country in a lecture tour. A kind of identity crisis followed, after all, all her experimental effort had been highly criticized for two decades and it was this work she produced over the course of six weeks with great concept, yet regular stylistic that gave her the appraisal she had longed for. (Weiss, 1998, p.54)

Stein faced, in the early twentieth century, all the predictable criticism of trying to make it in the literary masculine world as a woman and a lesbian. Yet, she arrived in Paris long before her American counterparts, fearlessly, and dealt with it by continuing her quest towards acceptance. That was all there ever was for her: acceptance. One sees traces of that quest in every innovative attempt and any letter exchanged between her and the artistic men of the generation. From them, she undoubtedly got that ever-

escaping recognition and gave back twofold by maintaining a haven for young artists to visit, grow within and find the link between writer and editor; painter and buyer. Gertrude Stein should today be considered, above all else, as the glue that cemented the role of American expatriates in Paris and the very foundation on which many of their attainments were built upon.

Conclusion

With the development of this dissertation – whose inclination had always been to rekindle interest and depict the aesthetic of the nineteen twenties – it became increasingly clear that art should strive to always be open to the influence of its own diverse ramifications.

The studied epoch trailed a set of ideals supported on pillars of complete abandonment or repurposing of flourish, a focus on the subjective, curiosity for foreign influences and knowledge, as well as a tendency for radical experimentation. In other words, it should be noticeable how so many of the analyzed works and authors orbited around either a radical altering of perception towards the artwork or the construction of one that attempted to mean more yet show less. Moreover, it seems that the outer world as seen by the eye lacked the necessary elements to completely satisfy the artist, given the multitudes of angles and edges, traits and sensations that make up a single person. Unsurprisingly, art went on to become absorbed in the subject of war, yet surprisingly not only referring to the demise it brought, but also its universal reach. Since the call was to innovate, blending influences by means of exchanging knowledge between continents was quickly seen as the best way achieve it. As to the boundaries of art, those too were challenged during this time in attempts to deconstruct the engraved notion that some subject matters could not be transformed or expressed in art.

A great paradox found in this body of work has to do with the demystification of modernism as temporally and spatially universal. The microclimate found in expatriate Paris is one that leaves a bittersweet aftertaste – its duration being at fault. In contrast, it is proof that while most of the work these authors developed came from a will to unveil the inner workings of the mind, much of it was also made possible after conversations in Parisian cafes and Gertrude Stein's studio. In a way, the idea of an artistic community was very present at this time and place, although admittedly, hidden behind self-centered predispositions. But how could one avoid being influenced in the capital of arts if that's where the vanguard laid? A defining characteristic that allowed the ripple effect to be noted in the French capital. Not only in the practical sense, by arriving in Paris and being redirected to Stein or astonished by an early Braque, but also in the sense of overcoming the other, and the nature of experimentation that left the door wide open for fresh attempts, new perspectives and different angles of approach. It grew into a conviction, during the making of this work, that the aesthetics fueled by American artists, whose two feet stepped in Paris in the nineteen twenties are not only encompassed within the spectrum of modernism, but also an intrinsic part of the movement. As a subgroup of modernism, these American-born artists can be said to be a blend of influences, between their home country and the continent that served as their

refuge and inspiration. In other words, there is hardly any manner of categorizing them fully without mentioning both locations – the one they were born in and the one they developed in as artists.

The "années folles", characteristically materialized in Paris, knew to hold tight to its nine years of duration, influenced by the above-mentioned figures, surely, but brought up by something else entire. An infrastructure of thoughts and propositions, uncertainty and rejection, showered these years unrepeated with all the right tools and all the right reasons to elevate whichever craft to a level of distinctiveness.

Interestingly, these times appear to express to us a reactive status, a response of a generation to a world of changes, social, technological or otherwise. It also seems that one is often clouded in questions in one's time, questions that might have been answered in the historical past. A certain parallel between generational longings should be drawn here and considered so that to avoid the repetition of past constraints. This work intended to indirectly display worrisome social topics – as well as artist's viewpoints – so that to ponder one's relationship with these themes. Be it war, technology, our outlook on earthly vices or women's rights, is it not the time to look back at an era that created or shaped our notions on said matter? Certainly, it would stand as a meaningful exercise. In this dissertation, then, it should come out as clear that vital paradigms shifted during the first half of the twentieth century – most of which implied for the attainment of a fairer world, even if at time at expense of unfair verdicts. Some of these essentials are nowadays being shifted back, toned down and discarded. This is an appeal for an academic revival of these notable works, one that is hopefully going to consider these imperative matters and filter through the inevitable idiosyncrasies of the era.

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