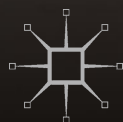


Politics and
Aesthetics of the
Female Form,
1908–1918

Georgina Williams



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palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-319-75728-5 ISBN 978-3-319-75729-2 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75729-2>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018934370

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer International Publishing AG part of Springer Nature
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

For Michael, Hannah and Joseph

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing this book, my appreciation is extended to the Imperial War Museum, the Museum of London, Brigid Peppin, the Courtauld Institute of Art, the Women's Library at LSE, Unilever and Prof. Alan Armstrong. Access to relevant media would have been made far more difficult had it not been for the excellent library services at Winchester School of Art and the Hartley Library at the University of Southampton. I am grateful for the help and support of everyone at Palgrave Macmillan, and in addition remain indebted to the attentive eyes of Dr. Jane Birkin, Dr. August Jordan Davis, Dr. Sarah Hamiduddin, Hannah Williams, Michael Williams and Adrienne Bishop.

Finally, my love and appreciation goes to my wonderful family, Michael, Hannah and Joseph—as always.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Women in the Frame

At the beginning of the twentieth century, ‘a first generation of educated women sought to correct an historical record that had left them out’.¹ Although often a complicated association, the ties connecting women with modernity nonetheless served to empower them into understanding their position within the changing cultural landscape.² *Politics and Aesthetics of the Female Form, 1908–1918*, examines how the pictorial representation of women in Great Britain during this decade contributes to this positioning, including the ways in which women pictorially represented themselves. Historical periods and events are uniquely exposed through the artwork of the era; by considering visual constructs and pictorial tropes as mechanisms by which certain artworks can be analysed, alternative perspectives are provoked and previously considered explanations and analyses re-evaluated. This book is an art-historical work, with the objective of demonstrating cultural and political impact on contemporary perceptions with regard to imagery of the female form.

Studies within the field of visual culture ‘provide the possibility of unframing some of the discussions we have been engaged in regarding presences and absences, invisibility and stereotypes, desires, reifications and objectifications from the disciplinary fields... which first articulated their status as texts and objects’.³ Conversations around the art-historical as a method of cultural examination exposes points of view related not only to the artwork as an object, but also to the elemental objects contained within each image. Artworks can be expressive of personal, public, or political narrative,⁴ but that is not to say the creation and utilisation

of art to dispute previously held suppositions is risk-free; female artists have always fought exclusion, confronting 'limited options, public anger and professional scorn' alongside 'condemnation and censorship'.⁵ Nevertheless, female artists have consistently opted for 'audacious action over safe acceptance', enticing risk in pursuing 'political expression', seeking 'provocative subjects' and, importantly, 'giving a voice to the voiceless'.⁶ When this is expanded, a clear dichotomy can be seen between woman as artist and woman as subject, even when the latter role is facilitated by other women. It is this considered pictorial representation of women that forms the basis of this book as a means by which this era of history can be supplementally explored.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, 'the arguments in art criticism and art history' in respect of female artists 'centred around two critical questions: what are the qualities of women artists' work ... and what is the relationship of women's work to contemporary concepts of femininity?'⁷ Although the quality of women's artwork during the prescribed era has some bearing on the aims and objectives of this exploration, of more import is what it was women wanted portrayed and how this may or may not differ from the actuality of their pictorial representation. This is pertinent because during the decade that forms the temporal context of this book many women were fighting both for and against a "feminine" perception, in the sense that in certain circumstances women's femininity was often used to undermine them. One principal example of this is the opposition women encountered in their fight for equality and which occurred both textually and pictorially. This aspect runs parallel to an exploitation of women's femininity, including in advertising and in imagery employed by the State during the First World War. These dual perspectives are explored throughout, taking into account decisions the women concerned needed to make regarding what they could use to their advantage, and what aspects, when they had control over the situation, they selected to specifically fight against. In respect of suffrage movements, art historian Lisa Tickner believes the related imagery was 'Too "artistic" for the interests of political history' and 'too political (and too ephemeral) for the history of art',⁸ an observation that can equally be applied to pictorial posters, postcards, pamphlets and banners associated with other propagandist campaigns, including those connected to the First World War. This pictorial archive has not particularly featured even in documented histories specific to pictorial propaganda, nor in those of women working as artists and designers,⁹ but is an

omission that continues to be productively addressed as this combined genre of art history and visual culture, alongside gender studies, forms a crucial part of contemporary enquiry.

More focused attention on gender studies and comprehensive analyses of feminist theory are areas debated more purposefully elsewhere, however, and do not form the central premise of this book. The emphasis of this particular exploration lies with the pictorial, and the highlighted images are selected specifically to meet the prescribed objectives. Nevertheless, the concern is not just with the more usual analysis pertaining to each image as an object, nor does this investigation centre solely on the genealogy of just one visual trope contained within that image. This book explores and focuses on combinations from within each of these areas and investigates their subsequent formation into a unique whole, acknowledging both commonalities and contrasts between certain representations of women during this decade. Tickner writes of the Artists' Suffrage League founded in 1907, and the Suffrage Atelier founded in 1909, and their ambition to produce 'representations... in the sense of actual images and pictures'.¹⁰ However,

images in this sense cannot be separated from images in the sense of mental representations, and concepts that may be put into words rather than pictures. All images are traversed by language, and images are also "texts" in which codes are operative and meanings are produced.¹¹

This conjecture, which incorporates the ideas pertaining to a 'huge stock of images stored in the memory',¹² is relevant to this book in two respects: firstly, the idea of 'mental representations' relating to a whole, and secondly a more abstract consideration in the form of a sign or symbol; both are aspects explored more fully in this and later chapters. Although this examination does not concentrate on elements contained within an image in a way that might construe it as a work dedicated to semiotics, French philosopher Jean Baudrillard's concept of a 'visible continuum'¹³ could be said to fall into this latter category. The 'visible continuum' is, in effect, a means by which we can make tangible from within the past that which we cannot physically perceive. The eighteenth century artist William Hogarth documented theories relating to a serpentine curve he designated as a *line of beauty*,¹⁴ and this *line* exemplifies a visual construct with a long genealogical legacy—a

visible continuum—regardless of whether it is discerned by the observer consciously or unconsciously (Fig. 1.1).

In respect of Hogarth's theorising, it is worth acknowledging that in the introduction to a 1955 edition of *The Analysis of Beauty*—Hogarth's published manuscript of 1753—art historian Joseph Burke writes that 'The serpentine line, which has proved a stumbling-block to so many readers of the *Analysis*, requires some introduction', despite it being 'as old as art itself'.¹⁵ Hogarth's interest in the aesthetic legacy of the serpentine curve contributes to the ways in which his *line of beauty* can be considered as an example of a visible continuum, and subsequently be utilised as an analytical mechanism. Within *The Analysis of Beauty*, Hogarth writes of how 'objects' are contrived using a variety of lines but it is the addition of the serpentine line, particularly in 'human form', which has 'the power of super-adding grace to beauty'.¹⁶ Such application to figurative imagery in general and the female form in particular is therefore pertinent to the examination undertaken here, especially when the *line of beauty* is recognised as a visual construct with an ability to attract the viewer. This is of relevance to artworks in general, but notably so when considered in respect of artworks created to command specific

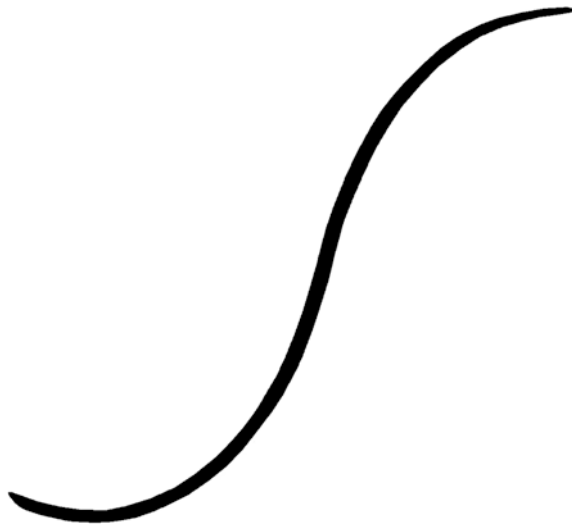


Fig. 1.1 William Hogarth's *line of beauty*

attention and a subsequent productive response from the viewer. This includes advertising, as well as propagandist imagery as both suffrage and First World War artworks can be appraised. Examples of this are illustrated in Fig. 1.2, and the relationship between an attractional image and accompanying text that is either related or unrelated is explored within this book.

Hogarth expands upon his reasoning in relation to the *line of beauty* when he simultaneously references a *line of grace*.¹⁷ This construct is a serpentine curve that in general is three-dimensional and not necessarily seen in its entirety—for example a *line* that dips in and out of vision as it curves around a sculptured figure. Hogarth reflects upon this, commenting on a utilisation within artworks where not all the *line* can be physically shown, meaning it often requires the aid of the imagination to continue through any breach.¹⁸ Hogarth's theory relating to this point is certainly corroborated in respect of the *line*'s disappearance as perceived by the viewer, not only in the three-dimensional object, but also as viewed in the two-dimensional execution of something three-dimensional such as a female figure. Hogarth insists the *line of beauty* and the *line of grace* should be 'judiciously mixt'¹⁹ however, and bearing in mind the *line of grace* as a separate concept has arguably all but been subsumed into that which surrounds the more commonly referred to *line of beauty*, it is the latter expression that is exclusively employed throughout this book.



Fig. 1.2 *Future* 2017 (© Georgina Williams)

Hogarth acknowledges the *line of beauty* as a construct with a genealogical heritage—one that has subliminally embedded itself within the memory of the observer²⁰—and declares it indicative not only of movement, but movement at its most beautiful; Hogarth emphasises this when he writes of ‘the pleasure of the pursuit’²¹ and how the serpentine curve ‘*leads the eye a wanton kind of chase*’ [italics in the original].²² Consequently the *line of beauty* contributes to the accumulation of visual keys and codes coinciding as contributory constructs in the creation of a whole. This genealogical connection

may or may not have a tangible effect, depending on whether traces are mobilized that are strong enough to take advantage of the structural weaknesses (ambiguities) in the perceived figure. It is a matter of the relative strength of the stimulus structure as compared with the structural strength of the pertinent traces.²³

The application of this concept to pictorial representations of women within a viewer’s memory bank is examined throughout this book; nevertheless, at this point an alternate perspective in relation to how these conscious and subconscious memories effect our perception of what we see should be considered. Baudrillard acknowledges that ‘One can live with the idea of a distorted truth’, yet ‘metaphysical despair’ is borne from the notion that the imagery obscures nothing—on the contrary, it reveals that these are not images but rather ‘perfect simulacra forever radiant with their own fascination’.²⁴ This concept can be applied to images of women which are not, from a literal perspective, “real”—as illustrated in contrived imagery that plays upon preconceived ideas and misconceptions in respect of the “ideal” woman. This is often found in advertising, and also includes the idea of a woman in peril who needs protecting, as demonstrated in certain strategies relating not only to First World War pictorial propaganda but also to some pictorial manifestations connected to the suffrage movements. Baudrillard’s assertion that what is provoked by ‘simulation’ is the extinction of truth²⁵ is a theory that can be allied with the ways in which women wanted to be represented during this era as opposed to how they actually were. This incorporates stylistic influences pertaining to representations by both female and male artists, and is an aspect explored throughout the following chapters.

Conflicts inevitably arise through reasoned debate, with the result that

The relationship between intellectual knowledge and visual representation is frequently misunderstood. Some theorists talk as though an abstract concept could be directly rendered in a picture; others deny that theoretical knowledge can do anything but disturb pictorial conception. The truth would seem to be that some abstract propositions can be translated into visual form and as such become a genuine part of a visual conception.²⁶

When considering artwork within the cultural and temporal context specific to this book, this supposition is of significance because of the crucial role played by the aesthetic and theoretical output of movements such as Vorticism, Futurism and Cubism. Vorticism, the British art movement founded by Percy Wyndham Lewis, was alone in being a pre-First World War, avant-garde Western European movement to count women within its numbers.²⁷ Two of these female artists, Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders, were signatories to the Vorticist Manifesto circulated via the first edition of the movement's publication *Blast* in 1914.²⁸ The writer Paul Peppis remarks that the ten years leading up to the outbreak of war bore witness to 'an unprecedented surge of artistic activity across Europe', adding that 'the avant-garde was cosmopolitan from inception'.²⁹ Peppis continues:

A generation of young artists and writers, sympathetic to aesthetic and social revolution and stimulated by the Cubists' experimental painting style and the Futurists' promotional and performative strategies, rapidly initiated their own rebellious art movements in nearly every European metropolis.³⁰

It is this cosmopolitanism that justifies the inclusion of continental-European-based art movements such as Futurism and Cubism within a study with a primarily British stance; Futurism was founded by an Italian, the writer and art theorist F. T. Marinetti, and the movement significantly influenced the British art world, including C. R. W. Nevinson. Margaret Wynne Nevinson, the artist's mother who was actively involved in suffragism, responded to a speech given by Marinetti at the Lyceum Club for Women in London, observing how the women present at the meeting, 'like *Mona Lisa* of old, smiled and smiled the while she listened to the "same old story"' [italics in the original].³¹ Without even taking into account the content of this particular 'story' the concept can be seen to correlate with how our visual perceptions are shaped by genealogical traces,

expanding upon the premise to include an image alongside signs and symbols as a 'mental representation' of a whole. In this context there exists a seeming requirement for women to be equated with symbolic imagery within the observer's imagination, including connecting them to historic figures and despite this practice—whether expressed by male or female artists and theorists—effectively attributing labels to the women concerned.

It is suggested that women were situated 'in a contradictory position within the formation of modernist ideologies: on the one hand they were emblematic of the primitive and mythologised zone of eternal femininity, on the other they were seen as subject to specifically feminine frailties in the face of the modern world'.³² When this is explored from a Futurists' perspective as just one contemporaneous viewpoint, the *Manifesto of the Futurist Woman* published in 1912 could not be more specific: 'Women are the Erinyes, Amazons, Semiramides [sic], Joan of Arcs, Jeanne Hachettes; the Judiths and Charlotte Cordays, the Cleopatras and the Messalinas ...'³³ The footnotes for the anthology in which this manifesto appears explain somewhat lengthily that

The Erinnyes [sic] are the Greek goddesses/demons of vengeance, also called the Furies, who are given their classical treatment in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*; the Amazons were mythical female warriors of antiquity; Semiramis is the name of a queen of ancient Assyria, famous for her beauty, licentiousness, and prowess in war, and treated by Dante in *Inferno*... Jeanne Hachette is a French folk hero who seized a standard from besieging Burgundian troops in 1472. Judith is the exemplary Jewish hero from the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible book named after her; she beheads Holofernes, an Assyrian commander besieging Bethulia, and saves the city. Charlotte Corday (1768–1793) assassinated the French revolutionary leader Jean-Paul Marat. Messalina (A.D. 22–48), third wife of the Roman emperor Claudius, was a byword for licentiousness and murderous intrigues [italics in the original].³⁴

Six hundred years before the publication of this manifesto the Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) included within his book *On Famous Women* mythological females as though they were real,³⁵ thereby emphasising how the genealogical thread incorporates the utilisation of female figures whether fact or fiction as signs or symbols, including within the art-historical. Furthermore it demonstrates the blurred line that can be seemingly discerned between the real and the unreal perceptions of women more generally, particularly in analyses undertaken by men, with the connotations of this conflation explored throughout this book.

The Futurists' often contradictory comments regarding women as documented in their manifestos are analysed for their relevance to the subject matter, including their own apparent need to connect a contemporary woman with a real or mythical female figure from the past. Evidence that this is not restricted to a masculine overview is demonstrated in examples of imagery borne from suffrage movements which similarly look at representations of women from history. These representations were utilised as a basis for their processional designs, included historic female figures such as Joan of Arc,³⁶ and were subsequently replicated in their own artwork. In 1912, Hilda M. Dallas created a poster to advertise *The Suffragette*, the newspaper of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) founded by Emmeline Pankhurst (Fig. 1.3). In this image Joan of Arc becomes "Justice", stepping forward to demonstrate her readiness for the battle, with the fight in this example being the enfranchisement of women. That 'Women's relationship to each other is frequently ignored, designated a non-subject',³⁷

Fig. 1.3 *The Suffragette* 1912, Hilda Dallas (© Museum of London)



highlights how inter-women associations are brought into focus when considering suffrage artworks—works by women for the promotion of a predominantly women’s movement and which concentrate on female rights and equality. Consequently, a desire to equate a contemporary woman with an historic, heroic female figure such as Joan of Arc can be seen as an understandable premise for these women to subscribe to.

The ways women are represented in pictorial propagandist material is further demonstrated in imagery related to the First World War. During this conflict there was to begin with a surge of very ‘direct and patriotic posters aimed at men’; by the beginning of 1915, however, some of the posters began to effect ‘a more subtle approach—targeting men via the women in their lives’.³⁸ The State’s ambition was to direct the textual and pictorial messages to the women close to male civilians, be they mothers, wives or girlfriends, bombarding them with varying ‘emotional appeals’ in order for them to induce men to enlist in the services.³⁹ The division between the mythical and actual power of women, and the ways it was portrayed at the time—predominantly from a pictorial perspective—is a key aspect of this exploration. Of particular interest within this method is how one of the poster design variations quotes playwright William Shakespeare’s character of Lady Macbeth in conveying its message, despite the absence within the poster of a pictorial manifestation of a female form. The concept that this contrived absence of a woman provokes as many questions as her presence (and which includes this particular example), forms part of the analysis within a following chapter, and feeds into the discourse surrounding a deliberate negation of women’s contribution throughout history, including in art-historical narratives. Furthermore it endorses the observation that the perception of women, particularly in imagery of a so-called “ideal”, is blurred by the morphing of the real and mythological, and utilised in text and image by both women and men: ‘Strong and fierce personalities’ that include ‘Medea, Clytemnestra, Antigone, Hera, and Artemis’ despite these being ‘fictional characters’,⁴⁰ as well as the very real figure of Joan of Arc as already acknowledged. Wynne Nevinson succinctly summarises this premise when she states that ‘Whether she be the subject of praise or censure, woman is now, as always, man’s most interesting topic’,⁴¹ and this is intriguingly observed in a Wyndham Lewis ink, pencil and watercolour work

from circa 1913. This artwork, titled *Portrait of an Englishwoman*, is described by art historian Richard Cork, who remarks how

Lewis, true to his iconoclastic temperament, destroys all traces of his woman and replaces her with an arrangement of thick black bars, most of which ascend in a diagonal succession towards the top of the design. They suggest industrial girders, even gun-barrels, and their repetitive oblongs consciously refute the curves that are normally associated with the visual depiction of a female.⁴²

Even when acknowledging the principles, aims and objectives of an aesthetic movement that consciously contributes to the construction of an artwork, there is still room for debate as to how this work can be productively interpreted by the viewer, all the while taking into account the concept of intentional fallacy. It could be surmised that it is, at the very least, difficult for a viewer to discern that the subject matter of this particular painting is a woman without the title, which is uncompromising in its signposting. It can be argued that few key visuals within one's memory would automatically suggest Lewis' work is a portrait—including for reasoning as theorised by Hogarth, who writes that there are 'strong prejudices in favour of straight lines, as constituting true beauty in the human form, where they never should appear'.⁴³ However, hypotheses relating to this aspect of interpretation, as well as further acknowledgement of the part a viewer's imagination plays in discerning the constructional elements of an image, are explored later in this book. Arguably the biggest question to consider is whether the apparent disguising of the feminine subject is rooted in a more dismissive attitude towards women in general, and one that clearly replaces the woman as subject with that of object. Along with the enquiry into individual, as well as movements' stated opinions in this regard, further consideration of Lewis' painting is undertaken as this book progresses.

The myriad ways in which women can be seen in the pictorial documentation of the era that survives, and which is often supported and endorsed by contemporaneous textual commentary, emphasises the long and sweeping curve from one extreme to the other to which women as both subject and object are firmly rooted. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, this book analyses and appraises, through pictorial media, the politics and aesthetics in the representation of women during the period 1908–1918, and the reasons behind focusing upon this particular

decade in the early twentieth century are elaborated upon in Chapter 2. During this turbulent period can be seen the fight for emancipation, as well as movement between the private and public spheres, especially in relation to a nation's requirements of women associated with the onset of the First World War. In addition are the technological advances which saw the rise of both periodicals and posters and the advertising stratagems distributed via these mediums. The pictorial poster in particular became a means of mass information-communication employed by the State,⁴⁴ and reflected innovations in pictorial advertising as a productive contribution to the nascent propaganda industry.⁴⁵ These aspects are considered along with the rise of avant-garde art movements, particularly Vorticism in Britain. The pictorial trope as visible continuum, including Hogarth's *line of beauty* as well as other recurring motifs, is also considered in this chapter, not only in respect of the potential value of each construct but also as signifiers of genealogical legacy, thereby becoming the means by which alternative perspectives can be placed upon historical analyses.

Continuation of the ways in which women were represented in the artwork of the era and the genealogy rooted in ancient Greek and Roman considerations, is examined in Chapter 3. This includes appraisal of commercial imagery, political artwork related particularly to the First World War recruitment campaigns, and portraiture and self-portraiture created in Great Britain between 1908 and 1918. This latter genre's exploration incorporates examples from the oeuvres of Laura Knight, Helen Saunders and Carrington, and the chapter also includes analysis of the female figure—whether nude or clothed—as both subject and object. Artwork specific to the output of the suffrage and anti-suffrage movements forms the basis of Chapter 4; this line of enquiry encompasses the shift in both perception and actuality of a woman's role once the First World War commenced in August 1914. In addition, political polemics relating to female emancipation and the manifestos associated with avant-garde art movements are explored, including those relating to the Vorticists and Futurists.

Chapter 5 primarily considers sexuality and sensuality and their exploitation for political and advertising means, along with the ways this can affect a viewer's perception of a so-called ideal. Consequently the concept of vanity is investigated, predominantly in respect of prospective connotations from an observer's perceived perspective. Because aesthetic stylings can be seen—particularly in Cubist and Vorticist imagery—that seemingly defeminise a female figure, the deliberate or inadvertent

dismissal of women is also examined in this chapter, taking into account how a pictorial absence of the female figure can be as important as her presence. Contrasts and commonalities relating to the premise of this book's investigation are appraised in Chapter 6 in order to expose both familiar and antithetical threads relevant to the overall analysis. These incorporate the premise of the visual ellipsis, and how the genealogy of recurring motifs, particularly of the ideal female figure, can be traced to examples within contemporary visual culture, including within the advertising industry. This thread of enquiry also encompasses observations pertinent to technological advances, and the incentives behind—in addition to the values of—the displayed image. Concepts relating to beauty and desire, as well as the idea of a framework and the containment of the female form via boundaries that separate the seeable from the unseeable and which can be transgressed both literally and metaphorically, are also explored in this chapter. A summary and conclusion of all that is considered throughout this book forms the basis for Chapter 7.

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CHAPTER 2

The Reshaping of Society and the Rise of the Avant-Gardes

The forty years that straddled the turn of the twentieth century is considered as a period ‘of crisis in which organized movements of women and labour claimed political and social representation, and the “age of empire” was challenged by anti-imperialism, nationalist campaigns, and bids for independence...’¹ The historian Modris Eksteins suggests the mindset of the Victorians unsurprisingly focused upon ‘a social code, a combination of social and ethical values’.² However, whilst Eksteins considers it incorrect to view this code as ineradicable, and that to regard it ‘as “bourgeois” or “Victorian” or “Edwardian” is to reduce it to a catchword that distorts’, he maintains an equal distortion would be to dismiss its existence entirely.³ Despite new ideas, some of which concerned ‘an awakening social conscience’ that distanced members of the younger generation from their parents, their roots remained within the Victorian era, and ‘It was to that high noon of power and Empire of prosperity and expansion, of national pride and security, that they owed their unshakeable confidence, their patriotism and the unquestioning sense of duty that went with it’.⁴ Consequently, in most social and political arenas the Edwardians were a perpetuation of the Victorians; it was the wider prospect of change and the subsequent ‘sense of challenge’ in the Edwardian age that was atypical.⁵ It is within this social, cultural and political environment that the subject of this book is situated, and the ways in which the connotations affect the predominantly pictorial representations of the female figure informs the exploration undertaken here.

French philosopher Michel Foucault writes ‘that ever since a discipline such as history has existed, documents have been used, questioned, and have given rise to questions’, including those relating not only to the truth of the information, but also the means by which this ‘truth’ is established.⁶ This latter consideration is significant, not least because of the difficulty that lies in interpretation of intention coupled with the benefit of hindsight, and such documentation necessarily includes that of pictorial as well as textual content. The general concern remains the same, however: the consequent construction created continues to represent ‘the language of a voice since reduced to silence, its fragile, but possibly decipherable trace’.⁷ In acknowledging this idea of a silence, a specific correlation is revealed in a documented history that has consistently endeavoured to reduce the role of women within it. In ‘feminist theory’, the evolution of a new ‘language’ that is productively representative of women is required in order ‘to foster the political visibility of women’; this is important because of ‘the pervasive cultural condition in which women’s lives were either mis-represented or not represented at all’.⁸ Whilst this relates to how, historically, the parts women played were either under-represented or ignored in their entirety, the idea of representation can be supplementally expanded to include physical renderings archived pictorially, with the two connotations not necessarily being mutually exclusive. The role of women within a prescribed time period can be explored and assessed through analyses that incorporate the spoken word, the written word and the pictorial; this chapter situates this imagery within the tempestuous decade 1908–1918 as a means by which the effect of cultural, social and political events can be seen to inform the artwork of the era.

VISIBLE CONTINUA

In pursuing a continuing analogous correlation with Baudrillard’s concept of the visible continuum, and in specific respect of the transformational time period of this book, the idea that ‘the Great War was perhaps the last to be conceived as taking place within a seamless, purposeful “history” involving a coherent stream of time running from past through present to future’ is of note.⁹ This legacy-associated metaphor parallels the genealogical as well as the representational mobility of these continua, as they pertain to what Foucault alludes to as substrata developed within each document relevant to an historical examination.¹⁰ Within

the twentieth century it is generally considered that there have been a minimum of three ‘waves of feminism’, with the first pertaining to the suffrage movements prior to the First World War.¹¹ If the second is situated in the 1960s and made ‘the personal political’,¹² then the third is attributed to the 1990s when a ‘wave of feminists were teaching women’s studies courses, amid a wider attempt to broaden the movement to include women of all classes, races and sexualities’.¹³ Gender theorist Judith Butler argues, however, that the very term “woman” identifies a ‘political problem’ as it assumes a denotation of ‘common identity’,¹⁴ thereby reflecting the substrata within a particular category, and further indicating varying threads as visible continua demonstrative of specific perceptions of historical events. As already recognised, wider analyses of feminism and gender studies form areas of research that lie outside the parameters of this book, but it is nevertheless worth noting here Butler’s acknowledgement that part of the problem stems from the assumption that not only is there some ‘universal principle’ attached but also that it does not legislate for ‘the cultural contexts in which it exists’.¹⁵ These cultural, as well as temporal, contexts are taken into account throughout this book, and certainly it is unarguable that when it came to the ‘public economic sphere’ the rights for Victorian women were scarce.¹⁶ There were limited accessible occupations outside the home, and rights related to divorce and property barely changed in the latter part of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Although women were to all intents and purposes excluded from ‘the public exercise of power’ it is, arguably, debatable that ‘business, law and politics were the only avenues through which power was accessible to women’—the inference being that a woman held ‘hidden influence, especially moral suasion’,¹⁸ even if restricted to matters within the home. Whilst retrospective analysis considers that 1910 ‘represents historically the moment of decline for Liberal patriarchal imperialist England’, as well as the appearance of ‘a different identity for modern women’,¹⁹ the writer Vera Brittain remembers that in her family it was not ‘the quality of the work’ that was important, ‘but the sex of the worker’.²⁰

That the years leading up to the First World War were turbulent both socially and politically is undeniable, with steps undertaken to widen the opportunities available to women not always translating into a reality for them. Peppis notes that in ‘Liberal England’ there was evidence ‘of internal instability and decline: the Suffragette movement, trade union activism, parliamentary crises, working-class agitation, Irish rebellion,

unemployment, rising poverty'.²¹ Peppis' reference to instability is understandable, but for it to be allied in one sentence with decline can potentially be perceived as undermining the ambitions and objectives of those who were struggling for improvement. Suffrage, despite the differences that existed between the movements, was overwhelmingly concerned with the advancement in women's rights and the pursuance of a more inclusive framework within which both men and women could progress. Clearly 'The business of nation and Empire was the province of men', and even if a significant proportion of women continued to focus on their own family affairs,²² to dismiss activism as being a symbol of decline rather than an attempt at advancement for a large tract of the population seems somewhat disproportionate. It does, however, underscore the difficulties facing those who were fighting against the inequality of the era. Writer Janet Lyon remarks on the 'public political woman' of the early twentieth century, clarifying the context in which she uses this term as relating to 'not only the women who assumed public voice in the Edwardian and Georgian eras'—which can arguably be equated with the "accessible power" referred to earlier—"but also, and more broadly, the whole spectacle of women asking for political rights as individuals".²³ Lyon advocates that 'this public figure, perhaps most prominently embodied by the British Suffragettes who engaged in street actions from 1906 to 1914, rapidly became an abiding though unacknowledged impetus of the pre-war avant-garde'.²⁴ Lyon clarifies her specific use of the term 'suffragette' as denoting 'the militant, law-breaking, as opposed to the law-abiding suffragist',²⁵ although suffragettes and suffragists were 'often the same people'.²⁶ Regardless, these militant women were behaving in the same way as men, and yet this aspect has all but been excluded from this particular documented historical genre.²⁷ Lyon notes the absence of discourse in most 'considerations of modernism' surrounding 'the whole unprecedented phenomenon of British women appearing en masse in the streets and beyond the law... even though modernists themselves often invoked the Liberated Woman as an image for modernity'.²⁸ This apparently liberated woman, however, was often financially supported by her sometimes disapproving family; Helen Saunders, as one example of an avant-garde artist, was supported by a 'private income'.²⁹ Nevertheless, by the turn of the twentieth century, the so-called "Modern" woman was one who went outside of the house to work in paid employment, socialised in mixed company without a chaperone, travelled and found her own accommodation to rent.³⁰

There were upper-class women who even at this time were exerting a not inconsiderable amount of political influence, yet this was almost always down to them being married to eminent men and stemmed from their positions socially as opposed to their individual rights as British subjects.³¹ The rise of the avant-gardes and the innovative influences on aesthetic and literary output at the turn of the twentieth century signifies the need that existed for a deliverance from ‘a central authority, from patriarchy, from bourgeois conformity’ and it is therefore unsurprising ‘that much of the psychological and spiritual momentum for this break came from the peripheries...’³² Among these peripheral groups Eksteins is broad in citing ‘geographical, social, generational, and sexual’,³³ with the latter of greatest significance to this book: women were on the periphery—outside the mainstream of social, cultural and political status. This serves as a reminder that this ‘category of “women”, the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought’³⁴ and is itself a reflection demonstrative of circular cause and effect, a perspective that continues to be considered as this book progresses.

‘INNOCENT, MODEST, INSTRUCTIVE AND AGREEABLE’

Consequently, and in continuing to recognise the concept of visible continua as a means by which genealogical threads can be traced through the various substrata in historical and art-historical pictorial and textual documents, it is worth further acknowledging commentary relating to Hogarth. It is considered that ‘No other eighteenth-century artist portrayed so well the exploitation of women by men... and by society... the oppressed condition of the poor, the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of the nobility and the folly of the middle classes...’³⁵ It is also during the eighteenth century that John Tipper, who edited *The Ladies Diary* until his death in 1713, believed his publication ‘should reflect “what all women ought to be—innocent, modest, instructive and agreeable”...’³⁶ Both references emphasise the clear continuum relating to the ways women were textually as well as pictorially portrayed, with the former arguably submerged under the weight of ideas more conducive with the latter. In respect of publications especially targeted at women, whilst social adjustments effected the greatest momentum in the increase of these magazines, technical advances made towards the end of the nineteenth century proved to be decisive:

The growth of cheap literature for the masses was founded upon developments in paper manufacture and printing, and upon the rise of organised retail distribution, which was itself dependent upon improved communications over the country as a whole. The production of cheap paper in large quantities, the mechanisation of type-casting and setting, and the introduction of fast, rotary presses were crucial...³⁷

Magazine titles directed at women increased from four to fifty between the middle and the end of the nineteenth century,³⁸ yet the main periodicals aimed at the women's market had always been cautious in avoiding topics related to women's rights; any comments directed to 'feminist activities' were 'infrequent and invariably derogatory'.³⁹ Although by the end of the nineteenth century advertising agents were taking note of 'the demonstrable characteristics of a predominantly female market', they unsurprisingly encapsulated their 'masculine biases and preconceptions' into the advertisements they produced and promoted.⁴⁰ Whilst it is possible this bias may not necessarily have been conscious, when these aspects are considered in the context of the era it is likely there was very little of the unconscious about it. Consequently what is key is this authority upon which rested the pictorial portrayal of women; as acknowledged, women of the decade existed, for the most part, outside political and public spheres. As one example, women had control over how suffrage movements represented their cause, but little or none in respect of how this was reported in newspapers and magazines which had set protocols relating to a so-called "ideal" version of a woman—one described editorially, as well as portrayed pictorially in the form of commercial advertising. Nevertheless, niche publications did devote time and type to revolutionary aspects—including *The Freewoman*, a feminist journal which ran during 1911 and 1912. In an article titled *Notes of the Week* in the first edition in November 1911, it is declared 'The publication of THE FREEWOMAN marks an epoch. It marks the point at which Feminism in England ceases to be impulsive and unaware of its own features, and becomes definitely self-conscious and introspective' [capitals in the original].⁴¹ However, as with Butler's concern with the noun "woman" suggesting a 'common identity', *The Freewoman* and its contents were not necessarily embraced by all feminists, thereby demonstrating the multiple layers of substrata that exist, and which need to be taken into account, when an attempt is made to consolidate, categorise and subsequently label.

The importance of technological developments benefiting the newspaper and magazine industries directed at both men and women is similarly reflected in the rise of the poster. During the nineteenth century and stretching far into the twentieth, the poster stands as a medium for advertising second only to newspapers.⁴² Restrictions applied to newspaper advertising encouraged this growth of bill-posting, as the poster offered the advertiser more freedom.⁴³ Furthermore—and crucial in attracting the attention of the crowd—the poster provides ‘a means of disseminating information with remarkable rapidity’.⁴⁴ The Industrial Revolution discerned a significant change in the nature of advertising,⁴⁵ and regardless of both contemporaneous and current considerations of the industry it nonetheless ‘filled a distinct need’.⁴⁶ What had once been a ‘novelty’, even an ‘oddity’, advertising ‘gradually began to gain acceptance as a commercial weapon...’⁴⁷—a weapon soon utilised to great effect by the propaganda industry, as from 1914 advertisements were competing and contrasting with a new wave of pictorial imagery on the advertising hoardings in the form of the political poster enlisted for the war effort.⁴⁸

It is the way in which women during this period were represented, again both pictorially and textually, that indicates how they were perceived by the wider public. The December 1911 issue of *The Windsor Magazine* contains within one advertisement an image of a woman illustrated cameo-style as head and shoulders set against a circular garland that construes the frame of a mirror despite no reflection indicated. The text reads, ‘Marvellous development accomplished’—a new ‘Method of enlarging the female bust. Thin women are quickly developed into commanding figures that excite wonderment and admiration’.⁴⁹ This “treatment” of somewhat dubious provenance is nonetheless noted as being of use to those who through ‘unfortunate circumstance of health or occupation’ are ‘deficient in this development’.⁵⁰ In blatantly advertising a supposed way in which a woman could become a female figure who is someone’s concept of an “ideal” woman, the heading for this particular advertisement states uncompromisingly that the product ‘MAKES WOMEN BEAUTIFUL’ [capitals in the original].⁵¹ Equating women with an ideal, along with what can be considered as constituting “beauty”, is explored throughout this book, but it is important to acknowledge here that ‘Valuation is the act of mind whereby we attach value to an object or regard it as valuable, and presumably in the same sense as we call an object pleasant because it gives us pleasure’.⁵² The

concept of woman as subject matter versus woman as object forms a thread of investigation within this book, and entwined with this is the consideration of a value placed upon the object, as well as the concept of a visual construct as analytical tool of which Hogarth's *line of beauty* serves as a productive example. This can therefore be allied with the idea that 'The valuation of an object is thus secondary to the apprehension of it. We not only see a picture... but we judge it to be beautiful. The judgment of value is thus superimposed or founded on apprehension or judgment of an object'.⁵³ There is a multitude of ways in which an image can be upraised in order for it to be perceived as "more beautiful". The addition of colour assists, but periodical printing procedures of the time did not always allow for this. Adornment is an obvious addition: flowers, headdresses, Grecian robes—augmentation of a female figure that elevates the ordinary to the extraordinary. Figure 2.1 is an enhanced version of the female form illustrated in Fig. 1.2; the more decorative style, including the addition of rich colours, can be construed as adding value to what is effectively the same pictorial image. The highlighting of serpentine curvature pertaining to the female figure by accentuating the *line of beauty* through its adornment in flora, thereby making the implicit explicit, also assists in effecting the viewer's perception of "beauty". Furthermore, the inclusion of a mirror is suggestive of further connotation and this is explored in a following chapter.

ATTAINABILITY

Consequently, alongside a conscious or unconscious recognition of a pictorial trope relating to a concept of beauty which therefore will attract the viewer to an image, lies the possibility of a contrived signposting as to what it is the viewer should be thinking or feeling—and the value thereby attributed—because of editorial bias relating to the image. A further view can be taken on this when it is aligned with German philosopher Theodor Adorno's remarks that 'All mass culture is fundamentally adaptation', and his assertion that this 'adaptation' equally applies to the 'consumers'—that each facet adjusts to accept the other in as simplistic a way as possible.⁵⁴ In the context of this book, which focuses on imagery of women, a perspective can be attributed in the form of a deliberate portrayal—not only as signposting to the viewer, but also in response to what it is that viewer wishes to see portrayed. Despite being a stratagem that runs contrarily to *The Windsor Magazine* advertisement



Fig. 2.1 *Of Value* 2017 (© Georgina Williams)

described, advertisers often regarded the pictorial element of their output as unconnected to the general message,⁵⁵ an analysis of which can only conclude that the image was there specifically for its value as an initial attraction for the viewer and not necessarily as a link to the product or service being promoted. In the eighteenth century Hogarth designed and constructed trade cards for businesses, including one for the goldsmith Ellis Gamble. This particular engraving (circa 1723–1733) conveys the company details in both English and French and illustrates a female figure as a winged angel in apparent Grecian costume rising above the text. In 1892, in *The Illustrated London News*, an advertisement for the

promotion of *Brookes'* soap portrays its Pre-Raphaelite-inspired female figure drawn with cloth draped across one shoulder and delicate sandals on her feet. She raises her right arm to clasp a cornucopia, while her gaze remains firmly on the viewer. The advertisement carries the tagline 'THE SPIRIT OF BRIGHTNESS SPREADS FAITH' [capitals in the original]. This pictorial trope is once more replicated in 1908 promotional material for Buchanan's "Black and White" Scotch Whisky; the paradoxical colour portrayal of the brand presents one female figure dressed in white and posed similarly to the *Brookes* woman, her right arm raised as though to garland an oversized bottle situated on a pedestal with a wreath she holds in her hand. She is mirrored by a black-clothed female figure whose left arm encompasses the bottle; both women hold glasses in their free hands. Whilst 'stunning illustrations reproduced with meticulous care and artistry' were being used by advertisers by the late nineteenth century,⁵⁶ evidence of how attraction to the message can be exploited by the utilisation of imagery of the female form, particularly when conveyed in ways seemingly established as how the viewer wants to see women portrayed, can be recognised as a practice boasting a long legacy as these examples bear testimony to. Of supplemental interest in respect of Hogarth's design for Ellis Gamble is the appearance of a *line of beauty* apparent within Hogarth's work prior to his 1745 self-portrait upon which he rendered a serpentine curve on a paint palette and titled it 'THE LINE OF BEAUTY' [capitals in the original].⁵⁷ Hogarth's theories pertaining to his *line* serve to underscore the idea of the female form as not only attractional subject matter but also as an attractional object; *The Windsor Magazine* blatantly acknowledges how a woman can conform to the concept of an ideal, and an "ideal" female figure is employed to attract the viewer towards unrelated products such as soap powder and whisky. Further to this is the query as to whom the imagery is being directed in the first place: suffrage material of the decade was aimed at both women and men in the pursuit of the goal of female emancipation. Certain propagandist imagery relating to the First World War was targeting men to enlist, and their mothers, wives and girlfriends to encourage this; in addition was the call to women to join supporting services during the conflict. Advertising, while ostensibly focused upon targeted audiences, nonetheless utilised similar stylistic constructs regardless of the product being publicised. In this latter respect, a more contemporary view observes that despite changes in the content of advertisements, an 'increasing semiotic refinement has not made the least difference to their

basic function',⁵⁸ which is another endorsement of how Hogarth's *line* can be seen to serve as one visible continuum possessing a lengthy genealogical heritage.

To further endorse the points made in this section of the chapter, it is important to remember that for the most part it is not what is being advertised that is under scrutiny in this book—be that a commercial product, a service, a political cause—but the ways in which the female form is employed to promote it. Pertinent, therefore, is that it is not the advertisement itself 'that evokes feeling', it is merely that the advertisement 'invokes the *idea* of a feeling; it uses feeling as a sign which points to the product' [*italics in the original*].⁵⁹ The very 'technique of advertising is to correlate feelings, moods or attributes to tangible objects, linking possible *unattainable* things with those that are attainable, and thus reassuring us that the former are within reach' [*italics in the original*].⁶⁰ Alongside the attainability or otherwise of the product or service advertised lies the attraction to the actual female form pictorially exploited in order to promote it. The styling of this female figure can simultaneously be considered as something that is attainable—either from one woman to another, or from the man who wishes to procure what is often portrayed as a so-called "ideal" woman. This is explicitly reflected in *The Windsor Magazine* advertisement of 1911, while being more implicit in the soap and spirits advertisements because they are ostensibly advertisements for products unrelated to the women themselves. In this can be seen the idea that 'The state of being envied is what constitutes glamour', and advertising is at least one factor in the 'process of manufacturing glamour'.⁶¹ However, there is an additional, converse, position—that a particular portrayal of a woman is the opposite of what the viewer (of either sex) wishes to "attain". Imagery of this style can include artworks related to suffrage movements—pictorial endorsement of anti-suffrage reportage, for example, as explored in a following chapter. Art critic John Berger observes how 'Publicity is the culture of the consumer society. It propagates through images that society's belief in itself',⁶² a contention that seemingly enforces the connection between the advertising and propaganda industries. Whilst this can be explored from a more general perspective, of significance is how it applies to the concept of the feminine figure as ideal, thereby indicative of how such a trope can be perpetuated when it is seen to serve a specific purpose. Further to this is the idea that when a viewer looks at something labelled 'a work of art', his or her perception of that artwork is 'affected by a whole series of

learnt assumptions about art'.⁶³ Berger lists these assumptions as being in respect of 'Beauty', 'Truth', 'Genius', 'Civilization', 'Form', 'Status', 'Taste'.⁶⁴ Images relating to the period 1908–1918 which therefore incorporate artwork associated with suffrage movements and the First World War, are not always categorised as “works of art”, at least not when analysed from a traditional point of view. However, the assumptions Berger speaks of all contribute to a viewer's perception of the imagery he or she is observing, effecting any action that viewer may be inclined to take in response. If this imagery forms part of a broader message, as pictorial posters, advertisements and photojournalism inevitably do, then the assumptions can be expanded to embrace the wider idea. Berger, who was writing in the last third of the twentieth century, considers 'Many of these assumptions no longer accord with the world as it is'.⁶⁵ However, because they are concepts that embrace the manipulation of a nostalgic past in order to promote an idea of a better future,⁶⁶ their continuing exploitation for both advertising and propagandist reasons is understandable. In an additional endorsement of the use particularly of the nouns 'truth' and 'beauty', not only do the classical Greek concepts surrounding these illustrate the mining of the past to positively project a future, it is also the ancient Greeks who first offered proof of the use of advertising for commercial reasons.⁶⁷ In this can be viewed further genealogical threads that act as visible continua as they weave through the substrata of historical and art-historical discourse, including Hogarth's concept of a *line of beauty*.

ANGELS

Nevertheless, in reverting to the idea of a pictorial trope with an ability to attract the viewer, the *line of beauty* can also be seen to serve as an attraction to what is ostensibly the *unattractive*,⁶⁸ as is endorsed in the concept that 'Any subject is available for beauty if treated beautifully'.⁶⁹ Advertisements can often be seen to disguise and deny 'the real issues of society... They create systems of social differentiation which are a veneer on the basic class structure of our society'.⁷⁰ In an era incorporating not only activism in the form of suffrage movements but also conflict as devastating and widespread as the First World War, this observation is of particular pertinence because it reveals the possibility of the employment of a façade in the promotion of the concept being sold. Moreover, and in recognition of the symbiotic relationship that formed in the first

two decades of the twentieth century between the advertising and propaganda industries (not least in their use of the pictorial poster), it is worth acknowledging how ‘propaganda is the manipulation of symbols for the sake of controlling public opinion in contexts characterised by power, influence and authority relationships between people and groups of people’.⁷¹ How this also relates to the employment of the female figure as a symbol of manipulation is aptly illustrated in two examples from this period. An advertisement for *Bovril* by S. H. Benson circa 1901 (Fig. 2.2) and a poster requesting donations for the Belgian Red Cross fund from August 1916 (Fig. 2.3) are each designed using the same stylistic structures. Both images show an injured soldier being cared for by a nurse as a ‘ministering angel’—stated in text in the commercial advertisement that uses this phrase as its tagline, and demonstrated by the addition of a pair of wings to the illustration of the nurse in Charles Buchel’s design for the Red Cross. Artist and suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst created for the WSPU an *Angel of Freedom* logo that similarly depicts a winged

Fig. 2.2 *Bovril: A Ministering Angel* 1901 (nurse giving Bovril as medicine to a soldier), S. H. Benson (Reproduced with kind permission of Unilever from an original in Unilever archives)



Fig. 2.3 *Belgian Red Cross* 1915, Charles A. Buchel (© IWM)



figure. This profiled female form is shown with her toes pointing downwards as though she is hovering, held aloft by the large wings attached to her back. Her left arm is raised to hold a long horn to her mouth. Rising above her is sometimes found a banner declaring the word “freedom”. The idea—literally illustrated in these examples—that the nouns “advertising” and “propaganda” can be so easily interchanged, is further upheld in the comment that marketing—which as has already been acknowledged is often not about the product at all—relates to the user who is yet to appreciate it, offering an image of that user ‘made glamorous by the product or opportunity it is trying to sell’.⁷² The relationship to advertising is clear in this observation, while its expansion into propaganda is underscored in the way this industry offers opportunity in its promise of a future, better reality. In the illustrations at Figs. 2.2 and 2.3, this is demonstrated by how the female form in the guise of a nurse is not only effectively “glamorised” by her elevation to angelic status, she

also projects the notion that the injured soldier to whom she is ministering will successfully recover and live on to embrace a promising future.

Important to this examination is the concept and subsequent exploitation of an ideal as a genealogical thread, and the writer Lori Anne Loeb remarks how in Victorian times ‘The “perfect lady” was commercially apotheosized through her identification with distant historical ideals. Swathed in robes, barefoot and crowned with laurel wreaths’ there was little relating this version of a woman to real, contemporary life.⁷³ As recognised in Chapter 1, such pictorial and historic reference was also utilised by the suffrage movements, as well as found within First World War propaganda material, particularly that connected to recruitment drives. What is important to observe at this juncture is how Loeb’s ‘perfect lady’ relates to the concept of the angel—specifically *The Angel in the House* from the title of an extended poem written in the nineteenth century by Coventry Patmore in deference to his wife. Loeb comments on how

The apotheosis of the angel in the house was partly an expression of a gendered definition of separate spheres. A woman being more delicate, fragile, reserved, yet virtuous, loving, and pretty was properly confined to the household sphere where her gentleness and nurturing were best employed.⁷⁴

In the context of the pictorial in advertising, it is seemingly this reversion to a Victorian ideal that was considered worthy of continual exploitation as an attraction for the wider population. However, the heritage of this “ideal”, particularly from a pictorial perspective, is rooted in the Greek and the Roman, specifically the mythology surrounding Aphrodite and Venus as representing the epitome of love, sex and beauty. Such influences can be seen in the three advertisements commented upon in the previous section of this chapter, whilst the recurring motif of the angel is demonstrated in Hogarth’s design for Ellis Gamble from the eighteenth century and Sylvia Pankhurst’s *Angel of Freedom*, as well as in the imagery illustrated at Figs. 2.2 and 2.3. Nevertheless, more generally the female figure, considered as being ‘natural, *unstructured*’, can be seen to constitute ‘something that is outside the proper field of art and aesthetic judgement; but artistic style, pictorial form, contains and regulates the body and renders it an object of beauty, suitable for art and aesthetic judgement’ [*italics in the original*].⁷⁵ Whilst the idea of a body’s containment is examined in Chapter 6, such labelling as suggested here—and

therefore a forced positioning under one category or another—extends beyond the subject/object in the shape of the female form, and incorporates the pictorial perpetrator when that person is also female.

In respect of this latter point, therefore, categorising such as this is succinctly summarised in the observation that ‘one must be an artist or a wife and mother’.⁷⁶ There is discourse to be explored in how ‘mother’ has become a designation in itself, as opposed to it being only one part of what or who a woman can be,⁷⁷ especially considering it is rare for men to be divided into “artist” and “father”—or, for that matter, “father” and *any* other noun. Furthermore, if historically male critics mentioned a female artist favourably it was likely they spoke about her ‘as if she were an aberration of her sex because of her talent’,⁷⁸ thereby denigrating her further in the assumption that she can be a *woman* or an artist, but apparently not both. The conflict this alludes to is more widespread in the context of the temporal parameters of this book because of the association with other female-attributed labels: for example, one can be either a suffragette (or suffragist), *or* a wife and mother. The battle between being a wife/mother as well as a productive contributor to the public sphere has clearly not been relegated to the early part of the twentieth century, constituting a debate that extends beyond the objectives of this book. Furthermore, in adhering to the era and incorporating the comments considered above, it should be recognised that ‘Women artists’ mythological status as outcasts from the norms of bourgeois ideology has often been measured against the norm of “ideal” wife and mother through attention to their sexual mores or behaviour...’⁷⁹ It is very easy to castigate women for their actions, including those relating to activism, when the concept of the angel-in-the-house is regarded as being the *only* ideal existing for a woman to aspire to, and therefore the intimation that this is the *only* woman a man wants to consider as being an acceptable female figure. Fighting this narrow and unrealistic “role model” becomes a challenge both rooted within, and running parallel to, the particular battle for emancipation ongoing in the early decades of the twentieth century.

TRAVERSING THE SPHERE

At the outbreak of the First World War there began an acceleration in the breaking down of the lines that existed between both classes and genders, splitting

all the radical political groupings into supporters and opponents, including of course the women; it also transformed the whole context of industrial activity. For the first time outside the traditional area of women's work like Lancashire, large numbers of women were concentrated together in industry. Women represented a crucial pool of labour power which the war economy had to use.⁸⁰

The coming together of members of the population from all walks of life and all areas of society was evidenced across Britain. Although Vera Brittain remembers that when women who later arranged the Scottish Women's Hospitals in both France and Serbia initially offered assistance to the War Office they were informed they should 'go home and keep quiet',⁸¹ by that same year of 1914 there numbered two and a half thousand Voluntary Aid Detachments 'manned by 74,000 enthusiastic volunteers, two-thirds of them women and girls'.⁸² In addition, young women who relied upon paid employment, and therefore were not in a position to volunteer full-time, could still dedicate spare evenings and Sundays to domestic work in hospitals or canteens; their skills were considered more helpful to the cause than those of the keen young women without experience who came direct from more affluent backgrounds.⁸³ One intriguing aspect related to these times lies in the following account by Lady Ottoline Morrell; in light of the efforts of suffrage movements, and the apparent overriding consolidation of the general public—at least to begin with—in support of the war, Morrell's account expresses a converse view:

...it was terribly painful going against the current of patriotic emotion that was carrying the whole nation further and further into the war. The whole world seemed intoxicated—drunk with a mysterious primitive emotion that stimulated people to deeds of noble self-sacrifice, enabled them often to endure great suffering and privations, but even acts of cruelty and intolerance were transformed in their eyes into a sacred duty... I saw the young uniformed women so free, so gay and liberated, driving cars so competently, and looking so fresh, proud and robust. I couldn't help feeling a violent resentment against them, that they should gain their freedom and happiness by trampling on the men, by liberating them, and so sending them out to the front.⁸⁴

It can be argued that it is a rarely encountered opinion that taking men's positions in the workplace allowed them to go to the front in the First World War, thereby implying that if women had not been prepared to

do so men would not have been able to enlist and as a consequence the war would have been over before it started. This throws another perspective into the mix: Morrell was a titled woman, married to a one-time Member of Parliament, supporter of the arts, a society hostess (Lewis describes Morrell's pre-war gatherings as 'great parties, of fashion and "intellect" mixed in equal measure').⁸⁵ She was also an unapologetic conscientious objector. It is therefore an interesting exercise to consider whether Morrell would ever have qualified as being representative of an angel-in-the-house, indicative of an "ideal". Certainly her conscientious objection would have alienated her from the swathe of society who would consider this unpatriotic. Although there were feminists who distanced themselves from the war and any contribution to it they may have been able to make, 'believing pacifism to be inherent in feminism',⁸⁶ it could be said that in being a conscientious objector at this time, and bearing in mind her cited comments, Morrell was separating herself from the idea of female emancipation in general. Moreover, to all intents and purposes, she appears to be actively condemning it, thereby playing into the hands of those who consider women incapable of productively contributing to wider society, and consequently maintaining that they should remain within the domestic sphere.

Nevertheless, despite how negatively large tracts of the male population viewed the suffrage movements—and, it has to be recognised, a not insignificant number of women as well—the onset of the First World War threw a spotlight onto the role women could and would successfully play in society. As is evident in Morrell's observation, women were suddenly confronted by opportunities previously unavailable to them, eventually accompanied by an albeit cautious recognition of both the 'right' and the 'need' for women to be able to transfer from the private to public sphere of life.⁸⁷ However, it was not beyond the State to exploit women for a common cause: extensive attempts were made to target them, particularly as the mothers who would send their sons to war and therefore appear as soldier-like—as heroic—as men.⁸⁸ This latter point is particularly disingenuous in its rallying of women to "be like men" when women were simultaneously so actively derided for desiring, from an equality point of view, exactly the same, as is considered more fully in later chapters. This targeting of the mothers of potential soldiers is aptly illustrated in a poster distributed by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee in August 1915 (artist unknown), that illustrates a black-clad, white-haired woman with her right arm about the shoulders of a moustachioed young

man in civilian clothing. The woman's left hand is positioned to emphasise the word 'GO!', whilst beneath her arm the text reads 'IT'S YOUR DUTY LAD', and then 'JOIN TO-DAY' [capitals in the original]. The man can be described as looking somewhat diffident, whilst the woman, who is undoubtedly intended to be recognised as his mother, appears confident in what she is asking of her son and therefore, presumably, the reasons why such duty, not to say sacrifice, is necessary. Whilst the woman's dress is not rendered in a way that can be considered counter to the fashion of the era, particularly for an older woman, it is notable that both characters' clothing is portrayed in dark colours that contrast dramatically with the orange background of the poster. Although this serves to emphasise the seriousness of the situation, it additionally carries a sense of prescience in cloaking the woman in black and thereby unknowingly insinuating an air of mourning to her physical appearance.

Running parallel to this approach is the exploitation of the woman as ideal, as the angel, utilised in advertising pertinent to the time, and subsequently additionally employed in State-sponsored imagery. Artworks relating to advertising will not 'speak of the present', but instead will 'refer to the past and always they speak of the future'.⁸⁹ Advertising portrays 'fantasy, ideals, life as it ought to be',⁹⁰ and it is unsurprising that any utilisation of the female form in pursuit of this will attach a fantasy, "ideal" persona to it. Nevertheless, and despite the close relationship between the propaganda and advertising industries, with regard to the concept of ignoring the present in an attempt to achieve these objectives it is clear that from a propagandist viewpoint, especially during conflict situations, there is a need to incite the population to act, and depicting current events creates the sense of urgency necessary for this to happen. In 1915, on behalf of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, Lucy Kemp-Welch designed a poster captioned *Remember Scarborough!* illustrated at Fig. 2.4. This relates to the December 1914 raid by the Imperial German Navy on the north-east England coastal towns of Scarborough, Whitby and Hartlepool. Key is the way in which, as noted, contemporaneous situations utilise the past in order to promote a desired future and how, in employing the female form in this endeavour the woman is often portrayed as an historic figure, even if of mythical status. In respect of the *Remember Scarborough!* poster what is implied is a future reality that sees Great Britain victorious and avenged. Running alongside this premise is the often-incorporated concept in the form of

Fig. 2.4 *Remember Scarborough!* 1915, Lucy Kemp-Welch (© IWM)



a more explicit suggestion of an ideal, particularly one worth saving, in order to give credence to what it is the State is asking its men to fight for, and its women to contribute to—in varying ways—whilst they do so. An example of this is found in a poster designed with a similar premise to *Remember Scarborough!*; after the sinking of RMS *Lusitania* Fred Spear created an image portraying a drowning woman and child, which consists of only a singular textual component, the word ‘ENLIST’ [capitals in the original]. Whilst the former poster employs the motif of a town under attack—and therefore its entire population—the latter exploits a concept of the solitary defenceless woman and her child as a mechanism to personalise the reasons as to why the observer should enlist in the services: this female figure could be your wife, your girlfriend, your sister, and she needs to be saved. In this is seen how value can be attached, not only to the image as a whole, but also to the constructs and tropes contained within it, as considered earlier in this chapter.

‘REPRESENTATIONAL CONVENTIONS’

Consequently, because ‘cultural responses to women’ are especially associated with how they physically appear, ‘developments in the visual image of women have particular implications for assessing their place in the social structure of their time’.⁹¹ Although photographic evidence to which this latter statement is mainly directed ensures an historical pictorial record (and whilst acknowledging the potential for manipulation in the photographic process), this can be expanded to include other media utilised in the depiction of the female form. This is not merely as a way of recording women involved in a particular event or era, but as a means of documenting the ways her image is portrayed and subsequently perceived. These points can therefore be further contemplated in light of the idea that it is insufficient to look, ‘admire’, and subsequently call what one is seeing as ‘beautiful’, because simultaneously the viewer needs to question what it is that ‘makes us want to contemplate it for its own sake’⁹²—as illustrated in the comparison between the images at Figs. 1.2 and 2.1. Allied with concepts relating to attraction, including Hogarth’s observations on the incorporation within artworks of his *line of beauty*, lies the wider consideration of what the image as a whole is relaying. Within Spear’s *Enlist*, for example, not only is the female figure employed for her attractional value (being young and beautiful), she is simultaneously exploited in order to represent wider social and cultural situations under threat by the war—including the nation’s children. This is similarly exemplified in another 1915 poster, designed by Gerald Spencer Pryse. Of particular interest in this latter illustration is that it is archived as a text-less image, although the accompanying description summarises its content and therefore its potential message: ‘A woman stands disconsolate, as another bends over a dead soldier; a house burns in the background’.⁹³ The poster is constructed using sepia tones, with a simple splash of red indicating the central figure’s blouse, as well as streaks that run down her long skirt and which could be interpreted as representing the blood of the soldier who lies at her feet in the arms of another figure. The central woman stares at the viewer, her hands held in front of her; she appears defeated, her demeanour imploring the viewer to at least offer sympathy as it is arguably too late for actual assistance. Within these posters lies the concept of ‘empathetic involvement as a requirement in the effective collaboration between propagandist and propagandee’;⁹⁴ a connection such as this is needed in order for the

viewer, be they male or female, to be incited into action, and personalising the message through contrived imagery serves this purpose appositely. In addition is the example this image serves to illustrate of how any message can be adapted via a varying of textual captions despite the pictorial element remaining the same, as demonstrated in Fig. 1.2.

Moreover, an additional thread of debate is provoked: is the conveyed message and the viewer's perception of it affected by his or her knowledge of the sex of the image's creator? This is an aspect that can be incorporated into the debate surrounding the reasoning as to why 'art historical institutions and discourses' created a context in which female artists were subordinated to male artists:

Were the successful ones exception (perhaps to the point of deviance) or merely the tip of a hidden iceberg, submerged by a society demanding that women produce children, not art, and confine their activities to the domestic, not the public, sphere?⁹⁵

Because such a premise can include commercial as well as fine art it opens up the possibility that the *Remember Scarborough!* poster risks being perceived as less effective than a similar design by Spear or another male creative, simply because of the sex of the artist. Whilst a viewer's response may be affected if the artist's sex is known, long before the public gets to see the imagery the commissioning and distributing authorities can themselves base decisions on acceptance of the design through preconceived ideas relating to the worthiness or otherwise of the work of the artist, and this is one aspect further considered later in this book. Certainly as women 'began to speak about themselves' they were—consciously or unconsciously—misunderstood:

Men had established a code of regulations for the making and judging of art which derived from their sense of what was or was not significant. Women, thought to be inferior to men, obviously could not occupy center stage unless they concerned themselves with the ideas men deemed appropriate.⁹⁶

The Guerrilla Girls, 'a group of women artists and arts professionals who fight discrimination', thereby considering themselves 'the conscience of the art world', ponder as to 'which is worse: to be belittled yet remembered as in days of old; or to be completely ignored by more

“enlightened” modern men⁹⁷—observations which highlight how the ways in which women are considered in general affect how they are considered more specifically, for example as artists in all genres.

In the early years of the twentieth century British art was undoubtedly under male control, although in 1908 the formation of the Allied Artists’ Association (AAA) created possibilities for female artists to exhibit with fewer restrictions than had been the norm despite this society being founded by men.⁹⁸ At this time female artists who were the most high profile were ‘ex-pupils, wives, lovers, mothers, patrons or colleagues of male artists in avant-garde groups’;⁹⁹ nevertheless, the AAA ‘accorded the “same treatment to all artists, irrespective of their positions and reputations”’.¹⁰⁰ As noted in Chapter 1, the Vorticist movement accepted women artists and furthermore was financially supported by women, predominantly by the painter Kate Lechmere. The aesthetic contribution by these women, specifically that of Helen Saunders, is explored in the next chapter, but in respect of the movement’s wider objectives Cork writes that, when compared to other movements of the time, Vorticism

lacks a sense of tightly-knit cohesion. Compared with the other, closely related radical movements which were simultaneously subverting establishment values on the continent, this English uprising seems riddled with dissonance and suspiciously short-lived. Whereas the Futurists made a special point of presenting the world with a united front, concealing private differences behind a public display of solidarity, the Vorticists never masked their misgivings about the whole concept of a group endeavour.¹⁰¹

These ‘private differences’, whether of personal or professional provenance, may have been borne from the inclusion of women within their number, albeit with dissatisfaction of the status quo felt on both sides of the gender divide. Furthermore, in addition to the lack of cohesion noted, it was unfortunate that Vorticism ‘was not granted the period of uninterrupted peace which both Cubism and Futurism had been able to enjoy’, with the First World War having ‘temporarily forbidden it to develop beyond its noisy beginnings’.¹⁰² Despite its short life, Cork nevertheless considers Vorticism as ‘an indigenously English form of abstraction’, with a ‘fundamental’ objective of extricating ‘art from outworn representational conventions’.¹⁰³ It is these representational conventions in respect of the figurative which are a key part of this examination and explored predominantly in Chapter 3. Certainly every Vorticist artist

wanted the new century to 'be accompanied by an art that reflected the dramatically changing fabric of life in England', and it is this objective of a 'one unifying force' which cements Vorticism's place within a continuing discourse.¹⁰⁴ Vorticism recognised the 'importance of renewal, not for its own sake but because the vitality of art works depends on the strength of their organic connections with and relevance to the evolving society which produces them'.¹⁰⁵ This is a society which during Vorticism's lifetime saw the rise of the suffrage movements, the burgeoning of technological processes which melded the requirements of an expanding pictorial advertising industry with that of a propagandist one (and vice versa), and the devastating onslaught of a world war.

As an endorsement of discourse enriched by contributions from varying substrata within an historical and art-historical account, the observations above are endorsed by Peppis, who concedes he is not alone in recognising the reshaping of society occurring during this period just prior to the First World War.¹⁰⁶ Peppis expands on this by acknowledging how, 'the rise of movements for working-class, colonial and women's political rights; the growth of foreign economic, military and imperial competition; the attendant sense of embattlement on the part of the largely upper-class male, and English ruling elite and intelligentsia', all assisted in provoking 'a masculinist backlash, in which perceived threats to British prestige were gendered female and denigrated, as the traditional upholders and bastions of such prestige were gendered male and celebrated'.¹⁰⁷ How this relates specifically to Vorticism is explored in the following chapter, but as a wider observation, and as an expansion of the either/or aspect of a woman's role, the concept of the attribution of male and female designations to universal declarations of what is effectively implied as good and evil, truth and untruth, suggests ramifications stretching into wider society. At the very least is the connotation that a female's place should remain within the private sphere. Whilst this transformational period proceeded to explode into the conflict of the First World War, revealing how the straddling of the classes through both forced and unforced groups developed within the population, it additionally exposes the incongruities related to how women were perceived—by themselves, each other, and by the male population, and the exploration of this aspect continues into the next chapter.

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Inside and Outside the Frame: The Female Figure as Subject and Artist

Although historically women have always been charged with the transference of ‘cultural tales’, there is an acknowledged gender bias as to who ‘gets to interpret the most significant stories’.¹ As this can be viewed from a pictorial perspective, further interest lies in how female artists commandeer subject matter usually considered as a male prerogative; consequently ‘when they seize the narrative they empower a new and often dangerous point of view’.² Supplemental questions can be asked, and long-established interpretations re-evaluated, when the focus is further centred on one particular subject: in the context of this book, that subject is imagery of the female form. Women of the era were in the position where they could either embrace or fight against the pictorial image of them prevalent within the public sphere; female artists’ portrayals of the female figure including the self-portrait, therefore, is one area where women could exercise ultimate control of the process. However, whilst this may be true in respect of creative production, such control did not necessarily translate into exhibitions, sales and subsequent access to the wider cultural and commercial world.

In the years leading up to the First World War the advertisement slowly morphed from ‘a creature of need’ to ‘a creature of fantasy’³ and, as indicated, often-included pictorial representation of a supposed “ideal” female form. Depictions of family in general changed, so that by the turn of the twentieth century there could be seen ‘the separation of the spheres’: the father figure as a ‘commanding presence’ began to be substituted by imagery more indicative of ‘feminine competence’.⁴

This latter point shifts the focus slightly, in that it overlays the pictorial trope of the “ideal” with the concept that a woman can be more than merely a harbinger of visual interest: she can also be a figure who possesses purpose and proficiency. Such pictorial concepts can be productively employed within both advertising and propaganda; certainly utilisation of the female figure within advertising demonstrates ‘a stilted, but stylish view of the angel of the house’, thereby emphasising ‘leisure and conspicuous affluence rather than redemptive purity’.⁵ The female form in suffrage artworks presents a similar visual, yet one who simultaneously insinuates resolve, whilst the same motif employed in imagery relating to First World War recruitment situates that figure as one who requires saving or, contrarily, one who holds a certain power of persuasion that can be exploited in order to encourage others to enlist. In contextualising the role of the female figure as both subject and object—and, where appropriate, creator—it is important to continue this exploration of pictorial representation of the female form by considering each genre’s position within the wider visual ecology of the era. Although focus on the political, in respect of suffrage imagery and manifestos relating to avant-garde art movements of the time are more fully explored in Chapter 4, this chapter concentrates on both State and commercial advertising, whilst simultaneously investigating how women represented themselves—and were represented by others—within the fine arts specific to this Modernist period.

CONTRADICTIONS

The observations concerning pictorial portrayal of a female form referred to above serve to demonstrate the mixed messages either deliberately conveyed in respect of particular manifestations, or disparately interpreted by observers. It appears that what this figure of the angel represented was becoming greater than the sum of its parts, where both perpetrator and viewer could utilise it to express whatever it was they considered to be an “ideal”, regardless of whether or not this correlated with other people’s perception of the same. In commenting upon the use of the female form in commercial advertising, Loeb employs the phrase “pleasing variety”,⁶ thereby bringing to mind Shakespeare’s prose, ‘Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale/Her infinite variety’,⁷ and which itself is cited within Hogarth’s *The Analysis of Beauty* when he considers that Shakespeare ‘sum’d up all the charms of beauty in two words,

INFINITE VARIETY' [capitals in the original].⁸ The concept of this variety that is both pleasing and infinite can be applied to the persona of the female figure, in respect of how she is both conveyed and perceived as well as being material to her physical appearance. The attribution of this particular example of a visible continuum is paralleled with the genealogical thread of Hogarth's *line*, and additionally through its rooting in ancient Greek and Roman concepts of beauty that are consistently employed within visual culture, weaving their way palpably into advertising imagery of the early twentieth century and beyond. This approach can be considered as an aggrandisement of the feminine in order to promote products and services: 'Draped in timeless Grecian costume, hair loosely knotted and frequently adorned with flowers or a laurel wreath, feet bare or in sandals, the classical commercial goddess contrasted dramatically with the elaborate reality of late Victorian and Edwardian feminine appearance'.⁹ This homage to ancient ideal, seen in advertising examples cited in the previous chapter, is also to be found in artwork relating to suffrage movements, as demonstrated in Louise Jacobs' *The Appeal of Womanhood* poster from 1912, an image explored in Chapter 4. Loeb comments on how

The commercial goddess is neither passive nor submissive. In recline or eyes veiled, she reveals not her weakness, but her potent temptation. She is a controlling and commanding force, an agent of super-human strength, of mythical power. Superficially, at least, her appearance associates her with purity and moral elevation, but her thinly disguised sensuality suggests a hedonistic interest in gratification.¹⁰

Loeb's theorising is of interest here, not least because it highlights the imperative that we must accept that the 'code' utilised in analysis will not be 'theirs' but 'ours', and therefore one that is less contemporaneously 'meaningful'.¹¹ Consequently it remains unknown whether the personae given to these women would have been recognised at the time the imagery was produced. Regardless, when considered in respect of the differing responses to each image dependent on the message, this summation provokes questions in respect of who it is that wants to see women portrayed in this way: is it other women, or is it men? Clearly there is contrivance in the elemental components of such imagery—that is, after all, what constructed imagery for advertising (and propaganda) purposes is about, regardless of the product or cause it is "selling".

However, the question remains: whose fantasy is this addressing? The Futurist Enif Robert writes how

Sensuality is a law for both sexes, and I don't know why a woman should be reproved for cultivating its intensity, when it is precisely men who drive her to it with an anxious desire that is itself a basis for life and makes all human beings, male or female, pass through the same gamut of sensations that are as ancient as the world—and as novel... as the world! [ellipsis in the original].¹²

It is worth considering not only how a male commentator might explore a similar point, but also whether a man would bother to comment on it at all, an aspect along with sexuality and sensuality evaluated predominantly in Chapter 5. Nevertheless, this once again exemplifies the apparent contradictions that lie within the portrayal and subsequent perception of the female figure conveyed in the style prominent in advertising particularly, during these early years of the twentieth century. Such considerations also continue to stimulate debate surrounding intention and interpretation: is it possible for one image to project conflicting identities, enable those identities to be perceived, and despite the multitude of meanings in both intention *and* interpretation still be considered as achieving its objective, whether that objective is a commercial or a propagandist one? In the same way a visible continuum in the form of a *line of beauty* can be employed as an attractional object, the use of pictorial tropes of classical provenance, such as a Grecian or Roman goddess, can transform that which may be considered as unacceptable into something not only merely acceptable but categorised as 'high culture'.¹³ In a reflection of the points made in Chapter 2 surrounding Fig. 2.1, a 1914 advertisement for *Pears'* soap constrains a partially-clothed, titian-haired beauty within a gilt frame, thus implying an elevation of the illustration to a higher form of art. There is no text on the artwork; the company name and the caption 'MATCHLESS FOR THE COMPLEXION' [capitals in the original] are specifically incorporated into the design of the frame, thereby projecting the imagery contained within that frame as a painting with a value purportedly more akin to the fine arts than the commercial industry. This demonstrates how the effect of original imagery can be altered by intimation, in the same way the *line of beauty* can add attractional value to an otherwise unattractive artwork, including one related to a focused pictorial propagandist campaign.

RECRUITMENT

At the outbreak of the First World War, when the incipient visual propaganda industry absorbed the protocols of the advertising industry,¹⁴ recognisable tropes relating to the female form began to be exploited and conveyed through use of the pictorial poster. In this way 'Women's work in the public spotlight, in the national interest and at the government's behest' became not only 'important' but also 'visible'.¹⁵ Immediately

there was an unexpected congruence between suffrage representations of an active and capable womanhood and the government's need of it—a novel "fit" between the graduate, the worker or the militant figure of Joan of Arc in suffrage imagery, and the representation of women on official recruitment posters...¹⁶

This is particularly pertinent when compared to the previously cited reminiscences of both Brittain and Morrell; whilst Brittain remembers women were initially asked to stay home (to, effectively, remain within their sphere), Morrell appears to blame continuation of the actual war on women's contribution to it. The State did not necessarily *want* female involvement, but it needed it. Consequently, in the same way advertisers 'elevate[d] kings and queens, doctors, soldiers, actresses, politicians, authors, beauties, and scholars to heroic status',¹⁷ pictorial propagandists of the First World War could escalate this with ease—the husband, son, brother into soldiers as heroes, whilst the women in their lives are viewed as similarly heroic for encouraging them to enlist. Of interest in this inventory is the inclusion of the noun 'beauties', as though this is a profession or role in itself; its incorporation does, however, correlate with the wider concept of the ideal, as the pictorial examples listed previously bear testimony to. A 1917 Women's Land Army poster, created by Henry George Gawthorn and which includes the caption 'GOD SPEED THE PLOUGH AND THE WOMAN WHO DRIVES IT' [capitals in the original], is observed by one commentator as being set 'in a religious context' with the phraseology augmented by a 'glorious sunset', thereby 'appealing to a woman's sense of duty'.¹⁸ This is a tonal sketch, the illustration and text conveyed in black on a dull gold background and with the sunset drawing in the viewer's attention in a much lighter shade of cream. Appraisal of this poster notes 'The woman's anonymity'—pictorially manifested by her back to the viewer and an indistinct

uniform incorporating hat, coat and boots—can be considered as making her ‘less engaging, but perhaps also less threatening to men who at the time were not used to women doing physical labour’.¹⁹ This is contrasted with another poster issued by the Ministry of Munitions in 1916, captioned *On Her Their Lives Depend*, created as part of the recruitment campaign for female munitions workers. This poster, with text top and bottom and which includes the entreaty to ‘Enrol at once’, has imagery constructed as a black and white photomontage. In the background there is a tank, and a soldier working on the ammunition for it. Collaged in front is a prominent female figure, in uniform, putting on her hat and staring straight at the viewer: a ‘woman who has been brought forward’, seemingly disturbed in her preparations before leaving for work, thereby forming ‘part of a different strategy’—one where the female observer is made to ‘feel positive about her potential contribution, rather than focusing on her duty’.²⁰ This observation is significant because it suggests the propagandist message is aimed at women who were yet to officially assist with the war effort, despite the text including a general statement in the third person that can just as easily be interpreted as targeting both women and men. The construction of this artwork is reflected in Septimus E. Scott’s 1916 poster, also created on behalf of the Ministry of Munitions and titled *These Women Are Doing Their Bit* (Fig. 3.1). This central female figure also appears to be getting ready to work, pulling on her overalls, her right hand raised as she looks straight at the viewer. The remaining text, ‘LEARN TO MAKE MUNITIONS’ [capitals in the original], is therefore clearly aimed at the female population, so the armed soldier in the background of the poster, smiling and waving goodbye as he exits the factory door, can be freed to fight on the front line. As noted previously in respect of commercial advertising, propagandist imagery needs to be aware not just of the message conveyed, but also how it will be received and interpreted by both female and male observers. These two groups contained the men the State hoped would enlist, the women expected to encourage their men in this objective, and the women (who may be one and the same) required to step into the men’s shoes as employees in the varying industries now suddenly open to them. Within this can be seen a circular cause and consequence—one which can additionally be interpreted counter to its intention, as reflected in Morrell’s observation cited in the previous chapter: if women did not agree to take

Fig. 3.1 *These Women Are Doing Their Bit*
1916, Septimus E. Scott
(© IWM)



on male roles in the workplace, the possibility existed, even if not the probability, that men could not leave their positions in order to go and fight. Consequently the last two posters described could conversely be construed as supporting Morrell's concerns, highlighting the role of women in ways that run counter to the posters' original intention. Furthermore, arguably any ambiguity existing within the poster may have been deliberately contrived as a way of minimising any alienation men may feel regarding women being invited, not to say compelled, to step into their shoes in their absence.

ROMANTICISATION

In further contextualising the female form, the representation of women in pictorial media can be expanded to include photography; political activist Susan Sontag writes of how

The history of photography could be recapitulated as the struggle between two different imperatives: beautification, which comes from the fine arts, and truth-telling, which is measured not only by a notion of value-free truth, a legacy from the sciences, but by a moralized ideal of truth-telling, adapted from nineteenth-century literary models and from the (then) new profession of independent journalism.²¹

An intriguing perspective can be found in this conjoining of ‘beautification’ and ‘truth-telling’, with the former deliberately employed as a way to either enforce or, conversely, disguise the latter. In Edwardian Britain, Christina Broom ‘propelled herself’ into photographic work in order to create a business by which her family could be supported; she was self-taught and subsequently ‘emerged as a pioneer for women press photographers’.²² Broom ‘snapped the tumultuous suffragette marches’ and in addition worked with the military;²³ her ‘ability to capture that everyday, relaxed soldier, gave a really different impression of life in the Army...’²⁴ The Army attributed a rise in its recruitment to Broom’s work, as soldiers sent these photographs to friends and family who would see them ‘happy’ and ‘healthy’ and subsequently be inspired to enlist themselves.²⁵ Consequently Broom’s photographs can be considered as having initiated the same effect as the targeted propagandist recruitment posters of the era, albeit conceived in a converse of the norm—a female artist employing imagery of a male subject to project an attraction that would subsequently serve in the promotion of a cause or message. Of supplemental note is that studio photographs are posed, whilst the subjects in Broom’s pictures ‘pose themselves, which is a different thing’;²⁶ potentially altering the outcome of the image and therefore how it is perceived by the viewer. The idea of a photograph being a captured, frozen moment of time can be contrasted with the posed, arguably manipulated image that whilst portraying a message of one form or another pictorially does not necessarily convey the whole story. Pertinent in this regard is one particular photograph of a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse (VAD) taken by Horace W. Nicholls on an unspecified date during the First World War (Fig. 3.2).

A commentary on this photograph remarks that Nicholls’ own title is ‘*Reverie: a Red Cross Worker*’ [italics in the original]—a caption described as ‘romantic’, and the nurse as its subject ‘prettily posed’, therefore discerning that both designations



Fig. 3.2 A portrait of a British Red Cross Nurse circa 1914–1918, Horace W. Nicholls (© IWM)

clearly reveal how the role of women as nurses was perceived as reassuringly “feminine”. The starched cotton uniform relates to the nun’s habit, the traditional attire of the dedicated woman. The faintly virginal religious aura is strengthened by the Madonna lilies in the background—the photographer here has borrowed from painting a traditional symbolic attribute revitalised by the Pre-Raphaelites.²⁷

The observations in respect of this photograph reflect the imagery contained within the poster advertising *Bovril* (Fig. 2.2), and Buchel’s design for the Belgian Red Cross fund (Fig. 2.3). However, whilst Nicholls’ photograph certainly underscores the perpetuation of the “angel”, it blatantly removes the female figure from the reality of her

role as a VAD. The image raises the question as to whether it was felt at the time to be paramount that these newly-working women were still distinctly and decidedly feminine—even fragile, arguably in order for men to believe they were fighting to save something that could not save itself, and as immortalised in contemporaneous artworks, including Spear's *Enlist* poster. In pictorially portraying a working woman in a way that was 'romanticised', she would not be 'perceived as a threat to the standard notions of womanhood'.²⁸ Women could be seen as not having changed, on a fundamental level, from how they were viewed before the outbreak of war, despite the obvious need for them to work towards the war effort and, in this example, in a role carrying a uniform officially declaring that contribution. The photographer Nadav Kander discusses the trust required by the subject, believing 'the life story' of the subject and that of the photographer conjoin, and it is that 'collaboration, whether it's conscious or verbal or through body language or thought' that controls the outcome and therefore the subsequent portrait.²⁹ It is an interesting conjecture to consider this in light of Broom's approach as well as to apply this to the photograph of the VAD and the relationship, however brief, that existed between the model and her photographer. In considering the significance of the photographer's 'life story', a photograph of this VAD taken by a female photographer (such as Broom) with manifestly different life experience to a male could have resulted in an entirely different response to the subject matter and therefore the subsequent aesthetic outcome.

Photographic archives contain many images of women engaging in work relating to the First World War, including other VADs; most are in posed positions, but some are less obviously so, and the majority are photographs taken by men. The particular photograph under examination here at Fig. 3.2 is very intimate, and provokes a multitude of questions, including whether the VAD was happy to be party to such an apparently "romanticised" view of her, and what she may have been thinking—in respect of this and other aspects of her life and situation—as she sat for the photographer. In addition is the query as to the purpose of the photograph: it does not demonstrate the actual role of a VAD, but undeniably makes a perfect portrait for someone close to her—an image of an angel, thereby ticking the box of what is perceived to be an ideal female figure of the era. Regardless, it is significant that the cited description of this photograph states the photographer has 'borrowed' from the art-historical archive, consequently serving as a reminder of the

role of pictorial tropes as visible continua pertinent to this exploration of the female form, particularly those considered to be of attractional value to the viewer. In this photograph, therefore, can be seen the traditions of fine art, the characterising of the subject to fit an ideal, and the diminishing of the reality of the subject's role, thereby transforming the 'subject into object', which, as French theorist Roland Barthes maintains, is how photography works.³⁰ Barthes continues with the observation that, in respect of the 'heterogeneity of "good" photographs, all we can say is that the object speaks, it induces us, vaguely, to think'.³¹ This comment is particularly interesting in respect of this specific photograph because the female figure as 'object' cannot be seen to be speaking the truth of her situation in the context of her First World War role. If this posed image of a VAD induces the viewer to think at all, then it is unlikely to make the observer reflect on the reality of a VAD's life, not least in how these female workers 'had to be tough'.³² There is no indication within this image of how VADs worked in 'flooded operating theatres', where 'there might be four operations going on at once' with the possibility of 'as many as ten amputations an hour'.³³ No sign that VADs nursed 'terrible wounds', laid out the dead, worked in conditions where 'the stench of gas-gangrenous wounds was almost overpowering', nursed soldiers 'choking to death as the fluid rose in their gassed lungs, men whose faces were mutilated beyond recognition, whose bodies were mangled beyond repair, whose nerves were shattered beyond redemption'.³⁴ No sign at all of the danger the VADs themselves were in as they worked in the field hospitals at the front. It is a photograph indicating how a woman could contribute to the workforce of the First World War, yet simultaneously cloaks the reality of that work in a miasma of the unreal.

PORTRAIT/SELF-PORTRAIT

In pursuing this exploration within the framework to which this book subscribes, it is necessary to acknowledge the environments within which women artists of the era worked. By 1908 Laura Knight was well established as an artist, living and working in Newlyn in Cornwall, exhibiting and selling her work in both Penzance and at the Leicester Galleries in London.³⁵ It is, however, her concentration on the female form that is most pertinent. Knight had long desired to paint 'a very large study of nudes' but was unable to persuade local women to pose for her, despite her being a female, rather than a male, artist.³⁶

Her eventual employment of professional London models caused consternation among the villagers, because the uninhibited behaviour of these women and their attitude to nudity beyond the studio setting was considered somewhat revolutionary.³⁷ That Knight appeared unaware of this disquiet bears testimony to her commitment to her work and what she hoped to achieve, an objective that included observing and documenting ‘the effects sun and light brought out on the naked body at different times of the day’.³⁸ Contradiction exists ‘in the experience of a woman who is also an artist. She feels herself to be “subject” in a world that treats her as “object”’.³⁹ This is manifestly highlighted when the female artist is portraying a female figure as the subject matter of an artwork. Furthermore, an additional perspective is placed on the concept when it is viewed within the context of what Foucault describes as ‘games of truth in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject’.⁴⁰ This can be applied to the specific example of Knight during this period: firstly, as noted in respect of the photographer and his or her model, a bond is formed between the creative and the subject. Secondly, this bond is enhanced by both subject and artist being female. Thirdly, the concept is expanded when a female artist is analysing and interpreting the naked female form, which demonstrates a differing intention and interpretation from that which occurs when the artist is male. It is considered that ‘from the early modern period onward, the notion of the self is bound up with complex beliefs about representation...’⁴¹ Of relevance, therefore, are Foucault’s comments on how, in antiquity, women were predominantly subjugated and constrained and yet ‘it was not their duties, or obligations, that were recalled, justified or spelt out’; it was, instead, ‘an ethics thought, written, and taught by men, and addressed to men...’⁴² Foucault reflects on how this ‘male ethics’ featured women as ‘objects’, and made no attempt to ‘define a field of conduct and a domain of valid rules’ that were applicable to *both* male and female, but rather ‘an elaboration of masculine conduct carried out from the viewpoint of men in order to give form to their behaviour’.⁴³ Although this aspect is analysed more fully in the next chapter, it is worth bearing these observations in mind when exploring the portraits and self-portraits of female artists of the era. In 1913 Knight painted a self-portrait whilst simultaneously painting the nude figure of her friend Ella Naper (later to be captioned *Dame Laura Knight with Model, Ella Louise Naper* (*Self-Portrait*)). That this conjoining within an artwork of a nude life model and a self-portrait had not before been seen within

the oeuvre of a female artist is noteworthy in itself for its innovation,⁴⁴ but particularly as it was created just at the time boundaries were being pushed and women were forging a place for themselves in areas previously inaccessible to them. In an expansion of Foucault's assertions, Berger comments that

In the art-form of the European nude the painters and spectator-owners were usually men and the persons treated as objects, usually women. This unequal relationship is so deeply embedded in our culture that it still structures the consciousness of many women. They do to themselves what men do to them. They survey, like men, their own femininity.⁴⁵

This is of particular interest when considered from the perspective of a *female* artist and her female subject, as is the case with the Knight artwork under discussion here, and made more imperative when it is recognised that the painting, which is now classed as 'a central work in the history of female self-portraiture', was only brought to prominence after the artist's death in 1970.⁴⁶ Despite the fact there are male artists whose work remained unrecognised until after their death, this nonetheless is an example of how the art-historical narrative has been distorted where female contribution is concerned. Although the painting was contemporaneously exhibited, and received some praise from fellow artists and local Cornish reviewers, this did not necessarily indicate a 'tolerance' for an artwork, regardless of technical proficiency, which so flagrantly challenged what was considered acceptable where women in general, and women artists in particular, were concerned.⁴⁷ A more contemporary analysis calls the painting 'extraordinarily bold', and as a purely archival description remarks how 'Both artist and model have their backs' to the viewer, although 'Knight's face is in profile'.⁴⁸ Continuation of this commentary nonetheless contends that the artist's

flair for self-dramatization is evident in the way she has chosen to depict herself in stylish hat, fichu, and red cardigan (her clothes became an important element of her public image), and in the striking and self-reflexive composition of the picture. It is both a large study of a nude, painted in a very realistic manner, and a portrait of the artist. Her presence in the picture acts as a statement of her authority and right to be there, and the dominating use of red and orange sustains this sense of visual energy; Laura Knight has arrived.⁴⁹

Inevitably, in restoring the female artist's place within the narrative, examination and interpretation of imagery neglected at its genus (and regardless of the reasons behind that) will be infused with the benefit of hindsight, and with a code that, as noted, is likely 'ours' and not necessarily 'theirs'. It is open to debate as to whether in 1913 this was the painting declaring Knight had 'arrived', in the sense this was the intention behind Knight's production of an artwork of this particular construction. In contrast to the interpretation above, curator Rosie Broadley makes compelling observations when she writes that the painting

is a complex, formal composition in a studio setting, which was new in Knight's work and must have required careful planning. Using several mirrors, Knight has constructed a composition where she paints herself indirectly, as though she is being observed. Both artist and model are seen from behind, and their similarly defined silhouettes compound the sense, not only that the viewer has interrupted the artist, as she works, but that these two people are united in an artistic enterprise.⁵⁰

What is irrefutable is that Knight set out to deliberately include the artist *and* the model, and the fact they are both female is itself demonstrative of a novel and unconventional approach. That Knight could have painted either subject—the model *or* the self—as a more traditional rendition of the female figure provokes debate as to what both artist and her subsequent painting are endeavouring to convey. When the painting is viewed from the perspective of Knight's blasé attitude to her models openly revealing their nakedness on Cornish beaches, it can be considered a declaration that Knight was happy to be publicly seen appraising the naked female form—conscious, as Broadley points out, of being observed whilst doing so. Nina Hamnett, a Modernist painter, writer and occasional artists' model, reflects on how at sixteen she

drew from the nude at the Art School, but I had never dared to look myself in the mirror... One day, feeling very bold, I took off all my clothes and gazed in the looking-glass. I was delighted. I was much superior to anything I had seen in the life class and I got a book and began to draw.⁵¹

Hamnett's 'presentation of herself as a free, adventurous and untrammelled spirit' which was 'formed in opposition to her prudish and constrained upbringing', means she was uninhibited when it came to posing

naked.⁵² Consequently, whilst Hamnett and Knight share a seemingly similar attitude towards the naked female form, Knight chose to depict her own portrait as a clothed figure and thereby emphasised the nudity of her friend and model.

SUBJECT/OBJECT

The semiologist Paolo Fabbri suggests that, in imagery, the ‘nude’ is ‘difficult to define’ and asks the question, ‘Where do the clothing and drapery begin and end, where the skin and the flesh?’⁵³ Although this is considered generally to relate to the semi-nude subject—a figure draped to portray an ideal of ancient Greek origin, for example—it is nonetheless of additional interest when the concept is aligned specifically with an analysis of Knight’s painting. The idea that fabric is ‘an obstacle or a mask, because what counts is only what it conceals’⁵⁴ shines a unique light onto the fully-clothed Knight as painter *and* subject, *because* she has positioned her clothed self-portrait within the wider visual landscape of a more traditional painting of the nude. The following observations therefore also reveal alternative perspectives when considered in the context of Knight’s painting:

The prototype Nude is isolated in space—to the point of containing its old shadow—and removed from time rather than being placed in a physical and temporal context. But if the process represents the change in the essence, it will be more intransitive than transitive (stoppage is a transition in equilibrium); it will privilege movement of the limbs over the movements of the flesh (the incarnate), and its rhythm will respond to a pre-established harmony (or disharmony). With respect to the visibility to which it exposes itself and which it imposes on itself, the Nude prefers direct presence to allusion and the implicit; it shows itself with a clarity that is the exterior correspondent of its internal unity. The Nude is theatrical, it likes to exhibit itself among stage curtains, tresses, clothing and gestures.⁵⁵

At this point, because it is not unreasonable to assume Fabbri is speaking of the nude in isolation, it is important to note that analysis of his cited observations within the context of Knight’s painting is not meant as a dissection of his original intention, only as expansion in order to place an alternate viewpoint upon the construction of Knight’s work. What can be considered, therefore, is how the connotations relating to the nude

are altered when that nude is captured in a context that not only contains a clothed figure, but one where that clothed figure is also the artist, as well as where both model and artist are female. In addition, Fabbri's suggestion of a nude that embraces the theatrical can be allied with comments made in respect of Knight's studio setup, thereby revealing a layered relationship between artist and model/s.

What neither of the previously referenced descriptions of the painting state is that there are, in fact, *two* nude figures within the composition, because Knight's *painting* of the nude is also contained within the image. Consequently, a triumvirate of female figures is created, magnifying the potential for exponential relationships to exist between them. As only one relational example, because of this particular construction the nude female forms outnumber the clothed, thereby indicating a balance that potentially undermines the position of the clothed figure, despite this being Knight who, as the artist, has control of the configuration and therefore the situation. As demonstrated above, the unique composition of Knight's painting continually serves to expand the discourse that more widely surrounds it, with further illustration lying in how, in constructing a self-portrait, one 'cannot entirely observe oneself', because 'something within self-observation remains forever unobserved, something self-observation cannot capture and represent'—unadulterated self-observation is in fact 'ultimately self-destructive'.⁵⁶ This is an echo of Immanuel Kant's contention that one cannot possess knowledge of the self, only knowledge of how one appears to oneself: 'The consciousness of self is thus very far from being a knowledge of the self...'⁵⁷ A self-portrait of a painter painting a portrait therefore offers multiple perspectives on not only how the resultant image is received as a whole, but also how each pictorial element contained within is perceived and subsequently interpreted by the viewer. When these points are applied to the Knight painting an additional conundrum is revealed: Knight is self-observing, whilst simultaneously experiencing all that is necessary for an artist to perceive and then commit to canvas a female nude. Furthermore, Fabbri, in referring to the nude in the way he does, seemingly determines the noun "Nude" as possessing the third person. In this way he confers attributes upon the nude suggestive of an active role and whilst this concept indicates an interesting, if arguably abstract viewpoint, in the context of the nude figure within both two- and three-dimensional artworks it is, as already recognised, inevitably the artist who has control of the composition and construction. Fabbri's approach confers the nude as "object", whilst his noted ascriptions in so doing

conversely convey that same figure as “subject”. Therefore this perspective also reveals a suggested conjoining of the nude model (subject) and the “Nude” (object) into subject, when it can just as easily operate conversely (subject/object equalling object). Regardless, Fabbri’s reflections cannot apply solely to the nude as observed figure, because they are equally relevant to the entire thought process pertaining to the artist in the construction of the image or sculpture, as well as to the relationships existing between the artist and model/s. In addition they highlight once more the complexities of the intention and interpretation process. Berger succinctly summarises such conjectures—including his own—when he declares that ‘Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at’.⁵⁸ Berger continues: ‘The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight’;⁵⁹ an assertion which once more proves doubly interesting when considered in light of Knight’s self-portrait with Naper and the observations pertaining to it. However, Kander’s comment cited earlier regarding the collusion of two life stories suggests that where the figurative is concerned the appropriate noun should be subject *not* object, and the concept of woman as subject/object is continually considered throughout this book. Kander’s premise can be expanded to include the artist alongside the photographer, underscoring how imagery of women produced during this period differs when the artist is female, an aspect further examined later on in this chapter.

AVANT-GARDE

In situating Knight’s painting within the wider pictorial ecology of the era, one which saw the rise of avant-garde art movements, of note is that Knight separated herself from bohemian art groups and never modified her style to reflect the influences of Modernism.⁶⁰ Wyndham Lewis describes the Modernist movements as being ‘born in the happy lull before the world-storm’.⁶¹ The Vorticist founder groups together post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, and Vorticism as finding ‘their intensest expression in the pictorial field’, maintaining ‘the structural and philosophic rudiments of life were sought’ and that in all cases ‘a return to first principles was witnessed’.⁶² The aims and objectives of these movements are important because of how they materialise within certain artworks produced, and therefore their subsequent contribution to the visual culture of

the period. Vorticism is relevant, in part due to its specific inclusion of the artist Helen Saunders whose work is explored later in this chapter.

In reverting to Lewis' comments regarding the art movements of the pre-war years, and despite the somewhat contradictory accounts existing as to what influences or otherwise were significant to the birth of Vorticism, some of the key words and phrases allied to the wider movements form a base for the exploration of the artworks that follow. Despite Lewis' documented dismissal of a connection to Futurism and to what has been described as the latter's 'rhapsodic romanticism', Vorticism's embrace of 'hard-edged, machine-age aesthetic' is nonetheless generally seen to be a variant of the Italian movement.⁶³ Along with inspirational elements derived from other aesthetic movements of the age, including the 'multiple perspectives' from post-Impressionism,⁶⁴ the 'semi-figurative' from Expressionism⁶⁵ and Cubists' 'facets', 'geometry' and 'multi-perspectivism', Lewis espoused 'geometricism with aggressive intensity', creating artworks considered as 'architectonic'.⁶⁶ How this is subsequently applied to imagery of the female form is exemplified in Lewis' painting titled *Portrait of an Englishwoman*, the connotations of which are preliminarily explored in Chapter 1. Cork remarks on how the architectonic approach to the figurative in this artwork 'constitutes a perverse denial of a woman's ideal contours',⁶⁷ and although the Modernist writer and critic Ezra Pound commented contemporaneously that Lewis 'presented cool beauty' with this painting,⁶⁸ fellow writer and critic T. E. Hulme notes that artists such as Lewis turned 'the organic into something not organic'.⁶⁹ In the second (and final) edition of *Blast*, subtitled *War Number* and published in 1915, Lewis writes that 'It is natural for us to represent a man as we would wish him to be; artists have always represented men as more beautiful, more symmetrically muscular, with more commanding countenances than they usually, in nature, possess'.⁷⁰ Lewis states that 'To paint a recognisable human being should be the rarest privilege, bestowed as a sort of "Freedom of Art"'.⁷¹ In the context of this book the pertinent question to ask, therefore, is how Lewis equated Vorticist stylings with the representation of the *female* form, including his own *Portrait of an Englishwoman*, and the concept of both deliberate and inadvertent defeminisation of the female figure is considered as this book progresses.

As noted in Chapter 1, the Vorticist Manifesto includes signatures from two female artists, Dismorr and Saunders, although in both issues of *Blast*—'Vorticism's polemical mouthpiece'⁷²—Saunders' name is

misspelt as ‘Sanders’, possibly as a way of deliberately concealing from her family her participation in Vorticist collaborations.⁷³ Saunders’ background was middle-class, ‘where daughters were not expected to work, let alone become artists’;⁷⁴ women who decided on a career at the expense of marriage were believed to be ‘unnatural’, and marrying therefore meant women artists would give up their careers,⁷⁵ a convention Knight at least was able to avoid. Eksteins suggests respectability ‘was more important as a criterion of social acceptability than wealth or power’,⁷⁶ which at least partially explains the perceived degeneracy associated with certain artists of the era despite their social standing. Nevertheless, Saunders had four unmarried aunts who between them experienced art school education, travel, missionary experience, and nursing among other occupations,⁷⁷ and Saunders did go on to study at both the Slade and the Central School of Art.⁷⁸ That Saunders responded with some immediacy to stylistic influences is illustrated in the fact that her paintings exhibited in 1912 were described as post-Impressionist, whilst in 1913 the label became Cubist.⁷⁹ This may, however, stem more from curators’ and critics’ need to categorise than from any deliberate manifestation of specific associated styling within Saunders’ work. Two other female artists were at the same time allocated this latter label—Lechmere and Dismorr—and art historian Brigid Peppin remarks that ‘the shared “Cubist” character’ of this work ‘suggests that an informal grouping was already developing around Wyndham Lewis’.⁸⁰ Peppin notes Lewis’ *Futurist Figure* of 1912 is a drawing of Saunders constructed ‘in his most pronounced “Cubist” manner...’⁸¹ Whilst this once again demonstrates an apparent requirement to continually categorise and label styles, even if this may sometimes run counter to an artist’s original intention, it nonetheless emphasises how eclectic stylistic influences do go on to effect the aesthetic output of all artists. Lewis’ influence on Saunders appears unsurprisingly to have been as much personal as professional; Cork cites Vorticist artist Frederick Etchells’ remark to the effect that Saunders would have adapted her own technique in order to mimic whatever style Lewis utilised.⁸² This is an allegedly vocalised opinion that serves to somewhat undermine Saunders’ position within the Vorticist movement in particular, as well as her talent as an artist in general, and is indicative of the belittling of women that contributes to the overt diminishing of their contribution to the historical and art-historical narrative. Saunders was apparently ‘interested in [William] Blake, whose linear designs incorporated the human figure’, and this

assisted in the conceiving of her artworks ‘in purely abstract terms’ and without tangible association to ‘any recognizable object’.⁸³ This suggests that a predilection to this style preceded Saunders’ involvement with the Vorticist movement, even if it was her affinity to this form of pictorial portrayal that drew her to Lewis and his Rebel Art Centre in the first place. Regardless, Saunders employs ‘the geometrical language of Vorticism’ in creating artworks that contain ‘a symbolic dimension’, as well as often integrating within them ‘figurative references’;⁸⁴ two examples of her work are therefore especially pertinent to this exploration.

The catalogue for the exhibition *Vorticism and its Allies* held at the Hayward Gallery in London in June 1974 lists Saunders’ *Vorticist Composition with Figure in Blue and Yellow* circa 1915, and acknowledges that the title given by Tate (the London gallery where the artwork continues to be held)—*Abstract Composition in Blue and Yellow*—‘has been slightly altered to take account of the design’s strong figurative element’.⁸⁵ Not only does this mixed media artwork align with Lewis’ *Portrait of an Englishwoman* on a compositional and stylistic level (the image is constructed using a collage of hard-edged, geometric shapes with block colours), it also reflects the importance of titling—not necessarily in itself, but as an indication of an artist’s intention, and endorsed by the assertion that the ‘title and the story’ are crucial in the understanding of an image.⁸⁶ However, in this instance it is not Saunders’ own narrative signpost to the viewer; the amendment in the titling is applied retrospectively, and by parties other than the artist. The figure within the artwork—one now acknowledged visually and endorsed textually—nonetheless remains anonymous and gender-non-specific, an aspect of analysis considered later in this chapter.

The second Saunders painting relevant to this book—an earlier artwork from circa 1913 illustrated at Fig. 3.3—more clearly demonstrates the figurative. Cork writes how this artwork,

depicting seven attenuated female figures trapped unhappily inside a cage structure presumably symbolizing the forces against which suffragettes were at that moment fighting, marks a bold step forward in the direction of semi-abstractness.⁸⁷

Peppin concurs in respect of the image’s relation to suffrage, yet advises that the title it has subsequently been given—*Female Figures*



Fig. 3.3 *Untitled (Female Figures Imprisoned)* circa 1913, Helen Saunders (The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London, © The Estate of Helen Saunders)

Imprisoned—is, again, not original.⁸⁸ Peppin also remarks that careful inspection of the image reveals ‘the figures may not all be women, and not all of them appear to be imprisoned’, and that consequently its retrospective titling is not as productive a label as leaving it untitled, which is how the painting was found after Saunders’ death in 1963.⁸⁹ Tickner remarks that in this artwork ‘Saunders probably comes closer than anyone else in the pre-war avant-garde to producing an overtly feminist painting’,⁹⁰ observing that the imagery demonstrates how within the Vorticist movement there was opportunity ‘for a feminist repudiation of femininity, if at the cost of swapping feminist content for geometric form...’.⁹¹ Tickner cites both *Female Figures Imprisoned* and *Abstract Composition in Blue and Yellow* in this observation, thereby ascribing the latter a *female* designation, despite referring to the original title that does

not acknowledge any figurative element at all, let alone one that is gender specific. Moreover, as already noted the former image is actually an untitled artwork. Knight's "self-portrait with nude", is usually referred to simply as *Self-portrait*, although captioned with the longer description of *Dame Laura Knight with Model, Ella Louise Naper ('Self-Portrait')* in the National Portrait Gallery in London where the painting now hangs. Whilst a self-portrait of an artist who is female is by definition rendering sex-specificity in a self-explanatory title, the inclusion of an additional figure within the construction necessarily alters the context of the image, and therefore its classification as simple "self-portrait". These observations generate specific considerations regarding titling: literally leaving a painting untitled is not the same as *titling* an artwork *Untitled*. Indeed, it is often purely for categorisation purposes that the retrospective title is put in place, in order to distinguish between works within an artist's oeuvre. Whatever the reasoning behind this subsequent labelling it signposts the viewer to an interpretational outcome the artist may not have originally been party to, arguably saying more about the designator than it does about the creator, and instituting threads of discussion proceeding along lines the artist might not necessarily agree with. As an example of this conundrum, the artist Cindy Sherman, who creates conceptual photographic portraits with herself as the central model but which—importantly—are not considered self-portraits, leaves these artworks untitled as a 'way of distancing herself from the images'.⁹² Furthermore, a broad designation highlights the very specific and distinctive use of *Englishwoman* in the title of Lewis' artwork, thereby drawing attention to the feminine in an image that, for stylistic reasons at least, sets out to strip the figure of any gender-specificity, and the relevance of this observation is considered later in this book.

CONVENTION

In continuing this exploration of female artists and their focus upon artworks of the female form, it is pertinent to consider that during the early years of the twentieth century, and 'Marginalized in the aesthetic and political debates swirling around modern art movements' of the era, 'many women turned to the female body as the primary subject of a woman's experience'.⁹³ This observation reflects one way in which a female could take control and consequently turn the object of a predominantly male gaze literally into a subject. As a Slade alumna, and

associated with members of the Bloomsbury group of writers and artists, Carrington offers a pertinent example of a female artist of the age who investigated the 'woman's experience' through portrayals of the female form. Like Knight, Carrington's artwork was not widely recognised until after her death, although it is arguably inevitable she was to become 'the subject of feminist research' aimed at salvaging the accomplishments of women 'obscured by a predominantly male culture'.⁹⁴ In the context of this book, Carrington's approach can be considered as threefold: firstly, she explores the female figure in her artworks; secondly, along with other artists including Saunders, she attempted to disassociate herself from the ethics and mores considered appropriate for a woman of the time. Thirdly, in so doing, Carrington underwent a physical transformation, beginning with the permanent eradication of her first name (Dora), which she allegedly deemed 'vulgar and sentimental'.⁹⁵ When Carrington first attended the Slade at the age of seventeen she was considered as being 'quite conventional looking'.⁹⁶ However, 'in 1911, in a defiant defeminising act, she cut her long locks of golden hair into a short, boyish bob' and along with two contemporaries became known as a "Slade crophead", thereby setting 'a trend for young female art students'.⁹⁷ That these female artists believed they needed to become more like men in order to compete—or, arguably, to blend in and therefore be regarded on a more equal basis—is, in the context of the era, unsurprising. Nevertheless, the observation is noteworthy for its extraneous detail in describing the 'long locks of golden hair', perhaps included as acknowledgement of the so-called feminine "ideal" and which consequently not only emphasises 'defeminising' but also attributes the verb with an action bordering on the barbarous. Similarly, by describing the subsequent bobbed hairstyle as 'boyish' the description of the metamorphosis from feminine to masculine via deliberate defeminisation is seemingly complete. The writer Jane Hill discusses a 1910 Carrington self-portrait, noting that,

before she cropped her hair, Carrington made an image of her limpid-eyed, full-featured face which was utterly without vanity; penetrating and revealing to an unusual degree. Carrington would often draw the polarities of light and dark and she drew her self-portrait, with the thick strokes of a blunt lead, in the most unflattering light there is, portraying the distortions brought about in a face lit up at night by a flame. And she did it so critically her face appears almost battered, her eye sockets

bruised, and it comes as some surprise that this is the face of a girl of seventeen.⁹⁸

Whilst the subject of vanity is explored later in this book, Hill's description of Carrington being 'battered and bruised' is suggestive of an artist-as-subject who feels physically abused by her situation, as well as dissatisfied with herself as her later radical change of appearance bears testimony to. However, Carrington's choice of medium (the 'thick strokes of a blunt lead') predetermines to some degree the intensity of the construction of the self-portrait. Nevertheless, comparison can be made with a drawing Carrington created of her brother Noel, also in 1910—one which conveys fine lines and delicate detailing, thereby rendering a tender portrayal arguably indicative of a physical expression of the difference in feeling between that which she held for the brother she loved, and that for herself and her then situation. Hill also remarks on Carrington's later pencil drawing of a *Reclining Nude* from circa 1915, declaring it 'a lovely example of Carrington's clear, directly stated line' suggestive of the nudes she was to later produce.⁹⁹ There is clear evidence of an unsurprising influence upon Carrington's work, not only from classical artists but also from her contemporaries: Hill remarks that Carrington's *Woman in a Chemise* (circa 1915) 'is so convincingly [Augustus] John-like it could quite easily be one of his drawings of gypsy tribes and is clearly Carrington learning by emulation'.¹⁰⁰ What is apparent is that Carrington was extraordinarily technically proficient, yet contemporaneous convention—or ambition—suggests a not necessarily uncommon requirement of an artist, and a female artist in particular, to effectively subordinate her style in order to succeed, as comments relating to *Woman in a Chemise* appear to indicate. Carrington's 1915 *Reclining Nude* is, however, a much gentler rendition—light, thoughtful and expressive in ways the former is not. The artwork illustrates a young female figure in traditional pose, laid back, head resting on a pillow, her face to the viewer but with eyes closed. Her right arm is raised so her hand is upon her shoulder, her right leg bent and crossed over her left leg. *Woman in a Chemise* shows the female figure standing, loose clothing slipping from the left shoulder and down, revealing one breast. Her left hand is on her hip and she looks down to the left, avoiding eye contact with the viewer. This pen and ink illustration appears almost cartoon-like in its construction, particularly considering its harsh, insensitive black outline—aesthetic technique prevalent in avant-garde artworks

of the era, including within Vorticism although this is Carrington's only and distinctly tenuous connection to the mechanomorphic aesthetic stylings of the Vorticists. Carrington, like Knight, was allegedly reluctant to affiliate herself with one particular art group, arguably not least because the world in which they lived and worked was one where 'men defined the terms' of both the 'work' and its 'value'.¹⁰¹

More than one commentator notes certain idiosyncrasies relating to Carrington's physical appearance, including reference to her arriving at a social event 'in one red shoe and one blue',¹⁰² consequently casting the aspersion that this was unusual not just for the time but also even among the artists and writers with whom Carrington associated. In 1913, Carrington created a *Self-Portrait in Workman's Cap and Trousers*. This image shows the artist leaning against a doorframe with her right hand, whilst she turns slightly and looks out of the picture—not directly at the viewer, but diagonally to the left-hand side. This is of interest in itself, bearing in mind it is a self-portrait; Carrington does not look directly at the viewer, therefore she does not look directly at herself as the artist. Her gaze could be construed as intense; the figure is not smiling. This artwork is described as a 'drawing of a cropheaded student in supposed fancy dress, wearing a soft peaked cap and voluminous workingmen's trousers held up with a leather belt'.¹⁰³ The use of the phrase 'fancy dress' is noteworthy, even when qualified by the adjective 'supposed'; workingmen's clothing for a female artist attempting a continual defeminising metamorphosis for reasons only partially documented and therefore primarily unsubstantiated. Fabbri's previously cited observation of fabric that is either 'obstacle' or 'mask' and important predominantly because of what it hides, serves to suggest alternate perspectives on the idea of this clothing as deliberate costume: male clothing specifically selected in order to disguise the female form beneath. This becomes more pertinent when considered in light of a series of photographs of Carrington taken circa 1917 at Garsington Manor, the home of Morrell.¹⁰⁴ One commentary on these images declares Carrington 'posed naked as a "living statue", embracing a sculpted figure on the terrace, as a sort of artistic joke'.¹⁰⁵ In the photographs Carrington can be seen to have climbed onto the statue and in more than one image positions herself with her limbs stretched in a balletic pose that accentuates the serpentine curvature forming a *line of beauty*. It is proposed that 'after such a display one can understand why friends were puzzled by her inhibitions in other matters'.¹⁰⁶ However, the fact that the photographs

were taken in the grounds of Morrell's home suggests they were perhaps never intended for public consumption, nor if there were issues relating to her identity that Carrington necessarily found such contradictions a personal struggle. Women artists who determined to 'gaze upon and depict the female form', whether that of a model or their own as self-portrait (and including Carrington's living sculpture), 'released the female body from its function as a personification of ideal beauty, recognizing its infinite variation and expressive potential'.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, this potential was 'unleashed' albeit via the conduit of 'an age-old form', from a very specific perspective that incorporates a value borne from 'experience over objectification'.¹⁰⁸ Although a gaze upon a naked woman does indeed suggest the objectifying of that female figure, what these photographs can be said to demonstrate is that Carrington, like Knight and Hamnett, was comfortable with nudity, albeit if the context in which this is exemplified here should be considered as separate from their more public personas.

NEW WOMEN

In situating these artists within the cultural context of the period, it is significant to consider Peppin's remarks that, despite Saunders claiming 'a share of the interest' connected to other Modernist female artists, there is little textual evidence about her life because there are 'no diaries and only a few letters'; her artwork is therefore left to speak for itself.¹⁰⁹ This places an intriguing perspective on Saunders' artworks in general, and on the two cited earlier in this chapter in particular—especially Fig. 3.3—because there is no revealed "back story" that can be directly, intimately and personally associated with her. Only the broader cultural, social, and political events taking place during the era within which she lived can be considered as potential influences on her work. Little or no first-hand accounts in respect of Saunders' reaction to events limits fact-based interpretations that can be placed retrospectively on her creative output. However, it is now known that her interest in women's issues led to her participation in 'the 1911 women's suffrage demonstration', whereby she represented 'one of the hundreds of suffragettes who had been imprisoned'.¹¹⁰ Whilst this knowledge might give retrospective credence to the analyses relating to the artwork subsequently designated *Female Figures Imprisoned*, the fact that Saunders originally left the

image untitled can only cast doubt on her own intention for interpretation where this artwork at least is concerned.

Alongside pursuing artistic careers, Saunders and Dismorr were seemingly

under pressure to position themselves as certain kinds of women. As indicated by their decisions to leave families and establish themselves independently as artists, they fashioned gender identities as “modern” or “emancipated women”—which entailed deciding which kind of “modern women” they would construct themselves as, whether the “New Woman” of fiction of the period or otherwise. Vorticism helped them to present as New Women fortified by feminist critical detachment from dominant femininities, as well as from some feminisms, of their climate.¹¹¹

Despite the connection to the suffragettes cited previously, as well as direct involvement with the avant-garde art movement of Vorticism, there still remains a deficit of actual evidence that could undisputedly link Saunders with the idea of a “New Woman” of the era as described above. Nevertheless, there is an argument for a re-examination of the Vorticist movement as a whole that takes into account ‘the sexually differentiated mappings of space and subjectivity’ in a capital city which was witnessing the peak of militant suffragism and which was soon to see the outbreak of the First World War.¹¹² Tickner is not alone when she queries what it was that attracted Saunders to Vorticism in the first place, citing particularly ‘its apparent contempt for femininity’.¹¹³ It is advocated that Vorticism’s pull was rooted ‘in its visual and literary engagement with metropolitan culture’,¹¹⁴ and Tickner maintains that despite Vorticism’s notoriety for what now looks like a ‘bully-boy style... this should not blind us to the fact that, in its rejection of sentiment, narrative, moralizing, and passivity, it also rejected much that was feeble and titillating in images of women’.¹¹⁵ This is a fair point and reflects the New Woman comments: compared with the more traditional painterly portrayal of the female form (whether naked or otherwise and which can be seen to include artworks by both Knight and Carrington), coupled with the stylings of feminine figurative imagery in advertising, Vorticism cannot be censured for proliferating the angel-in-the-house approach. Nevertheless, suffrage movements themselves were not beyond exploiting the female form in their aesthetic production; along with the representation of strong characters, including Joan of Arc, are female figures in peril exploited to further the cause, as is explored in the next chapter.

Exactly how much avoidance of the same on the part of the Vorticists was a deliberate attempt to address the ‘titillating’ portrayals traditionally seen in imagery of the female figure as a *specific* act of support for women, nonetheless remains open to debate. It can be argued that Vorticist dehumanising of the figure—the turning of ‘the organic into something not organic’—made it gender non-specific, and therefore ideal as a stylistic form that is inclusive and accommodating; representative of equality, as opposed to the inequality of women. As the First World War approached there is conceivably more justification for the mechanomorphic, gender-less figure but, whatever the sex of the artist, stripping the figure and thereby desensitising the viewer from the recognisable female form is negated by the subsequent titling of the image in the feminine. The application of an architectonic, machinic quality does not explain why, in the case of Lewis’ *Portrait of an Englishwoman* for example, a feminine designation is subsequently applied in the captioning of a painting created in this style. Dehumanising the figurative for stylistic purposes is one thing; additionally, and blatantly, highlighting the *defeminisation* of that figure by the very act of designating it female arguably speaks of a different reasoning altogether, as will be explored later in this book. Nevertheless, there is still a conversation to be had around the decisions taken in respect of the extraction of any form of gender recognition from Vorticist figurative artwork, notably from a female perspective—specifically considerations relating to why female Vorticists including Saunders happily endorsed and emulated this artwork at a time when the fight for the rights of women was so prominent. Consequently the following chapter focuses on the issues relating to equality and inequality, as viewed through the prism of both suffrage imagery and aesthetic and political manifestos of the era.

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CHAPTER 4

The Politics of Aesthetics and the Woman Question

Despite more women than ever training as artists in the period leading up to the decade under examination in this book, they ‘still lacked the cultural power to shape the world to their own image’.¹ The volatile years that preceded the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 included activism associated with the suffrage movements, and whilst Modernism gave birth to female artists prepared to step outside the so-called “norm” of what was generally expected of them, for the most part these women were unable to compete on the same terms as men. The imagery they produced was often innovative and experimental yet, particularly where Vorticism is concerned, raises questions surrounding the defeminisation of the female form. Women were challenged by the pictorial ideal, including the concept of the “angel” and what this represents, versus its antithesis—as though there can only be two poles available with no prospect of conflation. Evidence of this is found within advertising, an industry where the angel-in-the-house takes precedence when a female figure is desired or required. This motif is exploited within the State-sponsored First World War pictorial recruitment campaign, and also found in photographic imagery of which the romanticised photograph of the VAD at Fig. 3.2 serves as an apposite example. Within the visual ecology lies imagery relating to suffrage and anti-suffrage movements; this chapter concentrates on the political in respect of activism connected to suffragism, as well as avant-garde art movements’ manifestos, whilst the focus remains on how this all materialises in pictorial portrayals of the female form.

THE REAL QUESTION

Including suffragettes in a debate surrounding British Modernism can coalesce ‘the distinct concepts of artistic “avant-garde” and “political avant-garde”’, thereby widening ‘the disciplinary scope’ through which ‘avant-garde discourses and the relations they describe’ are generally viewed.² Nevertheless, the debates conjoining the political and aesthetic aspects of suffrage movements were affected by influences possessing a genealogical legacy stretching back beyond the birth of Modernism, and therefore remaining ‘subject to the pressure of precedent in genre and style’.³ As with advertising, which led into the burgeoning industry of pictorial propaganda as the First World War approached, ‘Representations of the ethereal feminine... borrowed from Pre-Raphaelite painting and art nouveau illustration, were adapted with difficulty to the needs of a militant campaign’.⁴ Such imagery, however, can be said to have ‘lent credence to the argument that “womanly” women needed the vote, and that the emancipation of feminine virtues into public life was a necessary condition of social reform’.⁵ This was clearly not a new phenomenon for a new century: in 1851 Harriet Taylor Mill anonymously published an essay in the *Westminster Review*, in which she considers ‘The real question’ as being ‘whether it is right and expedient that one half of the human race should pass through life in a state of forced subordination to the other half’.⁶ Mill maintains women are educated to believe that actively standing up for known and admitted injustices to women is ‘unfeminine’ and therefore best ‘left to some male friend or protector’.⁷ This exemplifies how the threat of defeminisation is used as justification as to why women should not stand firm in their beliefs and, in respect of emancipation, is a thread which continues to be explored throughout this book. In addition it simultaneously endorses the concept that women need “saving”, a political mantra exploited by the propagandist campaign related to the First World War that concentrates both textually and pictorially on ‘vulnerable young women and children who need defending’.⁸

More than half a century after Mill’s essay a strategic propaganda campaign was required, one within which the pictorial could form not only a complementary stream of information but would also underscore the points each movement was aiming at its target audience. Political philosopher Tom Bryder’s commentary in relation to what constitutes

propaganda, including the ‘manipulation of symbols’, is cited in Chapter 2, and it is also Bryder who states that

Since politics involves conflict about moral issues, material advantages and social status, in propaganda scripts some people are always pitted against others and we tend to see them as “natural” adversaries” or as arch-enemies. Political opponents often are portrayed as having foreign ancestry, they are believers in distasteful ideologies and religions, but they are always groups that are odd or different in some respect, and the difference may be real as well as merely figments of the imagination.⁹

Whilst within this observation can plainly be seen the protocols behind the State-sponsored propagandist agenda in respect of the First World War, the premise can also be expanded to incorporate the ongoing fight for emancipation. At odds in the context explained by Bryder were men and women who stood either side of the enfranchisement divide, and as Bryder points out such division is not always based on truth; certainly a considerable amount of what men feared where women’s emancipation was concerned was supposition, an aspect considered later in this chapter. In further aligning Bryder’s observations with the subject under discussion, Foucault’s concept of substrata is recognisable: moral, social and material issues falling under the politics banner, and further disseminated when each substratum is preceded by the term “women’s”. This can be dissected even further when the women’s movements are separated from each other—the suffragists and the suffragettes, for example. In 1906 the *Daily Mail* devised the term ‘suffragette’, in order ‘to distinguish the militants from the constitutional suffragists’ led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett, after which the denotation became widely used.¹⁰ Members of the latter organisation were early advocates of women’s suffrage and counted men amongst their supporters.¹¹ As noted in Chapter 2, Lyon denotes the suffragettes as ‘militant’ and ‘law-breaking’ in contrast to the ‘law-abiding suffragist’. Nevertheless, the varying groups involved in campaigning for female emancipation during the era faced identical issues in respect of the context of this book: how they were represented pictorially, how they could represent themselves, and what control, if any, they had over the distribution and subsequent perception of related pictorial material.

THE FEMININE QUESTION

With regard to the suffrage cause as a whole, in the years preceding the First World War

Both anarchist and socialist women were obviously afraid of antagonism between the sexes because they felt it would have a destructive effect on the movement. However, the feminist consciousness did create a strain in sexual relations because women became aware of their own subservience and passivity. They hoped that in comradeship they would find a new sexual equality. But the hope and aspirations of women were still at variance with their actual predicament.¹²

This assessment highlights the layers of substrata within both the debate of the situation and the actuality of it. Men and women being given equal rights and opportunities levels the playing field and dismantles the boundaries between the spheres. It is ironic that in the subjugation of women they are simultaneously elevated to the status of angel or goddess, as though such designation may prove an acceptable substitute for women's real aims and objectives. Nevertheless, as can be seen, imagery relating to such ideals was prevalent in all genres including appropriation by the suffrage movements. The historic pictorial trope of the ancient goddess is exemplified in Louise Jacobs' 1912 two-colour design titled *The Appeal of Womanhood* mentioned briefly in Chapter 3. This image situates London in the far background, shows a throng of desperate women and children, and in front of them a female figure clad in drapery. A banner containing the image's title circles her feet as she stares directly at the viewer, arms raised to hold a second banner which reads 'WE WANT THE VOTE TO STOP THE WHITE SLAVE TRAFFIC. SWEATED LABOUR. AND TO SAVE THE CHILDREN' [capitals in the original]. In the same year, on behalf of the anti-suffrage cause, Harold Bird created his own 'The Appeal of Womanhood' poster. Pertinently the central female "goddess" is conveyed in virtually the same way—arms raised, if draped slightly differently—and there is a banner similarly stating 'THE APPEAL OF WOMANHOOD' at her feet [capitals in the original]. The London skyline appears, although the throng of women and children are missing. In their place is a cartoon-like image of a wildly running woman, arms and legs outstretched, a hammer in one hand and a small flag bearing the word 'VOTES' in the other.

The text in the banner the central figure holds above her head reads 'NO VOTES THANK YOU' [capitals in the original]. Of most interest in respect of these two images is that the Bird illustration is in fact the first of the two to be distributed, with Jacobs' version considered as a 'riposte' to the anti-suffrage message.¹³ This is significant because an anti-suffrage poster that precedes a pro-suffrage design created specifically as a response suggests a process contrary to expectations, in that it designates Jacobs' image as not so much pro-suffrage but as a work carrying a counter-anti-suffrage message instead. This indicates a defensive rather than assertive strategy, and emphasises how women were seemingly always on the back foot in trying to progress their fight for equality.

Although opposition to suffrage did not inevitably equate to a more general resistance to the liberation of women,¹⁴ underlying anti-suffrage feeling was foreboding as to what effect such emancipation would have on the male population, 'as though masculinity and femininity are mutually exclusive and mutually damaging',¹⁵ this is demonstrated pictorially in the comparison between the Bird and Jacobs posters cited. That with or without the vote 'the processes of modernization were irreversible', (thereby bringing 'women more firmly into the fabric of daily public life'),¹⁶ is a situation that can be aligned with the avant-garde artwork produced at the time. This apparent threat—or at the very least the *perception* of a threat—upon masculinity, endorsed by the birth of the new brought in on a tide of Modernism and encouraged by the movements associated with female emancipation, can be used as a mechanism by which to further explore the stripped structures of Vorticist imagery of the figurative. In this can be seen not just experimentations rooted in architectonic, machine-age aesthetics, but a deliberate attempt to defeminise the female figure. This strategy can be interpreted as an aggressive *or* defensive move by the male artists of the movement, and arguably as an act of levelling the playing field on the part of female artists including Saunders, despite attempts at defeminisation being more generally used as a weapon against women. The debate is reflected in anti-suffrage material, including textually in the misogynistic opinions of Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger, as outlined in his 1903 publication titled *Sex and Character*. Weininger's declaration that 'it is not the true woman who clamours for emancipation, but only the masculine type of woman, who misconstrues her own character and the motives that actuate her when she formulates her demands in the name of woman',¹⁷ plays into the hands of those who wish to perpetuate the

ideal image of a female figure. This “angel” is expected to recognise that her place belongs only in the private sphere and even then under very strict conditions. Referencing Weininger here is important because this particular work and its contained opinions are evaluated by Dora Marsden, suffragette and editor of *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman* and *The Egoist*. Marsden summarises in an editorial in the feminist journal *The Freewoman* (and similarly titled *Sex and Character*) the premise of Weininger’s theory, according to whom

A woman’s personality-qualities are a pose, or a symptom of hysteria with tendencies towards male hypnotism; or they are illusory; or the female is partly male. He is at pains to point out, first, that no woman’s achievement in philosophy or art is equal to that of a man of fifth-rate talent, and that even the women who have arrived thus far have been masculine in feature, graceless in form, aping men’s clothing and manners, and have shown homo-sexual or bi-sexual tendencies.¹⁸

The specific reference to an apparent lack of ‘talent’ relating historically to women in general and female artists in particular highlights the circular cause and consequence which exists in a narrative of a male-dominated society passing judgement on female bodies of work, and the deliberate excision from history of pertinent examples of their achievements. These include—but are certainly not limited to—Artemisia Gentileschi becoming a member of the Academy of Art in Florence in 1616, and the fact that in 1723 the Dutch artist Margareta Haverman was actually expelled from the Académie Royale when her submitted painting was deemed as being ‘TOO GOOD’ to have been created by a female artist [capitals in the original].¹⁹ Similarly, in 1875 in a competition for sculptors where the artists were anonymous, the first prize was awarded to Anne Whitney; when it was revealed to the judges the sculptor was female, the prize was withdrawn.²⁰ It is arguably ironic, therefore, that historians and critics working in the twentieth century are considered as having even poorer records in respect of women than those from previous centuries, who included ‘Pliny the Elder in the 1st century A.D, Boccaccio in the 14th, and [Giorgio] Vasari in the 16th’.²¹ Nevertheless, art historian Linda Nochlin considers that a response such as this—a defensive justification of individual female artists’ positions throughout history as a rebuttal of Weininger’s and others’ proclamations of the type noted here—simply yet ‘tacitly’ *underscores* the ‘negative

implications'.²² Nochlin maintains it is not about discovering, or *rediscovering* the existence of 'great women artists' because the answer in respect of their absence lies more accurately in wider issues, not least in the connection to 'subjection of women' more generally.²³ Marsden's 1912 response to Weininger continues, as she points out that

The status of men and women defined by personality has nothing to do with sex. Sex has certain characteristics peculiar to male and female, physically and psychically, but their presence or absence has nothing to do with the initial gift of Soul—a gift which, for men and women alike, varies in amount for reasons not yet comprehended. The gift is never wholly absent, and the possibility of personality-development is always present. For its development free-will is necessary, and, if personality is present in any large degree, it will insist upon the possession of free-will.²⁴

This can be aligned with the subject under scrutiny in this book; it is individual characters with particular personality traits that determine opinion and subsequent decision-making. It is free will that stipulates whether or not a male critic, historian, gallery owner, editor or buyer will select the work of an artist who is female, even if this means a personal challenging of convention. The inclusion of this particular exchange between Weininger and Marsden is to contextualise an important aspect of the debate being undertaken at the time and which directly reflects on the theme of this exploration: the comments represent textually what the book examines pictorially. The Weininger pronouncement and Marsden's reaction to it indicate not only the ways in which women were viewed during this period, but the resultant multiplicity of responses that had to be considered by women in the continuing defence of their position.

THE SEX QUESTION

As early as the mid-nineteenth century Harriet Taylor Mill was asking why it was 'each woman should be a mere appendage to the man', concluding 'the only reason which can be given is that men like it'.²⁵ During the decade explored, many reasons were given as to why women should not be treated as equals to men, with the objections rarely changing from those Mill observed more than half a century before: Mill notes that one defence of the status quo employed the stock phrase "it has always been so" thereby, to all intents and purposes, closing off

‘all discussion’.²⁶ In addition it was said women should not be given the vote because they were ‘intellectually’ and ‘physically inferior’; women ‘were too pure to be involved in politics. If given the vote they would neglect their families and homes. Men would no longer open doors for them’: in fact, ‘Women did not really want the vote...’.²⁷ Imagery of the time reflects this; there are posters and postcards illustrating men working in the domestic sphere whilst the women march and protest, the men therefore having to undertake roles traditionally considered as “women’s work”, the children neglected along with the husband and the home. Mill is likely not the first, and certainly not the last, to so succinctly summarise that ‘a man likes to have his own will, but does not like that his domestic companion should have a will different from his’.²⁸ Consequently, women were effectively trapped by the number of disparate connotations relating to the ways in which they were pictorially rendered, and therefore by how they could in turn portray themselves as a means of addressing the manifold aspects of their situation. Historian Diane Atkinson notes that suffragettes ‘deliberately cultivated a feminine and fashion-conscious appearance to counter the public’s perception of their campaign as “unwomanly” and “unsexing”’, and ‘Even when engaged in “guerrilla warfare” against the government, suffragette window-smashers and vandals and arsonists were well-dressed and wearing a hat’.²⁹ This embracing of womanly and, arguably, “sexy” personas also suggests the reasoning behind inclusion of the goddess in aspects of their imagery that is perhaps over and above its simple prevalence as a pictorial trope popular at the time. Nevertheless, how much this can be seen to work against women as for them forms part of the continuing discourse. A *Punch* cartoon from 1911 by Lewis Baumer, titled *The Sex Question (A Study in Bond Street)* (5 April 1911), illustrates two figures that, if it were not for the smiles on their faces, could be said to be in a confrontational situation. They face each other in front of a shop window and are dressed virtually identically. The intention is clearly to demonstrate the thin line that exists between the male and female figure; their coats and shoes are essentially the same and both wear hats of similar styles. The small differences conveyed to separate the sexes include the cloche versus the bowler hat, the hint of a curl and a pair of earrings augmenting the figure on the left, and the intimation of trousers instead of skirt barely showing under the coat on the right. That the figures *are* smiling is illustrative of a playful attitude to this cartoon, one that whilst commenting on the ‘the sex question’ is not judgemental in doing so. Tickner argues

that ‘unconscious investments imply that we cannot always take suffrage imagery at its face value, although it is the purpose of propaganda to fix its meanings and refuse ambivalence’.³⁰ This is noteworthy because it provokes the question as to how effective pictorial propaganda can be if it is not quickly relayed, and a swift response to it is not activated within the viewer—if the “message” is *not* taken at face value. The Baumer cartoon serves as an example; it demonstrates one perspective from one publication, but a publication known for its satirical content. The *Punch* reader buys the magazine knowing its social and political stance—readers solicit a style to suit and cement their convictions; they are rarely persuaded by a publication offering an opposing editorial view to the one they already hold.³¹ This is reflected in a second *Punch* illustration, one created by C. A. Shepperson in 1916 and captioned *Our Amazon Corps “Standing Easy”* (26 April 1916). This sketch portrays a group of women in uniform, viewing their reflections in small mirrors, applying lipstick and powder, tweaking their hairstyles and checking their stockings. Whilst this supports Atkinson’s comment in respect of suffragettes being conscious of their appearance, it is simultaneously suggesting that women are vain and frivolous for being so, and therefore effectively questioning their capability for the roles they were undertaking as part of the war effort.

In the wider media ecology the release of pictorial information was predominantly in the control of men and therefore sanctioned by men. Pictorial material created by suffrage movements—by women and distributed to both women and men—was subject to criteria that aimed to cover as many of the preconceptions as well as the realities existing at the time in respect of what a woman’s role could or should be. Foucault’s previously mentioned comments regarding ‘male ethics’ where there was no defined ‘field of conduct’ nor ‘domain of valid rules’ relevant to both men *and* women is a reflection of Harriet Taylor Mill’s observations cited earlier in this chapter, with both suggesting a situation whereby women are expected to modify their behaviour *specifically* so that men do not need to modify theirs. Tickner acknowledges the recurring pictorial tropes in anti-suffrage imagery relating to the neglect of the husband, the children and the home, adding that themes additionally include ‘suffragists as spinsters, viragos or men; suffragists and Parliament; men, children or animals dressed up as militants; suffragettes and policemen; suffragettes and sex’.³² The main motifs in imagery relating to suffrage are ‘complex and extensive’—indeed, more

detailed—whereas ‘anti-suffrage imagery offers blanket condemnation or paints the disastrous outcome of women’s enfranchisement in sweeping strokes’.³³ There are postcards relating to suffragettes and suffragists that illustrate both movements’ members as harridans—‘a strict, bossy or belligerent old woman’³⁴—waving umbrellas and knocking down policemen. Although there was a difference in methodology between these two groups, the disagreements that separated them led to postcard producers not always reacting correctly to the demarcation between their methods,³⁵ yet any misconception of the situation should not necessarily be considered as purely accidental. Whilst it must be acknowledged that there were also women who were anti-suffrage in general, emancipation posed much more of a supposed threat to the male position than to the female; to all intents and purposes, all women would potentially benefit from the achievements of the activists, regardless of whether or not they were in agreement with either the objectives or the methodology utilised to attain them. In respect of all sides of the debate,

Both suffragists and their opponents drew on the iconography of woman in a late and dilute Pre-Raphaelitism, and in the contemporary advertising and magazine illustration that surrounded them, much of it influenced by art nouveau. These styles were aesthetically and ideologically congruent with the image of womanliness they wished to convey—the suffragists to assume its mantle, the anti-suffragists to argue that “real” women had no need of the vote.³⁶

As acknowledged, it is unsurprising that the influences affecting such imagery were the same stylistically as in advertising, even if sometimes limited by the technological processes utilised by the movements in producing them. As the “angel” was a productive trope with a recognised genealogical heritage, then reason existed as to why the motif should be included within artworks specific to suffrage; textual and pictorial protocols were established based on what was known to be of attractional value to the observer, regardless of the product, service or cause that was being promoted.

THE REALITY QUESTION

Whilst the pictorial trope of the woman in peril was exploited for propagandist purposes relating to the First World War, as illustrated in Spear’s *Enlist* poster, it was similarly utilised by the WSPU. In 1914 the

movement distributed a poster campaigning ‘TO KEEP THE LIBERAL OUT!’ [capitals in the original], citing Liberal support for the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act, 1913, as reason to do so. This Act, popularly known as The Cat and Mouse Act, meant imprisoned suffragettes who resorted to hunger strikes could be released when their health deteriorated, then re-arrested to serve the remainder of their sentences when their health improved. The pictorial content of this poster shows a cityscape as a background within a circular frame, in front of which is a giant cat holding the limp body of a female figure, dressed in black and white and draped in a banner bearing the colours—purple, white and green—and initials of the WSPU. A similar premise is found in a drawing from the era by C. Hedley Charlton (Fig. 4.1). This illustration is employed in varying guises in support of differing texts, including on the cover of the publication *Beware! A Warning to Suffragists*. In the context of this book, it is significant to consider whether the message lying behind both this image and the previous poster cited was intended to provoke a discourse concerning not only the “woman in peril” aspect, but also the *capturing* of the angel, and thereby elicit additional empathy from the general public. Conversely, it may only have further ingrained within the viewer’s consciousness that the women involved in these movements were antitheses to the ideal and therefore deserving of any punishment they had to endure. Of particular interest is how, along with the portrayal of the prisoner portrayed in Hedley Charlton’s illustration as young and beautiful (in another context one that would surely please the advertising industry), the chains winding around the figure form a *line of beauty*. In this way is reinforced the concept that, whether perceived consciously or subconsciously, individual pictorial constructs within an image can be of attractional value to the viewer, even if the image as a whole is considered *unattractive*, because of the subject matter and, therefore, the message being conveyed. Also of note is that the *line of beauty* in this example is explicit, as it is in Fig. 2.1, winding as augmentation around the figure in each illustration, rather than implicit as it often manifests within the curves of a female form whether nude or clothed. In comparing Hedley Charlton’s line drawing at Fig. 4.1 where the illustration as feminine figure is clear and precise, to Saunders’ untitled painting (subsequently known as *Female Figures Imprisoned*) at Fig. 3.3, whilst purporting to be concerned with the same subject matter the latter is cloaked in abstract anonymity by the stylistic rendering of Vorticism. Consequently, these points reinforce how

Fig. 4.1 Votes for Women circa 1908, C. Hedley Charlton (LSE Library Collection, TWL.2002.02.01)



pictorial tropes are perpetuated regardless of the differing genres of art within the wider visual ecology in which they appear.

Furthermore, such simplicity within the Hedley Charlton drawing in particular appositely illustrates that from a technical perspective the woodcut, though an ‘archaic method’ despite its ‘ease of production, cheapness, speed and boldness of effect’, undoubtedly links the era of the eighteenth century woodcut poster with the screen-printed one of the twentieth.³⁷ Advances in production can, as commented on in Chapter 2, potentially effect a viewer’s perception, including when imagery is rendered more realistically in colour. Similarly, Atkinson suggests that suffrage photographs existing today are arguably ‘misleading’,

maintaining that what is lost within the black and white portrayals is the reality of ‘a disciplined riot of colour’.³⁸ Such photographs include the recording of pageants and demonstrations, whereby contemporaneous observers were able to see ‘that suffragists were not the shrews and harridans’ alluded to in other imagery prevalent at the time: ‘The public demonstration was founded on a politics of “seeing as believing” and, if carefully orchestrated, could potentially become ‘a powerful instrument’ in eliciting ‘sympathy to the cause’.³⁹ Importantly from visual and perception perspectives, ‘When the suffragettes dropped the pageant as a vehicle of public representation, they became less visible as an orchestrated aesthetic spectacle and certainly less narratable’.⁴⁰ The WSPU colours of white, green and purple can be considered as conjoining the women via a uniform, thereby demonstrating a large collective with a definitive purpose, as set out by Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, founder of the publication *Votes for Women*. Pethick-Lawrence believed the WSPU colours needed to be instantly recognisable as representative of ‘the cause for which they fought’, describing purple as ‘the colour of dignity’, maintaining that white indicated ‘purity’, whilst green was both ‘the symbol for fertility’ as well as ‘hope for the future’.⁴¹ The ‘Suffragettes were to be the living embodiment of the values behind this unusual colour scheme’,⁴² and in this way could arguably be more favourably allied with other uniformed groups of the era, including the VADs and all the services relating to the First World War (female *and* male), thereby effecting the impact such cohesion has on the viewing public. This colourful interconnection, however, is crucially missing in images that are published monochromatically.

Of significance in respect of the impact of imagery upon the general population is how ‘Cartoonists deal in stereotypes: fine artists deal in reality and imagination, but journalism demands headlines, short-cuts and slogans. Psychologically people deal in stereotypes too’.⁴³ The remarks regarding certain *Punch* cartoons cited previously bear testimony to this idea of stereotyping, whilst the reporting of suffrage pageantry can be acknowledged as journalism; the genealogy of styles and tropes incorporating imagery informed by Pre-Raphaelite concepts can be seen to reflect ‘reality and imagination’. This particular aspect is demonstrated in one colour 1909 postcard by William Henry Margetson, distributed by the Women Writers’ Suffrage League (WWSL) founded by Cicely Hamilton and Bessie Hatton the previous year. This traditionally-constructed, painterly portrayal illustrates a blindfolded

figure of Justice standing at the top of a short flight of steps, a sword in her right hand, scales in her left, the orange orb of the sun haloing her head. Large wings fan out behind her, and at her feet a kneeling woman clings to Justice's robes whilst an apparently male figure, bearing a belt with the word 'PREJUDICE' inscribed upon it and with head bowed, attempts to pull her away; there is no text other than the League's title [capitals in the original]. The visible continua can be followed to a 1916 *Punch* cartoon by L. Raven-Hill and captioned *Pro Patria: A Tribute to Woman's Work in War-Time* (26 January 1916). *Pro Patria*, translated as "for one's country", illustrates a female figure ploughing a field and notable within this cartoon is that any stereotyping is amalgamated with the fine art contribution of Pre-Raphaelitism. Certainly it is less a cartoon in the sense we normally understand the style, and more a study for a Pre-Raphaelite portrait: the woman's face in particular speaks of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 1874 *Proserpine*, a Roman goddess modelled for Rossetti by Jane Morris. As a reflection of comments made regarding realistic renditions, Rossetti's painting is, understandably, a riot of colour. However, presenting the Raven-Hill cartoon in black and white as relevant to the publication's printing process—and in sharp contrast to the WWSL postcard—arguably expresses the toil the woman in the image is undertaking in a more evocative manner worthy of the subject matter, and in the same way artist Paul Nash conveyed some of his conflict imagery created in France. Nash wrote to his wife that his work from his position in the First World War trenches would be conducted using only the "brown paper and chalks" befitting of the sepia landscape within which he was subsumed.⁴⁴ In considering purely colour and tone, an arguably manipulated rendition shouts more loudly of the situation than reality ever can, despite this being in complete contrast to the commented-upon *loss* of meaning observed in black and white portrayals of suffrage marches and pageants. Similarly, whilst Atkinson remarks that 'Fashion and politics was a powerful new cocktail so far untried', with suffragettes therefore persuaded to always present themselves in their colours,⁴⁵ had the Baumer cartoon titled *The Sex Question* been printed in colour its premise—and therefore the "joke"—would almost certainly be diminished if not, in fact, entirely lost.

Pictorial propagandists of the era had to be aware of all these considered connotations in the creation of imagery that would best serve their purpose, and the female artist was of interest to the suffragists because she epitomised 'a type of the skilled and independent woman, with

attributes of autonomy, creativity and professional competence, which were still unconventional by contemporary criteria'.⁴⁶ However, although women artists may have possessed such attributes this did not necessarily mean they were always politically motivated. Equally, although these women could be said to be independent in spirit, and lived independently from a physical point of view, they were nonetheless often reliant on financial support from the families from whom they chose to live apart. Suffragist supplemental interest in the female artist lay in the fact that 'women's *cultural* creativity was constantly raised by their opponents as a reason for denying them the vote' [italics in the original].⁴⁷ This particular argument was justified by its perpetrators via reasoning that as, historically, there was no record of female artistic geniuses, women were therefore unworthy of the right to vote⁴⁸—an aspect Weininger seizes on in defence of his polemic previously discussed. What such discrimination fails to take into account is that it was only a relative handful of *men* who could be considered as possessing genius in these areas, yet all other men were still granted rights unavailable to women in their entirety.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, female artists found themselves 'caught in a paradox produced out of the clash between ideologies of femininity and of art: good-for-a-woman was all that a woman could be, but that in itself would never produce good art'.⁵⁰ Whilst acknowledging Nochlin's comments cited earlier in this chapter in respect of justification that is arguably self-defeating, this is nonetheless a situation highlighted in the cited experiences of the artists Gentileschi, Haverman and Whitney. Although this demonstrates a circular cause and consequence for female artists in general, within these observations can be seen the potential effect upon female creators of propagandist material in particular: before the pictorial tropes contained within can be assessed for their value as 'art in the service of social and political change',⁵¹ the artworks are considered unworthy simply because they are produced by a woman. Not only does this again reflect Weininger's commentary, it also underscores comments cited in Chapter 1 regarding the incomplete and propagandised art-historical record that is only relatively recently being retrospectively rectified.

THE EQUALITY QUESTION

When war broke out in August 1914 it had minimal impact on Knight and, at least to begin with, little changed for her.⁵² Married to a conscientious objector Knight was living among artists, concentrating her

entire life on her work, selling and exhibiting in order to live, ploughing earned money back into art supplies and sometimes travel specific to experiences and influences for future paintings. It is surmised that Knight 'would probably not have called herself a feminist but she painted and drew women with sympathy and insight and sensuous pleasure'.⁵³ Regardless of the lack of personal information relating to Saunders, it seems unlikely she shared Knight's bucolic bubble of existence. From a suffrage perspective, in addition to her participation in at least one suffragette march, two of Saunders' female friends were imprisoned—one 'for writing and distributing pacifist literature', the other for vandalism 'in the cause of woman's suffrage'.⁵⁴ Moreover, and as noted, as some believed pacifism was 'inherent in feminism' any blinkered view may be construed as an ignoring of, rather than an ignorance about, the war. Saunders worked in a government department and after Lewis enlisted she became his secretary (unpaid), a role that included the typing up of his manuscripts.⁵⁵ Lewis remembers how he had felt no 'conscience-prickings and soul searchings' when war broke out, conceding he may have 'flung' himself into it 'lightheartedly' and commenting that 'in art as in war I was extremely lighthearted'.⁵⁶ Eksteins maintains that 'Britain in 1914 was on balance still thoroughly skeptical of innovative artistic endeavor',⁵⁷ with Lewis later reflecting on 'how like art is to war', meaning "'modernist" art. They talk a lot about how a war just-finished effects art', but 'a war about to start can do the same thing'.⁵⁸ In 1914, Marinetti's and C. R. W. Nevinson's *Futurist Manifesto* 'attempted to drag all the English rebels' into their 'net'; Cork calls it a 'rash conclusion' when the manifesto implies that Lewis and his fellow Vorticists all concurred with its principles.⁵⁹ The differences and disagreements between the Vorticists and the Futurists are well documented, not least by Lewis himself. Of note in the context of this book, however, is that the artists listed by Marinetti and Nevinson include all but three of those connected to the Rebel Art Centre. The sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska was excluded (presumably because he was not English), but more pertinently so were Dismorr and Saunders, 'whose sex contradicted the fundamental Futurist belief in masculinity'.⁶⁰ As with Vorticism, there is inconsistency within the Futurist movement as to its members' views on women: Marinetti, in a 1911 manifesto uncompromisingly titled *Contempt for Woman*, writes that

In this campaign for liberation, our best allies are the suffragettes, because the more rights and powers they win for woman, the more will she be drained of love and cease to be a magnet for sentimental passion or an engine of lust.⁶¹

This can be correlated with Robert's comments cited in Chapter 2, thereby indicating the differing ways a woman's sensuality was addressed and, as can be seen here, often used against her. A supposed support of suffragettes undermined by a declared contempt for women in general is a somewhat irrational premise to uphold, although positioning a female figure as 'a magnet for sentimental passion or an engine of lust' underscores the antipathy towards women that includes the risk of a forced dismantling of the pedestal upon which men had placed their "angel". Marinetti continues:

As for the supposed inferiority of woman, we think that if her body and spirit had, for many generations past, been subjected to the same physical and spiritual education as man's, it might be legitimate to speak of the equality of the sexes. It is obvious, nevertheless, that in her actual state of intellectual and erotic slavery, woman finds herself wholly inferior in respect to character and intelligence and therefore can be only a mediocre legislative instrument.⁶²

Marinetti and his Futurist colleagues echo Weininger and similar narratives in their constant commentary that women should be treated differently to men, and listing a multiplicity of reasons in order to justify why. Fifty years previously, English philosopher (and civil servant) John Stuart Mill writes logically and simply

That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.⁶³

John Stuart Mill's statement is very straightforward and, indeed, timeless. Injustice lies in the subordination of *either* sex to the other; there is no suggestion that women want anything other than that which men have: they do not, in general, want to be men, they do not want to replace men, they just want the same rights as men. Constructing reasons as to

why this should not be the case adds substrata to a documented statement such as this gratuitously, and is sadly echoed in the struggle for equality that threads throughout the twentieth century and on into the twenty-first. Of interest is the contention that the fight against equality, then as now, is rooted in ‘feelings’ rather than ‘argument’,⁶⁴ and—particularly important when contextualised in the era under investigation here—the suffrage movements can be seen to have been caught up in the ‘law of the strongest’,⁶⁵ whereby ‘physical fact’ is converted into ‘legal right’.⁶⁶ Among the fears that existed concerning women moving in droves from the private to the public sphere during the First World War was the risk that ‘a rising tide of immorality’ would be an inevitable conclusion of women and men working together for long periods, disquiet in respect of night-time travelling to and from their employment, as well as close proximity to soldiers posted to towns and cities.⁶⁷ As early as 1909 Marinetti anticipates such apprehension, writing that ‘Yes, our nerves demand war and disdain women, because we fear that supplicating arms will entangle our knees on the morning of departure!...’ [ellipsis in the original].⁶⁸ Both commentaries exemplify an unreasonable justification as to why women should be expected to amend their values and behaviour precisely so that men do not have to alter theirs. Moreover, such anxieties do not take into account the *physical* ability of women to achieve the same as men, a fact that loosens the argument against their emancipation if not the feelings that accompany the fight. In addition was an assumption that a role reversal would ensue, rather than simply an increase in ‘the repertoire of women’s roles’,⁶⁹ an observation which again intimates an arguably deliberate misinterpretation on behalf of certain men (and women) in order to endorse antipathy towards female emancipation more generally. In 1912 Catherine Courtauld, on behalf of the Suffrage Atelier, created a cartoon titled *The Prehistoric Argument*. The illustration shows a man gesticulating to a woman standing in the entrance to a cave. The text reads: THE PRIMEVAL WOMAN—“Why can’t I go out too and see the world?” THE PRIMEVAL MAN—“Because you can’t. Woman’s proper sphere is the Cave” [emphasis in the original]. Not only does this demonstrate a recognition of the historic legacy of such a so-called argument, it also underscores how *any* “argument” is terminated before an actual debate can be engaged: “Because you can’t” is the same as “it has always been so”, as noted earlier. Such dismissive attitudes defy logic, and emphasise how any discourse can only be productive if both sides of the issue are fully prepared to engage in it.

THE MATERNAL QUESTION

If Marinetti's contemporaneous views in particular are suggestive of any doubt in where he placed women in the wider sphere, nothing could be plainer than his declaration that 'We intend to glorify war—the only hygiene of the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of anarchists, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and contempt for woman'.⁷⁰ Wynne Nevinson comments that 'War seems to be the chief tenet in the gospel of Futurism; war upon the classical in art, literature, music; war upon archaeology—upon all the "ologies" and antiquarianism of every kind'.⁷¹ Ultimately, Marinetti promotes the proliferation of war and activism, seemingly offers support for the suffragettes as an activist movement in itself, yet simultaneously denigrates the reasons why such a movement needs to exist in the first place.

Despite female artists forming part of the Vorticist movement and being signatories to the original manifesto, as noted the movement in general and Lewis in particular also held views on women that at best can be described as mixed. In the first edition of *Blast* in 1914 Lewis variously "blesses" and "blasts" women; Lechmere, financial and cultural supporter of the Rebel Art Centre, is notably blessed.⁷² In this edition of the publication Lewis writes an open letter to the suffragettes, asking them to 'LEAVE WORKS OF ART ALONE', stating that 'IF YOU DESTROY A GREAT WORK OF ART you are destroying a greater soul than if you annihilated a whole district of London' [capitals in the original].⁷³ In 1913 suffragettes destroyed paintings at Manchester Art Gallery, and in early 1914 suffragette Mary Richardson attacked Diego Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* in the National Gallery in London, an incident with connotations that are explored in following chapters. In the 1915 *War Number* edition of *Blast*, Lewis writes that in his opinion 'Women's function' is 'the manufacturing of children', and considers this of far greater importance 'than cartridges and khaki suits'.⁷⁴ In this contemporaneous comment on the conflict in which he was about to become involved, Lewis continues: 'It takes the deft women we employ anything from twelve to sixteen years to fill and polish these little human cartridges, and they of course get fond of them in the process'.⁷⁵ This is an evocative, not to say prescient statement in respect of the human cost of a war that was to prove, to all intents and purposes, a conflict between human being and machine,⁷⁶ and demonstrates the obvious and very necessary role of a woman in the process. Lewis' comment is

quite blatantly illustrated in one First World War postcard designed by Arthur Butcher.⁷⁷ In this illustration a young woman in uniform sits on a stool clasping a baby to her. Both figures look directly at the viewer. The caption reads, “*We can’t bear arms, but we can bear armies!*” [italics in the original] thereby demonstrating the ‘temerity to raise the question of childbirth and motherhood’ on printed postcards published alongside those that recognised women’s expanding role in the public, rather than the private sphere.⁷⁸ These points serve to reinstate the idea of the either/or aspect: for example, a woman can be an artist *or* a mother, seemingly not both. Wynne Nevinson remarks that ‘disdain for motherhood came from its low esteem in Victorian and Edwardian society’,⁷⁹ and decades earlier Harriet Taylor Mill had asserted that ‘It is neither necessary nor just to make imperative on women that they shall be either mothers or nothing; or that if they have been mothers once, they shall be nothing else during the whole remainder of their lives’.⁸⁰ Furthermore, an eighteenth century commentator queries why it should be that ‘individuals exposed to pregnancies and other passing indispositions’ are precluded from exercising their rights—‘rights which no one dreamed of withholding from persons who have the gout all winter or catch cold quickly’,⁸¹ consequently illustrating how this particular debate can be traced throughout the centuries. Atkinson’s suggestion that women did not eventually receive voting rights ‘because they filled artillery shells’ but because ‘right was on their side’⁸² is a converse view of the ‘feelings’ versus ‘argument’ debate, and one suggestive of another strand in the conversation. Nevertheless, along with the employment women undertook during the First World War and which demonstrates capabilities matching the men’s, acknowledgement was surely given to the sacrifice made by mothers who gave their sons as ‘human cartridges’ to the cause. These comments serve to demonstrate the particular conflict women undergo in respect of the role or roles they undertake, and which in itself extends its genealogical thread through the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries and on into the twenty-first.

THE MASCULINE/FEMININE QUESTION

This disconnect is also to be found in a more general and universal application of what constitutes division between masculine and feminine:

The Vorticists' embrace of masculine vitality facilitated their program of anarcho-imperialism, at least theoretically. In their eyes the anarchistic opposition to tradition and statist institutions, as well as the nationalist desire to revitalize the ailing empire by reforming English culture (making it "harder" and "colder"), were motivated by the same underlying desire: to defeat the effeminate forces of degeneration and decline (whether of domestic or alien origin), and reinject manly vitality into English art and life. To the extent that they supported the goal of imperial consolidation and bought into the masculinist system of values that underwrote that goal, the Vorticists collaborated, despite noisy rhetoric to the contrary, with the overriding ambitions of the British government and popular press.⁸³

Such emphasis on a masculine, 'harder', 'colder' culture, one which designates 'degeneration and decline' as 'effeminate', fails to recognise the feminine contribution—literally, as well as aesthetically—to the juggernaut of change cannoning its way towards the inevitable war machine. Lewis' reflection that if Vorticism was 'Art behaving as if it were Politics' then he 'did not know it' at the time⁸⁴ somewhat contradicts the suggestion that Lewis and his colleagues (including the female cohort) were not only fully aware in the months leading up to the First World War of the prospective impact the movement would have from a cultural, social and political perspective, but that it was in fact an effect they actively sought. Lewis acknowledges the media interest in Vorticism, and indeed comments that he 'might have been at the head of a social revolution, instead of merely being the prophet of a new fashion in art';⁸⁵ Lewis further remarks that 'The Press in 1914 had no Cinema, no Radio and no Politics: so the painter could really become a "star"'.⁸⁶ Lewis remembers that, on meeting Herbert Asquith (the British Prime Minister between 1908 and 1916) at one of Morrell's parties, he believed the former 'smelled politics beneath this revolutionary artistic technique', albeit much to Lewis' apparent expressed confusion.⁸⁷ It is difficult to ascertain if the views cited at the beginning of this section of the chapter correctly represent Lewis' position and therefore whether Lewis is being somewhat retrospectively self-deprecating in minimising his and Vorticism's role. This illustrates the issues that exist in relation to intention and interpretation: Vorticism plays an important part, especially in Britain, in the rise of the avant-gardes, but whether Lewis and his fellow rebels—including Saunders—were aware of this significance at the time

remains open to at least some debate. Certainly Peppis concedes there is contradiction between a desire to become ‘the nation’s anti-culture, the outsider society of artistic and political antagonism, non-conformity, and critique’ on the one hand, and ‘the culture of modernity and/or the future’ on the other.⁸⁸ As Peppis notes, ‘If the avant-garde succeeds in the former aim how can it achieve the latter?’⁸⁹—and, evidently, vice versa, although as essayist and art critic Clement Greenberg contends, it was Modernism that ‘used art to call attention to art’.⁹⁰

Within this challenge to the status quo lie the efforts of the suffrage movements and the actions of women more generally in the war effort; that the story of the suffragettes is ‘intimately linked’ to the First World War⁹¹ correlates, as recognised, with the consideration that it was women’s hands-on involvement during this time that promoted the cause for female emancipation over and above the activism taking place in the years leading up to the war. By August 1914, there were necessarily considerable adjustments made in women’s views in relation to employment, with the war breaking apart a number of beliefs that had endured during and after the Industrial Revolution.⁹² The women at the forefront of the suffragist and suffragette movements assumed different approaches in respect of this as the conflict progressed; Fawcett’s National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS)

was involved in practical war work by and for women, whilst maintaining a watching brief over women’s interests. It continued to make representations to the Government on all matters affecting women, and never lost sight of its original political aim: women’s suffrage. Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel of the WSPU, on the other hand, took a very different view of the opportunities that war offered women. They aimed to show that in patriotic endeavour women were the equal of men.⁹³

Whilst some of the arguments—and feelings—related to these moves have already been noted, it should in addition be recognised that although much of this change for women in the workplace was not to prove a permanent transition, the transference from private to public sphere and the subsequent ‘acknowledgement of a new relationship with the state’ continued.⁹⁴ Women may well have chosen to remain in, or return to, the private sphere of the home, but a way through to the wider world was kept clear⁹⁵—and there were, of course, men who did not return from the front in order to reclaim their positions of

employment. Pictorially this transition is reflected in the photographs held by the Imperial War Museum, illustrating women who took over the roles of their husbands and fathers. These roles include ‘grave-diggers, window-cleaners, chimney sweeps, car mechanics, policewomen, lorry drivers, postwomen, guards on the London Underground, aeroplane mechanics, coal heaves, tram and bus conductors, carpenters, bricklayers and workers in the chemical industries’.⁹⁶ There were a million and a half more women working in 1918 than there were in 1914,⁹⁷ consequently demonstrating the premise that any woman ‘who succeeds in an open profession, proves by that very fact that she is qualified for it’.⁹⁸ However, men believed women were ‘aspiring to be men, rather than aspiring to men’s freedom’,⁹⁹ with some imagery of the time focused on this role reversal, as indicated in part by anti-suffrage material considered earlier in this chapter. Brittain, who volunteered as a VAD, describes that ‘fear of a feminine stampede into war-work’, a trepidation inspiring ‘numerous authoritative proclamations to women students, bidding them—as women before and after Joan of Arc have so often been bidden—to stay where they were’.¹⁰⁰ It is interesting that Brittain employs the recurring motif of an historic female figure in her statement, and chooses Joan of Arc in particular. Towards the end of the war, the National War Savings Committee distributed a Bert Thomas-designed poster positioning a pictorial manifestation of Joan of Arc at its centre, below a textual component reading ‘Joan of Arc saved France’. The purpose was to encourage the purchase of savings certificates and was uncompromisingly directed at ‘WOMEN OF BRITAIN’, imploring them to ‘SAVE YOUR COUNTRY’ [capitals in the original]. These two examples align with the use of Joan of Arc in suffrage imagery as illustrated at Fig. 1.3 in highlighting how this specific historic female is utilised across all genres of both literary and visual culture.

Morrell, who as noted in Chapter 2 supported conscientious objection and believed women colluded in the replacement of men, held views counter to the opinions of many including Brittain, remembering that

By 1915 life in London had become entirely changed by the War. Politics and all our old interests had been swept away and there seemed no spot that one touched that didn’t fly open and show some picture of suffering, some macabre dance of death. If one looked on a hoarding there was an appeal to men to “join up”, and go out to suffer. If one looked into an empty house, there were raw recruits sitting on bare benches, waiting to

be drilled and sent out. If one just missed being run over, it was by some young Amazon, beautiful and ruthless, proud and happy to be dressed in khaki.¹⁰¹

It is intriguing that Morrell refers to these women newly working in the public sphere as Amazon, as in doing so she—knowingly or unknowingly—designates them the same warrior role as the men. Rosa Rosà, pseudonym of the writer and illustrator Edith von Haynau writes in one 1917 Futurist manifesto that

millions of women have replaced men in jobs which it was previously thought that only men could do, drawing salaries that until now a woman's *honest* work would never have been able to attain. Women are useful now, very useful [*italics in the original*].¹⁰²

This replacement of men in the workforce by women negates acknowledgement of the fact they were not paid the same as men for doing the same jobs. In the munitions factories at least, women received approximately two-thirds of what men had been paid.¹⁰³ Coupled with this is a seeming lack of recognition of the dangerous nature of the work: trinitrotoluene (TNT) is extremely toxic and, with munitions production increased exponentially during the war, actually yellowed the skin of these female workers, leading to them being referred to as “Canary Girls”.¹⁰⁴ In an echo of Morrell, Rosà continues: “The other day I heard someone tell a draft dodger: “If it weren’t for women, by now the war would’ve ended””,¹⁰⁵ which serves to underscore that, no matter how large a part women played in the war effort, how big a sacrifice they made, how much danger women put themselves in, they apparently can still be considered at fault irrespective of the path they choose. One justification for such apparent antipathy may lie in the concern that if women could demonstrate an ability to not only look after themselves but also to contribute so productively to the wider cause, then part of men’s reasoning as to why they were fighting in the first place—the defence of women because of a belief women could not defend themselves—was removed.

Rosà’s unwitting link connecting Morrell with the Futurist movement is also to be found in respect of Futurist and Vorticist mechanomorphism, with Morrell’s analogous challenge to the women she observed, asking: ‘Does it pain them to be frail shuttles in the vast machinery of destruction, or are they such perfect machines themselves...?’¹⁰⁶ By

immediately following this with the rhetorical ‘Little frail “flappers”, are you too only phantoms or real women?’,¹⁰⁷ Morrell manages to ascribe multiple designations to what is effectively one female figure: a woman who symbolises a breaking free of the private sphere in order to become a working woman necessarily contributing to the inevitable requirements of a nation at war. These connotations are all appositely captured in a photograph of female munitions workers taken by Nicholls at the National Shell Filling Factory in Chilwell, Nottinghamshire, in August 1917.¹⁰⁸ This black and white image shows a large factory floor almost entirely covered by upright, 6-inch Howitzer shells in perfect straight lines. The floor and its contents of cartridges are juxtaposed by dark steel uprights that form the structure of the building, as well as by uniform-clad women who stand amongst the cartridges. Three of these workers are prominent, arms up and eyes focused on the shells being guided by them to the factory floor. In reverting to Lewis’ comments in respect of ‘the manufacturing of children’ as ‘human cartridges’, this image additionally and deftly positions women within the actual machinery of conflict: in an echo of Morrell’s concerns, the women have become part of the machine, linked by the shells at their feet that reach up as high as their knees, connected by outstretched hands to the shells being lowered down to join them. This machinic metamorphism not only reflects the aesthetic outpourings of the Vorticists, it also highlights the defeminisation and, indeed, the dehumanisation of the figurative. As suggested previously, this can be associated with a premise arguably based on equivalency or, conversely, advocates defeminisation for reasons unconnected to purely aesthetic predilections. The antithesis of this is demonstrated in the promotion of attributes relating to sexuality and sensuality, and both perspectives are explored in the following chapter.

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From Presence to Absence: Exploiting Female Sexuality in Visual Culture

It is suggested that ‘analysing pleasures, or beauty, destroys it’;¹ Hogarth’s theories in respect of his *line* contained within his manuscript *The Analysis of Beauty* can therefore be contemplated from two distinct viewpoints. Firstly, by articulating and subsequently documenting a mechanism he believed was always there albeit largely unacknowledged, it could be argued that Hogarth demystifies a perceptual experience relating to beauty and thereby devalues it for the viewer. The second, alternative contention is that by committing his theory to textual record and therefore illuminating a way by which the mechanism of the *line* can be employed as an analytical tool, Hogarth effectively expands the depth and breadth of what a viewer may regard as “beautiful”. In transcribing the theory to practice, the imagery within which a pictorial trope such as the *line of beauty* is embedded becomes a ‘physical thing’ which ‘touches off a response and compels it, but we ourselves interfere with the simple effect of the stimulus from without’.² Whilst we may find ourselves innately attracted to an image or a construct within it, our reactions are “interfered with” by memory traces informing our interpretation of what we see. In keeping within the context of this book, these ideas can be extended in support of how

feminism has long acknowledged that visibility (the conditions of how we see and make meaning of what we see) is one of the key modes by which gender is culturally inscribed in Western culture—and feminist theory and

art practice rank among the most influential and wide-ranging arms of feminism. Feminism and visual culture, then, deeply and mutually inform one another.³

Imagery specific to the female form, whether of a focus explicitly related to feminism or within genres of more general provenance, can be seen to connect to the wider connotations of feminist and gender theorising. Therefore, whilst this book is not a focused study of feminism, the relevance of the underlying denotation of the term as ‘the advocacy of women’s rights on the grounds of sexual equality’ necessitates its consideration in the exploration, analysis and debate surrounding images of women and the pictorial constructs and motifs found within them.⁴ Regardless, in concentrating upon one particular aspect within the wider discourse, feminist accounts are sometimes problematical for historians because of ‘their conception of the relation of sexuality to politics’.⁵ If politics is assigned to the public sphere whilst sexuality remains in the private sphere—with the consequence that women therefore ‘cannot be motivated by private issues such as sexual identity’—it negates the idea that the two spheres are not mutually exclusive.⁶ It is this incompatibility between the spheres that led to suffragists viewing

their campaign as the best way to end a “sex war” brought about by separate sphere ideology—an ideology that finally reduced women’s identity to a sexual one, encouraged the view of women as sexual objects, and perpetuated women’s powerlessness in both spheres.⁷

It is the more focused exploration of these points, the extremes of female representation, and the visible continua within the pictorial associated with them, that form the basis of this chapter.

APPEARANCE

In situating the premise of this book and its temporal and cultural contexts within the wider conversation, the question is raised as to whether, in order to bypass a perceived instant dismissal of their cause, activists who utilise the pictorial need to succumb to advertising practices antithetical to their core beliefs as to how women should be visually portrayed. A similar consideration can be given to the question of whether or not there existed a requirement for women in the suffrage movements to exploit their own sexuality in the imagery they distributed in order to

garner attention, particularly from men, for the wider issues of emancipation. This latter concept especially can be expanded to incorporate propaganda relating to the recruitment campaigns of the First World War: in 1917 Joyce Dennys, artist and VAD assigned to the Navy, designed a poster in order to ‘attract women’ to the service (Fig. 5.1).⁸ The strategy behind this construction was apparently ‘to focus on dress by showing an immaculately groomed young woman in naval uniform standing on a windy cliff overlooking the sea, beckoning others to join’.⁹ The focus upon the ‘immaculately groomed’ uniform is of note when considered in the context of what it is, specifically, that is being “sold”. It is a poster seemingly aimed at women, with the cited analysis suggesting the uniform may in itself be part of the attraction to the cause. Coupled with this is the possibility that a woman’s sexuality need not be disguised by a uniform, and therefore not sacrificed if a woman responds to the call to bear (albeit metaphoric) arms. However, the actual “message” is

Fig. 5.1 Women’s
Royal Naval Service
1917, Joyce Dennys
(© IWM)



arguably not as clear as the cited—retrospective—observation suggests: under the caption ‘WOMEN’S ROYAL NAVAL SERVICE’, it simply reads ‘APPLY TO THE NEAREST EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE’ [capitals in the original]. Clearly the poster is a pictorial distributor for the recruitment campaign, yet the figure as it is illustrated could be described just as easily as offering a farewell to the men who have already embarked to France, rather than an imploring of women to join the Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS) and become a ‘Wren’ in support of the fight. The ambiguousness suggested could be intentional—the idea the women left at home, even if now in roles previously designated as only suitable for males, formed a large part of the reasoning behind why the war was being fought in the first place. This particular pictorial example at Fig. 5.1 was created by a woman, but commissioned by the State: the ultimate control over whether or not the finished poster was even produced and distributed presumably lay with men, which is not the case for material designed and distributed by the suffrage movements. Berger writes of ‘the surveyor and the surveyed’ that exist simultaneously within a woman ‘as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman’,¹⁰ an idea considered in Chapter 3 in respect of the female artist, the self-portrait and the portrait of a nude female figure. Berger comments that a woman

has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another.¹¹

When this is applied to the Dennys poster (Fig. 5.1) it raises the query as to whether the central premise—as seemingly cited in the retrospective explanation—is aligned with Dennys’ own objective, or solely with that of the commissioning body. Regardless, it underlines the importance of the pictorial requirement within media produced during this era and reiterates the difficulties that lie in selecting the most productive visual constructs for conveying the advertising, propagandist or stylistic message contained within. Revisiting the photograph of the VAD explored in Chapter 3 at Fig. 3.2 demonstrates the multitude of contradictions that coalesce when an image is created for advertising or propagandist means—most notably its purpose, and to whom it is directed. As

described, this particular photograph emphasises the female figure as an “angel”—in this case, a traditional “ministering angel” as demonstrated by the nursing uniform the subject wears. It does not, however, reveal the reality of the working life of the VAD. The photograph could serve as an invitation to other women to become VADs, and just as easily act as a reminder to the men in their lives what it is they are being compelled to fight for. The photograph demonstrates how women can move from the private to the public sphere and consequently be engaged outside the home as a significant contributor to wider society (complete with uniform to accentuate this point), yet it conveys this within an aura that both negates the reality of the work and additionally shrouds it in a cloak of romanticism. Although ‘a photograph is only a fragment’, it can nonetheless ‘turn the past into an object of tender regard, scrambling moral distinctions and disarming historical judgments by the generalized pathos of looking at time past’.¹² The photograph of the VAD can therefore be viewed not only with connotations considered as contemporaneous—a code that is “theirs”—but also as a retrospective overview of the era informed by a code of more current construct. This particular photographic example can therefore be considered, then as now, to simultaneously support *and* undermine the ongoing fight for emancipation, particularly when viewed in the context of feminism being ‘one of the most important ways in which we can most usefully come to an understanding of the image culture in which we are suspended...’.¹³ This is pertinent ‘because feminism is one of the myriad discourses that arose in symbiotic relation to the rise of modernity—itsself coincident with the development of the camera, media imagery and, in short, modern image culture’.¹⁴ This exponential increase in modern image culture illustrates circular cause and effect: whilst it can expand the points under consideration by adding pictorial endorsement to theory, it can also serve to negate preconceived ideas associated with a primarily theoretical concept. Feminism can be seen—unsurprisingly—to emerge from suffragism, ‘its parameters and positions’ therefore undergoing perpetual ‘negotiation’.¹⁵ Not only can a genealogical link as visible continuum be recognised here, in addition it stands as another example of how the codes employed in any analysis are likely to be as much if not more ours than theirs, and these continua can be both theoretical and pictorial with the latter of most pertinence in the context of this book.

As acknowledged, at least where they had control over the situation, women could either fight, take flight from, or embrace the pictorial

tropes generally employed in their portrayal, with the debate remaining open as to how imagery produced by women for the promotion of women's issues can be best constructed in order to attract other women. Dennys' poster at Fig. 5.1 utilises constructs not dissimilar to those applied in advertising and propagandist imagery created by men *and* women. As only one example of a pictorial trope, the female worker in Scott's *These Women Are Doing Their Bit* poster from 1916 cited in Chapter 3 (Fig. 3.1) raises her arm—itself a symbol of strength and aspiration, and in this instance to demonstrate the donning of overalls in emphasis of her readiness for the task ahead. Dennys' Wren is conveyed with her left arm raised, a position mirrored in a circa 1909 poster designed by Dallas, advertising the *Votes for Women* newspaper. A similar stance is found in a June 1918 poster calling for recruits to join Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (artist unknown); the central figure, uniformed and smiling, beckons with her raised left arm for women to 'ENROL TO-DAY' [capitals in the original]. There are two observations of note in respect of this latter poster; firstly is that part of the textual component reads 'The GIRL behind the man behind the gun' [capitals in the original], which manages to encourage a woman to participate in the war effort whilst simultaneously reminding her of her exact position—*behind* the man who will be undertaking the "actual" job. Secondly is the positioning of the raised arm compared to Dennys' Wren; the recruit (WAAC) illustrated in the 1918 poster is clearly *beckoning*, whilst the Wren, although retrospectively described as doing the same is in fact *pointing*, thereby contributing to the ambiguousness of the message. As an example of the traversing of tropes between the genres, in the advertising industry a 1912 black and white sketched advertisement for *Sanatogen* tonic illustrates its female figure the same way. However, in this example the raised left arm is bent towards the face, as though this robed woman is about to faint. The concept is clearly that she is in need of the tonic, and this is intriguingly personified in a semi-naked woman who appears to ascend from an urn labelled 'Sanatogen'. She is partially wrapped in folds of flowing fabric, her hair billowing out behind her; her right arm is placed strategically across her bare breasts. The intimation appears to be that this product could not only prove beneficial to a woman's health, it could also seemingly infuse that same woman with a sensuality she may have lost or, indeed, never before possessed.

The motif of the "angel" in both advertising and propaganda is one recurring pictorial trope as discussed, and reinforced in a postcard of

the era designed by W. Barribal which depicts a nurse with a wounded soldier.¹⁶ Both figures are smiling, and despite the soldier being heavily bandaged he has his right arm around the nurse as she passes him his crutch. The image is colourful and painterly and reflects the pictorial tropes of the *Bovril* advertising image at Fig. 2.2, and the Belgian Red Cross propaganda poster at Fig. 2.3. During the First World War ‘No one questioned women’s capabilities as nurses’, and from a purely pictorial perspective, ‘the publishers of postcards revered them’.¹⁷ As with the photograph of the VAD, ‘Idealised images combined concepts of beauty, love and motherly care with the professionalism of a uniform’.¹⁸ This almost other-worldly quality ascribed to these women—and which reflects the concept of the angel/ideal—is extended in the premise that after hearing the legend regarding angels appearing to protect soldiers at the battle of Mons, some nurses were seen to have ‘assumed heavenly attributes’¹⁹—as, indeed, is literally depicted in Buchel’s creation for the Belgian Red Cross fund. Women who were in control of the imagery utilised to promote their causes therefore needed to work with these inconsistencies: as noted, they could choose to continue the genealogical thread of the perceived ideal woman, or fight against it. They could portray themselves and each other in a “traditional” fashion, echoing the angel-in-the-house, or violently oppose it through the mechanomorphic stylistic influences of avant-garde art movements including Vorticism. It is this dichotomy that adds intrigue to, as well as raises questions within, the discourse that surrounds the subject.

VANITY

The contradictions faced were not confined only to female artists, designers and producers: the male advertiser of the years straddling the turn of the twentieth century ‘recognized the erotic potential of the angel in the house’, but this in itself posed a problem because of the conflict between ‘erotic potential’ and an ‘identification of women with purity’.²⁰ Undoubtedly this is not always about one extreme or the other; the boundaries between the two aspects are not necessarily cleanly defined and it is intriguing to view the imagery commented upon within this book in light of this—including Dennys’ Wren. Furthermore, in allying this with the analysis surrounding Foucault’s comments regarding ethics and mores, Berger’s observation concerning hypocritical moralising is significant: Berger remarks how, in art, ‘The mirror was often used

as a symbol of the vanity of women'.²¹ Berger continues: 'You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting *Vanity*, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure'; Berger notes 'The real function of the mirror was otherwise. It was to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight'²² [*italics in the original*]. Whilst this is an apposite theory, endorsing as it does a seeming requirement to ensure any responsibility for the viewer's perception (male) lies firmly with the subject (female), it also uncovers a more practical application for this accessory. The majority, if not all, self-portraits involve a mirror—whether created by a male or female artist; what is significant is that the mirror does not necessarily form part of the finished artwork, although this does not automatically undermine its contribution to the completed artwork as a whole (Sherman, as one example, predominantly creates her untitled photographic portraits, herself at their centre, with the assistance of mirrors).²³ Nevertheless, as indicated it is the woman who

stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning.²⁴

With this observation in mind, therefore, it is pertinent to return to the incident surrounding the suffragette attack on Velázquez' *Rokeby Venus* described briefly in the last chapter. This seventeenth century painting was created despite supposition that Velázquez was 'admirably incapable of idealisation', living as he did 'in the prudish and corseted court of Philip IV'.²⁵ The painting was judged 'an outstanding example of the genre of the female nude' and without equal within this artist's body of work.²⁶ Venus, in Roman mythology, is correlative to the Greek Aphrodite and is considered to be the goddess of love, as well as of sex, fertility and beauty; the art historian Kenneth Clark writes that

Since the earliest times, the obsessive, unreasonable nature of physical desire has sought relief in images, and to give these images a form by which Venus may cease to be vulgar and become celestial has been one of the recurring aims of European Art.²⁷

Richardson's attack on *Rokeby Venus* 'has come to symbolize a particular perception of feminist attitudes towards the female nude', arguably coming 'to represent a specific stereotypical image of feminism more generally'.²⁸ Noteworthy is the idea this particular manifestation of Venus was 'a finished, unflawed beauty'—an ideal—and although considered after the attack as a 'victim', this relates more to the painting as an object, rather than to the model—the subject—contained within it.²⁹ Because the painting involves a female nude, however, one who is viewing herself in a mirror whilst the onlooker observes her as she does so, she ostensibly is seen to assume an apparent culpability in the observer/observed process—a concept that can be controversially expanded should that observer subsequently turn out to also be the attacker.

These considerations regarding pictorial tropes of art-historical provenance are reflected in the advertising industry: Loeb comments on how 'The commercial woman had a focus on pleasure that necessarily required leisure. The recurrent motif of the woman looking into her mirror amplifies this commercial ideal', and continues the aesthetic legacy that associates that woman with Venus.³⁰ As with the Pre-Raphaelite thread, the plundering of an aesthetic storehouse for pictorial tropes as visible continua is seen in the utilisation of the mirror which, as Berger theorises, substitutes a male preoccupation for a female one and thereby attempts a transfer of any subsequent responsibility from one sex to the other. In addition the direct association with Venus can be seen in the perpetuation of a pictorial thread via Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. That this painting is an image that has been exploited for commercial purposes via mass media in general and the fashion industry in particular has 'narrowed the reception of the artist's corpus...'.³¹ Fragmentation by the appropriators of Botticelli's work for the purpose of alternative aesthetics means the name 'Botticelli' 'has become increasingly decoupled from actual works of art, itself becoming a brand that stands for the Italian Renaissance in the broadest sense'.³² This observation intimates a severing of a genealogical thread, whilst simultaneously enforcing the argument that employment of the motif can only be successful because of the acknowledgement that it is a recognisable visible continuum—one, as Hogarth suggests, that attracts the viewer despite the source not necessarily being overtly tangible. In addition, in one Futurist manifesto, Marinetti (along with his colleague Francesco Cangiullo) remarks that

when the *Primavera* by Botticelli made its first appearance it, like many other masterpieces, had its essential value in its surprising originality, quite apart from its various values of composition, rhythm, volume, and colors. For us today, long familiarity with this painting and the copies and imitations it has inspired have destroyed its surprise value. Which demonstrates how the cult of works from the past (admired, imitated, and copied), besides being pernicious for new creative talents, is pointless and absurd, since it requires one to admire, imitate, and copy only a small proportion of those works.³³

That Botticelli's paintings have informed the fashion industry is unsurprising considering 'their harmonious and inimitable decorative system presents appealing portrayals of feminine beauty'; Botticelli influence weaves its way through the twentieth century via designers including Elsa Schiaparelli,³⁴ Celia Birtwell and Dolce and Gabbana.³⁵ In particular the use of fragments of these artworks, as suggested in the cited comments above, reflects Berger's remark on how isolating and reproducing only a detail from an image changes the meaning; an 'allegorical' figure in a picture containing multiple figures, becomes a portrait when it is separated from its surroundings and subsequently taken out of context.³⁶ This is reflected via a sixteenth century oil painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder titled *The Judgement of Paris*, in this painting 'Paris, son of the Trojan King Priam, who was living as a shepherd, was sought out by Mercury, the messenger of the gods, and asked to decide which of the three goddesses, Venus, Juno or Minerva, was the most beautiful. Paris chose Venus...'.³⁷ One interpretation of the story suggests the painting represents 'an allegory of the choice between the contemplative, active and sensual life. The ideal choice was to combine all three: Juno's power, Minerva's wisdom and Venus's pleasure'³⁸—in order to create one "ideal" woman. This is referenced here because a fragment of the painting which includes the three goddesses only (thereby forming a portrait of Venus, Juno and Minerva), has been directly compared to *Victoria's Secret* branding imagery from 2012.³⁹ In addition to the recurring trope of the angel as a visible continuum with a long genealogical legacy, the parallel between the fragment of the painting and the selected promotional photograph of three *Victoria's Secret* "Angels"—'A fleet of women so beautiful, so primed and preened that the name bestowed on them is other-worldly'⁴⁰—is, from a pictorial-construction perspective, clear. In this respect, of significance is that the three goddesses are virtually naked

and in comparison the three *Victoria's Secret* “Angels”, although similarly posed, are less scantily clad, wearing as they do the lingerie the company sells. Cranach’s female figures wear head adornments, with only a mere suggestion of additional covering in the gossamer-thin, serpentine drapery that reveals considerably more than it conceals. The lingerie models straightforwardly promote the product, and it would clearly be a less successful campaign if the underwear being advertised is demonstrated off the body. Consequently the openly explicit sexuality and sensuality is understandable, although the models undoubtedly assist in enhancing this aspect (as recognised in earlier examples, they are young, and beautiful in what can be considered as a traditional view of the term). So little material covers the figures in the painting it borders on the irrelevant, yet in so doing underscores the previously noted concept that nakedness is enhanced by drapery because the interest really lies in what it is that is being obscured.

The supplanting of a figure into manipulated imagery for reasons antithetical to the artist’s original intention is demonstrated in the use of Leonardo de Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, an image found in the advertising of products ranging from hair care to food. Similarly is the treatment given to historical figures of both real and mythological provenance captured in two- and three-dimensional form and their images subsequently employed out of context, including in promotional material for suffrage as well as State campaigns (Joan of Arc being one example as described, and illustrated in Fig. 1.2). It is also worth considering, particularly in respect of Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* and its subsequent exploitation, how the imagery of women created as an attraction primarily for men has been transplanted into the fashion industry on items traditionally intended for the women’s market. Whilst this raises questions—to whom is fashion marketing really directed, to whom are the items actually being “sold”, are the lines that historically existed between the genders now being blurred to the point where direct targeting of a particular purchaser ceases to be of such value—the debate spills into areas outside the parameters of this book. In keeping within the boundaries, however, the concept of fragmentation can be further expanded to include the isolating of a figure that consequently alters the actuality of that figure’s role. The photograph of the VAD discussed throughout this book (Fig. 3.2) serves as an apt example of this; along with the comments considered regarding the varying messages this one photograph can productively—or otherwise—project, lies the premise that this particular VAD is

isolated from her colleagues. In so being her role is arguably diminished as it fails to convey the numbers of VADs whose contribution to the war effort was required, and therefore the scale of the transference of women from the private to the public sphere that was taking place during the First World War.

NAKED/NUDE

In addition to the art-historical reference as a genealogical thread are the points on sexuality reflected upon earlier—and the correlation with the “angel” takes on additional meaning even though the concept is still to project the image of an ideal. Furthermore, this can be extended in order to demonstrate how ‘blurred’ the line can be ‘between sexual liberation and sexual exploitation’ and why such indistinction can be ‘a goldmine for the advertising industry’.⁴¹ Of note is how,

In the erotic art, truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility, but first and foremost in relation to itself; it is experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul.⁴²

There are a plethora of perceptions and emotions contributing to the experience a viewer undergoes in his or her response to a work of art. This therefore reinforces the idea of values and how these can be determined, and in addition highlights that how and why they are assessed is dependent on the individual observer. Berger asserts ‘the essential way of seeing women... has not changed’, and further supports suppositions already considered when he contends that ‘Women are depicted in a quite different way from men—not because the feminine is different from the masculine—but because the “ideal” spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him’.⁴³ Foucault maintains that, as a term, “sexuality” was not in use until the start of the nineteenth century, qualifying his observation by declaring this ‘a fact that should be neither underestimated nor overinterpreted’.⁴⁴ When this is considered in connection with Berger’s comments regarding vanity it exposes that whether underestimated *or* over-interpreted, justification is required in respect of the reasons as to why a viewer

should contemplate an image of a female nude. Foucault considers it 'legitimate to ask why sex was associated with sin for such a long time', but equally to question 'why we burden ourselves today with so much guilt for having once made sex a sin'.⁴⁵ This in itself provokes a further line of discussion pertaining to how this dichotomy translates into imagery of the female form in general, imagery of the "draped" female form, and—of most significance—the sexualising of the female form in order to sell products, services or a political cause. Clark contends that

To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes and the word implies some of the embarrassment which most of us feel in that condition. The word nude, on the other hand, carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenceless body, but of a balanced, prosperous and confident body: the body re-formed.⁴⁶

The photographs of Carrington discussed in Chapter 3 are pertinent here: firstly, can she be considered as nude, and not naked, in the context described by Clark. Secondly, is such differentiation relevant to this specific photographic example within the image culture of the era. Thirdly, does the distinction lie with the artist or photographer, or the model as subject/object, and is the perspective consequently altered accordingly. An additional, if arguably controversial, viewpoint can be placed upon this discourse through Weininger's statement that

The female, who is only sexual, can appear to be asexual because she is sexuality itself, and so her sexuality does not stand out separately from the rest of her being, either in space or in time, as in the case of the male. Woman can give an impression of being modest because there is nothing in her to contrast with her sexuality. And so the woman is always naked or never naked—we may express it either way—never naked, because the true feeling of nakedness is impossible to her; always naked, because there is not in her the material for the sense of relativity by which she could become aware of her nakedness and so make possible the desire to cover it.⁴⁷

In designating the woman he is describing as object rather than subject, Weininger's fulmination serves to dismiss her entirely from the debate regarding the naked figure—of which she *is* the subject. In this way (and undeniably he is not alone in taking this stance) Weininger removes the ability for the naked figure to be considered as nude in the sense

described previously, thereby making the assumption his and not hers. These ideas can be expanded to include imagery with specific emphasis on the clothing the female figure is wearing, including Denny's 1917 poster illustrated at Fig. 5.1. What should be acknowledged in this latter example, however, is that there is nothing in this actual poster that emphasises, or specifies, the importance of the clothing other than it is visualised as the uniform relating to the job; the comments regarding this have been made retrospectively. The *Punch* cartoon titled *The Sex Question* is in direct opposition to this, in the sense that the entire premise of the pictorial message is clothing- and accoutrement-related. Either way it can be argued that in expressly commenting on the clothing shrouding a female figure the observer is automatically being signposted to recognise it as 'an obstacle or a mask' because, ostensibly, the most important element in relation to this is what that clothing conceals: the naked—or nude—figure beneath. Furthermore, 'every time we criticise a figure... we are admitting, in concrete terms, the existence of ideal beauty'.⁴⁸ This "admittance" forms part of what advertisers strive for in utilising the female form to sell products and services, an aspect explored more fully in the next chapter. It also provokes the concept that the onus falls to the woman to endeavour to achieve this ideal in order for her to conform to what it is men, and some women, expect to see. Aristotle declares that, 'as a general proposition, the arts either, on the basis of Nature, carry things further than nature can, or they imitate Nature';⁴⁹ art historian Lynda Nead cites Aristotle's considerations of beauty as being 'order and symmetry, and that which is definite'⁵⁰ in concluding that 'the notion of unified form is integrally bound up with the perception of self, and the construction of individual identity'.⁵¹ Despite Lewis' comments noted in Chapter 3 regarding artists who represent 'a man as we would wish him to be', it is a bold ambition indeed for any artist to be seen to improve on nature. However, as already acknowledged, the concept of drapery surrounding a naked figure can be seen as an attempt to intensify the sexuality of the female form, at least as it can be perceived by the observer. Clark remarks on how 'naked beauty reappears in the Renaissance as it first emerged in Greece, protected and enhanced by *draperie mouillée*' [italics in the original], a term relating to a sculptural technique 'in which a body is covered by a light, clinging garment' in order for it to become simultaneously 'more mysterious and more comprehensible'.⁵² This reinforces previous comments to this effect and in addition expands the debate to focus upon the line drawn between fully

clothed and nude/naked via this drapery; questions are thus provoked relating to substrata that includes the unremarkable, the pertinent, the abstract, the purely aesthetic, the erotic and the pornographic. Decisions on construction of an image are therefore made not only in respect of the creators' intentions, but also on the potential effect those creators wish to elicit from the intended observing audience. It may well be a thin line indeed between the unremarkable yet romanticised angel-in-the-house and the seductive ideal, thereby causing conflict connected to erotic potential and purity—the moving marker being where the mask of cloth ceases being ordinary and morphs into the sensual. Historically, it is the skin that encloses the female figure whilst allowing 'the flesh to show through the hair, the make-up, the ornamentation, the veil or the clothing'.⁵³ In this way 'The "nude" form is seen and half-seen, and its propositions of "truth" are expressed or modulated',⁵⁴ underlining how the way in which a female figure is portrayed is paramount in ensuring a productive response is initiated within the viewer.

Consequently it is germane to align these ideas with how,

In Greece, truth and sex were linked, in the form of pedagogy, by the transmission of a precious knowledge from one body to another; sex served as a medium for initiations into learning. For us it is in the confession that truth and sex are joined, through the obligatory and exhaustive expression of an individual secret. But this time it is truth that serves as a medium for sex and its manifestations.⁵⁵

Historically, truth is also equated with beauty; within Plato's *Republic* it is intimated that 'overwhelming beauty' can be a provider of 'knowledge and truth' whilst still being 'beyond them in beauty'.⁵⁶ This triumvirate of sex, beauty and truth uncovers a variety of threads, both individual and combined, relating to visible continua with long genealogical histories. It specifically correlates with Hogarth's theories regarding his *line of beauty*, enhancing the idea of its employment as an analytical tool in the unpacking of imagery, particularly that which explores the female figure. In addition it sets up a conversation concerning that which constitutes beauty, sexuality, or a combination of both from an observer's point of view (with sexuality defined here as relating to sensuality and desirability). Questions are consequently posed as to whether, in this specific context, "beauty" can be considered as being the same as "sexuality", whether the former is a more benign concept than the latter from the

viewer's perspective and, indeed, whether it makes any difference to the observer/observed relationship either way. Clark contends 'The Greeks wished to perpetuate the naked human body because it was beautiful', maintaining that 'Greek artists did not think of the nude merely as a repertoire of forms' and always demonstrated 'a fervent admiration for physical beauty'.⁵⁷ Aristotle makes the differentiation between 'that which is good' and 'that which is fair', believing beauty can be found in the 'immovable'.⁵⁸ Conversely, Hogarth's theories relating to his *line* interpret the serpentine curve as representing movement, and movement that is at its most beautiful despite the *line* being perceived within two- and three-dimensional artworks that are themselves motionless. This therefore underscores Hogarth's own premise that a viewer's imagination is key to the perception of movement within what is, from a literal point of view, immovable, and which assists in demonstrating how an artwork can be considered as expressive when viewed from the perspectives of both the artist and the observer.

'SEX AND GEOMETRY'

In expanding upon this reflection on literal and metaphorical movement within imagery, of interest is Clark's assertion that endeavouring 'to create an independent form on the basis of the human body' is not necessarily 'a lost cause', but suggests the outcome is that 'a new pictorial language involves too great a sacrifice of fundamental responses'.⁵⁹ This is a theory which can be seen to relate directly to Modernist—including Vorticist—visions of the figurative in general, and specifically to the female nude. Weininger, however, is unequivocal in this regard:

All forms of beauty which appeal to man, by reason of the aesthetic function, are in reality also attempts on his part to realise the ideal. Beauty is the symbol of perfection in being. Therefore beauty is inviolable; it is static and not dynamic; so that any alteration with regard to it upsets and annuls the idea of it. The desire of personal worthiness, the love of perfection, materialise in the idea of beauty.⁶⁰

In light of Weininger's forthright proclamations previously cited it is unsurprising that he holds very definite views on what he considers beauty to be, and this in itself uncovers strands of further debate. Firstly, the concept that beauty is 'static' negates Hogarth's theorising

in respect of his *line of beauty*. Secondly, Weininger's description demonstrates a dismissal of personal opinion in what is considered as "beautiful" (within Plato's *Republic* is the consideration that 'knowledge and opinion are not the same' but 'dependent on different things...').⁶¹ Thirdly, Weininger's comments also indicate the high ideal that women are apparently expected to live up to, but because these expectations are unrealistic such diatribes prescribe a level of attainment that simultaneously sets up the premise whereby women can be disparaged should they even attempt, let alone fail, to achieve what is in actuality unachievable.

Important in the context of this book is how these contentions can be applied to imagery of the era as well as potentially exploited to best promote a message through pictorial means. Personal opinion informs a viewer's concept of beauty even when known attractional objects are singularly or collectively incorporated into an artwork. In consideration of the significance of opinion, Clark's comment that 'Since Michelangelo few artists have shared a Florentine passion for shoulders, knees and other small knobs of form' is relevant.⁶² This seemingly simplified imagery highlights accentuation on the curves that differentiate between the male and the female body, consequently serving to emphasise the presence of Hogarth's *line of beauty* in the serpentine waves employed to formulate depictions of the female figure. That the Cubists utilised the female nude in similar fashion to 'their neo-classical predecessors'—namely, 'as a basic and largely unquestioned structure on which to hang stylistic concerns'⁶³—is an observation that can be extended to include two- as well as three-dimensional artworks, and reflects comments cited in Chapter 2 in respect of the 'natural, *unstructured*' female form 'suitable for art and aesthetic judgement'. This is of interest, not only when it is viewed in relation to figurative imagery created using Cubist or Vorticist stylings, but also when such representations are created of women *by* women. Certainly Hogarth observes that in order to gain 'a perfect knowledge of the elegant and beautiful', objects that are both 'natural' and 'artificial' should be considered in a 'systematical, but at the same time familiar way...'.⁶⁴ A century and a half after Hogarth's theorising, Lewis remarks within *Blast: War Number* that the Futurists had 'rejected the POSED MODEL, imitative and static side of CUBISM, and substituted the hurly-burly and exuberance of actual life' [capitals in the original].⁶⁵ the Futurists maintain 'it is perfectly reasonable for our Futurist works to *characterize* the art of our epoch with the *stylization of movement* which is one of the

most immediate manifestations of life' [italics in the original].⁶⁶ Artists have arguably been 'grateful' for the 'smoother transitions' and, most importantly, have thereby uncovered 'analogies with satisfying geometrical forms, the oval, the ellipsoid and the sphere'.⁶⁷ Lewis extends this premise by commenting that 'a series of matches, four for the legs and arms, one thick one for the trunk, and a pair of grappling irons added for the hands' can be 'rhythmically' constructed into 'a centralized, easily organized, human pattern', designating this foundation as a 'bare and heroic statement'.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, within this can be observed a circular cause and consequence, in that 'certain quasi-geometrical shapes' are gratifying to the onlooker's eye *because* 'they are simplified statements of the forms which please us in a woman's body...'.⁶⁹ Because shapes, as with words, have a multitude of 'associations which vibrate in the memory', then endeavouring to clarify this via 'a single analogy is as futile as the translation of a lyric poem'.⁷⁰ Clark expands upon this concept by suggesting that, because we are able to discuss both sides of the debate surrounding 'this unexpected union of sex and geometry', it is in itself 'proof of how deeply the concept of the nude is linked with our most elementary notions of order and design'.⁷¹ Clark's comments are illustrative of a pictorial thread that weaves from literal depictions of women within the art-historical, through a simplification of the same, and then subsequently on to abstract expressions of the female form, all the while taking into account the figure that is conveyed as clothed, naked or concealed by drapery to one extreme or the other.

As much as a certain amount of simplification can *emphasise* aspects of the body, the transformation of recognisable shapes can also serve to defeminise the feminine form to the point of the representation becoming gender-non-specific. It is suggested the 'model of Vorticist masculinity' served to bestow upon the movement's female artists (including Saunders) 'symbolic language and conceptual strategies with which to gain critical distance on forms of femininity regarded as debilitating in their avant-garde climate, in both aesthetic and professional terms'.⁷² Whilst an arguably unintended emphasis on feminist and activist issues has been retrospectively applied to Saunders' artwork of the human form, it is possible that 'an ungendered individuality' may have been appealing to female artists because it suggests a springing of 'the trap of binary opposition which locates them within the category of the feminine and defines the feminine as not-masculine'.⁷³ This is an alternate

perspective on the attraction to these aesthetic stylings that includes the possibility of an equalising attribute, one made through an apparent act of dehumanisation in general or of defeminisation in particular. Clark suggests, however, that ‘To scrutinise a naked girl as if she was a loaf of bread or a piece of rustic pottery is surely to exclude one of the human emotions of which a work of art is composed’,⁷⁴ thereby implying that Cubist or Vorticist stylistic attributes applied to the nude defeats the object of why an artist of either sex paints a nude figure in the first place. Equally it perpetuates the notion that the female figure within these artworks should be designated object rather than subject. These points can be expanded to include both clothed and nude figures which present as gender-non-specific but are designated by the artist—or retrospectively by the critic, curator or theorist—as female nonetheless, as is considered in Chapter 3 in respect of both Saunders’ and Lewis’ work. The psychoanalyst Joan Riviere maintains that ‘Womanliness... could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert reprisals expected if she was found to possess it...’; Riviere believes there is no distinction between ‘genuine womanliness and the “masquerade”’.⁷⁵ This contention, whilst adding substrata to the debate, provides dual explanations that are supplemental to the idea of a mask: firstly, as considered, clothing can be seen as a mask, one which acts as the boundary between the observer and the (naked/nude) observed. Secondly, as Riviere describes, overt ‘womanliness’—femininity, sexuality—can be described as a mask in itself. In respect of this latter point, the question is not only *what* it is concealing (Riviere suggests masculinity, but this may not be the only element), but also *why* it is required. A 1918 photograph taken by George P. Lewis is of particular pertinence in illustrating these points (Fig. 5.2). This image of a woman granite worker from 1918 captures a female figure, one who has moved from private to public sphere in response to the war effort yet one whose femininity is masked both literally and figuratively. In complete contrast to the photograph of the VAD (Fig. 3.2), the protective clothing that constitutes the uniform for the role this woman is undertaking renders the figure gender-non-specific—no angel, no ideal and in fact only designated female in the accompanying caption to the photograph. Although it is proposed the photographer seemingly ‘deliberately presented his subject as a sexless image inside a protective uniform pointing a “weapon” at a tombstone’,⁷⁶ there is more than adequate reasoning as to why the figure



Fig. 5.2 A female worker... 1918, George P. Lewis (© IWM)

is conveyed in this way that is specific to the role being undertaken. The actual work of a granite worker can be gender-non-specific, and requires protective clothing, including a physical mask, relevant to the dangerous nature of the task and substantial enough to shroud the female *or* male worker completely, thereby disguising the sex beneath. The idea of this being presented as deliberate, therefore, could be construed as disingenuous if it is suggesting the photographer is making a point outside of this—because if he is, what is the point he is attempting to make? As much as the way in which the figure is conveyed demonstrates a defeminising of the female form, it is in fact *dehumanising* the figure; it is a mechanomorphic representation, knowingly or unknowingly illustrative of avant-garde stylistic leanings of the era, particularly those explored in Vorticist artwork. It is, once again, only the caption that indicates to the viewer that it is in fact a female figure beneath the worker's uniform and therefore ostensibly a photographic portrait of a woman.

‘THOUGH SHE IS DREADFUL SHE IS ALSO SUBLIME’

When all of the above is taken into account, what is revealed is how fine the line is between the presence of a woman in visual culture and examples of imagery notable for her absence. This particular point is appositely demonstrated in the First World War recruitment poster from January 1915 briefly commented upon in Chapter 1, which quotes Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in conveying its message yet with no supporting pictorial content. The poster, constructed as purely textual in a striking three-colour, banner headline style, cites Lady Macbeth’s declaration to ‘Stand not upon the order of your going,/But go at once’.⁷⁷ After referencing the quotation’s source, the poster continues with the succinct direction to the onlooker to ‘ENLIST NOW!’ [capitals in the original]. Whilst general consensus considers the attraction of a Shakespearean quotation in First World War recruitment propaganda lies solely in the suitability, for propagandist purposes, of the phrase itself, this particular example can nonetheless be viewed as a somewhat odd choice of literary endorsement. The instruction in Shakespeare’s play relates to the dismissal of banqueters and bears no relation to any sort of enlistment, nor does it carry any connotations alluding to battle. It does, however, convey a suggestion that the message’s proposed appeal is to a certain section of society—one that recognises, and potentially understands, Shakespeare’s literary canon. The design and construction, therefore, arguably elevates the poster *and* its message to a “high culture” status, in the same way augmentation upraises some advertising imagery to the status of fine art. Regardless, it is productive to employ this particular poster to pursue a further relevant thread of debate in respect of the pictorial portrayal of women—specifically, that a woman’s absence is as important as her presence. To begin with, there is an arguable intimation in the approach to this particular example of propagandist distribution that, despite illustrations of the exploitation of women in the encouragement of men to enlist, the women of the early part of the twentieth century had power they did not in actuality possess. Furthermore, and taking into account the many posters that were purely textual, it is worth noting that in selecting this literary character it was nonetheless deemed unnecessary to include any accompanying pictorial component. Had the figure of Lady Macbeth been visually manifested and presented in a way that perhaps reflects the *Go! It’s Your Duty Lad* poster described in Chapter 2, this may have endorsed the decision behind the

choice, thereby reinforcing the importance of a woman's role in the process. Even if it can be assumed the quotation is utilised simply for the meaning it can convey—despite it being completely out of context and therefore counter to Shakespeare's original intention—there is undeniably conscious reasoning on the part of the poster's creators (working on behalf of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee) in supporting the text-only message with the *naming* of the character who speaks it. The source of the quotation is included as an elemental component in the construction of the poster—not just that it is from Shakespeare, nor from the play *Macbeth*, but that the words emit specifically from the character of Lady Macbeth. Whilst a 'focus on the intersection between women as producers of art and women in representation helps to unravel the discourses that construct and naturalize ideas about women and femininity at specific historical moments', of more pertinence in respect of this particular example is that 'It is also at the crossover of production and representation that we can become most aware of what is *not* represented or spoken, the omissions and silences that reveal the power of cultural ideology' [italics in the original].⁷⁸ This is equally as significant when applied to the individual images commented upon in this book from the point of view of what they may or may not demonstrate about the social, cultural and political contexts of the time, and in addition can open up new areas of debate when viewed collectively as an indication of the visual ecology of the era. Furthermore, the images illustrated and described in this book represent specific examples relevant to the subject matter and will therefore only exemplify certain perspectives. Atkinson comments on a collection of cartoons of the era that can only represent 'social history and not art history' because those available to view are the 'work that artists and editors agreed was part of the debate'.⁷⁹ This can be extended to include other media, particularly when editors, curators and historians, both contemporaneously and retrospectively, hold the control over what is revealed to and concealed from the general public, regardless of the reasoning (whether valid or otherwise) behind the choices made.

The concept of absence is therefore worthy of exploration beyond artists and images as individual subjects and objects omitted from the art-historical archive, and what can be seen in the Lady Macbeth example is a specific propaganda poster that lends itself to pictorial content of the female form—indeed, positively signposts the viewer to expect it—yet does not include a pictorial figure within its construction. Within

his study of the character of Lady Macbeth, Sigmund Freud cites fellow psychoanalyst Ludwig Jekels' supposition that Shakespeare cleaved his characters in two, with each part needing the other in order to become 'completely understandable'; Freud maintains it would 'be pointless to regard [Lady Macbeth] as an independent character... without considering the Macbeth who completes her'.⁸⁰ This theory can be aligned with the contention put forward by writer and artist Valentine de Saint-Point contained within her *Manifesto of the Futurist Woman*:

Every superman, every hero to the extent that he has epic value, every genius to the extent that he is powerful, is the prodigious expression of a race and an era precisely because he is simultaneously composed of feminine and masculine elements, femininity and masculinity: which is to say, a complete being.⁸¹

This reflects considerations regarding masculine and feminine attributes that continue to be highlighted throughout this book, and in addition mirrors the points made concerning masculine characteristics within women—attributes that are sometimes real and often assumed, and on occasions subsequently used against women depending on the protagonist's agenda. In emphasising collusion between masculine and feminine traits within both men and women it should not be forgotten that, in general, women are not asking to be men, or to replace men, they just wish to be treated as equal to men. In respect of the debate surrounding Lady Macbeth, in the context described here it can be argued that the feminine side of her persona is exploited in order to entice men to enlist, as well as to compel women to encourage men to enlist, whilst simultaneously insinuating that this feminine character is actually incomplete without her male counterpart and therefore seemingly cannot be a fully-formed human being. That Lady Macbeth is variously described as being in a state of 'neurosis as a result of *frustration*' [italics in the original],⁸² a 'steely-hearted instigator',⁸³ a "demon-woman"⁸⁴ and an hysteric⁸⁵ indicates an unusual choice for a role model, particularly one employed to assist in a wartime recruitment campaign and especially when considered in light of other recruitment posters commented upon in this book thus far. Although undoubtedly this literary character presents a powerful force to be reckoned with, it is also suggested 'Lady Macbeth's apparent bravery... in reality is an unconscious cowardice'⁸⁶—an interpretation that is again antithetical to the message

the State seeks to convey. Furthermore, Freud's description of Lady Macbeth as being 'an example of a person who collapses on reaching success, after striving for it with single-minded energy',⁸⁷ serves as a perfect analogy for reasons given as to why women should remain in the private sphere. Indeed, "hysteric", purported to be an 'excessively feminine' attribute, was appropriated by anti-suffrage campaigners as a categorisation for suffragists in general.⁸⁸ However, one early twentieth century analysis of Shakespearean tragedy, and consequently of contemporaneous relevance in respect of the temporal context of this poster, suggests that one 'gazes at Lady Macbeth in awe, because though she is dreadful she is also sublime',⁸⁹ and perhaps this comes closest to understanding the reasoning that might lie behind utilising the character in this way. Sublime: 'extreme or unparalleled', composed 'of such excellence, grandeur or beauty as to inspire great admiration or awe'⁹⁰—a dictionary definition that manages to additionally intimate the idea of beauty utilised for its attractional value to the observer. Nevertheless, in opting to issue this poster as a purely textual rather than pictorial distributor of propagandist messaging, the creators succeed in exploiting certain characteristics to create a female presence—one they presumably deemed would be effective in eliciting the response they required—yet simultaneously expunged her as a female figure worthy of a physical portrayal.

The representation of the female figure during this stipulated decade extends from a pictorial absence at one end of the spectrum, proceeds through a concealed manifestation as illustrated at Fig. 5.2—one that indicates defeminisation/dehumanisation and which is reflected in certain examples of Vorticist artwork—and on to the female form at the other which is portrayed as dressed, draped or naked/nude via varying degrees of perceived sensuality. Ultimately, however, they are all, in one respect or another, employed as a pictorial trope in the "selling" of a product, cause or aesthetic styling. Such disparate portrayal can result in differing perceptions and therefore interpretations of the messages conveyed, thereby contributing to the exponential layers within a conversation of the type undertaken here. This, along with other threads of analysis pertinent to the construction of this study as a whole, is considered in the next chapter, as the genealogy of recurring tropes is further examined and followed into the twenty-first century.

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CHAPTER 6

A Visual Genealogy: Tracing the Threads as Nodes Within a Network

John Berger remarks how ‘The art of the past no longer exists as it once did. Its authority is lost. In its place there is a language of images. What matters now is who uses that language for what purpose’.¹ Berger’s contention includes within it pictorial media that can be utilised for both propagandist and advertising motives. In addition it incorporates the idea of taking an image, manipulating the whole or its constructive elements along with its original intention at least insofar as can be ascertained, and employing this within differing contexts, an idea considered in the previous chapter. Furthermore it can be broadened to embrace the concept of this book: the language of images employed in order to cast an alternative eye on historical situations, events and eras. Foucault writes about books, considering their boundaries undefined, how ‘beyond the title, the first lines and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form’, the book ‘is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network’.² Foucault’s analysis presents multiple perspectives that sit within the contextual framework of this exploration: firstly, *Politics and Aesthetics of the Female Form, 1908–1918* bears testimony to his theories—an investigation that incorporates historical and contemporary thoughts and analyses which have, in turn, been similarly informed by others in order to contribute to the discourse as a whole. Secondly, whilst the *structure* of this book is predominantly literary, Foucault’s premise can equally be applied to the individual artworks under analysis within it. Each image is informed by its genre, its stylistic influences, its medium of construction, its title,

its intention and subsequent interpretation. Thirdly, by following the genealogy of pictorial tropes and visual constructs contained in imagery relating to the artwork of an era, along with analyses of the same, it can be demonstrated how influences continue to inform and subsequently affect contemporary representation. In considering the genealogy of not only the image but also the tropes and constructs embodied within that image, as is the case with the book the artwork 'is not simply the object', it cannot be contained within its physical framework, 'its unity is variable and relative'.³ When this unity is questioned, 'it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse'.⁴ Thus a textual study of the pictorial corresponds with Foucault's comments from a literal perspective, whilst simultaneously expanding to additionally apply to the imagery contained within. This chapter explores how the verbal or literary investigates and questions the content and construction of the pictorial, from both contemporaneous and current positions. In so doing, intentions and interpretations are laid open to debate, with the subsequent impact evaluated accordingly as the threads are pursued into the twenty-first century.

AN 'ACCIDENTAL RIGHTNESS'

There is genealogical legacy, and therefore potential value, in signs, symbols and tropes regardless of the message or the medium utilised to convey them, and irrespective of the era in which the imagery is conceived. As has been commented upon, particularly in relation to Hogarth's *line of beauty* as a visible continuum, whilst a sign or symbol is a substitution for something 'It can only mean if it has someone to mean *to*' [italics in the original].⁵ Each sign is dependent for its 'signifying process on the existence of specific concrete receivers, people for whom and in whose systems of belief, they have a meaning'.⁶ Alongside Hogarth's *line*, the pictorial trope as an example of visible continua can be seen to incorporate the angel-in-the-house, the drapery-clad Grecian or Roman goddess, and the nude (or naked) figure, with the latter often in the presence of a mirror thereby constituting vanity. In addition the concept is indicative of circular cause and effect in respect of the acknowledgement of these pictorial tropes: the artist and designer are influenced by their role as observer, translate the information into the work, and this is then recognised—explicitly or implicitly—by the viewer. British philosopher Samuel Alexander surmises that

The beautiful... whether in art or nature, is in its general sense something which is attractive or pleasing in itself or by itself apart from its aesthetic treatment. Usually, however, the word suggests that besides being attractive in itself it is also aesthetically right.⁷

The idea of something being ‘aesthetically right’ is noteworthy because it intimates an innateness that exists where opinion loses at least some of its value. Lewis maintains the ‘quality of ACCIDENTAL RIGHTNESS, is one of the principal elements in a good picture’ [capitals in the original].⁸ Pound concurs with his assertion that ‘One sees the work; one knows; or, even, one feels’,⁹ a reflection of the concept that simultaneously underscores Hogarth’s eighteenth century observations captured within *The Analysis of Beauty*. In aligning this with the idea of a pictorial trope named for its representation of movement at its most beautiful (the *line of beauty*), Alexander’s further comments are apposite, writing as he does that ‘the beautiful is easy aesthetic beauty and the ugly difficult beauty. Some artists find their very triumphs in making the ugly or unattractive aesthetically beautiful’.¹⁰ Certain images relating to propaganda, suffrage and anti-suffrage material, as well as artworks that emanated from the soldier-artists embedded within the trenches of the First World War, may not in themselves be considered as beautiful from a traditional perspective. Elements pertaining to an observer’s consideration of beauty, however—including the signs and symbols both explicit and implicit as acknowledged—can be either knowingly or unknowingly incorporated, and it is to these the observer finds him- or herself attracted. This is also illustrated more blatantly in advertising imagery previously reflected upon that includes the beauty of a female “ideal”, but one who is apparently extraneous to the product or service she is employed to promote, a campaign strategy further examined later in this chapter.

A more personal account related to Pound’s conjecture is echoed in this comment from the latter part of the twentieth century: ‘I knew I was being “exploited”, but it was a fact that I was attracted’.¹¹ This remark relates directly to advertising but as is recognised, the dependence on tropes and visible continua to engage the viewer in order for the message conveyed to elicit a productive reaction is echoed within the propaganda industry. We respond to these tropes because of the connotations of what they already mean to us, and these connotations do not change in the face of the particular emphasis assigned by the perpetrator. As acknowledged, ‘Classical themes had academic associations’,

with antiquity providing subject matter and motifs for painters from the time of the Renaissance.¹² In addition to the wider stylistic influences of the art-historical we respond specifically to elements within them, such as the drapery that partially masks a female form—arguably because we understand, whether consciously or subconsciously, it is what the drapery conceals that is the important aspect of an image or sculpture constructed in this way. This in itself extends the concept because of the varying interpretations placed upon the same pictorial tropes dependent on the sex of the viewer. Men and women perceive imagery of women differently, not least because perceptions of what constitutes an “ideal” are likely to diverge between the genders. What is additionally exposed within the comments and observations cited are the exponential levels of substrata relating to such an analysis. Concepts are perpetuated, ‘not in the vacuum of the abstract but through their active use: values exist not *in* things but in their transference’ [*italics in the original*],¹³ thereby serving to underscore the enormity that potentially exists in the layers of substrata that may need to be taken into account when an investigation is undertaken. Kant declares that imagination and understanding need to be combined in order to comprehend ‘a given representation’, noting that in this instance ‘a feeling of pleasure is thereby aroused’ and therefore ‘the object must be regarded as purposive for reflective judgement’.¹⁴ In an echo of Hogarth’s contentions, Kant continues that ‘A judgement of this kind is an aesthetic judgement upon the purposiveness of the object, which does not depend upon any available concept of the object, and does not provide one’.¹⁵ This signifies a connection between use and value and applies not just to the whole “object” but to the objects contained within as elements or fragments collating to create a whole. These elements and fragments can potentially acquire further use and value, and contribute to the multiplying layers of substrata when they are employed in ways counter to their original intention, as exemplified in the comments relating to Botticelli’s body of work in Chapter 5, and further explored as this chapter progresses.

VISUAL ELLIPSIS

When considering all this in the context of how images are made ‘intelligible’ when they are ‘revealed to the mind in the absence of the actual thing imagined’,¹⁶ then the very specific, contrived artworks created to serve a distinct purpose—as with First World War recruitment imagery,

advertising and that related to suffrage movements—can be seen to extend into the Modernist artwork of the era. The arguably indistinct constructive elements in Vorticist figurative imagery are nonetheless interpreted by the viewer as figures because the absence of the definitive can still be suggestive of their very presence. Comments cited previously relating to a metamorphosing of the organic into the non-organic feed into Lewis' suggested contention that 'figurative references' will always remain in any work of art,¹⁷ with the potential consequence being that the attraction to the corporeal will remain despite a technologised, machinic emphasis upon the composition. Art historian and critic Hal Foster comments in this regard, declaring that Lewis' idea of Abstraction is the 'conversion of a figure into a protective shield', and that Lewis

is not content to show the mere result of this armoring; rather, he evokes its struggle and its stake. Especially in the "designs" of the early 1910s a great tension exists between figure and surround, as if the body ego, never secure, were caught between definition, about to break free as an autonomous subject, and dispersal, about to be invaded schizophrenically by space.¹⁸

Foster's assertions equate to the concept of mechanomorphism, reflecting the comments made surrounding both Nicholls' photograph taken at the National Shell Filling Factory cited in Chapter 4, and George P. Lewis' photograph of the granite worker illustrated at Fig. 5.2, whilst simultaneously serving to perpetuate the premise that Lewis' aesthetic predilection was anticipating the point where the soldier of the First World War is assimilated into the very machinery of that conflict. Furthermore, a new light can be shed on the analysis pertaining to Saunders' untitled artwork at Fig. 3.3: Foster's 'great tension' can be seen to exist between Saunders' "Female Figures Imprisoned" and their indeterminate surroundings from which they seemingly need to 'break free'.

This process of completing, often subconsciously, the construction of an arguably unconstructed element within an image is encapsulated in the concept of the visual ellipsis—the potential recognition of a component within an image that enables the observer to develop its context.¹⁹ Greenberg remarks that Modernism uncovers how limitations of norms and conventions 'can be pushed back indefinitely before a picture stops being a picture and turns into an arbitrary object'.²⁰ More generally, Alexander writes how

images are images of things, and so in some more difficult sense are thoughts, when they are thoughts of physical things, physical too. The objects of the mind's internal visions are drawn in the lines and colours of external things...²¹

As indicated, there are certain preconceived ideas in what a viewer expects to see, with the mind analysing the lines and colours and, effectively, filling in the blanks. This can be extended to incorporate how an artist or designer can be 'excited by some subject or other' (including 'a woman'), and it is this excitement that 'issues in external action' in how a representation is then made.²² Hogarth's comments referred to in Chapter 1 in respect of the necessary use of the imagination in continuing the *line of beauty* through any breach in its physical presentation reflect this. However, Alexander also maintains

The artist does not aim at beauty; he aims at making an expressive object, and what drives him to do it is the constructive impulse. It is only by anticipation that such an impulse or sentiment can be called the impulse or sentiment of beauty²³

This is a noteworthy supposition in the context of previous considerations, and also because it can only be partially true. If beauty is related to attraction (and vice versa), then the artwork designed specifically to attract for advertising or propagandist purposes, if not created as an entire image that can be construed as "beautiful", will at the very least benefit from incorporating within it constructional elements connected to known considerations of beauty. That this correlates directly with Hogarth's *line* is further endorsed in this artist and theorist's adamant assertion that the *line of beauty* epitomises movement, and it is in this way that a connection can be made to Alexander's requirement for an object to be expressive. When this is viewed in the context of remarks made in Chapter 3, the connotations associated with subject/object expose how that which is expressive within an artwork can be clearly perceived when it manifests in a productive portrayal of a female figure.

In aligning this focus of attraction with the comments on the mechanomorphic framed especially in this section of the chapter, an interesting supplemental link is revealed with particular regard to Hogarth's *line*. When the significance of the *line of beauty* is formulated within a technological context it opens up a new area of investigation that

parallels key themes already contemplated yet specifically places them within a ‘nightmare marriage between sex and technology’.²⁴ The writer J. G. Ballard’s observation of a ‘marriage of reason and nightmare’²⁵ reflects contextual and temporal factors surrounding the First World War and therefore the imagery of both men *and* women pertinent to the time. Hogarth’s previously cited phrase relating to ‘*a wanton kind of chace*’ has been connected to desire via the ‘Wanton movements’ of a viewer’s eye because of the ‘aesthetic motion’ required,²⁶ and this can only be enhanced when that viewer’s imagination contributes to the process. If attraction to the *line of beauty* is linked to a desire within the viewer, then the depth of that desire can also be coupled to the aesthetics of the prescribed time period. As noted in Chapter 5, the substrata that extends from the unremarkable to the pornographic, incorporates within it the abstract and the erotic. This ‘marriage of sex and technology’ encompasses the female figure as an ideal, and machinic stylistic influences—particularly that which is seen within the artworks created by the Vorticists; the relationship between them is the suggestion of desire that manifests within the tangible visual construct of Hogarth’s *line of beauty*. This is significant, whether it is perceived in its entirety or as a visual ellipsis invigorated by the use of the viewer’s imagination, and an expansion of this premise is explored later in this chapter.

‘PAINTED WORDS’

In theorising the aesthetic, the spoken or written word can be employed to examine not only the image but all the connotations relating to the formation of that image; this is exemplified in points addressed in the previous section as well as within other chapters of this book. Examples include the comments regarding defeminisation of the female figure, and the specific titling of imagery relevant to artworks that include paintings by both Saunders and Lewis. History and art-history theorist W. J. T. Mitchell suggests there is ‘a canonical story of purification, in which painting emancipates itself from language, narrative, allegory, figuration and even the representation of nameable objects in order to explore something called “pure painting” characterised by “pure opticality”’.²⁷ Painting—or indeed, drawing, print or photography—may indeed ‘emancipate’ itself from these suggested categorisations, but as has been demonstrated it is reinstated as soon as we analyse, theorise and interpret. Mitchell regards his contention, however, as ‘one of the most familiar and

threadbare myths of modernism...’, going on to assert ‘that even at its purest and most single-mindedly optical, modernist painting was always, to echo Tom Wolfe’s (1975) phrase, “painted words”’.²⁸ It is not easy to conceptualise a life without imagery: images are ‘integral’ to the way in which we communicate, acquire knowledge and in general ‘the way we all represent and understand the world’,²⁹ and in expanding upon this it is worth taking into account the idea that, ‘Despite all that the brave new world of data promises, advertising isn’t a science, it’s still part art and as such its effects remain unpredictable’.³⁰ This is a noteworthy observation, not least because its premise once again traverses the genres of advertising and propaganda, and in addition endorses the comments regarding imagery as an integral contribution to life. The concept is equally as germane to the era under examination in this book as it is to current times: what constitutes “data” may change, but data of some description or another has always been utilised to seek out the most productive ways of directing the viewer to the message and vice versa, as continues to be explored. The gathered information concerning the viewer to whom the message is targeted is combined with tropes and visual constructs recognised as being of attractional value, and fundamentally this incorporates advertising, propaganda and, to some extent, manifestos relating to aesthetic movements throughout history. It is of note to consider this in relation to German philosopher Walter Benjamin’s assertion regarding the reproduced image: Benjamin writes that

*Reproductive technology... removes the thing reproduced from the realm of tradition. In making many copies of the reproduction, it substitutes for its unique incidence a multiplicity of incidences. And in allowing the reproduction to come closer to whatever situation the person apprehending it is in, it actualizes what is reproduced [italics in the original].*³¹

Benjamin’s comments focus attention on fellow philosopher Marshall McLuhan’s premise of ‘The Medium is the Message’,³² and can therefore be applied to how contemporary technological advances alter the means by which information is conveyed and received, if not necessarily the information itself or the concepts behind it. Prior to the First World War, posters (as an example of reproduced imagery) were found everywhere: ‘in the streets, at the railway station, on the sides of buses and trams, in shop windows—almost anywhere, in fact, where people congregated’;³³ in 2016, 71% of adults within the United Kingdom

(those members of the population over the age of sixteen) owned a smartphone—through which information, including pictorial, is distributed.³⁴ In respect of the advertising industry in particular, online search engines and social media are now ‘clawing away great chunks of marketing budgets from more traditional media’, with the result that in the United Kingdom in 2016 more was ‘spent on online advertising than all other media—radio, billboard, press and TV combined’.³⁵ Cultural theorist Paul Virilio makes the distinction between advertising as ‘the *publicizing* of a product’ in the nineteenth century, and as ‘an *industry* for stimulating desire’ as it became in the twentieth [italics in the original]³⁶—although, as has been demonstrated in previous chapters, such differentiation is not particularly distinct. Despite the medium employed in the conveyance of pictorial messaging advancing from a technological perspective, the resulting effect of saturation by imagery could be considered as ‘painted words’ possessing the potential to effectively remain the same. Images related to early twentieth century advertising, suffrage movements and propagandist messaging specific to the First World War, emphasise the significance of the reproduced image in the form of the poster and postcard, with both being swift and effective mediums of distribution—in excess of 900 million postcards were circulated via the postal service in the year leading up to the war.³⁷ Mass circulation for maximum impact therefore incorporates within its data what ‘The seasoned propagandist knows’, namely,

that the uses of symbols must be evaluated against the background of other symbols which compete for the attention of the general public or his selected audience(s). The successful propagandists are those who can get most people to read their own meanings into what is communicated. Thus political propaganda is not so much a matter of convincing audiences about the virtues of the propagandist’s own ideas and policies as an attempt to make the audience(s) believe that what is being communicated is the same as they always thought it was. Successful propagandists also know that one cannot change attitudes without the more or less active cooperation of those whose ideas they try to influence.³⁸

Whilst this illustrates how, in the decade under discussion, and particularly in propaganda, the poster or the postcard formed only part of a much wider campaign, the collusion between the perpetrator and the receiver suggested here reflects how the general public are seldom

influenced by something in which they are not already, albeit to varying degrees, invested. In addition is the contention that ‘propaganda based on truth is more effective than any other’.³⁹ Consequently, whether it is a postcard or poster in the prescribed era, or a present-day smartphone or laptop through which material can be insinuated via social media or online shopping sites, what is demonstrated is how productive such “mediums” as “messages” are for reaching the greatest number of potential propagandees or purchasers. This is further endorsed by Virilio’s observation that ‘the imposition of... “environment”’ becomes of ever-increasing importance,⁴⁰ underscoring the comments regarding the ubiquity of the poster during the First World War versus imagery conveyed directly into the observer’s hand via the contemporary smartphone. Benjamin’s remarks can be further considered as an extension of this, and therefore include the reproducibility of individual components of an image and the transference of the same—be that the pictorial trope of a female figure, or a visual construct such as a *line of beauty*. As acknowledged, whilst the media changes the concepts behind the imagery conveyed (as well as the compositional elements contained within) may not, an aspect examined further later in this chapter.

‘A THEATRE OF PERSUASION’

However, Benjamin comments on the possibility that the ability for an artwork to be reproduced takes precedence over the actual artwork, and in so doing its aesthetic ‘function’ becomes of secondary importance to any ‘new functions’ it may subsequently acquire.⁴¹ This concept can clearly be seen in the artwork as poster: a ubiquitous medium of distribution produced for low cost and efficiency purposes as a productive contribution to the promotion of a service or cause—as demonstrated in First World War recruitment imagery, as well as artworks relating to the suffrage movements. Of additional interest is Benjamin’s belief that ‘*the instant the criterion of genuineness in art production failed, the entire social function of art underwent an upheaval*’; Benjamin contends that ‘*ritual*’ was replaced ‘*by a different practice: politics*’ [italics in the original].⁴² This assertion emphasises how the incentives behind artists’ and designers’ creation of an artwork intended to stand alone as a singular image differ from those that coincide to create a work destined to become a poster or postcard—an artwork that is planned from inception to be a reproducible image and distributed to effect the emotional

responses of as many members of the public as possible. It has already been acknowledged that aesthetic style and pictorial tropes are transferable elements; in addition these artworks are connected by their ‘display value’:⁴³ an artwork has “value” as an original, but the actual values with which the image is invested alters when that artwork is put on display. Whilst an artist’s intention to create and subsequently display his or her work (whether for potential sale or otherwise) should be taken into account, this concept of an alteration in values is particularly pertinent to the reproduced image because these contributors to the wider propagandist or advertising campaign are designed *specifically* to be displayed; their value is therefore assessed accordingly. The message conveyed *via* the medium is similarly incorporated of “values”, ones that derive from the elements contained within, including the text and, equally as importantly, the visual constructs of which the *line of beauty* is an apt example. Furthermore, Freud postulates that if an individual allows him- or herself to be subsumed within a group, thereby letting others ‘influence him by suggestion’, it arguably indicates a requirement within that individual for a compatible association over and above a dissenting one.⁴⁴ Freud alludes this can be because of the influence of the sexual—either from an emotional perspective and therefore classified as “love” or, perhaps more appositely, eroticism,⁴⁵ thereby paralleling the points made in a previous section of this chapter. Freud maintains that the larger the number of participants in whom an observation can be made of their emotional response, the fiercer the ‘automatic compulsion’ becomes,⁴⁶ and in this way the posters as distributing media can be seen to assume ‘the modern concept of public space’, effectively becoming ‘a theatre of persuasion’.⁴⁷ The strength required for one individual to be critical of a given situation is lost to an emotional assimilation, which in itself leads to an escalation of excitement within those responsible for that initial effect upon the individual; the ‘emotional charge’ of the others within the mass therefore becomes ‘intensified by mutual interaction’.⁴⁸ Freud chooses the term ‘libidinal ties’ as a way of explaining what it is that links one individual to another,⁴⁹ thereby underscoring the points proposed earlier regarding the capacity for the *line of beauty* as visual construct to be exploited—not only for its ability to attract the observer but also in how it can be viewed in the additional context of a more erotic connotation. These theories are, however, potentially complicated in a contemporary technological context, because of the idea that there are seemingly ‘clear differences between the public and private space’ and therefore a

dividing line between the areas where individuals do and do not want to see promoted material.⁵⁰ Although it can be argued that individuals form part of a collective when simultaneously connected to the same content distributed through their personal devices, being ‘online’ is still considered ‘a very private way of absorbing information’.⁵¹ There is ‘a sense of ubiquity’ relating to a medium that is public that differs from a medium contemplated in private, with that ‘ubiquity’ consequently being of ‘value’ in itself⁵²—as recognised in the comments surrounding the reproducible image that includes the posters and postcards related to the First World War, suffrage and anti-suffrage movements and imagery relating to advertising. This transference of ideas between differing mediums of distribution, regardless of the era in which they are found, assists in explaining how Benjamin’s contention regarding reproduction remains of interest when viewed in a more contemporary light.

In correlating the points previously made regarding both a ‘marriage of sex and technology’ and the utilisation of new technological media as a method for the distribution of a message, a 2016 campaign for *BMW* cars is of particular interest. The premise behind this promotion is the ancient shell game, whereby an object is speedily moved between shells or cups in order to beguile the viewer as to that object’s whereabouts. In this example the “shells” are *BMW M2 Coupés*, and the “object” is the model Gigi Hadid. It is conceded that there is ‘a certain logic to the concept, even if it’s also a bit leering at heart’.⁵³ This is a noteworthy observation in light of points considered throughout this book, particularly in relation to a viewer’s depth of desire as well as how the female figure of Hadid is uncompromisingly designated as object rather than subject. Furthermore, among the various versions of associated videos uploaded to the internet, more than one tagline asks the viewer the direct question, ‘Can you keep your eyes on Gigi?’,⁵⁴ thereby unashamedly signposting the viewer to the female figure as object and effectively *away* from the subject, even though the subject is the product actually being promoted for sale. Nevertheless, additional interest undeniably lies in how Hadid is herself ‘a savvy social media player with more than 15 million followers’, an exploitable position in contemporary society because of the potential to expand the product’s usual customer demographic and subsequently exponentially increase the ‘pretty good chance of luring young men into buying the car...’.⁵⁵ In addition this particular situation proposes that the line between public and private space may not be as definitively delineated as suggested. Of further interest is how

Hadid's own video uploaded to the internet slightly if pertinently alters the tagline to 'Can you keep your eyes on me?',⁵⁶ immediately allocating control to Hadid, and making her the undisputed "subject"—one that seemingly exists in an environment that effectively dismisses in its entirety the marketable commodity supposedly at the centre of this advertising campaign. This twenty-first century example can be seen to efficiently parallel advertising and propagandist protocols of the early twentieth century via the utilisation of a ubiquitous medium as effective distributor of a message.

DESIRE, IDEOLOGY AND THE REAL

In respect of information, regardless of the mediums employed in its distribution, it should also be acknowledged that ideology is considered 'very capable' in the way it incorporates 'the *real* into itself; it does not invent total lies, but uses reality as its material and simply misrepresents our relationship to it' [italics in the original].⁵⁷ This corroborates points made on the effectiveness of a base of truth, as well as additionally reflecting the concept of misrepresentation of mythical female figures into the arguably real. Whilst critics who contend advertisements are (for example) untruthful, or sexist or bigoted have a genuine point to make, such censure circumvents 'the ideology of the *way* in which ads work' [italics in the original]:⁵⁸ how the viewer perceives the imagery is of more relevance than what the text is saying—what it is the advertised product, service or cause is *really* attempting to "sell", as appositely exemplified in the campaign strategy reflected upon in the last section of this chapter. Baudrillard contemplates how 'simulation threatens the difference between "true" and "false", between "real" and "imaginary"',⁵⁹ thereby emphasising the focused requirements that are necessary for efficient construction of artworks created for advertising and propagandist means. Baudrillard's hypothesis also reinforces the previously cited considerations regarding the inclusion within imagery of both real and mythological female figures in the promotion of a message, regardless of whether or not a *literal* connection between the female figure and the message can be clearly perceived. In addition, Baudrillard's premise underscores how universal declarations including truth and untruth are often arbitrarily given masculine and feminine attributions when it serves the protagonists' purpose. The combination of tropes relating to "truth" and "beauty" reflected upon earlier can also be extended to incorporate

the suppositions surrounding desire: in employing the pictorial to assist in attracting the viewer to the message there is offered an interesting perspective in the idea that ‘desire’ can be considered as ‘a dimension of the Real that remains inaccessible to depiction’—except that ‘Art refuses to accept this prohibition, and insists on depicting desire’.⁶⁰ This echoes comments made earlier, including the conjecture noted in Chapter 2 relating to the female figure as ‘suitable for art and aesthetic judgement’, and is clearly a belief Hogarth subscribed to as it led him to articulate his theories through *The Analysis of Beauty*. Furthermore, it is considered that ‘To possess the world in the form of images is, precisely, to reexperience the unreality and remoteness of the real’.⁶¹ In emphasising the significance of the pictorial in exploiting a nostalgic past in an attempt to sell an alternate future reality, these contentions provoke the notion of a breaching of the boundaries that separate the contexts between the actual and figurative framing of an image, an aspect explored later in this chapter. Supplemental to this is how ‘Desire had no history—at least it is experienced in each instance as all foreground, immediacy’.⁶² The idea that an emotion such as desire is devoid of history is especially noteworthy when aligned with the concept that ‘an ideology can never admit that it “began” because this would be to remove its inevitability’.⁶³ Although this can be viewed from the perspective of comments regarding the exploitation of an arguably undefined nostalgia, it is also a concept supported by Hogarth’s adamant assertion that his *line* was ever-present historically. Hogarth’s own contribution to its legacy is connected to his analysis, documentation and naming of something already in existence, rather than the creation or discovery of something entirely new.

In continuing the line of thinking regarding desire and aligning it with contemporary considerations of the female form, there exists a dramatic contrast to the *BMW* advertising strategy that is demonstrated in the continuing *Dove* Campaign for Real Beauty initiated in 2004, whereby an attempt is made ‘to change societal notions about beauty’ in its portrayal of “real” women.⁶⁴ These women are presented in advertisements for personal care dressed in minimal clothing, revealing figures more accurately representing the diversity and therefore the reality of the female population. This in itself provokes a pertinent question in the context of this book: does this approach depose once and for all the angel from her pedestal, or merely replace the mythical ideal with a more realistic and consequently more attainable female role model. That this is only one example of a challenge to the status quo amidst

advertisers' more "traditional" propositions (of which the *BMW* concept is a definitive example), appears to disabuse the notion that permanent change in strategy will be the industry norm in the twenty-first century. What both these examples highlight is how, whether it is in advertising or propaganda and regardless of the medium *or* the message, the protagonist can 'distract the audience's attention with vivid, suggestive and powerful appeals, so that he or she induces the audiences to continue the persuasion process themselves (autosuggestion)'.⁶⁵ The term 'auto-suggestion' equates with the concepts relating to recognition of a sign or symbol (including Hogarth's *line*) and incorporates the ideas pertaining to a visual ellipsis, all while simultaneously endorsing the idea that there needs to be an element of collusion between the distributor and the receiver. Bryder's proposition that 'Appeals to vanity, greed, being clever and proud' are elements beneficial to the concept of 'auto-suggestion'⁶⁶ are enhanced by the addition of beauty and truth. This premise can also be considered conversely, in that highlighting vanity and greed is a strategy employed in anti-suffrage imagery—and even in satire of the era, as demonstrated in Shepperson's sketch captioned *Our Amazon Corps "Standing Easy"* commented upon in Chapter 4. This illustration pokes fun at women in the forces, not least via the intimation of vanity imposed by the inclusion of the motif of the mirror, consequently undermining not only the *need* for women's contribution to the war effort, but also their willingness and desire in *wanting* to contribute; this approach perpetuates the situation where women are seen to be seemingly at fault regardless of what they do and how they go about doing it. Although it must be remembered such cartoons printed in magazines like *Punch* were in effect preaching to the converted, because of the calculated editorial stance that initially attracts a certain readership to a publication, such negative responses are not restricted to this time period. More contemporary examples lie in reactions to late twentieth- and early twenty-first century visual media including advertising, which is often based on criticism relating to body shapes and sizes, particularly the female body and known as body-shaming. However, 'Since language is a sign, it may be replaced by signs'; consequently, in advertising 'the meaning' is already present, and 'not absent from it in the realm of the ideal, to be deciphered and reached through words'.⁶⁷ A text-less message that involves the female form should therefore be apparent to the viewer, and clearly indicate what it is that female form represents. In further demonstrating how the boundary separating advertising from propaganda can

be decidedly tenuous, it is worth reverting to the Shepperson sketch as one illustration where the “message” is still likely to be successfully conveyed *without* the accompanying text. Conversely, in Courtauld’s cartoon cited in Chapter 4, whilst the image itself would still portray a somewhat combative attitude between the prehistoric male and female contained within it, the nuance of the “separate spheres” analogy would be entirely lost. In complete contrast to these examples, the First World War recruitment poster relating to Lady Macbeth explored in Chapter 5 demonstrates a text-*only* message that explicitly references the female figure yet does not pictorially convey her. As already discussed, the intended message within this example is suitable for its proposed purpose in the words portrayed *despite* this being counter to the quotation’s original context, and yet the connotations provided by the *character* of the cited female figure add substrata that questions the reasoning behind her employment in the first place. This is of enhanced significance because this is not simply demonstrative of a female figure in the abstract, but of a very specific literary female character with personality traits that in themselves continue to provoke debate and which assist in elevating the character’s status from mythical to arguably real. In addition is how this can be observed in the context of the suppositions Bryder notes as pertaining to both real and imagined differences within groups of people and which are exploited to serve the protagonist’s purpose, as reflected upon in Chapter 4. It is therefore worth acknowledging that ‘Image and text can fulfil their functions’ so long as it is remembered that each are ‘material forms and the “truth”, as a material-immaterial structure, must always be written and read anew...’.⁶⁸ This observation is an interesting perspective on McLuhan’s concept of the medium being the message, especially in relation to the representation of a “real” articulated through both text *and* image.

FRAMEWORK

In expanding upon perceptible traces within imagery of both literal and symbolic visible continua and the idea of undefined boundaries, as well as the use of imagination, a further discourse is provoked in relation to a framework. The framing of an image incorporates the literal in the straight lines of the physical frame that encompasses a painting, as well as both actual and metaphorical straight-edge borders of, for example, posters and smartphones within which the image and any accompanying text

sit. Plato's recording of the hypothesis that 'what *is* entirely, is entirely knowable; what in no way *is*, is in every way unknowable' [*italics in the original*]⁶⁹ (a supposition leading into his comments surrounding knowledge and opinion cited in the previous chapter), is reflected in the way framing serves to separate the content from the wider connotations that surround it. This suggests circumstances by which what is contained within is "seeable" whilst everything lying outside can be conversely construed as "unseeable" because of the separation in context. This premise can also be viewed from the perspective of pictorial mediums that collate disparate images or image and text supposedly to create a unified whole, and which is seen in the employment of a stylised female figure in the promotion of an unrelated product or service (Fig. 1.2 serves as an example of this). An additional implication can be seen in the utilisation of the mirror as a recurring trope: the mirror's reflection concentrates elements of imagery into a focused, framed motif, one that sits inside the wider pictorial constructs through which the literal and metaphorical lines need to traverse before they can leach into that which lies outside the wider framework.

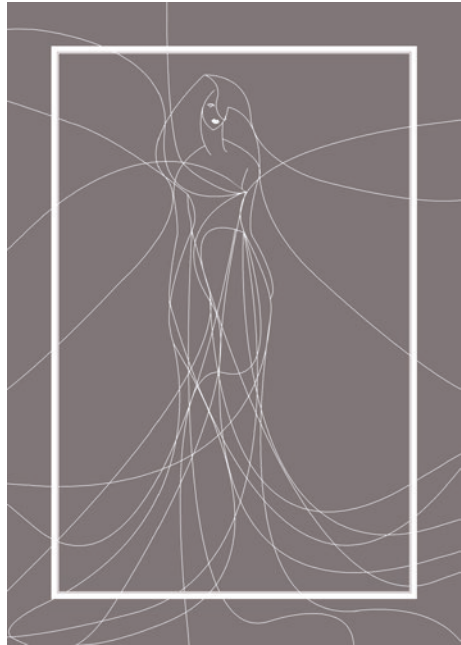
The scenario of the seeable/unseeable alluding to the knowable/unknowable, when related to the pictorial, is of particular significance in respect of the elements included at the time of its construction as intended by the artist or designer. Outside that structure exists the title given retrospectively—often for contemporary analytical or categorisation purposes—as well as when elements of the image are taken for their utilisation in unrelated situations. Saunders' cited artworks both serve as examples of the former, whilst the arbitrary use of elements of *Birth of Venus*, as well as of other real or mythical historical figures, is indicative of the latter. The lines are traversed by tropes as both literal and figurative constructs that speak of more than can be delivered via, and enclosed within, the medium through which they are conveyed, emphasising once again Hogarth's requirement for imagination. The concept that 'form and identity, visual representation and psychical structures overlap precisely on the issues of spaces and boundaries'⁷⁰ relates directly to the contained and uncontained considerations noted, whilst simultaneously applying to the actual and metaphorical framing of the female form. The straight lines and angles of image framing additionally serve to accentuate the curvature of the figure constrained within—curvature that can reflect serpentine "lines of beauty" whether viewed in their entirety or perceived through the context of the visual ellipsis. Interpretations

become unrestrained by any physical thresholds and are therefore subject to disparate analyses formulated by both male and female observers. This can also be allied with the conjectures considered earlier, including that which postulates pictorial tropes acting as Baudrillard's visible continua: the puncturing through lines and boundaries enable a traversing from the seeable where they can be manifested physically, and into the unseeable to consequently insinuate their pertinent trace within an observer's subconscious. Moreover, if the seeable can be considered as representative of reality, then the unseeable becomes suggestive of the promise of an alternate, often better real. The object within which textual or pictorial constructs are enclosed can therefore be construed as a link in the genealogical chain, one from which is emitted the memory traces that serve to connect us to it, albeit often unconsciously. The theoretical ideas considered in this section of the chapter can be translated into the pictorial, and when aligned with the example of the female form demonstrated in both Fig. 1.2 and Fig. 2.1 can be diagrammatically rendered, as illustrated at Fig. 6.1.

There is a supplemental aspect to these concepts when considered in conjunction with Nead's argument that 'one of the principal goals of the female nude has been the containment and regulation of the female sexual body'.⁷¹ Whilst this echoes Clark's assertions relating to order and design cited in the last chapter, the theory can be allied with the idea of control—particularly, who is in possession of it, a male or female. This control can relate to the artist, the advertising agent, the gallery owner, the editor, the State or simply the viewer. Furthermore if, as Nead attests, the female form can be construed as 'lacking containment', thereby allowing internal 'marginal matter' to emit from 'its faltering outlines and broken surface', then the result must arguably be that 'the classical forms of art perform a kind of magical regulation of the female body, containing it and momentarily repairing the orifices and tears'.⁷² Figure 6.1 can additionally serve as an apposite pictorial illustration of these suppositions, whilst Nead further explores such theories when she equates them with Richardson's attack on *Rokeby Venus*. Nead argues that

If the female nude is understood as the transformation of matter into form, as the containment of the wayward female sexual body within the framing outlines of artistic convention, then Richardson can be seen in terms of that pre-formed matter, as the fearful spectre of female sexuality that has to be regulated through male style.⁷³

Fig. 6.1 *Containment*
2017 (© Georgina
Williams)



Along with the supplemental perspective this places on the comments regarding framing, as recognised universal declarations can be either masculinised or feminised dependent on the protagonist's motive, and this can include the actions of a particular perpetrator as Nead insinuates here. Nead suggests Richardson's attack 'enabled a visualisation of this lapse from womanliness in the form of the mad assailant and her decorous victim'.⁷⁴ Assigning specific negative attributes to the actions of this forceful suffragette reveals a circular cause and effect: just as feminine elements (such as female sexuality) have historically been used to both endorse *and* denigrate women, so-called masculine acts undertaken by women are often subsequently dismissed as unedifying, regardless of the extremity of those actions. Women 'are not supposed to express anger, because it is threatening',⁷⁵ and whilst this can be allied with Richardson's actions in a literal sense, it is noteworthy that her specific attack was against an object (and, arguably, an idea), rather than a subject. Nevertheless, in some observers' opinions such actions invalidate women's right to be considered as equal to men.

‘INTERESTING AND IMPORTANT’

Recognisable themes running as genealogical threads through imagery relating to various genres, which include the ideal female form as both defenceless figure *and* empowered goddess, bring to mind the idea that

Modernity greatly expands our access to images of instantly beautiful others, inviting an attitude of neglect toward beauty’s less flashy kinds that escape reproduction by the image. The danger of the mechanically reproduced image, in short, is beauty without history.⁷⁶

Whilst this observation once more acknowledges the varying values attributed to a work of art (regardless of whether that work is intended as an original or designed specifically for reproduction), the final comment adds an additional layer to the theories examined. When considered in the context of the aesthetic legacy of the *line of beauty* as discussed throughout this book, the assertion could be said to be invalid. However, Sontag notes that

moral feelings are embedded in history, whose personae are concrete, whose situations are always specific. Thus, almost opposite rules hold true for the use of the photograph to awaken desire and to awaken conscience. The images that mobilize conscience are always linked to a given historical situation. The more general they are, the less likely they are to be effective.⁷⁷

This reveals yet another circular cause and consequence, one surrounding these suppositions when applied to the context of this book. Historical events may, as Sontag surmises, indicate a base from where our feelings towards certain situations and events stem, and imagery, including photographic, that relates to these events demonstrates how specificity effects the perception of, and interpretation by, the viewer. Atkinson’s comment cited in Chapter 4 regarding a false impression given of the suffragette pageants because the technology of the time produced black and white photographs that consequently erase their riot of colour, serves as a pertinent example of this. In addition is the designation “Canary Girls”, attributed because of the staining of the skin of female munitions workers during the First World War; the black and white photographs recording these women cannot demonstrate this anomaly. However, whilst colour photographic evidence would surely emphasise the courage and

commitment of these working women, such blatant indication of the danger of the work may have served to repel potential recruits and this is therefore, albeit inadvertently, avoided. This is a very specific example of the idea of a conjoining of “truth” and “beauty”: the viewer is required to be attracted to the image in the first place and whilst a true portrayal of a situation such as that surrounding the Canary Girls may be considered as *unattractive* (for the reasons cited above), a visual construct such as the *line of beauty* potentially perceived within the female figure can be seen to serve this purpose. Inciting men to enlist, or women to encourage their men to enlist, or women to join suffrage movements, supporting services or the Red Cross, are all examples of illustrative advertising and propaganda within historical events that indicate how affecting pictorial messaging needs to be if it is to form part of a successful campaign. In this way we can ‘anticipate that when we find objects true or good, it is because a special impulse has been brought into play where satisfaction is the beauty or truth or goodness of the object in question’⁷⁸—with the ‘object’ in this instance being either the image as a whole, an elemental component within it, or combinations pertaining to both. These concepts are as relevant in the era under scrutiny in this book, as they are in the decades that both precede and follow it.

The points considered within this chapter are brought together in an example of late twentieth and early twenty-first century literary and visual culture, demonstrating how genealogical threads significant to the subject matter of this book weave their pertinent trace across the globe and through the centuries. In 1985 Margaret Atwood published *The Handmaid’s Tale*,⁷⁹ a novel exploring how a theocracy has evolved, and because this is in no small part due to perilously low reproductive rates, this new State subsequently strips women of their rights and forcibly assigns fertile women as “Handmaids” to bear the children of the elite. Asked whether she considers the book to be a “feminist” novel, Atwood responds in the negative—if what is meant by this is ‘an ideological tract in which all women are angels and/or so victimized they are incapable of moral choice’.⁸⁰ The author continues, however, that the answer is in the affirmative when considered from the perspective that it is ‘a novel in which women are human beings—with all the variety of character and behaviour that implies—and are also interesting and important’.⁸¹ Atwood qualifies this comment when she reminds us that ‘women are interesting and important in real life. They are not an afterthought of nature, they are not secondary players in human destiny,

and every society has always known that’—yet, as Atwood points out, ‘The control of women and babies has been a feature of every repressive regime on the planet’.⁸² When Atwood set out to write *The Handmaid’s Tale*, she determined to exclude events within it which had not previously occurred ‘in what James Joyce called the “nightmare” of history’, and similarly to rule out inclusion of technology that was not yet readily obtainable,⁸³ consequently making this dystopian novel not only relevant but arguably prescient. Apart from the continuing thread in respect of the rights of women, one key link between this late twentieth century novel and the subject matter of this book is how the female figure is visually presented, and in the specific context of this chapter how that visual presentation manifests as a literal as well as metaphorical framing of the female form. Though a pictorial rendering is not contained within the book, Atwood’s central character—the Handmaid of the title—describes her uniform: ‘Everything except the wings around my face is red: the color of blood, which defines us. The skirt is ankle-length, full, gathered to a flat yoke that extends over the breasts, the sleeves are full’.⁸⁴ Atwood subsequently expands upon the reason for her chosen colour: ‘red, from the blood of parturition, but also from Mary Magdalene’.⁸⁵ Whilst a link to the motif of an historical female figure is employed as justification for the colour choice, Atwood is also clear in pointing out that ‘red is easier to see if you happen to be fleeing’,⁸⁶ a remark that endorses the reality of these characters’ subjugated positions whilst emphasising how colour can possess value beyond any decorative purpose. This is further enhanced when the thread is followed through to the present: the 2017 television adaptation of the novel⁸⁷ elevates the textual descriptions into three-dimensional, full colour representations of the uniforms, including the floor length winter cloaks that perpetuate the enveloping of these women into, effectively, ‘bundles of red cloth’⁸⁸—all physically realised by costume designer Ane Crabtree. This also serves as a reminder of suffrage gatherings cited in Chapter 4 that relate to ‘seeing as believing’, and how being ‘less visible’ can lead to being ‘less narratable’. The novel describes the white wings that frame the Handmaids’ faces; these are ‘prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen’.⁸⁹ Whilst the uniforms are, for varying reasons, vibrantly visible, the women who wear them are effectively *invisible* as testimony to their position in this dystopian society. Nevertheless, the visual endorsement of the descriptive assists in the understanding of what such collective costuming can additionally mean: as the main character proclaims in the

final episode of the television series, ‘They should have never given us uniforms if they didn’t want us to be an army’.⁹⁰ Consequently, whilst the ‘red shroud’⁹¹ of the Handmaids is designed to separate and, indeed, isolate them from other groups within the population, thereby emphasising their very specific status, it also unwittingly serves as a means by which they can become a unified, cohesive group—in exactly the same way the colours of the WSPU united the suffragettes in what is described as a ‘usefulness of “colours”’.⁹² This is not only in relation to how these women of the early twentieth century became allied within this “uniform”, but also in how they were subsequently perceived by people outside of the group, including other uniformed collectives, the public in general and the journalists and photo-journalists who reported on and documented their actions.

These observations of the pictorial distributed via both traditional and new media serve to support the reasoning behind how Foucault’s suppositions relating to the linguistic or literary can be expanded to art forms without negating his original premise: Foucault comments upon ‘The analysis of statements’⁹³ and it is productive to consider these as pictorial, as well as verbal or textual. Such analysis is

historical... but one that avoids all interpretation: it does not question things said as to what they are hiding, what they are “really” saying, in spite of themselves, the unspoken element that they contain, the proliferation of thoughts, images or, fantasies that inhabit them.⁹⁴

In applying these concepts to the imagery employed as examples within this book it opens up the conversation surrounding implicit and explicit tropes, autosuggestion, as well as propagandist meaning behind the message which can similarly be correlated with advertising stratagems. Foucault declares the question conversely being asked relates to

their mode of existence, what it means to them to have come into existence, to have left traces and, perhaps to remain there, awaiting the moment when they might be of use once more; what it means to them to have appeared when and where they did—they and no others.⁹⁵

This, then, corresponds with the specificity of the events taking place within the decade explored within this book, and the use and value that can be ascribed to the elements contained in both the literary (in the

form of this analysis), *and* the pictorial, in the form of what it is this book is analysing—the imagery of the era and the constructional components within it, both metaphorical and literal. In addition it emphasises how each element forms a link captured within a long genealogical chain—a legacy stretching back through the years preceding the period 1908–1918, as well as far into the future to become associated with contemporary imagery and its considerations. Foucault’s comments also provoke further debate in relation to intention and interpretation, with each aspect tempered by hindsight and therefore calling into question the context of the original—not only the way in which it was presented but also how it was received and perceived. As has been considered throughout this book, it is inevitable that, if the discourse within which an investigation such as this is to be situated and subsequently expanded, current as well as contemporaneous theoretical concepts are required for a productive examination to take place. Ignoring retrospective considerations would prove *counter*-productive, particularly when this entire exercise is itself a post-event investigation, and these points are reiterated within the concluding chapter of this book.

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CHAPTER 7

Women in the Frame: To Be Concluded

The feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray writes that ‘Woman ought to be able to find herself... through the images of herself already deposited in history and the conditions of production of the work of man, and not on the basis of his work, his genealogy’.¹ The incomplete female perspective from the visual, as well as textual record, distorts the historical narrative and therefore the role of women within it. Prefixing category headings with “women’s” adds to the multilayers of substrata that create a documented history, yet whilst acknowledging that the more layers that exist the greater can be the depth of analysis, it also arguably complicates the subject by separating women’s contribution from the contribution in general. It is a self-perpetuating issue: a seeming desire to “dismiss” the female perspective from historical, social and cultural accounts forces those who seek to address the omissions to uncompromisingly draw attention to them, when ideally such historical and art-historical records should be considered as an unabridged and cohesive whole. However,

the so-called woman question, far from being a minor, peripheral, and laughably provincial sub-issue grafted onto a serious, established discipline, can become a catalyst, an intellectual instrument, probing basic and “natural” assumptions, providing a paradigm for other kinds of internal questioning, and in turn providing links with paradigms established by radical approaches in other fields.²

To not focus on the feminine in debates surrounding equality in general 'is to deny the specific and particular problem' associated with being 'a human female' rather than male: 'For centuries, the world divided human beings into two groups and then proceeded to exclude and oppress one group', and any resolution to this situation needs to recognise this.³ Consequently, what the addition of an uncompromisingly signposted female perspective can reveal are areas of debate not necessarily previously considered. The discourse that welcomes re-evaluation of established concepts through innovative analytical tools can be reignited—and further expanded in order to include pictorial tropes, as have been acknowledged within the specific context of this book. There is a 'particular conception' that 'history' holds 'the revelation of meaning, of truth, the revelation of the meaning and truth of humanity'.⁴ This is a premise that not only corresponds with ancient ideals of truth and its connotations with beauty illustrative of genealogical links, but also one that underscores the points made in respect of prefixing within the substrata, thereby including *art* history as a way through which historical eras and events can be unpacked and potentially reassessed. Moreover, and as indicated above, the truth can only be revealed if the substrata represents a history that is fair and evenly documented in the first place: although 'the document is not the fortunate tool of a history that is primarily and fundamentally memory', with history being 'one way in which a society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked',⁵ it is the 'way in which a story is told' that 'shapes the perception of its essential meaning'.⁶ Therefore, by telling the story through images, as well as the visual constructs contained within them, a particular perspective on the narrative is revealed. The objective of *Politics and Aesthetics of the Female Form, 1908–1918*, in its exploration of the pictorial representation of women, is to align the textual and verbal documented perceptions of the female figure with the pictorial, acknowledging the discernible threads that weave through the prescribed era and on into the twenty-first century.

As established, Hogarth's *line of beauty* serves as a pictorial trope representative of a visible continuum, one that is attractive to the viewer and therefore of value to the protagonist who chooses to utilise it within his or her artwork. Ultimately the female figure lends itself to a productive demonstration of this *line*; consequently, as long as pictorial advertisements and propagandist material continue to employ the female form as a motif in the selling of a product, service or political cause, the *line of*

beauty will always be present, reminding the viewer, whether consciously or unconsciously, of the attractional value it holds. Hogarth perfectly illustrates how and why this serpentine line is found within the curves of a female form when he writes that ‘the waving line, or line of beauty, varying still more, being composed of two curves contrasted, becomes still more ornamental and pleasing...’⁷ Equally, however, this *line* can be seen in the drapery that conceals, to one extreme or another, the nude/naked form beneath. One theory as to why ‘(male) art’ historically focuses upon the female body, proposes that it is due to the fact ‘*it became the means for the most drastic form of exorcism of the fear felt of women’s sexuality*’ [italics in the original].⁸ This is a thread that can be followed through to the contention that then, as now, arguments as to why women should not be treated as equals to men are ‘fixated on the female body’,⁹ and yet it is also suggested that continuing success of goods and services employing the female figure in one manifestation or another in advertising is indicative of how women ‘readily accepted the masculine fantasy as a feminine ideal’.¹⁰ Nevertheless, although male advertisers can be seen to have exploited ‘masculine fantasies of sexy women’, the same ‘seductress’ in these pictorial advertisements arguably provided women with a perception of their own ‘ideal selves’ as both ‘sexually attractive’ and ‘powerfully irresistible’.¹¹ As a result,

In a culture that valued feminine decorum, her daring expressions of feminine sexuality appealed to the sexual side of women’s nature usually repressed in public forums. The advertiser acknowledged the potent force of feminine sexuality and the desire of women for sensual pleasure.¹²

In this can be seen the circular cause and effect that prevails in respect of how women wanted to be pictorially represented and whether they needed to go against their preferred concept of a so-called “ideal” woman in order to achieve their objectives, thereby ostensibly endorsing and reinforcing the “ideal” that had been formulated and subsequently favoured by the male gaze.

As recognised, the early years of the twentieth century were turbulent; whilst ‘tensions were developing between states... fundamental conflicts were surfacing in virtually all areas of human endeavor and behavior: in the arts, in fashion, in sexual mores, between generations, in politics’.¹³ Eksteins notes how ‘The whole motif of liberation’, be that ‘the emancipation of women, homosexuals, proletariat, youth, appetites, peoples’,

all come into focus at the beginning of that century.¹⁴ It was ‘a unique brand of “new woman,”’ who set her sights on achieving suffrage; ‘First she was coded as an aesthetic entity, then as a political entity, then as a revolutionary entity—inscrutable, foreign, and indeterminate’.¹⁵ Just as journalists searched for ‘a new idiom in which to talk about this unprecedented spectacle of middle-class Englishwoman on the street’,¹⁶ the ways in which she should be pictorially presented to the world became key to people’s perception of the women of that period. However, as acknowledged in Chapter 2 it is an erroneous premise that the word “woman” implies commonality. Because, as noted, for some pacifism was innate in feminism, this was one issue serving to separate women from each other during the early years of the twentieth century, with the First World War making the divide between ‘revolutionary socialists’, and ‘right-wing feminists’ who had been in support of the war unbridgeable.¹⁷ The Representation of the People Act, 1918, which gave voting rights to only a limited number of women, made the progress of a campaign rooted in one single issue unviable and dissipated the unity enjoyed pre-1914.¹⁸ During the General Elections of 1922 and 1923, a considerable amount of newspaper coverage was allocated

to the demands of the recently enfranchised woman voter. Women, as such, had always possessed for the Press a peculiar fascination in which the opposite sex seemed inexplicably lacking, and though their publicity stock had fallen during the wartime preoccupation with “heroes,” it rose again directly after the War owing to the fact that, unlike men, they had inconsiderately failed to die in large numbers. The reason universally given for limiting the vote to women over thirty was that the complete enfranchisement of adult women would have meant a preponderant feminine vote.¹⁹

These observations serve as an endorsement of points already contemplated, not least in that negativity seems always to be found in the attitudes and approaches demonstrated by women: women were clearly visible in supporting the services, they undertook roles traditionally considered as male prerogatives, they encouraged their husbands, brothers and sons to enlist, yet their very survival became another reason to disallow them voting rights that matched the men’s. Brittain expresses an additional, intriguing perspective to the debate when she considers that

Surely, since the finest flowers of English manhood had been plucked from a whole generation, women were needed as never before to maintain the national standard of literature, of art, of music, of politics, of teaching, of medicine? Yet surely, too, a nation from which the men who excelled in mind and body were mostly vanished into oblivion had never so much required its more vigorous and intelligent women to be the mothers of the generation to come?²⁰

Brittain positions these reflections in introspection as to whether ‘marriage and motherhood’ can be integrated with ‘real success in an art or profession’—and if not, which would be the poorer for its loss, ‘the profession or the human race?’²¹ In allying this with a deliberate misrepresentation of women in historical and art-historical narratives a prime opportunity to embrace and consolidate, as Brittain surmises, can be seen to have been missed. Moreover, it is suggested the war left ‘lasting changes’ in the ways in which women viewed themselves and how the image of them was ‘offered to others’.²² A ‘new dimension’ was added to the perception of women—by themselves, by men and by each other: ‘In addition to the expected virtues, women could now claim to be not merely decorative or pretty, but plucky, cheerful, competent, trustworthy and fully conversant with such important public concepts as honour and duty’.²³ This continues the debate as to why these qualities were not widely nor publicly attributed previously: women worked, they volunteered, they raised children—all areas in which their trustworthiness, bravery, competence and sense of duty and honour were demonstrated, yet a much broader societal affirmation, though still required, was unforthcoming.

In fact Brittain remembers the ‘excessive female population’ was consistently considered “‘superfluous’”—despite ‘the teachers, nurses, doctors and Civil Servants’ who made up the vast majority being ‘far more socially valuable than many childless wives and numerous irresponsible married mothers’.²⁴ The latter part of this observation can be construed as somewhat dismissive considering the fight was for the enfranchisement of all women, yet it demonstrates once more the divisions that existed between the various groups. Nevertheless, Brittain makes the point that this so-called ‘superfluous’ female population undeniably included relevant and essential contributors to cultural, social and political communities, and highlights an apparent ‘agitation’ that prevailed concerning ‘the mere existence of so many unmated women...’²⁵ Consequently the

fears and prejudices that beset the emergence of women from the private sphere as they moved to support the war effort reared their heads once more, becoming prominent areas of debate as the third decade of the twentieth century commenced. When war was declared in the summer of 1914 it had, at least to begin with, ‘a remarkable effect’ upon ‘the various discordant factions of pre-war Britain. Political parties, trade unions, the Irish and the suffragettes saw war as a transcendent cause to unify and direct their energies against a common enemy’.²⁶ The cited observations above, however, appear to emphasise that after the war the ‘common enemy’ had become—for neither the first nor last time—women. Brittain remarks on the ‘post-war reaction, in which neurosis had been transformed into fear—fear especially of incalculable results following from unforeseen causes; fear of the loss of power by those in possession of it; fear, therefore, of women’.²⁷ Men were concerned that women’s move from private to public sphere would negate their own position in society, whilst the domestic life historically attributed to females (looking after the home and raising the children) would be neglected; illustrations of the time, particularly in respect of anti-suffrage imagery, bear testimony to this line of thinking. A system of any era that encourages inequality between the sexes assists in allaying such fears, including by restricting women both access and opportunities.

Pictorial indication of these points, which additionally emphasise comments made particularly in Chapter 5 regarding how the absence of a woman can be as significant as her presence, is replicated in three images with more than a century separating them. In 1910, Raven-Hill created a cartoon for *Punch* titled *Re-United* (20 July 1910). Seven men sit around a table whilst an eighth pushes a rolled scroll emblazoned with the words ‘WOMAN’S SUFFRAGE BILL’ onto a high shelf [capitals in the original]. Below the title of this illustration it reads: ‘PRIME MINISTER (*Shelving Woman’s Suffrage Bill*). “WELL, GENTLEMEN, NOW THAT YOUR INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCES HAVE HAD THEIR FLING, LET’S GET TO WORK AGAIN”’ [emphasis in the original]. This relates to a Conciliation Bill of June 1910 forwarded by an All-Party Committee of Members of Parliament which would have resulted in at least some women receiving the vote. Although the House of Commons passed the Bill, it was ‘dropped’ because in November of that year an election was called; as a result, ‘Furious Suffragettes’ increased the intensity of their militant campaign.²⁸ In 1988, a Nick Hobart cartoon was published, also in *Punch* (18 March 1988), one in

which a man is positioned standing at the end of a long conference table addressing twelve more men. The perspective puts the viewer in place at the other end of the table facing the main figure, thereby suggesting the six men situated on each side of the table are only a small number of those present; between the viewer and the image the table can be extended, consequently increasing exponentially the number of men seated at it. The tagline of this cartoon reads “*The committee on women’s rights will now come to order*” [italics in the original]. In 2017 a photograph taken by Ron Sachs swept around the globe via traditional as well as new media, illustrating ‘...one powerful man in the White House watched by seven more’, as he ‘signed a piece of paper that will prevent millions of women around the world from deciding what they can and can’t do with their own bodies’.²⁹ It is an issue relating to women’s rights yet, as the photograph captures and in a reflection of the two cartoons, no women are present as the executive order is ratified.

Whilst the Raven-Hill cartoon insinuates that only token (male) interest was given to the Conciliation Bill, as with the Hobart cartoon it was published in *Punch* which is a satirical periodical. Sachs’ photograph, however, is photojournalism. These examples reflect the observation made in Chapter 4 regarding cartoons utilising stereotypes whilst journalism requires ‘short-cuts and slogans’—in effect, a visual soundbite. Consequently, whilst the three images all relate directly to women, on issues specific to women, they do not contain pictorial representation of women—and in the case of the two cartoons this is undoubtedly the point. The photograph, however, presenting fact-based evidence via photojournalism, could be said to, at least initially, lack explicit acknowledgement of the irony of such a situation. All three images require a caption of one type or another in order for the magnitude of the visual experience of all-male committees negotiating on female issues to be understood. Arguably the only message the viewer can receive *without* the captions from the cartoons and the newspaper reports that accompany the photograph, is the reminder that ‘in a righteous world’ committees would be comprised of equal numbers of men and women.³⁰ Nevertheless, any committee dealing directly with specifically-female issues should surely have the balance of power weighted in their favour, as is expected if the subject under discussion is specific to men. Continually discriminating against women in favour of men demonstrates how repetition of a position can serve to normalise the situation to the point of removing the requirement to question the reasoning

behind it.³¹ Irigaray asks whether ‘a worldwide erosion of the gains won in women’s struggles occurred because of the failure to lay foundations different from those on which the world of men is constructed’.³² This echoes Foucault’s comments cited in Chapter 3 regarding ethics and mores which are ‘thought, written, and taught by men, and addressed to men’, and additionally endorsed pictorially by the cartoons and photograph cited above, inevitably provoking a further discussion as to how foundations can be laid when women are often not even invited to the table and men will not engage in the discourse (‘it has always been so’). Irigaray suggests one reason why the women’s movement was still encountering ‘considerable resistance’ at the end of the twentieth century ‘may be that woman finds herself with this choice: *either you are a woman or you speak-think*’ [italics in the original]³³—an interesting perspective on the either/or conundrum women have faced, and continue to face, as acknowledged throughout this book.

The three images serve to endorse Atkinson’s comments cited in Chapter 5 regarding how only purposively selected cartoons can become part of the debate, an observation that can inevitably be expanded. It is only artworks by women that have been exhibited, catalogued and sold or commented upon in books, newspapers and periodicals, that survive long enough to become a chapter as opposed to a mere footnote within the story—if, indeed, their existence is noted at all. Similarly, in advertising and in journalism related to suffrage marches and pageants, it is only the drawings, prints and photographs approved by editors that become part of the publishing archive. Consequently, in respect of the pictorial representation of women, artworks chosen to exemplify the visual culture of an era—be that in advertising, political activism, state-sponsorship or the fine arts—will be documented based not only upon the archivist’s predilections, but also on what is available to assess, with all subsequent analyses or debate perpetuating the warped historical view. This continuing discourse is reflected in visual theorist Griselda Pollock’s question as to what the relationship is that exists ‘between sexuality, modernity and modernism’; Pollock queries that,

If it is normal to see paintings of women’s bodies as the territory across which men artists claim their modernity and compete for leadership of the avant-garde, can we expect to rediscover paintings by women in which they battled with their sexuality in the representation of the male nude?³⁴

Although the eighteenth century art historian Johannes Winckelmann's 'exaltation of male beauty (and lack of interest in female beauty) influenced museums and scholars for centuries',³⁵ a debate regarding *female* artists and their relationship with the male form extends outside the boundaries of this book. However, Pollock's concern nonetheless addresses a female artist's control over her sexuality in how the female form is pictorially depicted, as well as how she is perceived as an artist, and in this latter respect,

As twentieth-century museums and art history textbooks have defined and revised our ideas of modernism, the work of women artists has rarely occupied more than 10–20 per cent of illustrations in modern art books or of works in exhibitions of modern movements and in installations of permanent collections. This level of presentation, which is also reproduced in university curricula, reinforces the idea that women artists who worked in or around the modernist movements of the twentieth century were at best marginal or occasional presences in the art world, and therefore only of marginal interest in relation to defining avant-garde practice or its politics.³⁶

The Guerrilla Girls consider both aspects—the lack of female representation *and* the prevalence of 'women's bodies' as male 'territory'—when they uncompromisingly summarise the wider situation: one 1989 poster distributed by the group asks via heavy black text emblazoned on a yellow background, 'Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?' The poster replicates imagery taken from Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' 1814 oil painting titled *Grande Odalisque*—'a female slave or concubine in a harem...';³⁷ the colourful portrayal of the original female figure central to the painting is rendered in monochrome in the poster, whilst the fan she holds in her right hand and the draped fabric on which she lies is displayed in magenta. Of supplemental interest is that Ingres created, circa 1824–1834, a monochrome version of this work of art, titled *Odalisque en Grisaille* [*Odalisque in Grey*] which, for the objective of the Guerrilla Girls' poster, could have been replicated without adaptation to serve the same purpose. That the poster image is taken from *Grande Odalisque* and not the later work of art is confirmed by the inclusion of the fan, as well as the bracelets that adorn the model's right wrist, none of which are present in the monochrome version. The fact *Grande Odalisque* is considered as 'celebrated' and 'central to

Ingres's conception of ideal beauty', as opposed to the 'unfinished' and 'much simplified' variant in grey,³⁸ arguably explains why this particular nude woman was selected to make the Guerrilla Girls' point over and above any other figurative example, whether from Ingres' own oeuvre or from the body of work of another male artist. Regardless, the most important difference between the painting/s and the poster is the replacement of the model's head. In both paintings the figure, whose back is to the viewer, looks over her right shoulder directly at the artist (and therefore at her observer) with an expression that can be construed as neutral; in the poster the head is a black and white cartoon rendition of a gorilla in profile, blatantly staring to the right at the headline text noted above. Below this headline it reads, 'Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female'. The majority of this wording is written in black, whilst key elements are highlighted and emboldened in magenta: '5%', 'artists', '85%' 'nudes'. When the Guerrilla Girls reviewed these statistics in 2012, the percentage of female artists exhibiting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art had been reduced further to 4%.³⁹

As already indicated the earlier observations can be extended beyond the Modernist era, and it is also the Guerrilla Girls who observe that whilst art historians and critics always maintain their analyses are constructed on a criterion related solely to 'quality', the result is that such so-called 'impartial standards place a high value on art that expresses white male experience and a low value on everything else'.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Pollock's question as to how one can set about studying 'the work of artists who are women' is pertinent, when the objective is to 'discover and account for the specificity of what they produced as individuals whilst also recognizing that, as women, they worked from different positions and experiences' than their male counterparts.⁴¹ Such an observation throws open the conversation when varying factors commented upon in this book are taken into account: as Pollock contends, women work differently to men, hold disparate positions in society and undergo independent experiences. To one degree or another, this is as true in the era under examination as it is today. Nevertheless, such working practices, positioning in society, and personal experiences are not divided along one definitive line between "men" and "women": within each sex is situated the substrata that differentiates not only women from men, but also women from other women—as has been recognised, there is no categorical 'common identity'. It is the overwhelming lack of

equalising and unbiased criteria that leads to an uneven and inaccurate narrative.

When these points are combined with the comments regarding the female Modernist artist, they emphasise the sidelining in the art-historical discourse of the work of Saunders and her Vorticist colleagues including Dismorr, and how ‘Modernism is glossed and evaluated according to the chiefly formalist protocols of modernist art history’.⁴² As a consequence of this,

much that was politically challenging, aesthetically contradictory, emancipatory, and interdisciplinary in the culture of modernity has been leached out of our concept of modernism as a collection of objects and a sequence of styles. For its pre-war protagonists, the world was a new place, and modernism was a utopian project.⁴³

This serves as another example of substrata within a documented history—art, Modernist art, female Modernist art—and is reflected in the observations regarding Vorticism explored in Chapter 4. These not only describe Vorticism as an avant-garde, Modernist movement that can be seen to have embraced ‘anarcho-imperialism’, but also indicate how universal declarations can be given feminine and masculine attributes, with the feminine usually designated as that which is to be suppressed, despised and ultimately fought against. Conversely, masculine traits are generally celebrated—that is, unless they are observed within women. Furthermore, in exemplifying imagery relating to the First World War, it is not merely that which is retrospectively selected to illustrate the visual ecology of the epoch that distorts, but the biased selection of personnel commissioned to contribute to the genre in the first place. There were no official female war artists at the front line during the First World War, although artists and photographers were among the nurses and ambulance drivers, including Olive Mudie-Cooke,⁴⁴ and Florence Farmborough who worked as a VAD with the Imperial Russian Army.⁴⁵ Clare Atwood, Anna Airy, and Ursula Wood were commissioned to record conflict-related situations in Britain,⁴⁶ as was Knight.⁴⁷ Broom’s photographs, as noted in Chapter 3, straddled subjects affiliated with both the war and suffrage activism, whilst fellow photographer Olive Edis was commissioned to tour the battle fronts but not until 1919.⁴⁸ Consequently, this dearth of ‘official’ female war artists blocked many women from working as artists at all.⁴⁹

The female form in art—particularly the naked/nude figure—does possess a lengthy genealogical legacy, one that contributes to the premise of an ideal woman. During the decade under examination, this ideal is seen to be exploited in advertising, as well as in imagery relating to the First World War. Whilst the manifestos of avant-garde art movements employ the attributes of the ideal woman as reasons to diminish her role within the public sphere, anti-suffrage commentators drew on the antithesis of the ideal in their attempt to discredit a woman's fight for equal rights. Tickner writes that,

If the suffrage campaign shifted from arguments based on equality to those based on difference around the turn of the [twentieth] century (from “justice” to “expediency”), women artists did the reverse. They needed to escape the debilitating attributes of femininity and chose “art has no sex”.⁵⁰

Although the suggested shift within the debate surrounding equality is only partially true (regardless of the methodology, the objective remains the same: equal rights for men and women), the idea of a departure from specifically feminist attributes in the fine arts endorses the comments made within this book in respect of defeminisation and dehumanisation of the figurative. The lack of documented evidence limits fact-based interpretation of intention of artists such as Saunders, whose stylistic preferences may or may not have been informed by a personal political perspective that overrode the basic aesthetic proclivities of Lewis' Vorticist movement to which she was undeniably attracted. In acknowledgement of Pollock's theorising commented on previously, Saunders' untitled artwork known subsequently as *Female Figures Imprisoned* illustrated at Fig. 3.4 serves as just one example of imagery that remains situated within a discussion that is necessarily ongoing.

When the motifs and visual constructs acting as visible continua are all taken into account, their permeation through the substrata of an art-historical archive can be seen to assist in building an alternative perspective on imagery of women. They reveal how the decade in which this book is primarily situated feeds from the art-historical storehouse, incorporates the themes to serve the purposes of political, social and avant-garde aesthetics relevant to the time and, in turn, informs the visual culture of the decades that follow. In respect of a female narrative throughout history,

we may safely assert that the knowledge which men can acquire of women, even as they have been and are, without reference to what they might be, is wretchedly imperfect and superficial, and always will be so, until women themselves have told all that they have to tell.⁵¹

Because women's contribution has been consistently ignored, a complete historical record is now almost certainly lost—despite the aspirations of commentators including John Stuart Mill, whose own veracious and prescient opinion cited above was itself published a century and a half ago. It should be remembered that ‘Culture does not make people. People make culture’, and ‘If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture’.⁵² Moving forward, if the discourse continues to be broadened it will undoubtedly assist in a more equitable balance between masculine and feminine perspectives. By incorporating the pictorial, thereby furnishing future generations of both sexes with an additional mechanism by which a more productive exploration can take place, the continuing narrative will be seen to more accurately reflect the aims, achievements and roles of women, from an historical, as well as an art-historical perspective.

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