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Elizabeth Mansfield

book review of

Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London by Lynda Nead and *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* by Susan Sidlauskas

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Lynda Nead
Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London
New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000
viii, 251 pp.; 68 b/w ills., 15 colorpls.; $35.00
ISBN 0-300-08505-2

Susan Sidlauskas
Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting
Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000
xvi, 230 pp.; 56 halftones, 8 colorpls.; $75.00
ISBN 0-521-77024-6

Taken together, *Victorian Babylon and Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* signal a reorientation within nineteenth-century studies. Both volumes offer a history of nineteenth-century visual culture that is inseparable from a history of subjectivity. Subjectivity, or an individual's sense of his or her own identity, depends upon the awareness of a physical, as well as a psychic, self. Rather than treat subjectivity as a timeless universal experience, authors Lynda Nead and Susan Sidlauskas presume identity to be socially constructed. For this reason, their analyses of visual culture are bound to parallel accounts of subjectivity, which leads both of them to draw not only upon new approaches to art history but also upon methods deriving from performance studies and intellectual history. The history of nineteenth-century art and architecture is conjoined, in these two volumes, to histories of the body, space, perception, and consciousness.

Victorian Babylon defies summary description. As its subtitle indicates, the volume addresses the social, physical, and cultural geography of nineteenth-century London. The city's manifold character-as built environment, somatic experience, social gauge, leisure setting, commercial center, and imperial metaphor-demands an equally multifarious means of writing its history. Nead deploys precisely such an approach. Focusing on sites exemplary for their physical as well as cultural prominence, she offers a series of rich and provocatively intertwined excurses. The city sewers, the Embankment, Cremorne Gardens, Holywell Street, and Temple Bar are among the places Nead examines. To uncover the meaning of these places-and their aggregate significance as London-she analyzes their structures, histories, and functions as well as visual and textual representations of each site.

The complexity of Nead's method is mirrored by the structure of *Victorian Babylon*. The places singled out for close analysis are organized within three thematic sections: "Mapping and Movement," "Gas and Light," and "Streets and Obscenity." "Mapping and Movement" charts the public works that transformed London during the mid-nineteenth century. The various subway systems-and the maps and diagrams necessary for their construction and use-make literal the mid-Victorian tendency to imagine the city as a body. Sewers and water pipes are envisioned as arteries, narrow streets as "varicose veins," the City as "the belly of London," and adjacent districts as limbs, or "members." A major preoccupation of engineers and residents involved rendering this organism healthy. This task required first that the urban body be made visible and legible. Visibility came not only through maps but also via newspaper illustrations and advertisements. As Nead shows, the changing surface(s) of

London demanded new forms of representation. Maps, for instance, increasingly plotted subterranean and surface passages. But to do so coherently, the picturesque tradition of urban cartography (fig. 1) had to give way to new, more abstract means of representation. One of the earliest examples of this new trend in map making was the *Skeleton Ordnance Survey of London and Its Environs* (fig. 2). Here, Nead finds "Simplicity, clarity and professionalism . . . the principles of modern mapping" (p. 21).

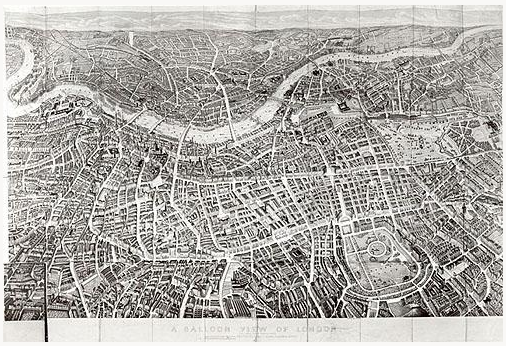

Fig. 1, John Henry Banks and Co, "A Balloon View of London," 1851. Folding map. Guildhall Library, Corporation of London [larger image]

Fig. 2, *Skeleton Ordnance Survey of London and Its Environs*, 1851. Sheet 20, right half (Southampton Ordnance Map Office, 1851). Maps O.S.T. (78). By permission of the British Library [larger image]

Nead discerns traces of this mid-Victorian desire for a legible city not only in maps but also in public behavior. Street etiquette was a growing concern. "Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century hundreds of guides and handbooks to social etiquette were published, with special sections devoted to conduct in the streets" (p. 72). In these mostly anonymous guidebooks, readers could learn proper deportment as well as ways to avoid becoming a victim of petty street crime or, in manuals written specially for women, unwanted advances. "Street etiquette," Nead goes on to explain, "is a complex semiotic system of looking and aversion of site" (p. 73). London's visible language of public behavior could be misinterpreted, however, as Nead shows. A series of letters published in the *Times* in January 1862 illustrates both the intricacies of this semiotic system and the consequences of misapprehension. A father from "the Provinces" vents his frustration at the brazen

advances directed at his daughter while she walked with a female relative along Oxford Street. Readers responded with their own letters. Some suggested that the father must be naively blind to his daughter's flirtatious behavior while others recommended that he limit his daughter's urban strolling to the early morning hours. What these letters reveal, as Nead makes clear, is that residents of London enjoyed a common language of public behavior. And, like any language, its subtle inflections could be easily missed or misinterpreted by visitors to the city.

In a volume shot through with penetrating digressions, the author offers here a particularly provocative detour. In the *Times* correspondence, Nead finds cause to revisit the concept of the *flâneuse*. Since Baudelaire's time, the *flâneur* has personified modernity. Urban, mobile, insouciant, and threatening cultural as well as social promiscuity, the *flâneur* defines modernity as an emphatically masculine experience. Feminist scholars have attempted previously to undermine the *flâneur's* apotheosis. Janet Wolff's often cited essay "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity"[1] seeks but does not find the female counterpart to Baudelaire's icon of modernity. Nineteenth-century social conventions, Wolff explains, quashed the conditions necessary for *flâneuserie*: "The line drawn increasingly sharply between the public and private was also one which confined women to the private, while men retained the freedom to move in the crowd or to frequent cafés and pubs."[2] Wolff insists that "women could not stroll alone in the city."[3] Thus, instead of searching for the invisible (and impossible) *flâneuse*, Wolff urges feminist scholars to expand the scope of modernity and modernist studies so that it speaks of "life outside the public realm, of the experience of 'the modern' in its private manifestations."[4]

Griselda Pollock responds to Wolff's suggestion in her essay "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity."[5] Here, modernity assumes an interior, domestic, and unmistakably feminine character. Pointing to works by Cassatt and Morisot, Pollock argues that the same aesthetic innovations and social tensions that produced modernity in public life also operated within the domestic sphere. Modernity exists within drawing rooms as well as on busy streets, within private gardens as well as in *cafés concerts*, making women, like men, subject to changing social and sexual roles. Like Wolff, Pollock concludes with a call for further scholarly action, "The configuration which shaped the work of Cassatt and Morisot still defines our world. It is relevant then to develop feminist analyses of the founding moments of modernity and modernism, to discern its sexualized structures, to discover past resistances and differences, to examine how women producers developed alternative models for negotiating modernity and the spaces of femininity."[6] Nead responds to Pollock's-and Wolff's-plea but not without first questioning the accuracy of their most fundamental premise: "Women could not stroll alone in the city."

It should be pointed out, though, that when Wolff proffers this assertion in "The Invisible *Flâneuse*," she qualifies it by acknowledging that class played as great a role as gender in dictating social conventions and public behavior. "The real situation of women in the second half of the nineteenth century was more complex than one of straightforward confinement to the home. It varied from one social class to another . . . from one geographical region to another," but she reiterates that "the solitary and independent life of the *flâneur* was not open to women."[7] Pollock echoes this idea: "Bourgeois women . . . obviously went out in public, to promenade, go shopping, or visiting or simply to be on

display. And working-class women went out to work, but that fact presented a problem in terms of definition as women."[8] Pollock goes on to explain this problem: "For bourgeois women, going into town mingling with crowds of mixed social composition was not only frightening because it became increasingly unfamiliar, but because it was morally dangerous."[9] Nead contests Wolff's and Pollock's strict interpretation of social codes. The letters from the *Times* cited above show, she explains, that "contrary to some recent claims, women of the middle classes did not need to be chaperoned in the 1860s and that the whole issue of chaperonage was open to debate and interpretation in this period" (p. 64). Of course, this observation is not sufficient evidence for the existence of mid-Victorian *flâneuses*. A public presence alone does not constitute *flânerie*. The *flâneur* observes without interest, experiencing the frisson of brief, anonymous encounters on busy sidewalks, cafés, and shops. But Nead pushes her reconsideration further, arguing that the correspondence confirms "that girls from respectable families walk unaccompanied in London and that this can provide sought-after opportunities for sexualized encounters with strangers" (p. 65).

Nead offers additional evidence that middle-class women might find-and even pursue-erotic pleasure in public spaces and through brief, anonymous encounters in the final section of her book, "Streets and Obscenity." Here, in her discussion of the erotic print and book industry of Holywell Street, Nead resumes the discussion she had begun earlier. Growing public pressure to prevent Holywell Street book merchants from peddling erotic materials occasioned alarmist newspaper accounts during the 1850s and ultimately, in 1857, a new obscenity law. Nead draws upon the legislation as well as popular commentaries in order to limn the public served by Holywell Street. In one article, the anonymous author frets:

> It is positively lamentable passing down these streets, to see the young of either sex-often, we blush to say, of the weaker-and in many case evidently appertaining to the respectable classes of society, furtively peeping in at these sin-crammed shop-windows . . . guiltily bending over engravings as vile in execution as they are in subject. (p. 184)

Not only does this confirm the presence of "respectable" women on Holywell Street, but it also recognizes their pursuit of visual, erotic pleasure. "The female consumers of Holywell Street are thus figures of tremendous imminence and potency. In a state of constant potential desire, they respond to the images of Holywell Street" (p. 189).

Nead stops short of claiming to discover the missing *flâneuse*. Instead, she calls into question the very category of *flâneur* as well as the definition of modernity to which it gave rise. Citing the writings of historian Mary P. Ryan and cultural theorist Elizabeth Wilson, Nead recommends treating the *flâneur* as a contradictory and fluid representation of modernity as opposed to a fixed and authoritative referent.

> To dissolve the identity of the flâneur is to begin to dismantle one of the central orthodoxies of recent accounts of modernity. It reopens the question of who occupied the streets of the nineteenth-century city and of the experience of that occupation. This allows a re-examination of the presence of all kinds of women on the city streets. . . . Nor were these women necessarily passive victims of a voracious

> male gaze, but they can be imagined as women who enjoyed and participated in the "ocular economy" of the city. (p. 71)

The mid-Victorian construction of masculinity receives more sustained scrutiny in the second part of the book, "Gas and Light." In this section, a history of London's gasworks unfolds alongside an account of the aesthetics of artificial lighting. "Gaslight in Victorian London was industrial and metaphorical; it had an economics and a poetics" (p. 84). The site Nead chooses to exemplify the manifold character of London's illumination is Cremorne Gardens. Cremorne enjoyed a multifaceted presence in the Victorian imagination. Commercial triumph, leisure ward, brazen spectacle, technological marvel: the pleasure garden served as a metaphor for the city around it. Nead finds in Cremorne a microcosmic illustration of the capacity of artificial lighting to transform urban experience. Like that of London, the character of Cremorne changed when the sun set and the gas jets were ignited. Daytime visitors to Cremorne came mainly from the middle classes. Families could stroll through the formal gardens, visit the circus, and maybe observe a balloon assent. Evening fireworks marked the conclusion of the day visit. As families exited Cremorne following the pyrotechnics, denizens of the crepuscular Cremorne began to arrive. By 10:00 P.M. the dancing platform was filled and nearby tables were occupied by "loungers" and "swells." Under the glittering gaslights around the bandstand, men of varying means and status enacted a distinctively urban and modern masculinity.

"Masculinity at Cremorne was confusing and problematic," Nead observes (p. 132). Especially at night. The diurnal Cremorne was populated by middle-class family men or low-wage clerks enjoying their day off. In the flickering chiaroscuro of night, however, anyone who could afford a fine suit of clothes and the single shilling admission price might assume the role of "the emblematic masculinity of mid-nineteenth-century London . . . the 'lounger,' or 'swell'" (p. 132). The instability of masculinity at Cremorne, she argues, was symptomatic of a broader breakdown in class identities within London. If "linen drapers' assistants" could be mistaken for men of "genuine means" in the glow of gaslight, then the very social fabric of London threatened to unravel. Nead contends that this perception underlay a series of concerted attacks on Cremorne. Advocates of temperance teamed with antivice missionaries and local residents succeeded in shutting down Cremorne Gardens in 1877.

For Nead, the masculine masquerade staged at Cremorne is evidence of London's modernity. Urban, contingent, diffuse, and intensely self-conscious, this modernity traces its roots to Benjamin and Baudelaire. Nead's analysis differs necessarily and importantly from that of her predecessors, though perhaps most emphatically around the issue of gender. Masculinity and femininity-like the urban landscapes of Haussmann's Paris or Victoria's London-are deliberately constructed and equally subject to "modernization." But Nead's interest in moments of gender refashioning or instability are not without relevance to her larger study of nineteenth-century London. What the gender, and consequently class, blurring at Cremorne reveals is the destabilization of Victorian culture.

Cremorne, like modern London, was at once reassuringly British and disconcertingly "other." During Cremorne's heyday, the British Empire reached its apogee-a significant coincidence, according to Nead. Embedded within the popular rhetoric around Cremorne

is the language of imperialism. Imperialism depends upon stable boundaries between self and other. As the British Empire encountered moments of unexpected failure-abroad during the 1857 Indian Mutiny or at home after the devastating 1865 explosion of the Nine-Elms Gasworks-the bounds of self and other were compromised. As Nead demonstrates, this slippage manifested itself through cultural forms and experiences that can only be described as uncanny. Freud termed the sensation that fuses comfortable familiarity with alarming disorientation as unheimlich. Underlying Freud's uncanny is the dread of difference, specifically a difference that compromises one's sense of wholeness, of belonging, of one's physical and psychic integrity. Before difference can be safely disarmed as "other," there is a moment *en abyme* during which the previously established categories of self/other, true/false, *heimlich/unheimlich* threaten to collapse, annihilating the self. If neuroses represent an individual's negotiation of the uncanny, then what are the symptoms of a cultural or national preoccupation with the uncanny?

Nead offers Holywell Street (fig. 3) as the site most symptomatic of London's modernization, its increasing uncanniness. Here, contained within a few blocks of old London, Victorian society found a vehicle through which it could confront and repress its collective identity crisis. By the mid-nineteenth century, Holywell Street was synonymous with pornography. A small side street near the Strand, Holywell contained some of the oldest buildings in London. Likely Elizabethan, the shops and apartments had housed textile merchants before evolving into a center for second-hand clothing and furniture during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was during the eighteenth century that Holywell Street became part of a Jewish quarter as well as a haven for radical booksellers. These latter shopkeepers, initially supplying republican tracts and political broadsheets, turned to the more lucrative trade in erotic prints and books. This enterprise was the dominant business by the mid-nineteenth century, though Nead demonstrates that mid-Victorian representations of Holywell Street frequently include references to its varied history. Often, the threat posed by obscenity was linked to the quarter's Jewish past. Nead explains, "The Jewish traders provided the mythic dimension of the place; they were ciphers for the dangerous transactions that were imagined in the dark confines of the narrow lane" (p. 176). In this way, Holywell served as a visible marker of the Other, whether racial or sexual. This association of Holywell Street obscenity with threats to British national integrity manifested itself perhaps most clearly in Lord Campbell's comment on the success of his 1857 Obscene Publications Act. Campbell declares, "This siege of Holywell Street might be compared to the siege of Delhi" (p. 201). As the Indian Mutiny was suppressed, so was Holywell.

Fig. 3, W. Richardson, *Holywell Street*, 1850s. Watercolor. Courtesy of the Museum of London
[larger image]

In *Victorian Babylon*, Nead treats the history of London with the same multiplex and diffuse scrutiny that Walter Benjamin's gave Paris in his unfinished *Arcades Project* (ca. 1927-40). The comparison of *Victorian Babylon* to the *Arcades Project* is, I believe, warranted not only by Nead's archaeological method but also by the book's structure. Although Benjamin left some-often contradictory-notes on the complex cross-referenced structure his study might finally take, the book's ultimate form remained unresolved. Nead brilliantly solves this conundrum. Victorian Babylon's three thematic sections offer a flexible framework for the sites she explores. Then, within discrete chapters, her exemplary sites are treated to diachronic as well as synchronic examination. Like a gridded test trench, each piece of evidence Nead uncovers can be isolated for close study without losing sight of its relationship to her broader project. Finally, not the least of the pleasures offered by *Victorian Babylon* is the clear and unaffected prose through which Nead conveys her sophisticated analyses. With Victorian Babylon, Nead sets a new standard for the scholarly study of Victorian culture and history.

Walter Benjamin likewise plays an important interlocutory role in Susan Sidlauskas's *Body, Place, and Self in the Nineteenth Century*. Sidlauskas takes Benjamin's observation that "the nineteenth century, like no other, was addicted to the home" as the starting point for her study. Thus hers is not the nineteenth century of city streets and public leisure, but rather a nineteenth century defined by middle-class domesticity. Edgar Allen Poe, as opposed to Baudelaire, serves as Sidlauskas's chief guide. Like Poe's "Philosophy of Furniture" (1840), *Body, Place, and Self in the Nineteenth Century* discerns in bourgeois domestic life evidence of broader social impulses and concerns. Interiority, Sidlauskas claims, characterized a distinctly nineteenth-century sense of self. A perception of self that is *contained* psychically, bodily, architecturally, and socially characterizes interiority. In other words, the nineteenth century understood identity as something that could and should have limits. These limits manifested themselves most emphatically-and revealingly-in the literal interiors of middle-class domesticity.

Whereas Poe scrutinizes the parlors and dining rooms of his middle-class subjects, Sidlauskas leads us through a series of painted interiors. She explains that "the painted interior did not function, ultimately, as a sign of safety, but instead became a deeply contested terrain where the very nature and limits of identity were debated rather than resolved" (p. x). Degas's *Interior* (1868-69), Sargent's *Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (1882), Vuillard's *Mother and Sister of the Artist* (ca. 1893), and Sickert's *Ennui* (ca. 1914) each serve as examples of "the pictured domestic interior as a metaphorical vessel for the self" (p. x).

Before addressing her exemplary paintings, Sidlauskas devotes a chapter to the techniques and theories of Henri Lecoq de Boisbaudran. An instructor at the École Gratuite de Dessin, Lecoq filled his studio with domestic furnishings: draperies, chairs, plants, lamps, and so forth. He discouraged his students from giving any less attention to these objects than they would give to the living model posed among them. Lecoq invited painters-and, hence, viewers-to perceive furniture as animate, as replete with emotional or narrative significance, like the experimental Realist theater developing simultaneously. He referred to this practice as the *mise ensemble*. "During the nineteenth century," Sidlauskas explains, "the practice of animating one's immediate surroundings began as material inspiration and came to constitute a mode of configuring identity" (p. 9). Here, she moves to validate the historical basis for her argument. Perhaps anticipating the reader's pause in the face of her assertion that this "mode of configuring identity" is characteristic of the nineteenth century, she avers, "New modes of acting within space are admittedly difficult to identify with any precision" (p. 9). This said, Sidlauskas justifies the historical specificity of her argument:

> Around mid-century, literary descriptions of space, architectural analyses and their accompanying illustrations, pictorial space as it was imagined through drawing exercises, and commentaries on vision collectively defined a moment that would from then on unsettle the relation of body to place, figure to ground. (p. 10)

To support this broad assertion, Sidlauskas tenders the writings of the architect César Daly. His descriptions of a church, for example, as "something living, animated, that speaks to me" are offered-along with citations of Elaine Scarry and Jonathan Crary's recent theoretical arguments-as sufficient evidence for her central thesis. That there are other examples of this kind of writing from the nineteenth century is undoubtedly true-Victorian art historian Emilia Dilke comes to mind as one who used similarly evocative prose when describing architecture-but surely additional examples are required when attempting to attribute a gross characterization to an era as complex and well-documented as the nineteenth century. How does the notion of a nineteenth-century Western European interiority cohere? How, precisely, does it differ from seventeenth-century Dutch interiority? From eighteenth-century French interiority?

Sidlauskas's response to these concerns may be discerned in a theory of representation she argues is unique to the nineteenth century. Coupled with Lecoq's *mise ensemble* was his insistence that artists "represent what they *imagined* as well as what they saw" (p. 15). This "radical position" promoted the superiority of individual creativity and of memory over convention and copying. Lecoq's *mémoire pittoresque* conjoins psychic or creative interiority (the artist's individual subjectivity) to the domestic interiority of his *mise-ensemble* studio practice. While this theoretical framework helps to support Sidlauskas's claims, a further

elaboration of this model-and its distinction from earlier theories of mimesis-would help to justify the author's broad claims. In addition, the influence and scope of Lecoq's mnemonic approach-especially its relationship to Poe's oblique scrutiny and Baudelaire's mnemonic art-deserves more sustained inquiry here.

In her most compelling analysis, Sidlauskas pursues the duplex nature of interiority through a close reading of Edgar Degas's *Interior* (fig. 4). As a representation of domestic space, the low ceiling and precariously tipped floor suggest emotional if not social oppression. As Sidlauskas explains, "It is impossible to establish with certainty *Interior's* class or location, and even the identity, and thus the gender, of its primary inhabitants. This is a room that was 'built' for expressive effect" (p. 25). Like Nead, Sidlauskas refuses a facile association between the domestic environment and femininity. "The usual polarities between the masculine and feminine realms of the nineteenth century, as they are employed to interpret images, must be tempered somewhat. . . . I would add that *men's* interior lives must be considered as well" (p. 26). Indeed, Sidlauskas raises the possibility that Degas produced Interior at "a pivotal moment in the evolution of his own masculine identity" (p. 26). The psychic interior depicted here by Degas, then, maps his own preoccupations with intimacy and sexuality.

Fig. 4, Edgar Degas, *Interior*, ca. 1868-69. Oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Henry P. McIlhenny Collection, in Memory of Frances P. McIlhenny [larger image]

If *Interior* represents a sexual encounter, as the painting's alternative title, *The Rape*, suggests, it is not simplistically aggressive or masculine. Sidlauskas points to the emphatic bourgeois domesticity of the space: the gold-framed mirror, the lamp with its glass shade, the sewing box, the embroidery hoop. *Interior*, she concludes, documents a familial drama rather than the oft-suggested rape of a servant by a bourgeois gentleman. And the woman herself represents-as Sidlauskas convincingly demonstrates-not a particular (classed or named) woman, but Woman generally. The man, then, may stand in for Degas: "His class identity seems at first to echo the artist's own, for he is garbed much as Degas himself dressed during these years" (p. 52). Sidlauskas, however, quickly retreats from this overtly biographical reading of *Interior*.

> If his own sexual preoccupations were implicated-perhaps unwittingly-in *Interior*, the painting's power stems in great part not from its personal revelations, but from the

> fact that Degas gave figural and spatial form to a far more general uncertainty about the nature and appearance of masculine authority. (p. 53)

Here, again, Sidlauskas voices her suspicion of the standard characterizations of nineteenth-century gender roles. With his hands in his pockets and his discarded top hat, the figure bears the iconography of the *flâneur*. "It is as if the ambient *flâneur* has become trapped in the interior" (p. 55). The discourse of modernity has no designation for the domesticated *flâneur*. Like Nead, Sidlauskas demonstrates the insufficiency of previous critiques of modernism. Gender-and class-roles clearly were much more fluid and fraught than generally acknowledged. "While we are not admitted, exactly, into the metaphorical interior of Degas's own sexual anxieties, we are given a glimpse of the larger state on which those anxieties may have been imagined, masked, or, in the language of the post-Freudian age, repressed" (p. 60).

In the subsequent chapter, John Singer Sargent's *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) directs the author's inquiry into childhood as a cipher of interiority. Childhood, like gender or class, is socially constructed and historically embedded. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, children came to symbolize an "essential, original" and immanent self. At the same time, widespread interest in health, nutrition, physiology, and cognitive sciences focused popular attention on children as exemplars of human development, but this preoccupation carried an unsettling correlative: death. Just as children signified processes of growth and maturation, they served as reminders of the inevitability of death. Quoting Carolyn Steedman's *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority*,[10] Sidlauskas concludes that "the conceptions of interiority and loss were conjoined and concentrated in the figure of the child" (p. 64).

Sidlauskas's discussion of *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* pursues some provocative lines of inquiry into the nature of childhood and its representation, but much of this analysis relies upon earlier, published accounts by other scholars. Her conclusions-which come after detailed analyses of Sargent's treatment of each of the four girls, the space in which they are gathered, and the room's furnishings-largely restate the conventional interpretation of the painting: "Sargent shows us the stages of the attainment of the interior life, and of its accessibility. . . . For Sargent, the claims of interiority were perhaps dramatized most intensely in the liminal state of adolescence" (p. 90).

Sidlauskas resumes a more compelling and original stance in the following chapter, "The 'Surfaces of Existence': Édouard Vuillard's *Mother and Sister of the Artist*." In the previous three chapters, she suggests that domestic interiors might be understood as stages on which daily life is both embodied and displayed. Vuillard's painting gives rise to a further elaboration of this theatrical model. With it, Sidlauskas finds exactly the fusion of self and setting that her theory of interiority demands. The complex surface patterning of *Mother and Sister of the Artist* (fig. 5) prevents the viewer from discerning precisely the boundaries between a dress and wallpaper, between a seated figure and her chair. Indeed, the painting suppresses an easy apprehension of a figure-ground relationship. Sidlauskas takes recourse to Vuillard's journals, in which the artist puzzles over "how the self could merge conceptually and aesthetically with its surroundings yet still respond to the unforeseeable demands of

emotion and incident." Sidlauskas explains that "in so doing, he was exploring how the self could be both subject and object" (p. 92).

Fig. 5, Édouard Vuillard, *Mother and Sister of the Artist*, ca. 1893. Oil on canvas. Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Mrs. Sadie A. May [larger image]

This dichotomy proved elusive at first. "Vuillard equivocates about the status of a self that is conceived as inseparable from its setting" (p. 94). Only through the representational model provided by the theater does the artist find his way out of this quandary. By theater, Sidlauskas includes a variety of spaces of performance: the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, the marionette theater, and Charcot's amphitheater at the Salpêtrière hospital. Theatrical convention determines the awkward pose of Vuillard's sister, Marie. Leaning precariously near the left edge of the painting, Marie bows toward her centrally seated mother. Her hands hover strangely by her side, suggesting that she is both steadying herself and preventing the papered wall from collapsing on her. Read against contemporary theories of stage gesture, Marie's pose becomes a legible mark of her strained deference to her mother as well as her confinement in her mother's home, where she lived and worked. Marie's disconcerting appearance leads Sidlauskas to observe that her "disjunct body parts, contracted posture, splayed hands, bobbing head, and lack of fleshiness are not unlike the features of a puppet." Vuillard was, in fact, "an active participant in the world of avant-garde puppetry" (p. 111). Furthermore, a puppet theater with which Vuillard was affiliated, the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, staged performances with live actors behaving as if they were puppets. "Actors' movements were stilted, constrained, and enigmatic." Perhaps Vuillard has endowed Marie with these gestures in order that her individuality be "downplayed to construct a unified whole" (p. 113).

The Théâtre de l'Oeuvre developed a stagecraft that relied on new, cryptic gestures "suitable for conveying an assortment of familial and sexual tensions" found in avant-garde plays like those of Ibsen (p. 115). These strange gestures physically convey the meanings traditional theater would deliver via soliloquy. Sidlauskas argues that Vuillard makes use of this distinct, abstract stage comportment in his depiction of Marie. "Her posture is inchoate. For all the possible anecdotal or psychological explanations, her contraction ultimately demands a different kind of framework for understanding" (p. 117). For this different framework, Sidlauskas evokes not only avant-garde theater, but the performance of hysterics. Witnessed

in the amphitheater at Salpêtrière, the deportment of hysterics was directed by Dr. Charcot, who "would guide his patients through the various stages of hypnosis. . . . A cataleptic patient would sometimes appear frozen in an incongruous asymmetric posture" similar to Marie's (p. 118). Sidlauskas concludes that "Marie Vuillard's bodily configuration offers [a] refutation of her era's conventions of feminine display. . . . The faint signs of feminine identity that Vuillard has preserved . . . vie with the sensation that her bodily presence seems more object-like than human. Like a marionette, she moves under another's control" (p. 119). Vacillating between figure and ground, subject and object, human and puppet, Marie Vuillard and her mother thematize the uncanny. In this way, Vuillard succeeds in representing a literal interior as a metaphor for psychic interiority.

Vuillard's 1893 painting offers, according to Sidlauskas, one of the last successful representations of modern interiority. "The demise of the pictured domestic interior as a metaphorical vessel for the self coincided roughly with the actual devastations of World War I" (p. x) the terminus ad quem of her study. Walter Sickert's *Ennui* (Tate Gallery, London), painted during the first year of the war, marks "the end of the idea that interiority could be represented through the phenomenal world, through a body's charged juxtaposition to a domestic interior" (p. 124). Sickert, though, was a painter of the nineteenth century. He knew and applied Lecoq's ideas. In his own advice to artists, Sickert noted that "a picture generally represents *someone, somewhere*. The error of art-school teaching is that students are made to begin with the study of someone and generally nowhere. . . . I am inclined to think that in good composition, the order of consideration must be from the somewhere, to the figures in it" (p. 130).

Toward this end, Sickert would abandon his studio to paint his models in rented rooms around Camden Town. He found these often shabby-and even dangerous-places evocative of the lives and tastes of the figures depicted within them. Sickert held that "the house where man is born, and is married and dies, becomes his theater" (p. 126). The domestic interior literally sets the stage for a life. Influenced by Henri Taine's social theories, Sickert attributed the development of personal values and aspirations to the vagaries of one's milieu. Despite this, *Ennui* exposes the breakdown of this system. Sidlauskas observes, "There is a disturbing incompatibility between the profound psychological disengagement of the figures and their bodily fusion on the surface of the painting" (p. 137). This tension reflects a change taking place in the conception of self around the time of the war. Home no longer serves as an analog of self. "Private subjectivity was more and more internalized-a vision held privately rather than acted out in the domestic interior" (p. 146). What causes this rupture about 1914? Sidlauskas suggests several contributing factors: the literal exposure and destruction of domestic spaces during bombing raids; the development and dissemination of Freud's theories of subjectivity as rooted in a mind split into conscious and unconscious realms; and utopian programs for domestic architecture that emphasized social order and collectivity over individuality. *Ennui* foreshadows the disjuncture between self and home that would, according to Sidlauskas, come to characterize twentieth-century Western society.

Sidlauskas, like Nead, argues that the nineteenth century usually delineated in modernist literature is incomplete. A more expansive view depends not only upon the scholarly excavation of overlooked sites but also upon a willingness to reconsider earlier conclusions. That modernity developed on city streets as well as in middle-class apartments cannot now

be doubted. Similarly, the *flâneur* must be reckoned as only one (carefully contrived and historically privileged) manifestation of modernist mobility and desire. What Nead and Sidlauskas show is that a more complete understanding of modernism can be achieved only by interweaving historiography with history. The predominant sources on the nature of modernity-whether Baudelaire, Poe, and Benjamin or Wolff and Pollock-have become history. *Body, Place, and Self in the Nineteenth Century* and *Victorian Babylon* remind us that history, like all forms of representation, is simultaneously opaque and transparent.

Elizabeth Mansfield
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Notes

[1] Janet Wolff, "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity," reprinted in *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, by Janet Wolff (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 34-50.

[2] Ibid., p. 40.

[3] Ibid., p. 41.

[4] Ibid., p. 47.

[5] Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art*, by Griselda Pollock (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 50-90.

[6] Ibid., p. 90.

[7] Wolff, "Invisible Flâneuse," p. 45.

[8] Pollock, "Modernity," p. 68.

[9] Ibid., p. 69.

[10] Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority*, 1780-1930 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

Illustrations

Fig. 1, John Henry Banks and Co, "A Balloon View of London," 1851. Folding map. Guildhall Library, Corporation of London [return to text]

Fig. 2, *Skeleton Ordnance Survey of London and Its Environs*, 1851. Sheet 20, right half (Southampton Ordnance Map Office, 1851). Maps O.S.T. (78). By permission of the British Library [return to text]

Fig. 3, W. Richardson, *Holywell Street*, 1850s. Watercolor. Courtesy of the Museum of London
[return to text]

Fig. 4, Edgar Degas, *Interior*, ca. 1868-69. Oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Henry P. McIlhenny Collection, in Memory of Frances P. McIlhenny [return to text]

Fig. 5, Édouard Vuillard, *Mother and Sister of the Artist*, ca. 1893. Oil on canvas. Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Mrs. Sadie A. May [return to text]