Material Memory: The Work of Late Sickert 1927-42

Volume I

Merlin Seller (MSt)

PhD Art History

University of East Anglia

School of Art, Media and American Studies

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Name: Merlin Seller
Reg. No: 100060872
School: Art, Media and American Studies (AMA)
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Abstract

This thesis argues that late Sickert was as significant and complex as the Sickert of Camden Town, and explores the richness of the historically specific ways a major British artist's hitherto neglected corpus functioned. In particular, I investigate the mediation of time and material memory in Sickert's paintings of 1927-42. These works mix responses to contemporary press photography with Victorian imagery from a century earlier at a time when both were loaded with problematic political and cultural meanings.

Late Sickert appropriated both past and contemporary mass culture, but I stress the importance of the material conversion of memory. The thesis argues that in his work 'time' is played with in various material ways – from speed to delay and from the time of historiography to the time of painting itself. Spectacle and remembrance were critically negotiated in the space where the materiality of paint meets the different temporal qualities of its source images. These paintings used the material thingness of paint to reflect sceptically on narratives of Englishness in the 1930s.

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Introduction

Rather than treat late Sickert as a relic or eccentric, there is much to be gained from evaluating the artist as a vital contemporary in the 1930s. This thesis presents new avenues of research into the cultural significance of his oeuvre's strange and captivating materiality, and aims to increase awareness of how these 'material memories' functioned in their social-cultural context. In what follows I argue that Sickert exposes inconsistencies and erasures in narratives of English national and imperial memory through the dry and layered materiality of paint - which I term 'material memory.' This introduction will first situate this project in relation to the literature, before discussing its deeper conceptual underpinnings and my methodological premises, before finally preparing the reader with a structural outline of the thesis.

As an opening into the 'material memory' of Sickert's paintings let us begin with a gateway. This is an image of an estranged Victorian city and the trace of a photograph of Christopher Wren's architecture displaced and rebuilt in 1878 [Fig. 1]. Walter Sickert's *Temple Bar* (1940) is a painting which arrests the viewer and animates the core themes of this thesis: medium, memory and time. Painted two years before his death, this is an image which both scrutinizes historical developments in the City of London, and buries them in a muddy field of re-mediation – the grid of transcription reapplied as a final layer. This is a painting which immediately signals a depth of

historical and cultural resonance and a significant capacity for self-aware and recursive material practice, yet along with a large body of paintings from the artist's late oeuvre it has suffered from a notable lack of scholarly attention.

This art-historical thesis is concerned with materiality and mediation as a strategy of national and imperial critique in interwar Britain. Its object is late Walter R. Sickert's found-image based oil paintings of 1927-42, predicated on the transcription of both contemporary and Victorian press imagery and commenting on the memory work of new technologies. This represents a body of historically unusual images and a period of unparalleled contemporary popularity for a major canonical figure in the visual cultural landscape of 1930s Britain, but it is also an area of later critical neglect. My research focus intends to redress a surprising omission within art-historical scholarship, further contribute to theoretically and social-historically nuanced revision of British Modernism's historiography, and use these images to gain insights into British visual culture of the late 1920-30s.

With the recent conference "Walter Sickert: The Document and the Documentary" (2015), critical interest in revising accounts of Sickert's work has been renewed, and this thesis is a timely intervention into our understanding of a major

twentieth-century painter.[1] My project's historical dimension is complemented by theoretical inquiry and I am interested in Sickert's strategies of remediation, their implications for contemporary medium ontology, and their reflections and refractions of the inter-war period's relationship to its historical past. Sickert's production process, which retains visual presence for Sickert's means of transcription, resulted in paintings which I argue were popular and controversial objects spanning technologies, audiences and time. Thus I both address a hole in canonical scholarship, and further explore the implications of conceptually complex works.

Here these works are sub-divided into two principal branches: Sickert's paintings based on photographic prints and his larger output the *English Echoes*, based on Victorian illustrations, which he began in 1927. These images deserve our attention, I argue, because of what they can teach us about issues of intermediality and temporality in painting.

My intervention stems from the current limits of the Sickert literature pertaining to his inter-war works. Sickert's first posthumous retrospective, organised by Lillian Browse in 1943, delimited the future structure of Sickert scholarship in terms of focus and valuation. Her omission of Sickert's latest

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[1] I presented a version of material from Chapter 5 as a paper at this conference, at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 4 December 2015.

and most experimental work, which she pathologized as the product of "collapse due to old age,"[2] uncritically reflected their initial reception by Bloomsbury intelligentsia, where Vanessa and Clive Bell had seen them as "idiotic," "ridiculously feeble."[3] This legacy remains apparent in Sickert's main monograph writers, Wendy Baron and Richard Shone, both of whom make large acknowledgments of Browse in their work. Their foundational 1970s and 1980s monographs maintain a consistent, traditional art-historically biographical and formalist line, continued in Baron's latest work *Sickert: Paintings & Drawings* (2006).

With Sickert, as with the reception of many canonical artists, late works are either read as ultimate expressions of a lifetime's intent, or an irrelevant postscript, never seen as independent or contemporary as our understanding of them becomes tied to considerations of the author and traditional notions of 'mature style.' Late works are treated as the summation of a preconceived artistic trajectory or narrative, a moment of 'grace' or rebellious 'genius', or else they are elided and excused where they do not fit the frame of the author function, dismissed as the product of 'senility.' In the words of Alistair Smith, Sickert's canvases were "typical of an elderly man whose

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[2] Lillian Browse, *Sickert*,(London: Faber & Faber, 1943), p.4
[3] Clive Bell, "Sickert at the National Gallery," *New Statesman and Nation* 6 September, 1941.

memory is fed by the events of his youth."[4] Such traditional
Sickert analyses are necessarily reductive in attempting a
singular, biographical explanation for historical objects, and
problematically ableist in their negative fixation on age and
mental health.

Scholars' attempts to marginalize these works partly stem
from the discomfiting power of the paintings themselves. For
accounts predicated on the valorization of technical ability and
the creative 'artist genius,' paintings produced from found
images with the aid of assistants and rote procedures are
necessarily disruptive. As Richard Morphet outlines, Sickert has
been disparaged because of a distrust of his apparent
'dependence' on ready-made material and his mechanical method of
transposition. There is therefore an aversion to those works
which seem to write the artist out of themselves, and remove the
traditional markers of artistic genius. Indeed, Baron dismisses
the idea that they manifest criticality or authority, referring
to the Echoes as simple "Nostalgia for the Victorian age of his
boyhood," and of his photo-paintings commenting: "it is
improbable that Sickert's motivation was to create a record of
his own time or to make a social comment. He was gripped by the

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[4] Alistair Smith, "Mr Sickert Speaks: The Artist as Teacher', *Walter Sickert: 'drawing is the thing,"* (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 2004), 25.

way a particular photographic image could capture a moment of
high drama."[5]

    While major scholars have clung to affirming the centrality
of the artist, others have substituted the primacy of Sickert
for the found image as 'origin.' Rebecca Daniels and Patrick
O'Connor have focused their research on tracing and cataloguing
the source material for the paintings.[6] What has been omitted
however, in these fixations on 'origin,' is analysis of how the
paintings themselves operated for audiences.

    Consideration of the works themselves has been rejected for
precisely the reasons that they are interesting in terms of
their function and reception – their problematizing of
ontological distinctions between media, their unusual subject
matter and their invocation of time, novelty and remembrance in
seeming contradiction of modernist narratives of progress.
Browse reads them as "trying to recapture the spirit of an
earlier era whose story-telling morality was by then out of
date."[7] Shone argues there was a 1920s break in Sickert's
artistic capacity, foreclosed by his reliance on mechanical
processes, with instances where his photographic source material

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[5] Wendy Baron, *Sickert: Paintings and drawings,* (New Haven: Yale University
Press, 2006), 120-121.
[6] See Rebecca Daniels, "Richard Sickert: The Art of Photography," in *Walter
Sickert: "drawing is the thing"* 2004, 26 and Patrick O'Connor, "'The Reunion
of Stage and Art': Sickert and the Theatre Between the Wars," in Baron, Wendy
and Shone, Richard, eds. *Sickert: Paintings.* (New Haven: Yale University Press
1992), 32.
[7] Lillian Browse, quoted in Baron. 2006. *Sickert*, 122.

"fails" to become "art."[8] Patrick O'Connor refers to a wide range of art historians when he reminds us "not everyone is convinced by these paintings," and Baron is even moved to a lexicon of obscenity, revealing her distaste for photographic source material – lamenting its "perverse" (read: anti-modernist) desire for naturalistic detail.[9] The procedures and material indifference of these paintings blur definitions between art and non-art for contemporary critics and later historians alike.

This scholarship's proximity to contemporary criticism has obscured the historical socio-political relevance and theoretical implications of these anxieties by repeating them. My project, as a revision, uses aspects of social art history and post-structural theory to attempt critical distance, and explain the plural character of works: "too great to be classified in his own time" where "Few people really like Mr. Sickert's pictures. Fewer still really understand them."[10]

To understand this material, this thesis builds on valuable critical work concerning Sickert's early output. The Camden town works have attracted critically strong interventions from

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[8] Richard Shone, 'Walter Sickert the Dispassionate observer', in *Sickert: Paintings,* Baron and Shone eds. 1992, 9-10.
[9] See Patrick O'Connor, "'The Reunion of Stage and Art': Sickert and the Theatre Between the Wars," in Baron and Shone eds. *Sickert: Paintings* 1992, 32 and Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 120
[10] "Mr Walter Sickert," *Daily Telegraph* 21 July 1924 in TGA Press Cuttings - Sickert, Walter, 1860-1942, id: 170614-1001 and "Mr Sickert's Rise to Fame," *Daily Express* 8 February 1928 in TGA Press Cuttings - Sickert, Walter, 1860-1942, id: 170614-1001

Anna Gruetzner Robins, Lisa Tickner, David Peters Corbett and Valerie Webb, but their approaches are focused on Sickert's pre-war production, and mainly apply social historical and psycho-analytic methodologies to more conventionally 'realist' works read to different extents as documentary. From this discursive interest emerged the Tate's project 'Camden Town Group in Context' (2012), which took the pre-war movement as its object, implicitly recognizing the importance of layering socio-cultural contexts for future Sickert analyses.

Two academics at St Andrews have also begun the process of changing our perception of interwar Sickert in relation to his theatre-based imagery, and his aesthetic theory respectively. Contributing to the Tate project, William Rough extends social historical approaches to cover a span from pre-war to inter-war theatre subject paintings, interested in the networks and tropes of the theatrical scene. The other timely critical foray into Sickert's interwar work considers his writing, part of Sam Rose's wider project on British art historiography and Formalism, and is persuasive in suggesting we take the artist seriously as a theoretician, and respect the aesthetics of the interwar period as a diverse field.

However, this still leaves us with the main body of his late painterly production and the literature remains weighted in favour of the pre-war period at the expense of engaging the increased amount of institutional power, mass media

representation and cultural capital surrounding his work in the 1930s. Sickert's highest grossing works increased their market value six-fold 1927-1928, grossly out-competing the formalist painters favoured by Bloomsbury, the dominant modernist intelligentsia.[11] In the same year, possessing both the titles of A. R. A. and President of the Royal British Society of Painters, Sickert was the focus of three exhibitions simultaneously, while courting controversy by overseeing democratic exhibition hanging procedures and regularly contributing to the press throughout the decade.

In a wider frame, English painting of the late 1920s and early 1930s has suffered from the same dismissal as parochial retrenchment in foundational texts by Charles Harrison and Frances Spalding: "historically curiously rootless," "personal and idiosyncratic."[12] However, art historians such as Corbett and Sue Malvern have fundamentally changed British art historians' prerogatives, shifting critical enquiry into consideration of how and why modernity was being displaced visually in the inter war period, opening up readings of formerly marginalized British paintings. In exploring Sickert's images as important cultural artefacts discussing Englishness across time, I also look at the

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[11] In December 1928 a Christies "market test" drew 65gs for the largest Duncan Grant, while Sickert dwarfed all other modernists on show selling a pre-war work for 660gs. See A. C. A. Carter, "Rise of a 'Modern' Artist - Increasing Value of Sickert's Work - Sadler Collection," *The Daily Telegraph* 1 Dec 1928
[12] See Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939* (Second Edition, Yale University Press, 1994), 167 and Frances Spalding, *British Art Since 1900,* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986), 61.

work of literary and cultural historians interested in diagnosing changes in the English national imaginary in its relation to, and construction of, its past. Alison Light has introduced the concept of "conservative modernity" to help elucidate the multiple aspect of modernity in the interwar era, while Patrick Wright's concept of "Deep England" isolates a key contested area of cultural terrain in discussions of Englishness – the idea of Englishness as a spatial and durational construct.[13]

From these premises this thesis considers articulations of English national memory in Sickert's materiality, situating Sickert in relation to interwar discourses of identity and aesthetics in English national and imperial imaginaries, reading these paintings through post-structural models I develop around my concept of 'material memory.' My main research questions are: How do these works reflect on appropriation and inter/trans-medium practices?; and what can we learn about visual culture and the English national imaginary in the interwar period by thinking through these works? At a fundamental level these questions present key issues in art object ontology - the ontology of medium and the object (transmediation, appropriation and materiality).

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[13] Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso, 1985), 5-10.

Here I am aware of, and reacting to, the recent intellectual turn towards subject-object relationships in recent philosophy and the wider humanities. What I refer to is a varied and wide-ranging tendency - object-oriented ontology, the similar but distinct 'New Materialism,' and the foundational model of greatest significance to my project: Thing Theory.[14]

As Rebekah Sheldon summarises, while object-oriented ontology subscribes to an objective world view in which culture and human epistemology are secondary and epiphenomenal, of particular relevance for my project is its more interesting proposition that the alien agency of objects has been occluded in scholarship by a focus on textual meaning and representation.[15] Recognizing the power and influence of the non-human raises interesting potential questions for the impact of the materials used in human culture. Feminist New Materialism (as a loose constellation of theorists from Donna Haraway to Jane Bennett[16]) has been important in helping to articulate the impact of objects on human identity in a way which helps highlight both the potential diffusion and extension of human identity in the world of non-normative bodies and things, and

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[14] Largely established by Bill Brown in his foundational essay. See Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Things (Autumn, 2001)
[15] Rebekah Sheldon, "Form / Matter / Chora: Object-Oriented Ontology and Feminist New Materialism,' in *The Nonhuman Turn,* Richard Grusin ed., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 194.
[16] Traceable in both cyborg theory's extended notion of the subject, and even Bennett's work previous to that discussed below. See Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: the reinvention of nature,* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and Jane Bennett, *In The Nature of Things: language, politics and the environment,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993)

the importance of matter. In doing so they attempt to avoid adopting the objective scientific rationalism of object-oriented ontologists which treat objects as fundamentally separable from the human.[17]

A tendency in New Materialism, and in particular Thing Theory, is instead to call for the recognition of the strange interface of humans and non-humans, a disruption of hierarchies of subject and object, and a fascination with the relative power and influence of things. When I use the term "thingness," it is not in the sense of object-oriented ontology's realism and its critique of Poststructuralism to which I do not subscribe, but in closer harmony to Feminist New Materialism and the foundational work of Bill Brown. Jane Bennett's highly influential 2010 text *Vibrant Matter,* is a key strand of thought on this topic relating aspects of object-oriented ontology to the wider humanities in order: "to articulate a vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans to see how analyses of political events might change if we gave the force of things more due."[18] As I reflect on in my own work, human agency remains something of a mystery in her account, but needs

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[17] Such as Timothy Morton and Graham Harman who treat objects as distant and discreet things in themselves, hidden from humanity and human ideas. See: Timothy Morton, "Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology," *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2011): 163-90 and Graham Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Peru, Ill.: Carus Publishing Company, 2005), 7-20.

[18] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), viii.

to be de-emphasized in order to recognize non-human animals and things as 'acting' not merely 'behaving'.[19] However, her philosophy is arguably more part of a vitalist tradition which claims to understand the lives of objects, and is focused on positive political outcomes in the present whereas my work remains more of a focus on the social-historical power of things to disrupt human memory in a historical context. Where Bennett has need of "agentic assemblages" of things and persons as expressive and productive of change, in Sickert's quiet assemblages of paint I locate a thingness concerned more with strange persistence.

Bill Brown's foundational essay is more open-ended and explicitly uses the objects of art-historical discourse for its material as well as drawing upon the intellectual inheritance of Heidegger, Benjamin, Latour and others. Brown's 'thing' is concerned with the interface of the human and non-human, their conversation - neither with a view towards objectivity nor the emancipation of the object, it is a demand for a New Materialism which asks: "not about things themselves but about the subject-object relation in particular temporal and spatial contexts."[20] With this my project holds sympathy: Brown's is an argument against the hierarchy of media, against the binary of form and

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[19] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 99-105.
[20] Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Things (Autumn, 2001), 7.

content, and for the material relationships which had become

displaced by a privileging of the text: "victims of the word."[21]

His interest in the 'thing' is also a claim against obsolescence

- an interest, stemming from Benjamin, in the continued agency

of things over time which is deeply resonant with my own thesis.

For Brown, things are both latent and excessive, "concrete and

ambiguous,"[22] and Sickert's material memory asks the viewer for a

similar conversational relationship of subject and object, only

for Sickert the thingness of paint is even more frustratingly

distant than Brown's account might suggest.

My account, cognizant of, but removed from, object-oriented

ontology and Bennett's work thus also diverges from the letter

of Thing Theory as such. In summary, this overview is intended

to acknowledge the wide and varied field in which the 'thing'

holds subtly nuanced ontological and political meanings, and

indicate how my use of the words "thing" and "thingness" are

both less optimistic and less specific to established

definitions. Sickert's late work is not a celebration of the

thingness of paint as vibrant matter, but instead a meditation

on the indifference of matter to humanity, and a strategy of

critical strangeness is both emphatically present and beyond

full articulation in human language. Thingness, in my account,

is the epithet of the alien and non-human, the material both

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[21] Brown, "Thing Theory," 16.
[22] Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," 4.

resistant to meaning and an obdurate presence we cannot ignore. For my purposes, thingness is not so much a vibrant relationship as a friction between subject and object. It is the power of a thing to interrupt meaning. I provide this outline of thing theory as an indication of the intellectual background which helps us foster an awareness of the resistance of the material world to human understanding, but the scope of this project remains both less optimistic about the human relationship to the thing, and less decentring of the human in its social-historical account.

With these interests in mind, there remains one particular human agency which I need to deconstruct before beginning my exploration of Sickert. Moving forwards I will first complete my investigation into the author function in Sickert studies, and then frame this project's constructive approach in the aftermath of deconstruction.

> Sickert's deterioration, however, was far more tragic than the loss of mobility in his hands or even failing eyesight, for it affected his vision and judgment so that *both the man and the artist* entered upon a steady decline.[23]

Having outlined the state of the Sickert literature so far, evaluating its limitations, I want to look deeper into the prerogatives behind this scholarship in the context of the 'author function,' and conclude with an extreme Sickertian case

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[23] [emphasis added], Lilian Browse, *Sickert* (London: Hart-Davis 1960), 50.

study before outlining the structure of the thesis. I will argue
that the artificial limitations of the scholarship likely stem
from an institutional need to structure and delimit 'Sickert' as
the territory of a specialist community.

To begin we should interrogate what we mean by 'Sickert' as
the author of an oeuvre. In its first instance, Roland Barthes'
seminal text makes clear that the author, or artist, is only
available for historians as the objects he/she produced. They
are performative, generated by the reader in the act of reading
for they are not before us physically, and their works are not
direct traces of one human mind but instead the result of
multiple historical factors – even the texts they leave us are
the result of translation, iteration and influence: "a tissue of
quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture."[24] The
artist is a marginal factor among many and impossible to isolate
as a coherent, delineated entity in the face of the multitude of
forces which compose both them and their work: cultural, social,
material et al. Rather than reconstituting a fantastic singular
origin which is proportionally speaking a minor factor if
accessible at all, Barthes suggests we should focus upon the
nexus of reading where an awareness of both the context of
ourselves as readers and the full history of the object as a

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[24] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (1977) reproduced in Harrison,
Charles and Wood, Paul eds., *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing
Ideas*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 143-6.

work is necessary: "a text's unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination."[25] However, while Barthes convincingly demonstrates the redundancy and inaccessibility of the author in comparison to other frames of analysis, Foucault is more thorough and effective in his analysis for examining what we lose by restricting ourselves with the author-artist.

In "What is an Author?," Michel Foucault proposes a flexible and historically contingent model of authorship that fundamentally remaps the position of the 'author' in relation to what we conventionally see as their product – the 'text' or artwork.[26] After Barthes somewhat optimistically pronounced the author 'dead', Foucault's intervention was aimed at explaining the empirical survival of the 'author' over time, and here he will prove most relevant to our discussion. Foucault understood that not only was the literal author a relatively trivial, indeed inaccessible, factor in the genesis of the artwork, but that modern historians use the term 'author' to denote a very specific construct. As a recent historical development, the 'author' manifests as a historically contingent and institutional mechanism of control – a technology better termed an "author-function." This has little relation to the original historical figure and proves fundamental to defining and

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[25] Barthes "The Death of the Author," 147.
[26] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Art in Theory 1900-1990,* eds. Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul, 2003, 949-953.

policing what remains: Homer, historically, was most likely several individuals, and so 'Homer' refers to no-one but constitutes a unifying principle for a selection of texts. Moreover, throughout modernity the author is multiple *within* a text, different voices and moments from anecdotal to reflective to procedural to emotive.[27] Instead of being the generative source of meaning, the 'author' functions to limit it, excluding texts from analysis such as those lacking his signature or 'intention' - and flattening those that remain under the same frame of analysis – policing the authenticity and homogeneity of the oeuvre. The author is used to guarantee the historicity, consistency and value of the work – and crucially this involves disqualifying bad or anomalous works, and allowing for the idea of moral responsibility to be attached to the corpus.[28] While a limiting condition may remain a prerequisite for analysis, attachment to the author in particular is predicated on anxiety: "The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning."[29]

Consolidating Foucault's implications for art history, Catherine Soussloff argues that the 'artist', exemplified in her discussion of anecdote, constitutes a means of structuring time

[27] Foucault "What Is an Author?" 950.
[28] This facet has older historical roots, going back to the means by which transgressive discourse was policed by enacting the punishment on a person for whom the text stood metonymically, Foucault "What Is an Author?" 950.
[29] Foucault "What Is an Author?" 953.

and analysis in a manner which reduces analyses to a grand narrative, a "generic model" biography, the "interpretation of the artist in culture as chunks or 'cells' – units beyond which further examination was unnecessary or in which a certain kind of historical truth was understood to be immanent."[30] Thus the artist/author is invoked as a promise of immediate and irreducible truth, but in fact offers the partitioning and delimiting of analysis pinned to the reductive trope of the artist genius. Soussloff's project is to overcome the transcendent qualities of what she calls the "absolute artist" - who is articulated uncritically in so much art-historical discourse as a supra-historical force, a mind which can perform operations outside of context - and return them to their historically contingent situation.[31]

Therefore, we can assess accounts privileging the inaccessible and irrelevant 'artist', as uncritical, limited endeavours aimed at naturalizing power. No longer present to the art historian, except in works which are all incomplete, historically mediated objects of varied contextual provenance, the artist 'Sickert' is a construct of subsequent discourse at the expense of all other contexts and readings, reducing the object to the emergent phenomenon of an individual who is in

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[30] Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 139.
[31] Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist*, 106-7.

some part *sui generis*, or 'unmoved mover.'[32] However, as Foucault reminds us, to think of these as simply reductive analyses focused on tracing an elusive but real historical actor is to misunderstand: whether knowingly or not, these accounts are repressive, engaged in legitimizing their own discourse whilst governing which meanings are privileged or disallowed.

Art-historical criticism on late Sickert has held on to this ideology and now bears a remarkable homogeneity - at odds with its heterogeneous subject-matter - coming to rely on the author function to structure and limit analysis. Through adherence to a generic artist-centric model of maturity and decline, along with the author-function's overriding prerogatives of authenticity and consistency, innovative found-image-based and procedurally painted late works have been cast to the margins. This is a field where one of Sickert's chief monograph writers has recently trivialized the *English Echoes* as "playful nostalgia" 45 years after 1960s neo-romantics such as Michael Ayrton similarly typified them as "sad squeaks."[33] Patrick O'Connor refers to a wide range of art historians when he reminds us "not everyone is convinced by these paintings,"[34]

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[32] If an author cannot be wholly substituted for by the larger contexts which condition her, then the author must in some aspect be able to act without cause, and so the myth of the author has the quality of the monotheistic divine 'prime mover' in Aristotle's sense, see Aristotle, Book 12, *Metaphysics.*

[33] Michael Ayrton, "An Obscure Person," *New Statesman* 28 May 1960.

[34] Patrick O'Connor, "'The Reunion of Stage and Art': Sickert and the Theatre Between the Wars," in Baron and Shone *Sickert: Paintings* 1992, 32.

and their mixed mechanical and artistic provenance. Consensus on Sickert now holds that his practice was craft-focused, sometimes ironic and egotistically assertive, with a relatively unproblematic emphasis on the strength and virtue of tradition. The unassimilable material of the corpus - the late works - is rejected for the ways in which it disrupts the border of Sickert's oeuvre. Their origins disturb the author-function.

While the late works are often relegated to a position of low esteem, there is a recurrent conceit in the literature that they cannot be ignored, and moreover that they simultaneously possess all the characteristics that make Sickert 'great.' They are not merely extra-canonical - they occupy an ambivalent position. They are both continuations and breaks from several of the artist's traditionally 'consistent' themes (detachment, irony, realism etc.), as well as the most commercially and popularly successful moment in his artistic production.[35] These are works which confuse the narrative, existing both inside and outside its limits, and so appear "disconcerting or bizarre."[36]

Sickert is an artist repeatedly read as paradoxical, yet the critics and historians have assumed a similar set of contradictory opinions in negotiating his late work. Structural characteristics of past critical responses to Sickert have

[35] Richard, Morphet, "The Modernity of Lake Sickert," *Studio International*, vol.190, no.976, July–August 1975.
[36] Richard Shone, "Walter Sickert, The Dispassionate Observer," in Baron and Shone, *Sickert: Paintings* 1992, 10.

internalized aspects of the Sickert 'Legend' in the construction

of a Sickert author-function with which to police the discourse.

Scholars label Sickert paradoxical or ironic, and stop their

analysis there. In Soussloff's terms, this is the irreducible

cell of Sickert scholarship - something which can be indicated

but not translated or explained. To begin rehabilitating late

Sickert's work and moving beyond this "cell," we should relocate

Browse's late-Sickert 'pathology' from the art objects to the

art-historical discourse. In deconstructing the anxieties of

this discourse, we not only rehabilitate fascinating cultural

objects, but also a plurality of potential readings, political,

socio-economic and cultural contexts.

Alistair Smith epitomizes the pathologization of the late

Sickert corpus, terming Sickert's late teaching "typical of an

elderly man whose memory is fed by the events of his youth."[37]

Yet the word 'nostalgia' in interwar England was itself a loaded

term. Our period opens with the largest industrial mobilization

in British history, the general strike of 1926. In 1930s

England, inflation and slump in 1920 left purchasing power a

third of what it was in 1914.[38] Two million were left unemployed

by the war, which constant structural unemployment in a Tory-

dominated interwar period did little to alleviate before the

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[37] Alistair Smith, "Mr Sickert Speaks: The Artist as Teacher," *Walter Sickert: "drawing is the thing,"* (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery) 2004, 25.
[38] Harrison, *English Art and Modernism,* 147.

Depression raised that figure to three million. All this in a country whose shattered national pride, its industrial base, only recovered by the late thirties owing to massive state investment in a war that remained a deeply socially divisive and unpopular prospect until 1939.[39] This was a decade of hunger marches and frozen social mobility, a 'vanishing' countryside and a waning empire. Bound to this socio-economic catastrophe was an emergent discourse on a feared "crisis of civilisation," involving Sickert's circle as it did most of the intelligentsia - this was a period of socio-economic turmoil to which Sickert could not fail to have been exposed. Even Stanley Baldwin took to the airwaves to propagate his theory of economic and cultural Britishness – while eugenics and plural fascisms haunted contemporary literature and organizations.[40] The Thirties constituted a time troubled by the interplay of huge societal and cultural dynamics which manifest only as voids in art-historical accounts of Sickert's late work. Images read as symptoms of bodily decline are better understood as historical factors – products and producers of historical texts and events - and by tracing the contemporary context of these images we begin to see the scope for a much more nuanced and rich reading

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[39] Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars,* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 220-21.
[40] Julie Gottleib, "Body Fascism in Britain: Building the Blackshirt in the Inter-war Period," *Contemporary European History* 20:2 (2011): 111-136.

of an oeuvre which explicitly mobilized historical documents and culturally charged material.

Tellingly, as much as with negative accounts, cases where his late works *are* addressed positively typify enforced readings that neutralize and remove all social context from the images. Here, the uncritical reiteration of contemporary accounts is perpetuated again but in terms of a revised Sickert 'Legend' of artistic authorial power, as Shone first outlines and then proceeds to merely affirm as true.[41] Where Baron ascribes him similar virile will, "more energetic and more inventive than ever before,"[42] it constitutes part of a reading that attempts to suspend his work as a self-sufficient continuity, the use of photographs being the extension of formalist interest in reconciling line and colour.[43] This technocentric and uncritical appraisal is reiterated in O'Connor, who simply sees Sickert on a quest "...to outdo the camera with its haphazard techniques.[44]" But what did this mean for audiences, and what did these technologies signify?

While Baron also focuses on his commercial portraiture, she still argues for the need to sacrifice the English Echoes as "fanciful conversation pieces",[45] repeating the Formalist Clive

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[41] Richard Shone "Walter Sickert the Dispassionate observer," 9.
[42] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 117.
[43] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 122.
[44] O'Connor, "'The Reunion of Stage and Art'" 1992, 32.
[45] Baron 2006, 117.

Bell's attack: "ridiculously feeble...sad squeaks".[46] Even
Morphet's explicit focus on the late paintings stems from an
explicitly 'return to painting' ethos of personal expressivity,
in an essay prompted by 'The New Spirit in Painting' exhibition
of the previous year. Indeed, Morphet makes no secret of the
historical specificity of late Sickert's rehabilitation, citing
his contemporaries' newfound interest in German neo-
expressionism as a motivating force in this re-valuation.[47] We
see, in summary, no place for a full and balanced analysis of
the late 'Sickert' works in a literature dominated by the
'Sickert' author-function

However, even in richer and more nuanced research we
encounter omissions and elisions. The most critically aware
accounts still exhibit the three central problems I've traced in
relation to the author-function dominated Baron-Shone school:
the de-valuing of the late works, the removal of cultural
context in favour of the formal, and the emphasis on the author.
David Peters Corbett's main interest in Sickert lies in his
negotiation of the dualities of modernity – its order/disorder,
its (il)legibility – opening the investigation with his article
of 1998.[48] His attention, however, remains focused on the Camden

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[46] Richard Morphet, "Late Sickert, then and now," essay in Hollis, Marianne,
ed. *Late Sickert: Paintings 1927-1942.* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain,
1981)*,* 8.
[47] Morphet, "Late Sickert, then and now," 8.
[48] David Peters Corbett "Gross Material Facts": Sexuality, Identity and the
City in Walter Sickert, 1905-1910', *Art History* 21:1 (1998): 45-64.

Town period, though he notes that these late works remain the most problematic part of his oeuvre, especially for the connoisseurial and hagiographic wing which reads these as a retrenchment and a loss of technical ability.[49] While Corbett does address the late works in the last chapter of his Tate publication, it remains a point of departure warranting further development. And while Corbett addresses the ground-breaking nature of these images in a more critically aware approach, he reinserts the images into a biographical trajectory of which the 'artist' remains the dominant term, reinforced by a largely formalist analysis that prioritizes Sickert's technical concerns.

Corbett also invokes an implicit teleology, even if he better negotiates the narrative 'generic model' of the artist, reading Sickert as losing a battle to maintain the commanding visuality of the English flaneur.[50] While Corbett invokes the flaneur identity in order to denounce its applicability to Sickert (with greater critical acuity than Shone's negotiation of the term) he finds himself fashioning a new identity for Sickert which imbues his account of the works with much of the same authorial agency, privilege and formalism as the Baron-Shone school. Corbett sees Sickert's late oeuvre as

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[49] Corbett, *Walter Sickert,* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 2001), 54.
[50] Corbett, *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1848-1914.* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 204.

demonstrating "self-consciousness about the claim paint can reveal the world to its spectators,"[51] but more than this, an art about art, with increasing formal interest, a concern with craftsmanship, self and isolation from the world.[52] Corbett allows these paintings their return to the "silent kingdom of paint."[53] Where Corbett remains most compellingly relevant to my analysis, however, lies in his emancipation of "modernity" from Modernism – allowing us to approach an English art form, existing outside the form-oriented narratives of early twentieth-century art, as one which is historically relevant and incisive, and, as Corbett argues, see the modernity of Sickert in his very denial of authorial power.[54]

By widening our scope, contextualizing these images, and grappling with their reception, we can begin to correct these weak methodologies, vested interests, cultural elitism and elisions, and start to question why and how this restrictive discursive formation itself coalesced. With awareness of the economic and social disruption of the period, looking at the ambivalence, tension, and confusion in contemporary reportage, I will investigate problematics in these works, beyond the simple attestation of writers like Daniels that his use of found images was wholly condemned at the time.[55] In actuality, unsettling

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[51] Corbett, *The World in Paint*, 169.
[52] Corbett, *Walter Sickert,* 54.
[53] Corbett, *Walter Sickert,* 65.
[54] Corbett, "Gross Material Facts," 47.
[55] Daniels, "Richard Sickert: The Art of Photography," 26.

examples abound of adulation combined with incomprehension: "too great to be *classified* in his own time"[56]; "Few people really like Mr. Sickert's pictures. Fewer still really *understand* them"[57]; "the portrait *defies analysis*"[58] [my emphasis]. It is from the essential ambiguity, provocation and opacity of works that openly declare their referents and muddy meaning with the material of paint that a penetrating revision should start.

First, however, I shall employ a case-study to complete my analysis of the Sickert author-function and allow me to elaborate on some of my central theoretical principles. A debate at the margins of art history will help us understand the way this development persists, and how it is articulated in an extreme but highly relevant border-case.

An illustration which epitomizes this aversion to the material object in favour of the author-function, is the case of Patricia Cornwell, which effectively reveals some of the shared paranoia at work in both the traditional canon and the fringes of the discipline. Disciplines are constituted by their margins, yet the process that delimits the traditional and the alien is deeply historically contingent. David Carrier dedicates a revealing supplement to his *Principles of Art History Writing* to

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[56] "Mr Walter Sickert," *Daily Telegraph* 21 July 1924 in TGA Press Cuttings - Sickert, Walter, 1860-1942, id: 170614-1001.
[57] "Mr Sickert's Rise to Fame," *Daily Express* 8 February 1928 in TGA Press Cuttings - Sickert, Walter, 1860-1942, id: 170614-1001.
[58] "Two Art Shows," *Daily Telegraph*, 9 February 1928 in TGA Press Cuttings - Sickert, Walter, 1860-1942, id: 170614-1001.

discussion of a fundamental epistemic question of art history in a series of border case studies.[59] How the discipline distinguishes between originality and deviance, he argues, is an unstable dialogue based on the cultural imperatives of the establishment. It is a question of power policing itself at its borders – where new approaches are either deemed to undermine the core structure of the discipline or expand its remit. The 'innovator' and the 'eccentric' are two sides of the same coin that threaten to either despoil the discipline's territory by admitting the irrelevant and populist, or provide fresh approaches admissible because of their use of recognized structures and rhetoric: "Each interpretation must be judged relative to the interests of an interpretative community...There is no intrinsic difference between normal and eccentric art history.[60]" As Carrier argues, the exclusion or acceptance of these accounts has less to do with their internal inconsistency, than with the changing preferences and traditions of contemporary methodologies.

In the Sickert literature, Cornwell's argument - that Sickert and the Ripper were the same agent - inhabits the most eccentric point on the periphery. Her *Portrait of a Killer* has been the subject of both far greater investment and a larger

[59] David Carrier, "Deep Innovation and Mere Eccentricity: Six case studies of innovation in art history," in Mansfield, Elizabeth, ed., *Art History and its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 115-29.
[60] Carrier, "Deep Innovation and Mere Eccentricity," 126.

readership than any book of the academic canon. However, while she is engaged (albeit often dismissed) by criminal historians,[61] her work has been completely excluded from art history. This counter-history of Sickert-the-Ripper stems from a man purporting to be the artist's son, an idea investigated by Steven Knight,[62] but now dismissed within 'Ripperology': the identity of Jack the Ripper is a 'cold case' where cognitive and preference bias have been allowed free reign over a huge body of malleable and unreliable evidence.[63]

This has done little, however, to deter 'eccentric' research in which the legend grew deeper, and by 1990 Jean Overton Fuller was asserting that Sickert himself was the killer.[64] This reached its climax in 2002 when Patricia Cornwell, a fiction writer who also established the Virginia Institute of Forensic Science and Medicine, applied intensive forensics and capital to rendering the 'Legend' concrete – to give substance to the phantom.

Cornwell's entire approach begins with a problem of reading. As with her predecessors, she begins with the treatment of images as transparent documentary evidence. The police

[61] H. H. A. Cooper, "A Review of 'Portrait of a Killer: Jack the ripper Case Closed," *Journal of Applied Security Research* (25 March, 2010), 365.
[62] Steven Knight, *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* (London: HarperCollins, 1976).
[63] Philip Sugden, *The Complete History of Jack the Ripper* (London: Robinson, 1994) pp.1-14.
[64] Jean Overton Fuller, *Sickert and the Ripper Crimes* (Oxford: Mandrake of Oxford, 1990).

commissioner who introduced her to the case had his suspicions aroused by *The Camden Town Murder* [Fig. 2]: "He painted some murder pictures...I've often wondered about him."[65] We may deride such an atavistic response to violent imagery, but the notion that image-making can incriminate haunts Sickert's corpus, and for Cornwell it becomes a point of faith that: "The painter never painted anything he had not seen."[66] For Cornwell the viewing of Sickert's images is both revelatory of the unseen artist and performatively inextricable from violence: "If a jury had seen that, they would have said 'hang him.'"[67]

Cornwell here raises key problematics for the wider Sickert literature. As Morphet outlines, the late works have largely been disparaged owing to misreading of their overt transparency, their seeming *dependence* on ready-made material and his mechanical method of transposition.[68] Where Browse, Baron and Shone fought to assimilate Sickert's mechanical reproduction of source material to ideas of his authorship, and indeed found their material immediacy troubling to the degree that they were often read as indistinguishable from their referents, Cornwell takes this trajectory to its logical extreme in equivocating between paintings and mortuary photographs [Fig. 3].

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[65] John Grieve quoted in Cornwell, *Portrait of a Killer: Jack the Ripper – Case Closed,* (London: Sphere 2002), 12.
[66] Cornwell, *Portrait,* 35.
[67] Cornwell quoted in Fiachra Gibbons, "Does this painting by Walter Sickert reveal the identity of Jack the Ripper?," Accessed 27 September 2013 http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2001/dec/08/art.artsfeatures.
[68] Morphet, "Late Sickert, then and now," 8.

Ripperologists such as Linder, Morris and Skinner use accusations of commerciality and populism to exclude Cornwell from their discourse, her work succeeding in their eyes due to "her reputation, and $6million of research."[69] Art historians, however, address her claims head on at the level of 'seeing,' rather than raising doubts about methodologies and desires that bear similarity to their own. Sickert scholarship comes to reflect literal detective work, and reveal the problematic forensic ontology of the image – both eccentric and accepted accounts read the works as indexical, agreeing that these images are traces of the author and the source. Like the naive view of photography itself that it retains an uncomplicated indexical relation to its object,[70] both approaches treat Sickert's work as means to an end rather than functional material objects in themselves.

In an interestingly resonant case, historian and photography theorist Louis Kaplan deconstructs science and documentary photography at the point where they intersect with 'paranormal' investigation.[71] In early photographic manipulations that probed the limits of the medium, we see

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[69] Seth Linder, Caroline Morris, Keith Skinner, *Ripper Diary: The Inside Story* (Stroud: The History Press, 2003), viii.
[70] For refutations of the 'truth' and naturalism of photography see the work of Krauss, Flusser, Snyder et al, and for an elegant overview Charlesworth, Michael, "Fox Talbot and the 'White Mythology'' of Photography," *Word & Image* 11:3 (1995): 207–15.
[71] Louis Kaplan, "Where the Paranoid meets the Paranormal: Speculations on Spirit Photography," *Art Journal,* vol. 62:3 (Autumn, 2003): 19-29.

ghosts [Fig. 4], however, their genesis (the simple technique of double exposure) was well known to technical and scientific communities at the time. At first glance one would not assume they posed an epistemic threat, but the reaction of the scientific elite grew to excess. Scientists published numerous and obsessive accounts of the origins of these images. Their over-elaborate reasoning suggested a disciplinary fear that science had limits, that its analyses were unable to provide complete accounts of the world: they themselves became paranoid in the form of their investigations, mimicking the conspiracy they felt unable completely to dismiss.[72] Jacques Derrida draws similar conclusions in *Spectres of Marx* concerning theory and politics. His '*Hauntology*' signifies an ontology that approaches paranoia, one that, unable to pin down its object, finds itself dogged by the object's ineffability. In a fascinating inversion of the norms of theoretical practice, academics find themselves inhabiting both the position of subject and object – chased by what they hope to catch – and here the delusional and the sceptical become indistinguishable.[73]

Traditional art history's fragile claims undergo similar stress in their confrontation with the periphery – in their excessive repudiation and its reversion to type in defence.

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[72] Kaplan, "Where the Paranoid meets the Paranormal," pp.20-21.
[73] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx,* Translated by Peggy Kamuf, (London: Routledge, 1994), 170-5.

Baron attempts to foreclose discussion by arguing the claim that Sickert was the Ripper is not debateable but constitutes "fantasy", as she outlines in both her own monograph and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.[74] This damning language correlates Cornwell's account with delusion, and Sickert's biographer Sturgis repeats it in his review of posthumous discourse on Sickert: "an established fantasy."[75] Indeed, other canonical publications on Sickert have largely tended to ignore Cornwell's allegations or dismiss them out of hand, as have art critics, but when Cornwell pursued her investigation to the point of damaging the physical surface of a painting the resulting uproar deployed a language of guilt and atrocity – "an act of irresponsible cruelty ... monstrous stupidity"[76] – that almost mirrored Cornwell's discussion of Sickert: "I saw evil.[77]" At its height Sturgis, increases the stakes to equal those of Cornwell's public pronouncements: "I am prepared to stake my reputation upon the point."[78] In order to secure the object of study and validate traditional art-historical enquiry, the extremes of controversy exhibited by Cornwell need to be excluded, expelled. This is a necessary strategy to defend the

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[74] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 57, and Baron, 'Sickert, Walter Richard (1860–1942)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, September 2004, accessed 25 September 2013, www.oxforddnb.com.
[75] Matthew Sturgis, *Walter Sickert: A Life,* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005)*,* 642.
[76] Richard Shone quoted in Fiachra Gibbons, 'Does this painting by Walter Sickert reveal the identity of Jack the Ripper?,' Accessed 27 September 2013 http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2001/dec/08/art.artsfeatures.
[77] Cornwell, *Portrait* 2002, 12.
[78] Sturgis, *Sickert: A Life,* 625.

limits of the field and prevent this central contradiction - a paradoxical, ironic and maverick 'Sickert' which is multiple but singular - from unravelling. However, in committing to the unstable author function, the Baron-Shone school is trapped, unable to progress or widen their analysis. When Baron affirms that Sickert "defies categorization"[79] she in effect reifies a paradoxical category - the concept of artist-genius as a means of delimiting the corpus. However, the discourse remains haunted by the spectre of the author-function.

Repeatedly, the prodigious but treacherously ambiguous and self-contradictory archives of Sickert correspondence are invoked, a body of material that mirrors the character and reliability of the Ripper letters. Sickert manifests repeatedly as a paradoxical author-function of both hyper-mediation and transparency, yet this paradox is read as definitive, even though it is a circular validation of artistic power. As Sturgis finds in Cornwell's 'Ripper', so we find in Baron and Shone's 'Sickert': "The fact that the many and various handwriting and literary styles of the 'Ripper' letters in no way resemble Sickert's becomes – for Cornwell – an example of Sickert's own devious ingenuity, and a reflection of his artistic training."[80]

When Cornwell compromises the borders of art history, biography, science and fiction she is attacked for making the

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[79] Baron, *Sickert* 2006 p.132.
[80] Sturgis *Sickert: A Life* p.638.

central ontological problem of the Sickert 'Legend' explicit,
his fragile and contradictory function is rendered too bluntly
for art-historical consensus to permit. In 2001 Cornwell
ultimately destroyed a Sickert canvas in pursuit of his DNA. In
a sense, there could be no more concrete a desire to find the
trace of an author, no more paranoiac a process, to find the
artist literally behind the work at the expense of the work
itself. This event was lamented as deviant madness by Baron,
also suggests the often hypocritical paranoia of an author-
centric discourse that subsists on the inference of a
transcendental author and his behaviour from his material
traces: "It's like taking a Caravaggio apart to investigate the
stabbing he was involved in. It's mad."[81]

The image of a painting torn apart is resonant and
evocative as well as symptomatic. Breaking the material work in
an effort to find the immaterial author-function, killing the
object in order to resurrect the author – the material is
destroyed in search of a self-deluding fiction. If the obdurate
materiality of Sickert's late paintings is both part of this
anxiety, and the element elided by the discourse, what would
happen if we made the substance of these paintings our object,
and to what extent can we replace the author-function? What new
historical relationships and affects might we tease out from

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[81] Shone, *Guardian.*

these paintings' material memories, their opacity and their mediation? Between the epistemic extremes of Object-oriented Ontology and the author-function I want to let go of ghosts, and ask wider questions of an extraordinary body of material objects. I have outlined key terms for this thesis, and situated my approach in relation to the literature, but before I begin my close analysis of these painted canvases this section outlines what I aim to achieve in light of the problematics exposed by the Sickert author-function and the material thingness of these paintings. I here want to make a case for the humble aims of this thesis, with an awareness of the problematic terrain in which it intervenes.

My aim is not to comprehensively account for these objects, or present a unifying function for them, but rather to open up aspects of their significance which have previously been overlooked. Where previous accounts have attempted to master Sickert's material, to marshal it under a totalizing explanation, I will be both more restrained and more tactical in my approach. It is my hope that this thesis will achieve two aims: one, to extend scholarly interest to Sickert's late work such that it may be considered on a par with, and as significant as, Sickert's earlier work; two, to be sufficiently disruptive as to help Sickert's paintings refer us to a greater number of contemporary and theoretical contexts.

Having deconstructed their maker, I continue to write about the outputs of the 'Sickert' author-function construct. Establishing the 'how' and 'why' of this problematic has led me to consider what kind of compromises an art historian must make, and here I attempt to locate a kind of working art-historical frame through which I can better understand my own process, through the model of the material encounter, or conversation. Here I will first outline the issue I need to resolve and begin situating it in historiography, then I will consider alternatives and their critiques, before using my own reading of semiotics to better understand and contextualise the systemic nature of obstacles I've encountered in the process of writing.

My material is delimited conservatively, and this I would like to justify. If the category of 'artist' is to a degree suspect, then why am I writing under the rubric of 'late Sickert'? What are the implications of a deconstructed 'Sickert' for writing in the field? Why am I interested in these images, and not others? In working towards answering these interrelated questions, I will consider the implications of semiotics and the opportunities opened by a turn to materiality.

In his incisive meta-historiographical mode, James Elkins looks in depth at the feasibility of "Art History" in the aftermath of Poststructuralism. In *Stories of Art* he argues that the idea of a fair, representative and proportional art history is an illusory goal that falters on practical grounds whenever

it approaches execution.[82] He observes how empirically projects aiming to revise art History have the tendency to reaffirm the canon, and goes on to hypothesise "perfect stories of art" which in his account continually prove unsatisfactory. With each theoretical or methodological innovation in art-historical writing, the basic underlying structures of style, culture and period problematically persist – interventions in gender studies for example, which suggest the need for a radical overhaul of the canon, augment rather than replace the old sequences and assumptions of art history.[83]

However, one of Elkins' explicit aims and key assumptions is to investigate the idea of a totalizing account, a 'Perfect Story' or survey text. The issue he encounters is arguably the contradictions inherent in the idea of a 'total' account of any field. When trying to assimilate a diverse and nebulous constellation of objects, such as world art, any unifying account will necessarily be reductive. This thesis, however, neither attempts to be a survey text of art history in the aftermath of the 'author function', no a comprehensive monograph on Sickert.

Yet, after the deconstruction of the author-function, what is 'Sickert'? What am I looking at and how? Here is an aspect of what Elkins gestures to is a wider problem in academia after the

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[82] James Elkins, *Stories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 117-152.
[83] Elkins, *Stories,* 121.

advent of deconstruction, that while many contemporary texts treat metanarratives with scepticism, being aware of the problematic models in your discipline is different from eradicating them, and necessarily a limited strategy.[84] Our implicit concept of art history writing, even after decades of post-structural intervention, is still largely predicated on an implicit notion of the 'Zeitgeist': a particular art object is commonly read as indicative of wider discourses at its time of reception. To paraphrase W. J. T. Mitchell, art history has yet to distinguish and define a theory of coincidence as distinct from causality.[85] Without such a distinction the contingency of objects and their interpretation is open to a wide range of open approaches, but this is an observation Mitchell finds to be widely left out of consideration. To what extent, then, do I de-construct Sickert merely to con-struct my own grouping, and to what extent is this a more secure foundation?

Considered from another angle: what unifying criterion for material under analysis is beyond reproach? Elkins explores many hypothetical alternatives for survey texts on global art history, but in questioning general approaches his critiques are equally relevant for specific art-historical investigations which take general principles for granted. First he proposes art

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[84] Elkins, *Stories,* 129.
[85] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011)*,* 20-22.

history which side-steps all narratives – a visual essay without annotation, or a grouping by theme – and argues that avoiding the problem does nothing to combat it.[86] The stories are merely forced into hiding – by not providing a narrative, such approaches leave a space into which falls a conventional/normative meta-narrative. Elkins next considers a strict chronological approach, but encounters Mitchell's problem of coincidence – strictly grouping all object production globally by year leads to correlation without necessarily causation, and still defers the problem of how to balance accounts of different kinds of object.[87] Elkins moves on to consider the implications of using the length of historical time as the measure of history – treating periods proportional to each other considering the fraction of human time they spanned.[88] Granted this appears to be more of a problem for survey texts than specific lines of enquiry like mine, but the result is the virtual elimination of any justification for publishing more than a footnote on modern art, and my span of 1927-1942 would disappear in an art history which seriously embraced 300,000 years.

In summary, the implications are that in considering this material I can neither avoid mentioning Sickert and canonical

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[86] Elkins, *Stories,* 132.
[87] Elkins, *Stories,* 133.
[88] Elkins, *Stories,* 138.

art history, nor effectively delimit or justify my material by a temporal frame, which in any event is predicated on a biographical principle. Thematic selection of material would also seem to falter on the grounds of Elkins first thought-experiment. According to his argument this still hides biases in the selection of material, but lacks the situational awareness of a chronology. If I were to re-define my thesis along the lines of materiality and memory in British visual culture of the 1930s, the inclusion of 'Sickert' paintings would be a disproportionate privileging of fine art. For Elkins, as general good practice in academia would also attest, the best we can hope for is to make a beginning with the admission of our interests and the limitations of our methodology going forwards. No methodology is without its limits, just as no lines drawn in history are beyond doubt.

What, then, do we address when we encounter the paintings themselves, what properties are there that might unite the material in a new way? The physical nature of the paint surface in each of the paintings I consider does impart to them a singularity which asks questions of the viewer. While some fiction authors would sooner destroy the material works and focus on an immaterial construct, these objects were made of material and they have lived through, and been shaped by, time. After all is said and done, these paintings 'exist' and they exist through being used and observed. Images imply absences,

they have lacks, desires, and in Mitchell's words "want."[89] By existing in a state of perpetually incomplete explanation, as things which can never be fully comprehended yet fascinate us, they make entreaties of the viewer. They beg to be 'answered,' and from this point I would like to begin.

Constraints are necessary for understanding an object, and as Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson remind us, there are strategic limitations to the removal of the author-function.[90] To reach a working resolution, I now want to consider the methodological issues semiotics has raised, and approach some of the limits and potentials of history writing constructively. A central problem to be found in isolating a group of materials for analysis lies in the fundamental decision of which materials explain them, and which other materials they explain. The implications here are twofold. Firstly, they highlight the problem of prioritizing an object for study – why does a text explain an image and not vice versa? This is a problem at the heart of Elkin's analysis – painting has a negligible cultural footprint in terms of reception when compared to mass media and utilitarian objects. Secondly my problematic raises the problem of sufficiency – how many texts/images/objects are both necessary and sufficient to provide us with an explanation of a painting? For my thesis the

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[89] Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 28-57.
[90] Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History: A Discussion of context and Senders (1991)," in *The Art of Art History A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 264.

problems are these: why do I explain paintings with reference to their sources rather than vice versa, and what would be a sufficient frame of reference for discussing these paintings if their maker is reduced to a secondary factor.

Bal and Bryson persuasively argue that the answer is contingent upon academic convention. 'Context' implies a problematic hierarchy of material, of 'text' and 'context.' They argue *a fortiori* that each text is no simpler than the text which it is made to explain.[91] Implicitly invoking the principle of Vagueness[92] from analytic philosophy, they note that every context has its own set of contexts in a regressive series, each level vital in understanding the preceding, and so on *ad infinitum*.[93] The only limit we can impose by which we can halt this infinite regress is contingent upon our mode of analysis, if not in an *a priori* sense arbitrary. *A posteriori*, whether explicitly or not, it is a negotiation with both the art historian's audience and the art historian's object.

At this juncture, it is worth returning to Elkins, who poignantly argues that alternatives to traditional stories of art, alternatives to the white euro-centric canon, do not exist in radical form because no-one *can* write a perfect history. We

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[91] Bal and Bryson "Semiotics and Art History," 256.
[92] Vagueness is best illustrated by the following thought-experiment: consider a mound of sand, remove one grain at a time, at which point does the aggregate of sand cease to be a mound? See "Vagueness," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed 10 December 2013, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/vagueness/.
[93] Bal and Bryson "Semiotics and Art History," 257.

are too vested in our current culture to think completely

outside of it, and our current culture still treats many

problematic constructs as its only points of reference.[94] We

neither escape culture, nor translate that which is too alien to

us. Any intelligible art history has to take a known but

problematic model as its basis for saying something new, or else

ostracize itself from its readers. This problem is not just one

of institutional power – the policing of the discipline, of what

is (in)admissible - but also a fundamental problem of living in

history and attempting to grasp it at the same time. To write

involves a denial of history, to situate in history precludes

the viability of writing. Indeed, it is this context, the moment

of writing, where Bal and Bryson finally arrive: "to use

'context' not as a legislative idea but as a means that helps

'us' to locate ourselves instead of bracketing out our own

positionalities from the accounts we make."[95]

The position of ambivalence, indecision and inactivity

which can result from attempts to rationalize the preconditions

of historical inquiry, can be overcome through contesting the

all-or-nothing assumptions 'total' explanations and 'perfect'

stories make. If we wish to 'encounter' and learn about our

relationship to an object, rather than 'master' it, the task

becomes a conversation on the significance of these paintings,

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[94] Elkins, *Stories,* 147-8.
[95] Bal and Bryson "Semiotics and Art History," 252.

rather than a dictation. In admission of our own position, and the otherness of painting, we can formulate more compelling accounts.

In this spirit, I proceed with the following balanced approach. While in the body of my thesis I cannot completely excise the author function, I do claim to mitigate its excesses and expand our understanding of these paintings. I have found throughout this thesis that operating with a critical approach to the coherence of the oeuvre has proven productive of both a more extensive and yet coherent account of these objects and their reception. The corpus offers a practical premise for research which avoids ostracizing readers; its alternatives (either discarding the canon or continuing the 'legend') remain impractical; and a critically extended analysis of 'Sickert' offers a significant contribution to Sickert studies and our understanding of interwar British painting.

To conclude, I want to reflect on indeterminacy and compromise in discourse on Sickert in the present moment, and emergent outcomes from a recent conference which resonate with my own 'positionality.' In December of 2015 the Paul Mellon's "Walter Sickert: The Document and the Documentary" conference brought together Sickert's most influential scholars, and resulted in a wealth of discussion, signalling the timeliness of revising our accounts of Sickert. The field of interpretations that day embraced both the empirically minded social-historical

and the theoretically minded ahistorical. T. J. Clark and Anne Wagner therefore made for a wise choice of correspondents, as figures who in an earlier historical moment helped establish social art history, and in the present have begun embracing more of the material and the personal components of encounters with painting. Speakers at "The Document and the Documentary" could be said to have come from both the pages of *The Painting of Modern Life*, and *The Sight of Death.* It was a spectrum along which I found myself positioned in the middle. William Rough and myself were the only participants to speak to late Sickert, but for me the most interesting intervention that day came from Sam Rose's paper "Sickert's Indeterminacy."

Emergent from his account of the broad theoretical frame of Sickert's work for contemporaries and later scholars, Rose made both a bold analysis of current Sickert scholarship, and an equally bold suggestion for future approaches. Alongside his critiques of social art history and promotion of the phenomenological opening of painting to observers in the present, he noted that a core property of Sickert's painting had proven a stumbling block to later interpretation. Sickert's paradoxical focus on both document and medium, on both social engagement and wry material ambivalence, has often only been touched upon. However, as I have previously noted, while historians such as Baron and Shone often allude to the 'ironic', 'complex' or contradictory nature of his work, they stop at the

point of allusion. To say a painting is ambivalent, ironic or indefinite to the point of ineffability is to simply label and fence off one of its most interesting qualities as an object.

As an alternative, Rose suggests, we should focus on this "indeterminacy" and take this as a point of departure. We should engage with that affective quality rather than stop short of it, or limit it by appeal to historical convention. The radical implications of this proposition are that it asks us to consider what constitutes an explanation of an object, how far our methodology takes us, and how to keep pushing forward an analysis.

In the interest of opening up some of the specifics and effective potentialities of Sickert's ambivalences, 'Conversation' with the material will be my methodological assumption going forward, not the dictation of a perfect story. When we encounter an object we encounter something Other. Contact with a painting, in the manner we experience it, has something of the haptic connotations of 'contact' – a touching, a collision which leaves both object and interpreter changed. While I have highlighted a myriad of problems that encounter may entail if we conceive of it as transparent or uni-directional, the model of 'conversation' presents a way forward.

Communicating objects is never a passive process, but an active exchange which can never exhaust the meanings of a painting, as Jas Elsner argues in relation to the art

historian's first contact with the object, *ekphrasis*: "It constitutes a movement from art to text, from visual to verbal, that is inevitably a betrayal."[96] The limits of my methodology will in part be the limits of conversation. Like interpersonal communication, touching and investigating an object is a process of misunderstanding: projecting, correcting and partially translating. The potential to be refused or changed by the image, and indeed to be prompted by it anew, ensures a stimulating conversation. While this conversation has neither a necessary end-point, nor the unmitigated affinities and communication afforded by a 'dialogue,' an analysis exploring the indeterminacies of Sickert's painting can be productive without being prescriptive. I do not want to, nor rationally can I, reduce objects to a theoretical model or author-function, but what this thesis can do is help us listen to the way these images echo. Sickert's paintings in the end will always exist as undecided objects – neither reducible to the author-function, nor completely separable from the corpus. It is my hope that I provide an account which softens the distortions of previous scholarship and expands its horizons.

This thesis explores Sickert's work in two sections sub-divided into chapters. These sections will consider moments of Sickert's late work - beginning with an analysis of the '*English*

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[96] Jas Elsner, "Art History as Ekphrasis," *Art History* 33:1 (2010): 12.

Echoes' before turning to Sickert's paintings based on photography.

In Chapter 1 I introduce Sickert's use of material memory through a focus on the spaces and environmental backdrops of paintings which engage themes of Englishness in the material of the landscape. These *Echoes* repeat the retrieval and performance of national and imperial artefacts in a manner which aims not at an unproblematic excavation of the past, but presents a partial and fraught process of accretion. These paintings staged the act of remembering, which allowed the image brought to the surface to appear both old and new to contemporary audiences, an uncanny embodiment in thin facture and simulacral mediation. Sickert's paint stood for the matter of landscape as a thing, filled with artefacts and bodies mixed and muddied, and far from cleanly accessible - a very material memory. Sickert's paint, as we see again in Section 2, did not give life or an aura to his sources, but instead presented a material remnant between media.

In Chapter 2 we explore the core ontological tension of the *Echoes* in their mobilization of the Victorian and the modern, to build on our understanding of the ambivalence of Sickert's paint and how the materiality of the past persisted in Sickert's present. By both materializing and distancing the tactile surfaces of the Victorian and the present, Sickert disrupts a wider field of First World War remembrance trying to establish national continuities and discontinuities. Sickert's *Echoes* of

Victorian domestic scenes subversively embodied historical continuity as a kind of remainder, rather than a legible narrative, material memory accreted between a Victorian and Modern.

Completing Section 1, Chapter 3 concludes our discussion of the *Echoes* with Sickert's posthumous portraits, his most intense realization of the dense thingness of paint. As exemplified in *The Raising of Lazarus*, painting here is not vital and expressive, but the banality of death - the ineffable remainder. Consolidating our understanding of remembrance practices in the interwar period, we examine how Sickert disrupts the elision, erasure and metaphoric representation of the dead with a material thingness closer to Victorian practices. Sickert's posthumous portraits are neither a complete displacement nor revelation of the real dead body, but an indeterminate material.

Chapter 4 opens Section 2 with a focused study of *Miss Earhart's Arrival* to mirror Chapter 3's discussion of *Lazarus* of the same year*,* broaching discussion of Sickert's work from photographic sources and the theme of international travel. Sickert's engagement with new media technologies, as with his mobilization of old media in the *Echoes,* is subtly critical of narratives of imperial and national identity, and articulates a scepticism about the immediacy of representation and the unique potential of the 'new.' I argue that we can think of *Arrival's* transmediality as frustrating the realms of the virtual and

potential, the consumer and the military, the photographic and the aerial. If flight was the medium of possibility and photography the medium of documentary truth, paint was the thing which could corrupt both.

Finally, Chapter 5 progresses our understanding of Sickert's post-photographic work by turning our attention from the spectacle of flight to the spectacular body of celebrity itself. Drawing in themes from earlier chapters' observations on the representation of the stage and the Monarchy, this chapter focuses on Sickert's scepticism of another new medium: film. Englishness is again exposed as a hesitant and insecure remainder of media representations, and material memory a powerful means of exposing inconsistencies and erasures in interwar spectacles as well as narratives of nationhood. Celebrity stands precarious - halted. Sickert's paintings have neither the assumed coherence of drama, nor the imagined immediacy of radio, but instead offer the uncanny remainder, an anamorphic look at motion pictures' spectacular bodies through the material stillness from which they are composed.

In summary, Sickert's late work combines the social historical issue of Englishness in the interwar period, with an epistemic issue of the capacities of different media – probing the difference between material memory and historical narrative. In Sickert's late work, the claims of national/imperial narratives and media technologies to be able to suture together

past and present and to fully articulate cultural memory, were disrupted by the process of remediation and materialization. Concepts of imperial progress and continuity were checked and contested through these canvases, creating problems and anxieties for those committed to conservative and progressively utopian political, commercial and institutional narratives.

For Sickert the recent past had not disappeared but become strange, and the degree of national, cultural and technological innovation in the present needed to be qualified where conservative cultural commentators sought to erase the Victorian and stress the historical novelty of their age. From motor transport to flight, from x-rays to film, I explore how the analysis of remembrance and its technologies impacts our understanding of Sickert, and likewise informs us about how Sickert uses the blunt, restive material of paint to intervene in interwar art to engage themes of memory, spectacle and imperial identity in time.

Section I

Chapter 1: Material Memory of the Land

> I don't suppose that he [Mr Tillard] will deny that the
> definition of landscape is 'what we see out of doors'.
> Gasometers, whether we like it or not, are an existing
> element of the 'English landscape.'[97]

To begin, let us step into the gateway of *Temple Bar* and
consider paint's articulation of space, in a literal sense
Sickert's background. This chapter considers the ground for
Sickert's figures, and the soil in which significant elements of
the English imaginary were staked in the 1930s. One of Sickert's
first provocations in the decade related the materiality of
paint to the subject-matter of historical 'landscapes' and
backdrops with the effect of articulating specific qualities of
material memory in the interwar period. To begin our
conversation with these strange paintings I want to examine the
space around figures, often marginalized in scholarship on a
primarily figurative painter, as a way into discussion of
Sickert's use of 'material memory.' Exploring Sickert's body of
English Echoes, paintings re-mediating Victorian sources for
audiences of the 1930s, this chapter will look at how
conservative imperial identity grounded in English earth was
unsettled through the layered materiality of paint. Articulated
memories of the land are often deeply invested with wider
cultural arguments, and Sickert's treatment of English soil as a

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[97] Walter Sickert, "Gasometers" *The Times* 16 May 1930, reproduced in Anna
Gruetzner Robins, ed. *Walter Sickert: The Complete Writings on Art* (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 2000), 580

painted material medium brought together different times and values in a critique of the present. As the cultural geographer David Matless has argued via Latour, the English landscape is a dense, unseemly tangle of connections between ideas and objects, pasts and present: "If landscape carries an unseemly spatiality, it also shuttles through temporal processes of history and memory. Judgments over present value work in relation to narratives of past landscape."[98]

Sickert's oeuvre has widely been appreciated as one dedicated to the human figure in context, and to begin contextualizing Sickert's late work my investigation will examine Sickert's approaches to the mediated space through which the figure moves. While the images I consider are not landscapes in the genre sense, in significant ways Sickert's figures moved to something approaching the outdoors - flat, rural, Victorian and fictional. I will consider how Sickert's paint negotiates a 'temporal landscape', revealing ways in which these works interact with contemporary culture surrounding motorized transport and urban/rural development by unearthing and burying artefacts of historical time in the medium of paint.

This chapter and the following focus on issues of 'time' and 'materiality' and interrelate two areas of Sickert's late work: *Echoes,* based on the transcription of Victorian

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[98] David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion, 1998), 5.

illustrations featuring figures traversing 'landscapes'; and

(building on the work of William Rough[99]) works with theatre

motifs based on photographic translations of stage sets. By

looking at the material treatment of space, the landscape as an

endless series of layers, through these works I will explore the

ways in which Sickert's strange paintings were able to

critically embody elements of national narratives.

   Sickert's work began facing a new kind of critical

opposition when he started to introduce historical and literary

fragments into pictorial spaces which the Bloomsbury group

sought to frame as flat, formal and disinterested. His complex

and predominantly antagonistic relationship with Bloomsbury came

to a head in 1925, just before he embarked on these works, a

turning point for when Fry began to lose faith in Sickert's

painting: "He would make us believe anything about himself but

the truth... ...his perversity drives him to pose as the

defender of the sacred tradition of Victorian anecdotic

painting."[100] This change in opinion on the part of the dominant

'school' of modernist painting in the 1920s manifested as a

rejection of the *Echoes* from 1927 on-wards. As a critical stance

this resonates with recent scholarship which reads these

canvases as "Nostalgia for... his boyhood."[101] However, other

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[99] William W. Rough, "Walter Richard Sickert and the Theatre c.1880-c.1940,"
(PhD. Diss, University of St Andrews, 2010).
[100] Roger Fry, "Walter Sickert A.R.A.," *The New Statesman*, 17 January 1925.
[101] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 122.

contemporaries demonstrated a critical understanding that these images were something more:

> The first forty years of the painter's life were lived in the time of Queen Victoria, but these Victorian tableaux go back further than memory, they spring partly from the 'spirit of criticism' which in this case includes a nice sense of the social values of the period and an instinct for the dramatic... that is rare and rich.[102]

The depth of time in these works and their divided reception invite the viewer to question what Fry meant by Sickert's intention to "Make us believe anything about himself but the truth."

This chapter thus looks at aspects of 'landscape' and national-historical discourse in the interwar period, focusing on the treatment of aspects of the geographic and temporal margins between rural and urban. Exploring competing anxieties in cultural heritage and tourism, I attempt to elucidate correspondences between national conversations and the material spaces present in Sickert's late painting, which lifted heavily from found Victorian imagery and interwar fictions of the past. This will first engage the discursive place of the Victorian in that landscape and the implications for how audiences read Sickert's *Echoes*. How was Victorian England being handled and framed in mainstream and *avant-garde* artistic circles, and what factors set the terms for how paintings with Victorian content would be read? The argument will then move on to examine

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[102] William Plomer, "Mr Sickert's Exhibition," *The Listener*, 9 March 1938.

physical changes to the landscape with the growth of infrastructure, travel and tourism. Finally, this chapter will conclude with reflections on Sickert's theatre paintings to see how his sense of a material reality fitted with the almost simulacral construction of space in his images, through the idea of landscape as a performative and archaeological layering and mixing of material memory.

A painting of a nineteenth-century portal is a significant frame with which we might think through both this chapter and this thesis as a whole. Painted two years before his death, *Temple Bar* [Fig. 1] stands as a brilliant example of painting reflecting on urban transition. As a transcription of a Victorian source photograph, this mediation offers the viewer a materially ambiguous 're-membering' of Christopher Wren's gate-house. Moreover, Sickert's material process doubles historic reconstructive work at the architectural level, the portal having been painstakingly transplanted brick by brick between 1878 and 1888 from its situation as an old gate to the City to its position as an aesthetic feature of Theobald's Park. Its obstruction of traffic rendered it an obstacle to late Victorian civic planners' notions of 'progress,' leading to the displacement of the gate and the expansion of the road. The object had become obsolete, the accumulated sediment of progress which needed to be dredged from the streets, a thing caught in the dry paint of Sickert's grid.

In the 1930s we see similar concerns surrounding restricted traffic into and out of London - contemporary ribbon developments were perceived to truncate traffic entering and leaving London, slowing down the flow of bodies and capital. This, Sickert suggests, was not an entirely novel problem from a historical perspective. His painting conveys to the viewer a Victorian relocation, itself relocated both to its original context by the appropriation of a pre-1878 photograph featuring the gate at the edge of the City, and also a relocation to the stuff of paint, re-embodied through a process of squaring up the photograph and canvas. This is a portal in transition, a margin where space and time are in historical and representational flux. Deconstructing and reconstructing stonework in thin and thick layers of paint, *Temple Bar* suggests that we experience the urban periphery as a site of recycling historical identities.

Sickert painted this canvas, loaded with connections to the changing nature of city limits and intercity travel, with the assistance of Therese Lessore shortly after relocating to Bathampton. Reflecting on a gate to the city he had long studied, Sickert was at that point in a predominantly rural context. However, rural England was becoming increasingly interconnected with urban England and the London metropolitan area in the 1920s and 1930s, through the development of motor

transport and the growing culture of motor-excursion.[103] This

cultural development, and the rapidly evolving circuits of

domestic tourist travel, were formations feeding in to Sickert's

work through the connections of mass media and both the artist

and audience's personal experiences of travel. Sickert himself

visited Bath and Margate, the latter a large sea resort

regularly served by motorized omnibuses. Indeed, it was a key

co-ordinate for a new generation of motor-enabled tourists and

working class holiday-makers keen to capitalize on convenient

seaside excursions, their rising numbers stimulating the

development of holiday destinations such as Dreamland Amusement

Park where Victorian seaside leisure was given a fresh neon and

art deco architecture for urban populations in the 1920s.

In *Temple Bar,* historical development and transition in the

form of the expansion of the urban and the spread of new forms

of mechanized transport is reified in paint. Sickert re-traced

the grid of transcription after it became redundant, breaking

down the picture once again, reducing each section to discrete,

barely intelligible artefacts. Here the viewer is confronted

with an unfinished and ongoing historical thought, the

appropriated remnants of a dislocated past. The process of

painting metaphorically re-enacts a rebuilding of the gate,

brick by brick, but freezes it in its scaffolding. This is a

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[103] L J K, Setright, *Drive On! A Social History of the Motor Car* (London: Granta Books, 2002), 6-10.

visually and haptically dense image of recovery and loss. To further unpack it, and understand the ways this paint engages changing temporal experiences of the urban/rural periphery we will need to turn to the visual culture surrounding transportation and middle class conceptions of domestic travel.

As arguably the last of the *English Echoes* series,[104] *Temple Bar* can be seen as the summation of Sickert's engagement with the 'Victorian', a project begun in his writings of the mid-twenties which lauded Victorian fashions and artists.[105] When the *Echoes* had their first major exhibition in 1931, their reception evidenced a tension between appreciation and disdain for form and content. An appreciation of the mastery of an aesthetic which could be comfortably assimilated by formalist connoisseurship was met with a disdain for the content which seemed to invalidate it through its unfashionable subject matter and disavowal of authorship: "almost extravagantly beautiful in colour";[106] "'Echoes' is exactly the right word for this bland recovery of a bygone age.";[107]

> In the rules of the Royal Academy relating to the works inadmissible to the Summer exhibition it is written: No copies of any kind. A strict interpretation of this rule would necessitate, I suppose, the rejection by a

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[104] Only *Harriet Wilson Riding in the Park,* which has also been dated to 1940 by Baron might present a counter-example, and it disappeared into private hands in 1973 without an extant reproduction, see Baron *Sickert* 2006, 518
[105] For example see "Woodcuts of the Sixties at the Tate," *Burlington Magazine*, March 1923.
[106] *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 May 1931
[107] *The Times* 9 May 1931

conscientious jury of every single one of the paintings which Mr Sickert is exhibiting...[108]

However, Sickert was well aware of the cultural stakes and the implications his strategy had for the perception of the novelty and originality of his work. As he proclaimed in his well-received Margate lecture series of 1934, in his ontology everything was recycled: "There are really no original things", "We can't make something out of nothing... It is like translation and drama."[109] This process of problematic transcription and embodiment lay at the heart of the divisive properties identified by critics of these paintings, and also constituted a core premise of Sickert's late pedagogy. In arguing that these images constitute a material sifting and accretion of national artefacts which bore critically on their historical present, I will explore where their hybrid modern and Victorian nature interfaces with cultural changes in the national imaginary of the land - the excavation and burial of the archaeological depths of English culture.

First, however, it would be beneficial to outline the wider art-historical context of this investigation of Sickert's inhabited landscape. In the face of later scholarly dismissal of the contemporary significance of these images, we should acknowledge the modernity and provocative potential of Sickert's

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[108] *The Sunday Times* 10 May 1931.
[109] Walter Sickert, Margate Lecture, "Colour Study: The Importance of Scale" 16 November 1934, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 655.

late paintings. These canvases' meanings and potentialities are not exhausted by establishing their modern or *avant-garde* qualities, but to appreciate how these paintings resonate with and disrupt contemporary trends in painting and the significance of the landscape we need to acknowledge both David Peters Corbett's thesis in *The Modernity of English Art* and Ysanne Holt's work in *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape* which provide points of critical departure.

In reaction to previous generations of conventional art history, and early Marxist art history, where interwar landscape painting was understood as "historically curiously rootless,"[110] and "personal and idiosyncratic,"[111] Corbett explores the subtlety of responses with which many Modernists in the 1920s made indirect visual arguments about modernity: "oblique, less frankly about contemporary experience."[112] Broadly we see a change in inter-war representations of landscape from formal innovation and urban subject matter in the early 1910s to a relative naturalism and patriotic rural subject-matter by the 1920s. However, as Corbett demonstrates, there are ways of reading an expanded field of artistic practices in the modern period as engaging with modernity.[113] By examining how motifs were being textually framed before and after the war, as well as

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[110] Harrison, *English Art and Modernism,* 167.
[111] Spalding, *British Art Since 1900,* 61.
[112] David Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1997), 2.
[113] Corbett, *Modernity of English Art*, 5.

treating the sublimation of more radical aesthetics as productive rather than reductive of visual culture, landscape painting can be better understood as engaged with a wider range of social reference points.

Holt's work on modernist British landscape painting further focuses on the 'figure in the landscape' as one of its "key visual themes," exploring how works previously treated by scholarship as reactionary or nostalgic effectively mediated modernity for contemporaries, engaging discourses from health and bodily wholeness to colonialism.[114] For Holt, paintings of rural and suburban space, of English land, are always reflective of a wider arena of social and historical relations, building on W. J. T. Mitchell's understanding of the landscape as a "cultural medium" and not an objective reality.[115] Understood this way, landscape is itself a kind of dynamic material, a medium involving culture - not separate or prior to it.

Moreover, in concurrence with Corbett, Holt asserts that "the particular significance of these representations, much of the time, lies precisely in that which was unrepresented."[116] Indeed, Sue Malvern has advanced this line of argument to the extent that we might read some of these displacements in terms

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[114] Ysanne Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape,* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2003), 4.
[115] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2002), 5.
[116] Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape*, 9.

of the body.[117] The buried body, in the aftermath of a war fought on foreign soil, became a symbol fraught with anxiety for the British public, and the dead were in multiple ways metaphorically linked with the mud that consumed them. The soil of the nation thus also connoted the bodies of a "lost generation," whose bones were scattered through the dirt. Malvern thus also invites us to explore the idea of a landscape inflected by what appears to be absent, and to consider how this relates to a lived engagement with the traces of the past. Calm and idyllic landscape paintings could also remind the viewer of what was buried beneath the surface.

    For contemporaries, overlaying these anxieties and artistic trends was a national conversation on the landscape which reduced complex erasures and displacements to an ideologically conservative system of patriotic signs - the land and the soil as a broad metaphor for Englishness in the 1930s.[118] In 1924, against the backdrop of rapid structural changes in the countryside, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin argued for the timelessness of a modernizing land in his Speech on England: "To me, England is the country, and the country is England...and the sight of a plough team coming over the brow of a hill, the sight that has been seen in England since England was a land ... the

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[117] Sue Malvern, "War Tourisms: 'Englishness', Art, and the First World War," *Oxford Art Journal*, 24:1 (2001): 47.
[118] Mario Faraone, "'England, Their England': Images and Ideas of Englishness in the political writings of 1930s," *Anglistica: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (Napoli), 4:2: 2000: 140-150.

one eternal sight of England."[119] However, this was a decade

which saw significant displacement of manual and animal labour

from the countryside, through migration and obsolescence

respectively, and only three years earlier agriculture had

suffered the loss of state support in the withdrawal of

protectionist fixed prices with the repeal of the Agriculture

Act (1921). With the massive growth in the numbers of traction

engines and exponential increases in car use and the crises of

ribbon development, there was a growing lack of fit between the

nation's self-image, and the land being ploughed and driven

over.

In the wake of these systemic changes, the rhetoric became

increasingly focused on a prelapsarian landscape. At its most

general, the novelist Evelyn Waugh could write that nationalism

was a matter of ancient "geographical distribution."[120] At its

extreme, Edward Mosley would claim nation and countryside were

synonymous, and the 'land' a superior term to its people.[121] More

importantly for the appreciation of a broad audience, however,

national conservative institutions echoed Baldwin's language,

and the deployment of the pre-industrial figure in timeless land

and topography as a nationalist symbol. As a new mass audience,

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[119] Stanley Baldwin, "Speech on England" (May 1924) published in Baldwin, Stanley *On England, and Other Addresses* (Deadington: Philip Allan & co 1926), 6-7.
[120] Evelyn Waugh, *Robbery Under the Law: The Mexican Object Lesson* (London: Chapman and Hall 1939), 226.
[121] Michael Mann, *Fascists,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), 7.

radio listeners were faced with content filtered by the
nationalist and conservative Director General John Reith for
whom broadcasting was "a vehicle of national discipline."[122] The
BBC's "The National Character" series, running from September to
December 1933, was the longest running and most popular BBC
production of the 1930s, and it was dominated by the
conservative voices of Baldwin and the popular conservative
historian Arthur Bryant. It reaffirmed the connection of the
historical pre-industrial past to national identity in the
present, using this retrospective to frame the possibilities of
a nationalist British future. In the words of the *Radio Times*
its aims were: "to examine the position of Great Britain and the
British Empire in the light of past achievements and present
problems."[123] The series propagandized the notion that if the
most prominent aspects of Britain's international prestige
failed - industry and trade - British rootedness in the land
would prove the nation's salvation.[124] Implicit in these
broadcasts was the idea that the 'true' or 'original' nation was
veiled or buried by the dirt of industry, and needed to be

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[122] Avery Todd, *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922-1938*,
(Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 15.
[123] *Radio Times,* Issue 522, 29 September 1933.
[124] Andrew Causey, "English Art and 'The National Character', 1933-34," in *The
Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the national past, 1880-1940,* eds.
David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt, Fiona Russell and Paul Mellon Centre for
Studies in British Art (New Haven: Yale University Press 2002), 276.

"unveiled" or somehow excavated from the sediment of recent history.[125]

However, pre-war studies such as that of the sociologist Harold Mann, had already established for critically and intellectually informed middle class audiences, that 'urban' economic and racial malaise was already endemic in the countryside.[126] The landscape was starting to present the imagined symptoms of urban England and this convergence told the lie to a discourse which framed city and landscape as spatially, historically and materially distinct. Conservative discourse on nationalist identity was thus being formed in reaction to, and with the elision of, structural changes developing in the rural landscape since the late nineteenth century. Here lay the foundations of the 'Little England' myth, which Alison Light's analysis of national identity in interwar literature outlines as a rejection of an imperialist past in the aftermath of the horror of war and a focus on domestic, rural land – a retreat, retrenchment and introversion in an attempt to defend and define national identity.[127]

Andrew Causey has elucidated the sublimation at work within the cultural discourse Sickert was operating in, revealing attempts to excavate and mobilise the English pre-industrial

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[125] Causey "English Art and 'The National Character', 1933-34," 280.
[126] Mark Freeman, *Social Investigation and Rural England, 1870-1914*, (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society, Boydell Press 2003), 132-3.
[127] Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), 8.

past for the contemporary ends of national cohesion and appeasement. The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition of 1934 framed the critical consensus on British cultural history by locating its historical roots in two principal 'pasts' - the medieval and the eighteenth century. Victorian art was disparaged and elided as a traumatic industrial intermission, with Hogarth preserved as the father of English art - a position echoed in the writing of the art historian W T Whitley.[128] Sickert's work, and his ambivalent performance of the role of artist (as alternately transgressive and conformist), straddled the binary of this value system. He was elected to the Royal Academy in 1924 only to resign dramatically at its rejection of Epstein's modernist sculptures in 1935, and both displayed pride in allegedly owning Hogarth's lay figure and gave praise to forgotten Victorian talents. This dynamic fusion of institutionally approved and occluded pasts speaks of a critical ambivalence working through both the artist's textual and visual performances - a strategy that was historically engaged and provocative.

To conclude our overview of the cultural framing of English soil, the historian should note that not only was the landscape a spatial and economic locus of the national imaginary, it was also coded as historical – the rural could be seen as a displaced past. Light sees this as part of "conservative

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[128] Causey, "English Art and 'The National Character', 1933-34," 282.

modernity," and its "Janus-faced" nature - cultural institutions
looking both forwards and backwards in a deferral of modernity
but also an embrace of a new conservatism attempting an
assimilation of a rural past into an urban present.[129]
Compounding this was a contemporary emphasis on literary
culture, alongside a community of art critics and historians
concerned with reworking its canon.[130] These competing
objectives, ambivalent values, and perceived historical missteps
contributed to a pervasive anxiety about the security of
Whiggish history and narratives of identity and progress.

Simon Joyce further complicates Light's argument, however,
by contending that by the late 1930s there were contested
relationships of appropriation and rejection between the
interwar and its Victorian past. Outside of the 'progressive'
Bloomsbury view which rejected and promoted differing elements
of the Victorian, or the position of what we might call more
'regressive' traditional nostalgia, there existed a new
dialectical engagement between the concerns of heritage and
modernity. Joyce indicates that there was a space where the
Victorian was being appropriated in the interwar period to both
'progressive' and 'reactionary' ends.[131] In light of this
conjunction of contested pasts, and with awareness of the

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[129] Light, *Forever England*, 9.
[130] Light, *Forever England*, 12.
[131] Simon Joyce, *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror* (Athens: Ohio University Press 2007), 43.

discursive pressures to construct a coherent history through narrative and sublimation, the historian needs to treat the use of the 'Victorian' in Sickert's *English Echoes* seriously rather than dismiss them as the product of Sickert "playing the fool."[132] The Victorian itself was multiple, and inflected the interwar period in in ways politically conservative and nationalist Power felt compelled to be very vocal in disavowing.

The visual and material complexity of Sickert's paintings opens up these debates in a range of disruptive procedures and references. In a typical *Echo*, Sickert's *The Idyll* [Fig. 5]*,* this Victorian past is rendered anew for the contemporary audience, through the meshing of traditional illustration's quality of figurative line and the colour of modernist painting. First exhibited alongside other *Echoes* at the Beaux Arts Gallery in 1932, what David Peters Corbett describes as its almost Fauvist colour[133] is superficially not far removed from the dry pastel hues of Paul Nash or Ben Nicholson. However, in process and content, what it describes is a fictional Victorian world. This past imaginary is transcribed into a decorative and texturally rich surface, cropped and balanced with a Modernist formal aesthetic. Through this mediation the landscape space itself changes. It becomes compressed and confused, the layers of paint overlapping and reapplied. In the middle distance a

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[132] Clive Bell quoted in Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 308.
[133] Corbett, *Walter Sickert,* 52.

horse and cart blends into the environment, while dark patches of trees disappear under the later application of cold blue *sfumato*. The only part of the landscape that seems more concretely spatial than a screen or theatrical backdrop is the shadow cast by the main pair of figures. The only thing left tangible and concrete being the residue of paint itself.

Around this island of strong deep colour, the bulk of the foreground and background blur together as if the afterimage of this 'Idyll's' luminous sun or a backdrop lost to stage-lighting. Indeed, light here disrupts what would in a Victorian context have been a unified representation of 'world'. With its background and foreground disjointed, its luminosity connotes what Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge argue was a "lurid" effect for the Victorians, denoting moral danger and social margins.[134] John Gilbert's *ILN* engraving *An Embarrassing Moment* becomes here emotionally intensified and dream-like, provocatively distorted through material translation. Sickert does not offer a simple haunting of present by past, but a strange materialization, warped across time.

These wanderers in the landscape seem lost, stranded without a narrative, half present, their edges fraying away into rough areas of bare canvas, odd artefacts brought to the surface

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[134] Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge, "The Plot Thickens: Toward a Narratological Analysis of Illustrated Serial Fiction in the 1860s," *Victorian Studies*, 51:1 (Autumn, 2008), 80-1.

of the painting. They remain spatially close to each other but their gazes are distant and disconnected, these bodies are mute, hesitating around the edge of something left unsaid. Fragments of a Victorian era, mixed with the material stuff of Fauvist paint, the image of the Victorian unsettles an interwar audience attempting to forget the Victorian past with the strange material evocation and development of another time. This context, that of collective historical forgetting and remembering, suggests Jacques Derrida's model of the *hauntologous* – a fragment of the past which prompts anxieties about an unrealized imperial future.[135] Yet Sickert presents the viewer with material that *was* realized, paintings which are both strange and emphatically *present*. The sediment of paint embodies the media archaeology of the mass medium of press illustration – the vast clutter of a wood and steel engraving culture dying in the wake of reproducible photography and half-tone printing.

In the aftermath of the historical caesura of the Great War, Sickert's work exposes a displaced historical remainder, the return of tense, pensive figures to reflect strangely on the present. The people who stand in his landscapes, and the self-reference made to their transcription, combine to make doubly

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[135] For a sustained exploration of haunting in the post-cold war context, see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, Translated by Peggy Kamuf, (London: Routledge, 1994), *hauntology* could be summarised as describing a state of failed historical mourning, a failure to process, or exorcise the 'past' – both an uncanny relationship to our own historical identity and the state of living with the consequences of failed world-views and predictions of the future: "ghosts already dead and not yet born", xix

de-familiarized pictorial spaces - estranged from the present by their use of a suppressed past, and estranged from that past by the introduction of colour, quick, dry brushwork and thick facture. Borne from the past, they seem incomplete in the present - tactile but unfamiliar, fragmentary. A seemingly unfinished admixture, and rejecting the conventions of established cultural narratives, they have the latent potential to critique dominant conservative notions of the 'national character'. For a discourse developing a newly codified language of Englishness attempting to define and delimit historical and geographical identity, these paintings' manifold ambiguities and obfuscation of clear narrative exposed the fragility of these definitions. The paintings' very flatness, the closure of the gap between grid and the surface of the painting, wood engraving and paint, past and present, attacks the idea that there was an authentic past somehow veiled by intervening time. Instead, we live in a landscape rich in the mixed material of multiple pasts. The soil has been turned over again and again, transmuted by the plough, the wheel and the brush, its history cannot be discarded. Sickert's mobilization of the Victorian illustrated press, from samples of the *London Journal* and *Illustrated London News* to the era of *Judy* and *Bow Bells*, returned to the viewer an impression of an impression - always incomplete and culturally mediated. These paintings were a new version of a past's self-reflection - a self-image displaced and modified. The

Victorianist Ann Colley, though focusing on Victorian painting,
provides a relevant point of reference for the aesthetic changes
Sickert enacts. She notes that a density of visual detail was a
significant functional element of Victorian image-making,
deployed in practices of nostalgic recollection in the 1850s to
overcome or elide "the fact of absence" – to divert attention
from lost figures and landscapes.[136] Where she argues that an
emphasis on detail limits the viewer's capacity to reflect on
the invisible, the removal of detail in Sickert's translations
would offer more scope for the audience to project, more space
to reflect on what did and did not remain. Lynda Nead's
complementary exploration of the highly coded gender
relationships in mid-Victorian engraving looks more widely at
principles of composition in Victorian engravings and
illustrations. Nead notes how the subtle articulation of the
"figure in the landscape" in the Victorian pastoral genre was
also used to establish a unity and harmony of social roles,
landscape and nation, through compositional and iconographical
harmonies.[137] Absent in the *Echoes,* detail and balance were thus
key aesthetic elements of the appropriated images Sickert
stripped away – not repeating the past but subverting and
exposing its material.

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[136] Ann C. Colley, *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture* (London:
Palgrave MacMillan 1998), 32-33.
[137] Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian
Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1988), 40-43.

Indeed, Peter Sinnema has argued that in the late nineteenth century the illustrators of publications such as the *Illustrated London News* were actively engaged in Victorian projects of constructing national identity, defining Englishness negatively - a structurally similar process to conservative strategies of the 1930s. Sinnema argues that a shared property of engravings for news reportage and fiction illustration was the intention to create a 'collage' with the text and other local publications, acting as a stabilizing element in the cultural fabric which confirmed a middle class patriarchal notion of "world".[138] Sickert's paintings, however, break image and text apart, embodying the fragmented imagery to implicitly undermine stable notions of historical identity.

The function of Victorian press illustration was highly dependent on its visual conventions and discursive situation. To alter the context and presentation of these images by re-presenting them was therefore never to merely reiterate or straight-forwardly evangelize a Victorian world view, but involved changes and disruptions to their original meaning, and the materialization of historical absences. Sickert did not simply paint the motifs of one time in the style of another, in practice he indicated that there were untranslatable elements,

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[138] Peter W. Sinnema, *Dynamics of the Printed Page: Representing the Nation in the Illustrated London News* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 105.

contingencies and material properties that necessarily both change and persist.

Where in a painting such as *Idyll* Sickert reduces linear and iconographical details, redistributes the tonal composition and removes the textual framework, the image emphasizes what is absent without straightforwardly recovering it. Sickert was selective in pictorial elements, and re-purposing pictorial functions – his practice was neither the nostalgic desire to return to the Victorian nor the modernist impulse to forget it. By extending the context of circulation these images were originally embedded in, displacing this supplementary imagery to a new time and territory, Sickert could not and did not merely copy their original function, nor repeat them without changing them. Stranded between the structures of Victorian and Modernist image-making, these images work against both the past and present world views they engage.

Through this analysis we can start to see how the material, transmediated, nature of Sickert's *Echoes* unsettled contemporary notions of an England rooted in the land. Highly constructed images of Victorian figures caught between past and present. Sickert's canvases were well positioned to put pressure on anxieties concerning national identity and the writing of history and geography in the English context. To further nuance our understanding of the impact of these images on their viewers the historian should consider the dynamic nature of the

contemporary landscape as it pertains to national identity, and the spread of touristic experience among his audience. To gain a richer awareness of the effect of these images, we need to ask: what backgrounds were middle class audiences bringing to the shifting and oblique content of these paintings? What were the new contexts defining how spaces of Englishness were inhabited and how audiences came to explore and experience their collective sense of past?

Sickert explicitly engaged with physical and aesthetic changes in collective appreciation of landscape through his critical writings, and his pursuit of controversy offers insight into popular perceptions. As a cultural and aesthetic commentator throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, he had articles published in major national newspapers on a roughly bi-monthly basis, and engaged with tensions between the industrial and the timeless landscape alongside his discussion of painterly practice.[139] In his writings he experimented with oblique comments on the tensions of the urban/rural divide and the ambivalent destructive but empowering presence of motorcar infrastructure: "In a hundred years when things have altered again a little, aesthetes will be collecting paintings or prints of these oases of iron posts with their pearl-like heads and

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[139] I am indebted to the work of Anna Gruetzner Robins here, as throughout my thesis, for her collation of Sickert's writings. See Anna Gruetzner Robins, *Walter Sickert: The Complete Writings on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000).

their gnome-like pathos, as piously as we now collect the prints of the old coaching inns."[140]

What are we to make of this odd turn of phrase? As was typical, Sickert is performing provocatively for his market and wider self-image, but in this instance he also touches a topical nerve. In a period where modernists and conservatives both located 'authenticity' in the pre-industrial landscape - what Holt describes as a recurrent motif of modernist nostalgia[141] - Sickert argues that 'authenticity' lies in the material explicitness of the industrial present. Sickert goads and entreats his readers and viewers to place petrol pumps in history, as part of an inheritance for future generations, and he does so by aesthetically linking them to the nineteenth-century engraving tradition he himself mobilizes in his paintings. His respect for the material thingness of objects related interestingly to his own artistic method and his own painterly truth to materials: "The aesthetic principle involved is that an adequate machine has a beauty of its own."[142] When Sickert reacted to Sir David Milne-Watson's proposal for camouflaging motor transport infrastructure behind nostalgic facades, Sickert argued similarly that gasometers should *not* be made to look like eighteenth-century architecture, but instead

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[140] Walter Sickert, "Beautiful Petrol Pumps," *Morning Post* 18 April 1928, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 565.
[141] Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape*, 6
[142] Walter Sickert, 'Art and the Gasometer. Questions of Colouring', *The Daily Telegraph* 29 August 1930 reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 607.

that they should declare their material identity: "There is no reason why we should desire a gasometer to look like a Martello tower, or as Halsden has wittily indicated, an avenue, or why a form dictated by steel should be falsified by variations of colour proper to stonework."[143]

This desire to naturalize and obscure aspects of infrastructure was a response to the growing visibility of motor transport which the *Echoes* draw our attention to - an absence in representation they allow us to dwell on. Understanding the historical dynamics motivating the commentators Sickert lampoons can thus give us greater insight into the conditions of their reception. Indeed, motor transport was an increasingly important cultural factor in the relationship between English urban and rural society, and the means by which space was aestheticized and colonized. The technology's social impact was beginning to be felt in the 1920s with its rise in popularity and its capacity to supervene over other methods of material exchange and transport. The 20s and 30s saw car ownership exceed 2 million, a golden age of the Morris and the Austin. People and goods were now more mobile, and this proved crucial to the State's resistance to the 1926 general strike, providing alternatives to labour withheld by strikers' bodies. Indeed, in the face of the subsequent depression, car manufacturing was one

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[143] Walter Sickert, 'Art and the Gasometer. Questions of Colouring', *The Daily Telegraph* 29 August 1930 reproduced in Robins *The Complete Writings* p.607.

of the few industries to experience increasing demand.[144]

Aspirational middle class motor culture also had a wide visual

and textual footprint in public discourse of the 1920s and

1930s, generating huge volumes of guides, reminiscences,

technical manuals and advertisements from commercial vehicle

organizations.[145] In short, motor transport was leaving a large

material and cultural impact on a wide range of areas in society

- ripe for artistic reflection.

Indeed, on an even larger scale, bus travel was opening up

new spectacles for the masses, the first intercity bus being

established in 1925, and by the 1930s charabancs and Greyhound

buses were being termed "super-cinemas of the highways" by

contemporaries.[146] In contrast to travel via railroads, the bus

passenger was predisposed to take in the countryside as a series

of aesthetic images and spaces. Immersion into the twists and

turns of old English roads was seen as an important element of

these holiday ventures.[147] More importantly, these aestheticized

trips into the country's interior were even seen as didactic -

articulating an 'Englishness' embedded in the landscape and its

ancient toponyms.[148] Middle class gallery goers were learning to

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[144] Roy Church, "Deconstructing Nuffield: The Evolution of Managerial Culture in the British Motor Industry," *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 49: 3 (August, 1996): 561.
[145] T. C. Barker, "The International History of Motor Transport," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20:1 (Jan., 1985) 1985, 4.
[146] Richard Hogart quoted in Peter Thorold, *The Motoring Age: The Automobile and Britain* (London: Profile Books, 2003), 109.
[147] Thorold, *The Motoring Age*, 110.
[148] For a discussion of the uncanniness of this experience and the breadth of ways in which the motor car was changing middle class perceptions of space and

engage and interpret the landscape in new, visual, intimate and nostalgic ways - motor cars even delivered the bourgeois experience of open space ready-framed by the windshield.

However, significant structural changes in the landscape brought with it problems as well as 'progress.' The spread of vehicles and tarmac exceeded the capacity to plan, assimilate and record it at local and national levels, even evading earlier systems of timetabling, Thorold reminding us that: "Progress among bus companies in the 1920s was so rapid that an attempt by a journalist to produce a regular Travel by Road Guide with detailed bus timetables had to be dropped."[149] Both motor car and charabanc contributed to urban change. The periphery of the city became the site of an even more acute problem for facilitating spectacular trips into rural England: Ribbon developments truncated traffic along arterial roads, inhibiting ingress and egress from the city by car.

Significantly, these developments problematized the geographical distinction between urban and rural - constituting both a product of, and impediment to, motor transport.[150] Such a metropolitan periphery became a double threat - to both commercial traffic into the city and holiday transit out - which lead to calls for parliamentary regulation to order and delimit

intimacy see Alicia Rix, "'The Lives of Others', Motoring in Henry James's *the Velvet Glove*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 36:3 (Spring, 2013): 31-49.
[149] Thorold *The Motoring Age*, 102.
[150] John Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) p.182.

urban and rural space during a period of large-scale building programmes. As Lord Crawford emphasized in the House of Lords: "I do not want to reduce the number of cottages or bungalows up and down the country by one per cent. All I ask is that they shall be properly planned."[151] Urban growth outpaced planners, furthering anxiety about the tourist experience and urban penetration of the countryside: "Modern England is rapidly Blackpooling itself", lamented J. B. Priestly.[152] As this sentiment suggests, there was a popular feeling that 'untouched' timeless spaces were running out, and that the countryside was becoming over-populated with sightseers at the same time as its representation as a pristine and unchanging space was essential to national identity.

Read in this context, *Temple Bar* draws the viewer to a past iteration of a very contemporary problem. The former periphery of the City becomes its centre, reflecting the incorporation of the margins of the rural at the growing limits of the metropole. Indeed, London's growth was such that its population increased by nearly a million inhabitants between 1921 and 1931. An image of developing traffic infrastructure at the heart of the city therefore invoked the periphery, the rural, and the relocation of economic power from the north to the capital. Most

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[151] Lord Crawford, HL Deb 10 April 1935 vol 96 cc685-715.
[152] J. B. Priestly, *English Journey* (London: William Heinemann Ltd./Victor Gollancz Ltd. 1934), 51.

importantly of all, in its reconstruction of reconstruction and displacement of the displaced, this painting also evokes the idea that the landscape was no longer virgin or timeless, but instead already built on, always already constructed.

Indeed, in his paintings of *Barnett Fair* [Fig. 6]*,* Sickert took another photographic precedent, again declaring the source material through the unaltered blue *camaieu* used in transcribing the grass, and as with *Temple Bar* he affirms both the ephemeral and constructed nature of its referent. Located on the northern margins of London, its pictured folk fair was itself an empty echo of horse trading fairs destroyed by industry and recession. Ribbon development and the growth of suburbs were beginning to encroach on the annual fair by the late 1920s, and quickly enveloped it.[153] In these paintings Sickert presents two scenes of dislocation, images with muted palettes and crusted skeins of paint, which beg reflection on transition, loss and the development of rural and urban space, the churn of a dynamic terrain.

In concrete terms the landscape was undergoing significant changes, but how was this being mediated in the conventions of contemporary imagery? Considering Sickert's wider visual cultural context allows us to better understand how these losses and transformations were being sublimated by contemporaries. The

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[153] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 470.

motor car itself was notably absent as a motif in representation
- avoided almost entirely in painting. In preference to this,
the unpopulated landscape or rustic coast typify the works of
Paul Nash or Ben Nicholson, which displace the very technology
which enabled the visual penetration of these areas. In the
field of commercial advertisement motor cars were visually
present, but heavily framed. The car was represented as a
frictionless entity in relation to the pre-industrial land,
sometimes represented by direct metaphorical allusions as in
[Fig. 7] which was poetically advertised as being equipped with
suspension capable of handling "rough uncertain roads," as if
able to delve directly into "Deep England."[154] In every iteration
the novelty of this technology was portrayed as offering
spectacular access to the pre-industrial past. Ford released its
"Tudor Saloon" branded car in several iterations, its name
borrowed from the vocabulary of the Heritage industry, while
some high-end Rolls-Royces were even fitted to resemble
hermetically sealed Georgian drawing rooms.

   This pattern of omission and circumvention was repeated in
the wider transport industry, under Frank Pick's strategic
promotion of the London Underground and Shell's advertisement of
the motor car and its associated countryside infrastructure of
petrol stations. Neil Harris has examined Frank Pick's strategy

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[154] Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso 1985), 5-10.

of associating mass transit in London with notions of rural 'place' through a saturation of landscape imagery on hoardings and posters.[155] This inverted the tentacular London Octopus, portraying it as something commutable - a living connection to the countryside - introducing safely framed idyllic landscapes as decorative advertising on buses as well as underground stations. The spaces of urban work were saturated with images of rural leisure, and motorized transport was sold on the promise of access to open, undeveloped (pre-industrial) space. Here the growing displacement of workers from workplaces and the social isolation of middle-class suburbia which the social historian Ross McKibbin charts, was re-framed as freedom of movement, and the return of a prelapsarian moment.[156] Distance was muted, and unsurprisingly the diffusion and increasing ambiguity of the line dividing the urban and rural was framed positively rather than anxiously - consumer benefits stressed over heritage costs.

Rising congestion was elided in the marketing of escapism. Destination was privileged over the representation of the time and process of travel. Outside the metropole, Shell's lorry hoardings marketed motor transport in the countryside itself. Using Nicholson, Nash and Graham Sutherland's images of the idyllic countryside, the company conveyed a sense of the

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[155] Neil Harris, "Civic Identity, Promotion and Mass Transit: A Tale of Three Cities," in Teri J. Edelstein (ed.) *Art for All: British Posters for Transport* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 88-9.
[156] Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 81.

landscape as both ancient and virgin, an ancestral land waiting to be discovered. As the design historian John Hewitt has observed, there existed an evident contradiction in portraying the mechanism of the landscape's destruction as its saviour, and just as significantly this was a contradictory superimposition of times: of the present and the historical past.[157]

The population and technologies traversing the landscape were displaced - the imagined engagement with the landscape was both instantaneous and eternal, novel and ancient. Such an imagined tourist is conceived of as a time-traveller - someone who changes location by jumping through time rather than disrupting space. "Everywhere," in the landscape, was rendered as both ageless and new, never historicized or dynamic:

"EVERYWHERE YOU GO/ YOU CAN BE SURE OF SHELL"

"SEE BRITAIN FIRST ON SHELL"

Sickert, however, ambiguously materialized the time and history of transportation, using paintings that implied and congested both a sense of historical and narrative time. In comparison to d'Ylen's advertisement design for Shell [Fig. 8], Sickert's *On Her Majesty's Service 1930-1* [Fig. 9] presents the viewer with neither safe displacements nor naturalizing imagery,

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[157] John Hewitt, "The 'Nature' and 'Art' of Shell Advertising in the Early 1930s," *Journal of Design History*, 5:2 (1992), 121.

but rather an earlier form of road transport intruding into a decorative and diffuse space. Named and framed as Victorian communication infrastructure, England's road-based postal service, Sickert's pictured landscape is a social, material and historically specific one. Its evident grid of transcription is visible like a map plotting a lost land, one quite markedly written out of the contemporary ordinance survey publications, which produced maps exclusively of pre and post nineteenth-century Britain.[158] Sickert's painting both breaks up the landscape and exposes its constructed nature, its forms shifting and dissolving under the strongly delineated hooves of the carriage's horse. A moment is frozen here in narrative time, an arduous journey just undertaken rather than an advertised destination already attained. This horse does not emblematize the synthesis of the urban and rural as in d'Ylen's image, the fusion of the industrial and pre-industrial, but instead acts as a ghostly figure, a disruptive remainder, while the vehicle's wheels shine with fast flickering highlights that accentuate speed and urgency. The *Echoes* demonstrate a working material landscape, a landscape with a history of labour, neither the mythic conceptions of the landscape as virgin or ancient.

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[158] The ordinance survey released a series of seven historic maps 1924-39 which reached as far back as the Neolithic, but omitted the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Sickert was emphasizing the recent historicity of
infrastructure at a time when it was culturally 'invisible.'
Depicting carriages and trains, he portrayed the recent past as
actively tied to the present: by deploying a hidden Victorian
history he showed that the 'modern' *had* a history. Where visual
ephemera and fine art in newspapers and galleries elided
movement through the landscape, along with its social and
ecological impact, Sickert populated the spaces of Baldwin's
'country' with the artefacts of the recent past. Mobilizing a
historical imaginary, he resurrected the displaced dead of the
landscape and made an absence apparent.

Where Ford's adverts allayed fears of "uncertain roads
ahead" by advertising cars whose suspension could handle the
recent bumps of history and empower the driver to visit the pre-
industrial past [Fig. 7], Sickert's paintings gave voice to that
accreted and congested intervening time by re-mediating the
dying medium of newspaper illustration into paint. Here the
Victorian past is given some of the agency of the tourist, it
visits the viewer, even threatens them with its overt presence.
Where posters would ameliorate conservative fears by stressing
the immediacy and unchanging nature of the pastoral landscape's
past and present, Sickert presented transformed Victorian
illustrations which stressed the opposite. Sickert's paintings
showed a different kind of historical landscape, one continuous
with the material of recent history rather than the ideology of

deep time, using a method which declared the intervening time and the process of construction. If conservative discourse held that the industrial era 'veiled' the authentic nation, then Sickert attempted to relocate authenticity to these very veils or layers, locating markers of a developed landscape and congested recent past and rendering them into things - hard to ignore but also hard to frame.

Tellingly, the art critical press reviewing Sickert's work was most frustrated by the way these sources seemed to present themselves with an intense immediacy, without the distancing effect of a palpable authorial hand. Victorian compositions were read as intrusive artefacts, a: "selection of subjects rather than in departing from the originals";[159] "No copies of any kind… strict interpretation of this rule would necessitate, I suppose, the rejection by a conscientious jury of every single one of the paintings…"[160]

These images and the grids used to square them up remain visible to the viewer, as if they were still in a state of excavation. Like the archaeological sifting of remains, the thin, incomplete layers of these paintings reveal a confused stratigraphy. The grid acts as a net which catches immutable material artefacts, retaining fragments of affective potential in place of their narrative.

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[159] *The Times* 9 May 1931.
[160] *The Sunday Times* 10 May 1931.

Added to this mediation, as we have seen in the case of *Temple Bar,* the contemporary viewer could also be affected by symbolic connections these images drew in strengthening Sickert's linkages of Victorian past and the interwar contemporary. In another *Echo*, *An Expensive Half Sovereign* [Fig. 10], viewers could read an oblique reference to the disruptive effect of transport technologies. The rising discourse on road accidents associated with ribbon developments and open-top charabanc travel meets the image of the previous century's traumatic transportation issue *de jour,* the train wreck. Moreover, we see the consequences for those who ignored the past which lay just around the corner. The tracks lead the eye to Sickert's signature, which projects its facture above a corner of bare under-drawing. "Anon" is written in the opposite corner, nearly disappearing in the dry and barren flora of the foreground, as if overgrown by short, dry brush-strokes. Sickert credits an unknown artist and renders a real but forgotten personage present, yet another body in the quagmire of landscape and paint, all through the mediation of this moralizing illustration. In place of the straightforward and instrumental text of a transport poster Sickert employs an opaque script of brush-marks. The artist presents a rich textural field for the beholder, and like the central figure we try to pick out the salient detail, the meaningful message from the mass of paint, without apprehending the oncoming engine - as if to lampoon the

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antiquarian who ignores the more immediate 'threat' of the Victorian train.

There is a material thingness to these paintings, and a temporal depth - a profoundly material aspect, as well as a potent mixture of motifs. For all their visual presence, they remain thing-like, somehow hard to fix as objects. How then are we to interpret the activity and the hybridity of these images? Moreover, what more can we draw from how these material and affective properties engaged concerns with both the time of contemporary processes on the urban/rural periphery, and the broader stretches of historical time these activities were associated with in the national imaginary? Before performing a closer discourse analysis of these paintings' reception, the concept of the temporal landscape can offer us greater purchase on where and how these material qualities and historical issues intersect.

The anthropologist Tim Ingold, building on Barbara Bender's work, emphasizes the importance of both temporality and materiality in understanding how notions of landscape change. However, his key argument stresses that historians need to critically overcome a false distinction between the concept of the landscape as an objective reality and a view of it as a complete cultural construct.[161] Neither, he argues, is a

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[161] Barbara Bender, "Time and Landscape," *Current Anthropology*, 43, Supplement: Repertoires of Timekeeping in Anthropology (Aug-Oct, 2002), 103.

sufficient explanation of landscapes as they exist, and instead he appeals to "dwelling" as a model for thinking through landscape: landscape as we experience it is anthropogenic, it does not exist before it is altered by human presence, and could be better described as a "taskscape."[162] For every hole dug there is a mound made - landscape remains stubbornly material, thing-like, but also always in a process of becoming. Similar to W. J. T. Mitchell's understanding of "landscape" as a verb - rather than simply an object acted on, or a subject constituting itself - with Ingold we can see a landscape as a dynamic 'thing', a material process constantly articulating human activity.[163] Landscape is performative, constructing and redistributing itself materially, and in Sickert's painting we see canvases which fundamentally construe the landscape as "dwelt" in Ingold's sense. They are inhabited and delimited by human activity - both that of the artists' hands and their fictive Victorian figures - a material space which is performed and insists on its thing-like presence. They are both mute matter and noisy cultural artefacts.

If we return to *Temple Bar* in light of this, and juxtapose it with advertising imagery for travel out of the city such as a General Transport Poster [Fig. 11], we encounter a striking

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[162] Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of Landscape," *World Archaeology* 25:2 (1993): 153-5.
[163] Mitchell, *Landscape and Power,* 5.

contrast. In the poster the viewer finds a conductor gesturing
to vast unseen vistas which remain safely framed by nature in
the form of arching trees, the prospect of an ancient rural
England. Sickert's arch, by contrast, seems to fuse and flatten
space rather than facilitate its penetration, the grid re-
painted after the image was transferred. This blocks the viewer
from entering the fictive space through the same mechanism which
provided the pre-condition for constructing that space in the
first place, a suggestive visual analogy for the arterial roads
around London which both enabled travel and also congested the
suburbs. Rather than a safely framed representation, or an image
of travel which elided the time of travel, Sickert returns to
the viewer an embodiment of the ongoing activity and
construction of the temporal landscape itself. This is in many
ways a 'congested' pictorial surface, congested with layers of
times passed. Its motif becomes nearly un-recognizable, as if
the more we dig through layers of impasto material into the
history of this image the more it shifts and disappears. The
more emphatic the paintwork the more it blurs its motif. Sickert
enfolds present displacements with a scene of Victorian
displacement. Dead paint, redundant grids, layers stacked and
repeated, it is an image Helen Lessore described as "very
difficult to see" without the photograph.[164] Where nationalist

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[164] Helen Lessore quoted in Baron and Shone, *Paintings*, 520.

commentators like Baldwin and Bryant had framed industry as obscuring a true 'Deep Englishness', Sickert represents history as confusing material strata, lacking an original layer or substratum.

Sickert's paintings are both rebuttals of the notion of a 'timeless' landscape, and wry comments on the mediated relationship of the public to a landscape which was being negotiated and reconstructed on multiple levels. In the *Echoes'* reception we can see clearly these issues concerning the material memory of the landscape, and this manifested for viewers of the paintings as problems with painterly process and contradictory qualities of immediacy and distance. The Leicester Galleries Exhibition of 1931, "English Echoes a Series of Paintings by Richard Sickert, A. R. A," became a defining moment for Sickert's new appropriation-based work.[165] In press reception, a heavily loaded lexicon of 'time' was put to use, articulating the anxieties surrounding the return of their historical materials that seemed to escape safe, conventional framing. Sickert himself was awarded the same character as his paintings – a protean youth, the old mixed with the new: "Mr Sickert's astounding faculty of rejuvenation makes one think of him as the Peter Pan of British art."[166] But this was an

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[165] This was the first in a series of one man shows largely focused on the *English Echoes.*
[166] *The Daily Mail* 29 April 1931.

ambivalent compliment, this 'youth' could be either novel or
out-of-date – Sickert was also read as an artist who refused to
let go of the past: "Mr Sickert, A. R. A., is the Peter Pan of
the art world";[167] "has returned to the days of his youth".[168]
Sickert's own personage seemed to embody the ambiguous
temporality felt in relation to his paintings.

Rather than the astute identification of nostalgia, these
descriptions were an attempt to understand these paintings by
anthropomorphizing them, as the contemporary writer William
Plomer noted in 1938: "these Victorian tableaux go back further
than memory."[169] The *Echoes* seemed difficult for critics to
chronologically fix - from their position in the trajectory of
the artist's career, to their unusual content. They were read
alternately as bland and extravagant, old and new, original and
imitative, as if Sickert's brush were turning over the topsoil
of the painting like an English plough. The 'protean' artist's
powers of control and mediation received a great deal of
attention - the paintings dazzled their audience, fascinating
and bemusing in equal measure: "In jaunty colours and twirling,
calligraphic brushwork, Sickert gives us a large helping of
Victorian Baroque";[170] "almost extravagantly beautiful in
colour";[171] "the fact of colour enables the artist to put his own

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[167] *The Glasgow Evening Citizen* 7 May 1931.
[168] *News Chronicle* 8 May 1931.
[169] William Plomer, 'Mr Sickert's Exhibition' *The Listener* March 9 1938.
[170] *News Chronicle* 8 May 1931.
[171] *The Daily Telegraph* 9 May 1931.

emotional emphasis upon what is represented."[172] Moreover, they also appeared to defy the rules of artistic development - the paintings of this 'Peter Pan' artist were both entirely new and yet aggravatingly consistent: "an entirely fresh note in the artists production";[173] "Again we have the transcripts ......[this] might appear, to many people, Sickert's permanent phase."[174]

More conservative publications, such as *The Daily Telegraph,* deplored them: "They are a little slighter and definitely more anecdotal";[175] "'Echoes' is exactly the right word for this bland recovery of a bygone age."[176] At the same time as they were lauded for their formal aesthetic strength, their sources remained problematic. These referents seemed to possess a disturbing degree of emphasis and presence in a way that seemed to over-determine their mediation: "selection of subjects rather than in departing from the originals";[177] "In the rules of the Royal Academy relating to the works inadmissible to the Summer exhibition it is written: No copies of any kind. A strict interpretation of this rule would necessitate, I suppose, the rejection by a conscientious jury of every single one of the paintings which Mr Sickert is exhibiting..."[178] Both between and

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[172] *The Times* 9 May 1931.
[173] *The Daily Mail* 29 April 1931.
[174] *News Chronicle* 8 May 1931.
[175] *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 May 1931.
[176] *The Times*, 9 May 1931.
[177] *The Times*, 9 May 1931.
[178] *The Sunday Times*, 10 May 1931.

within the supportive and dismissive camps of art critics these paintings were divisive, and to a degree, uncanny.

However, as he marketed his own practice, for Sickert: "There are really no original things", "We can't make something out of nothing... It is like translation and drama."[179] This idea of painting as a process of recycling material was evident in the way some viewers engaged with the works themselves, as a journey through a series of temporal landscapes. Evocatively and succinctly, one critic described his encounter with the works as travelling through a space suffused with time: "We are made aware as we pass through the gallery of what Henry James called 'A sense of the past.'"[180] This evocative analogy was a reference to an unfinished Henry James novel of the same title, published in 1917, in which a man travels back through time to the nineteenth century through an encounter with the portrait of an ancestor. The protagonist is made to perform their ancestor's role in the past, however the novel ends before he can return, leaving the tensions of the plot unresolved and the character stuck between times. Like Sickert's *Echoes,* the figure is marooned in a painting between past and present, engaged in an unfinished process. James' narrative went on to form the basis of the more successful time-travel-themed play *Berkley Square*

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[179] Walter Sickert, Margate Lecture, "Colour Study: The Importance of Scale," 16 November 1934 in Robins *The Complete Writings* p.655.
[180] *The Daily Telegraph* 9 May 1931.

which ran 229 shows internationally between 1929 and 1930, premiering in London in 1926. This was certainly a performance which Sickert was at least aware of as a regular theatre goer, and may indeed have seen. As an unresolved narrative of travel to the nineteenth century in a transmedia work, its similarity to the *Echoes* is resonant – emphasizing themes of traversal through time and the problems of attempting to excavate the past. If Sickert's paintings complicate the position of the 1930s tourist as a kind of time-traveller or archaeologist, they also present an interesting proposition for audiences of the temporal landscape across different media.

Indeed, visual correspondences between Sickert's works based on stage photographs and works based on engraving, with the implications of movement through a gallery space, bring us to new readings of Sickert's theatre paintings. *Echoes* and theatre works are two 'areas' of Sickert's production which overlap at many points – from paintings based on Victorian illustrations of theatres, to works based on unattributed sources with formal similarities to those of verified theatrical productions [Fig's. 9 and 10]. These paintings are often located by scholarship in relation to Sickert's fleeting career on the stage in his youth, part of a general privileging of Sickert's younger years which distorts our appreciation of his later production. However, as William Rough has explored, Sickert's theatre works were highly contemporary images actively engaged

with their present moment.[181] What then do Sickert's 'staged'
landscapes tell us about his wider use of material space and
time in his *Echo* production?

Some contemporary theatrical trends bear limited
similarities to Sickert's reinvention of the Victorian, but also
serve to show how Sickert's painting differs from the field of
modernist drama and theatrical appropriation in the 1930s.
Contemporaneously with Sickert's late work, eminent modernist
writers such as Forster and Eliot were appropriating the
'Pageant Play' format, an English folk tradition accessing and
staging local histories - a kind of folk-historical re-
enactment. The modernists deployed the popular genre as a means
of politically revising conventional histories of the landscape
for a mass audience, as in Eliot's *The Rock* (1934).[182] Indeed,
Sickert himself expressed an interest in the pageant play, and
Eliot's Victorian folk genre work was first performed in
Sadler's Wells, a theatre with which Sickert had a long history.
The last article appended to his monumental scrap-book
collection of newspaper articles in the Family Archives in
Islington even documented a traditional pageant play in 1925.[183]

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[181] Rough explores Sickert's networking with contemporary celebrity and his
work's relevance to contemporary trends in theatre, see Rough, William (2012)
http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/william-
rough-walter-sickert-and-contemporary-drama-r1104370 - Accessed 12/01/16.
[182] Joshua D. Esty, "Amnesia in the Fields: Late Modernism, Late Imperialism,
and the English Pageant-Play," *ELH,* 69:1 (Spring, 2002): 250-251.
[183] G., N., 'Anglo-Saxon Folk - A Malmesbury Pageant', *Sunday Times* 5 July
1925, 5

However, in contrast to Sickert's work, this area of modernist appropriation was explicitly political and didactic, aimed at the education of the masses. While it drew inspiration from Ruskin and Morris, it also drew from a breadth of history at once less selective and less incisive than Sickert's - from the Saxons to the Tudors.

Eliot, Forster and Woolf used a distinct strategy - inserting content from the recent past into an older folk medium rather than the appropriation of the recent past into a modernist idiom – yet they still indicate an interesting context for Sickert's work. In the 'neo-traditional' pageant play we see what the literary scholar Joshua D. Esty charts as an attempt to resignify 'England' via "the substitution of elaborated (modernist) style with a spare aesthetic of self-contemplation on the collective level," and in Sickert we see an equally subversive project of counter-canon building.[184] Nominally Sickert's intention was to make the next generation of artists, and the public at large, actively engage with the recent past and disrupt the canon: "I confess also to desire to do a little propaganda by sending the young painters to rifle the wealth of English sources of inspiration."[185] This he describes as a very physical and actively exploratory enterprise, like an

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[184] Esty, "Amnesia in the Fields", 270.
[185] Walter Sickert, Letter, 1931 discussing the Leicester Gallery Exhibition, quoted in Baron *Sickert* 2006, 122.

archaeological sifting and sorting of artefacts from the past. This was intended as an ongoing painterly experiment with connections and discoveries yet to be made, rather than a more direct and didactic mediation of material for a working class audience.

The *Echoes'* 're-creative' and material strangeness becomes even more pronounced in the deployment of landscape spaces in Sickert's theatre works - the commingling and repetition of simulacra, the painting of wooden flats and fabrics. The bulk of these theatre works were in the first instance based on promotional or commissioned photographs, and in the process of transmediation from stage fiction to photographic record to painterly interpretation, the image is flattened, compressed like we see in Echoes such as *Temple Bar.* Two-dimensional stage backdrops and costumed actors are reduced to the same dry painted surface. Props, costumes and actors all become so many thin layers of paint.

Rough has explored the genesis of Sickert's theatre paintings, and the context of their sources, building on the attribution work of Rebecca Daniels.[186] Shakespeare was experiencing a resurgence owing to an influx of new talent, and Rough argues that Sickert was engaged in a related project of modernizing the bard in a manner keenly aware of contemporary

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[186] Rough, "Walter Sickert and Contemporary Drama" - Accessed 12/01/16.

theatre practice, especially noticeable from 1935 onwards.[187]
While a major stage production of *As You Like It* in 1934 did
play with the flattening of space, and the reinterpretation of a
French pastoral landscape with cubist set elements, I argue that
Sickert does more than just reflect or document 1930s theatre in
his work. Sickert's painting is most suggestive in this regard
where his treatment of the 'figure in the play' relates to his
treatment of the 'figure in the landscape' as a material
substance of history.

In the dry facture typical of theatre paintings, such as
[Figs. 12 and 13], Sickert's mechanical treatment of his source
material reduces the focal figures on the stage to the same kind
of decorative paintwork as their backdrop. The figures are as
de-realized as the screens behind them, flattened in the process
of transmediation from stage to photograph to painting, and in
their formal and material similarity to *Echoes* they seem to
congest different kinds of popular imaginary, evoking a
contemporary interpretation of period costume. Different degrees
of viewer immersion become elided in this compressed and de-
familiarized painterly space: a painting of a photograph of a
performance of a play that evokes eighteenth-century fashions.
Sickert's invokes more fashionable material, but muddies and

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[187] This was also the focus of the argument William Rough brought to the
December 2015 conference "Walter Sickert: The Document and the Documentary" in
his paper "Cribbing from Shakespeare."

reduces it in paint, relativizing the distinctions between
document and fiction, the artefact and its surrounding soil.

Visually, iconographically and procedurally, *The Idyll*
[Fig. 5] and *L Ci Darem La Mano – Don Giovanni* [Fig. 14] bear
strong resemblances in embodying the landscape as a highly
culturally mediated amalgam of material and performance - of the
artefactual and of pensive travel. Both share the dominant cold
blue hue of their underpainting, expressing it on their
surfaces, with areas of *Idyll* where this colour is washed back
over the foliage as a final layer. While the figures in these
paintings assume very different and exaggerated relationships,
as pairs they are both flattened to the same pictorial plane,
and where their limbs encounter each other they visually fray
and give way to exposed areas of canvas weave and earlier layers
of painting. These are images which imply antecedent images, and
deposit them in a mixed sedimentation of matte, pastel-coloured
paint.

In *Simulacra and Simulation,* Baudrillard elaborates his
understanding of similar imaging practices, and articulates the
idea of iterating and screening a picture such that it
constitutes: "a model of a real without origin or reality".[188] He
identifies the "simulacrum" as a copy without an original, a
product of modernity which displaces the object with its image,

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[188] Jean Baudrillard, trans. Shiela Faria Glaser, Simulacra and Simulation
(Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1-7.

to the extent that the common experience of the world becomes flattened by the ubiquity of images – the image both precedes and effectively produces 'reality' as we experience it. In Sickert's theatre paintings, we find that the problematic collision of the strange and the familiar provokes similar "simulacral" disorientation for their critics, and probes the differences between painting and its object. While these paintings are material things, part of the cultural landscape they create and that creates them, they retain some of the indifference and opaque qualities of the simulacrum. As much as these paintings give they also withhold, in conversation with the viewer. If detail, balance and a reliable relationship of text and image were the preconditions of a stable Victorian representation of the world, Sickert's paintings were closer to the diffuse mediation of simulacra, but the tactile facture of his paint offers a tantalizing, if fragile, solidity.

In *La Ci Darem La Mano* the viewer witnesses a moment of temptation - Don Giovanni's invitation to Zelina to enter his world, a duet which seems to entreat the viewer to enter a dry land of paint, as our eye follows the line of his leg which describes the depth of the stage.[189] At a distance the painting resembles a thinly painted Gainsborough or Van Dyke, and only title and proximity to the viewer alert the audience to the

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[189] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 554.

figures' 'costumed' rather than 'historical' status. Scrubbed areas of thin paint lie like drapery and costume across the picture plane, while the shimmering blue of the under-painting used in transcription links the male protagonist with the background sky, flattening the image. Indeed, Sickert's friend the novelist and art critic George Moore wrote to him in the twenties with the observation: "your skies were blue paint broken with a little vermilion, symbolic skies, curtains..."[190] *La Ci Darem La Mano* is like a veil that, though it might tempt and repel, conceals nothing. Critics were palpably aware of the constructed nature of Sickert's work, but had difficulty in distinguishing between unfashionable elements and qualities of value, between the selected source and its mediation, a central part of critics' wider problem in answering paintings that visually both invite and rebuff the viewer.

Before concluding this chapter, let us consider the following pair of images, *The Standard Theatre, Shoreditch 1844* 1936 [Fig. 15] and *Temple Bar* 1939 [Fig. 1]. Both are overt transcriptions, Victorian spaces which used to be near neighbours. In the former, Sickert pictures what was even originally described in the *Illustrated London News* as the "Temple of Drama." It too had been altered and rebuilt since its construction, converted into a cinema in 1926 - one already

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[190] George Moore in correspondence with Walter Sickert, 18 March 1920, TGA 8120.1.40.

fallen on hard times in the mid-1930s and soon to be demolished. This painting offers layers of deposited space, broken up by the pictorial planes of figures and architecture but texturally merged into a single opaque material like a figural frieze on dry plaster. As in confronting *Temple Bar,* the viewer is impeded, the painting pretends to offer a pictorial window only to flatten and fold its focal point into the crumbling veil of the stage - a curtain poised above figures who could, interchangeably, be flats or actors. In a space that reads as a succession of veils, performance, displacement and materiality are its key themes - history read as a confusing stratigraphy, the landscape a stratigraphy being turned over, dug-up and re-buried, material memory.

What we see in Sickert's work is a negotiation of spaces of the English imaginary as a dynamic and strange material. Between history and the labour of consuming, traversing and fantasizing the landscape, Sickert created material spaces which encouraged active archaeological sifting while they embodied and performed the depth and distance of the recent past. In the arena of national visual-cultural debates, a space of accreted time, the landscape was being re-formed, but in Sickert's work we see some of the cultural artefacts being dug up and buried in the process. Contemporary perceptions of the English landscape being lost and being found, novel and ancient, near and far, reveal anxieties about the way in which these dynamics demonstrate the

historical 'construction' of the temporal landscape which Sickert's work foregrounds. Sickert's work provides a commentary on the dynamic cultural archaeology of English soil - a landscape experienced as both historical and current, present and absent, a temporal and material 'taskscape.'

It repeats an operation of retrieval and performance in a manner which aims not at an unproblematic excavation of the past, but as a partial and fraught process of creative digging. These paintings staged the act of remembering and reassembling, which allowed the image brought to the surface to exist as both new and old, an uncanny embodiment in thin facture and simulacral imaging. When, in one of his Margate Lectures, Sickert declared: "Drawing is the variation of different forgers trying to forge a cheque,"[191] he was describing his project not as one of confronting Power with truth, but the dirty business of re-mediating and re-framing the past for a plurality of interpretation and performance. In essence, Sickert's paint stood for the soil of the landscape, filled with artefacts and bodies mixed and muddied, and far from cleanly accessible.

As one final image to sum up the landscape as both a culturally constructed and material thing in Sickert's *Echoes* and theatre paintings, *Hamlet* (1930) [Fig. 16] provides us with a picture of burial and exhumation. As the gravedigger tosses

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[191] Walter Sickert, "Squaring up the Drawing," 2 November 1934, in Robins *The Complete Writings*, 634.

out the bones of Yorick like so much detritus to make space for the body of Ophelia, Hamlet leans on a gravestone and muses about the dense palimpsest of lived experience beneath his feet. Diffuse green and brown paint unite Hamlet's imagination and the labour of digging: this is not so much the tragedy as we know it, but the way we experience history.

The previous chapter investigated *Echoes* and theatre subjects which prompted a material engagement with collective memory and the dynamic landscape of the English imaginary. They performed material memory, the muddled layering of the recent past, and articulated a relationship to that past which was fraught, partial, creative and close. These uncanny images revealed aspects of the suppressed Victorian in a way which spoke to the historical recomposition of the material landscape. However, how can we develop our understanding of what this process of material memory achieved: what was the nature of the bodily encounter with the *Echoes;* and what do the more numerous genre scenes in Sickert's series have to tell us?

In this chapter I want to build on the first and expand on this productive relationship of material, memory and process to turn from a focus on the confused layered material space of paint to focus on the work of memory and the tactility of the surfaces of objects themselves. Considering the friction Sickert's painted surfaces could generate with contemporary remembrance practices will help us to more fully gauge their critical potential. Focussing on Sickert's multi-figure *Echo* compositions, often of interiors, this chapter addresses some of the ways the 'Victorian' invades the modern painted surface - a surface which seemed to both capture and distance their Victorian figures. Here I want to build on the notion of the "taskscape" and Ingold's observation that changes in a lived

space are a redistribution of material rather than an addition or subtraction. In looking at more intimate spaces and objects, I contend that Sickert's paintings reveal some of the consequent uncanniness involved in this recycling, at the same time as demonstrating that remediation represents both a loss and a continuity for collective memory.

The social practice of discussing and accessing history in the contemporary moment needs to be understood in its interwar context in order to appreciate the affective potentials of Sickert's doubly-estranged Victorian images. After expanding on the principal contradiction at the heart of these paintings' original reception - their paradoxical temporal identity - discussion will turn to how these images of the Victorian and Modern might operate amid the contexts and conventions of practices of historical memory and heritage in the 1920s and 1930s. To understand how Sickert's particular conceptual juxtapositions and tactile material treatment negotiate such issues, this chapter will explore the operation of a conceptual and material 'echoing' using three principle contexts: photographic snapshots in relation to the *Echoes'* materiality, war memorials in relation to the *Echoes'* conceptual juxtapositions and the place of Victorian and pre-Victorian heritage in relation to both.

First I identify how the *Echoes* problematize ideas of capturing and representing the past - through the lens of the

contemporary tourist camera - by stressing the mediated surfaces and limits between different kinds of modernity. Second, to understand why practices of remembrance were significant and evolving, this chapter relates the *Echoes* to practices of First World War memorial culture and material memory, identifying contested issues of displaced and disrupted narrative history. Third, in exploring the strangeness of the Victorian Other, heritage projects concerning the pre-war period will help elucidate the ramifications of Sickert's work in relation to 'Deep Englishness', and the problems of providing a narrative for recent history, further situating the *Echoes* in a contemporary culture grappling with living alongside the past.

This chapter argues that critical confusion in reading the history and visual coherence of these paintings relates to problems of categorization and representation within the wider field of personal, cultural and national remembrance. To understand how these paintings operate, I argue that we need to consider how the material and tactile nature of these works' paint surfaces invite their audience to try to reach out and touch the past. In a related vein to Chapter 1, I show that critical emphasis on formal characteristics in these works to the detriment of their 'older' content was a reaction to the emphatically haptic qualities of these paintings which articulated the conceptual 'friction' of the Victorian/Modern, impacting each other. These paintings describe the problems and

necessities of existing 'after' one's time in a way

metaphorically resonant with contemporary theories of

'psychometry', the idea that touching objects imprints upon us

affective content from the past just as we leave our mark, and a

concept which persisted after the end of the Victorian period

itself.

In 1923 Sickert condemned the manner in which the Tate

Gallery hung monochromatic illustrations, the fertile source

material driving his work after 1927:

> [The idea is] that black-and-white illustrations are
> ignored if they are not cut out of the books that they were
> done to illustrate, mounted, framed, glazed and hung up on
> the walls of a large gallery, with a catalogue. This is a
> modern error. Placed in this manner, they are certainly
> more difficult to see. The spectator must stoop below the
> line, and stand on tiptoe to see above the line, with the
> added difficulty of the obstacle created by the glass that
> covers the drawings. Thousands possess and handle the books
> and papers, at home or in libraries, to units who go to any
> exhibition. No exhibition is open very long, while the
> books and magazines are available as long as the paper
> lasts. Such drawings are done for the express purpose of
> being held in the hand, and their execution is calculated
> accordingly.[192]

Sickert emphasizes three important factors for audience

engagement with Victorian imagery: accessibility, awareness of

context and the original bodily encounter involved in engaging

these images. After 1927, then, how does Sickert rationalize and

effect the insertion of his mediated press illustrations into

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[192] Walter Sickert, "Woodcuts of the Sixties at the Tate," *Burlington Magazine*
March 1923 in Osbert Sitwell (ed.), *A Free House! or The Artist as Craftsman:
Being the Writings of Walter Richard Sickert,* (London: Macmillan, 1947), 245.

the gallery? How do his paintings of illustrations further or contrast with a project of intimate and tactile mass media Sickert perceives in press illustration itself? This chapter considers Sickert's balance of the "more difficult to see" art object with the "held in the hand" mass consumer object, which would in certain ways come to define his *Echoes*.

The end of Sickert's career offers a poignant metaphor for how Sickert would synthesize this dialectic pedagogically. In [Fig. 17], a photograph of 1939, we see the opening of a Bath School of Art exhibition in Bath's Victoria Art Gallery, near to where the artist moved to spend his final years:

> Sickert brought along his own selection [of illustrations] taken from the back numbers of *Punch* or the *Illustrated London News*. Thus we came to know the drawings of the Victorian illustrators, Georgy Bowers, Leech & Keen. Sickert's allusions were sometimes obscene particularly when he was referring to people he had known personally, and he often lapsed into French. But it was all very enlivening and broadening to the minds of a young and unsophisticated audience.[193]

As we saw in the previous chapter, Sickert had for a decade been broadening young and unsophisticated minds: "through a little propaganda by sending the younger painters to rifle the wealth of English sources of inspiration."[194] This idea of 'rifling' through sources also suggests an image such as [Fig. 18], a photograph documenting Sickert's work space, filled with

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[193] Headmaster of Bath School of Art, quoted in *A Celebration of Bath Academy of Art at Corsham*, ed. Derek Pope (Corsham: privately printed, 1997), 11-12.
[194] Walter Sickert, quoted in Morphet, 'Late Sickert, then and now,' 102.

the incoherent detritus of strewn press imagery. What he calls

for is polemical, to burglarize the recent past by force, not to

cradle its artefacts.

In Bath he used an epidiascope, a form of opaque projector,

to transpose fragile, 'original' printed artefacts onto a

screen.[195] The heat from the strong lamps used in these

projectors often damaged their object, but this risk was

consistent with Sickert's strategy.[196] He intended to negotiate

the ephemerality of objects through material translation, and

generate myriad fragile encounters with his audience: "No

painting has eternal life. When, and if, Renoir's paintings

fade, they will have been perpetuated by photography, and by

that extension of photography, colour reproduction, which is

perpetually improving, and, above all, by pious copyists."[197]

What was important to Sickert, therefore, was to scale up these

images and project them for a young provincial audience,

reinserting them into circulation even if they might be consumed

in the process. Reinforcing the connection between the textual,

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[195] "The epidiascope itself was an old technology dating from the turn of the century: "Lithographs in bound periodicals or reprints may simply be placed upon the carrier of the machine while the book is held open with the hand, and the whole page appears with the colours and lines of the figures perfectly reproduced." A. D. Mead, "The Epidiascope," *Science*, New Series, 21:526 (January, 1905): 152.
[196] "The heat radiated is not in the ordinary way sufficient to do any damage to the objects shown, but for delicate articles which it is desired to keep as cool as possible, a special cooling apparatus is provided in the form of a fan which can be switched on when required, and which has the effect of exhausting the hot air in the instrument." Anon. Secretary, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 79: 4115 (October, 1931): 961.
[197] Walter Sickert, "Painting From Nature," *The Times* 3 April 1933 in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 625.

pedagogic and material aspects of his work, we see in [Fig. 17] that he performed this lecture in the presence of one of his material manifestations of this project, an identifiable *Echo*, titled *Portrait of Painters Grandmother Anne Sheepshanks of Tavistock Place London and London Road Reading* (1931-2) [Fig. 19].

Sickert's *Echoes* were central to his practice in the 1930s, and in their representation of Victorians handling ephemera, and negotiating furnished interiors, they reflect on a tactile quality of learning and a material quality of memory. A preliminary visual analysis of a range of *Echo* interiors lets us see this wealth of sources, their stylistic diversity and their common interest in the tactile overlapping and hesitant touching of surfaces – the sense that they grapple with the positions of being 'held in the hand' and 'difficult to see'. Sickert's subjection of his fragile sources to the threat of burning evokes the subject of *The Holocaust* (1937) [Fig. 20]. Here we see a woman casting material into an open fire, illegible documents dropped from a hand which itself seems to fray and deteriorate – merging with the weave of the canvas as it approaches the cut of the frame. Her gaze is hidden, but the man appears confrontational, arms folded, eyebrow raised – the viewer can infer that what she shreds and burns are documents important to their relationship, perhaps letters, a will or testimony. In the fictive space between her and the viewer lie

these fragmented things, a scattering of documents which evoke equally prominent bare patches of canvas and rhyme with the intervals of the grid of transcription. Insofar as this image is recycled and broken down, this suggests, it is recapitulated within another framework - narrative is reconstituted into visual effects. However, this translation seems incomplete and ambivalent - aware of its unsettling strangeness. As we will explore further in Chapter 3, Sickert had ambiguously and provocatively reflected in the 1920s on the concurrently present and absent quality of painting's subject: "The subject of painting is, perhaps, that it is not death. It is, perhaps, nothing more."[198]

   Ambivalence is embodied in both this image's material and its subject. The attitude of the male figure could equally suggest an accomplice, or the watchful eye of a husband ensuring the disposal of adulterous correspondence. This ambivalence is carried into the paint: at one visual extreme the woman's skirts flicker even more energetically than the fire, while at the other its fictive 'fabric' fades into transparency, letting the fireplace bleed though. The painting's melodramatic title concerns an immolation, a deathly erasure, but the image is also partly reborn, the source is frozen in action between the dry rebarbative paint surface and the underlying grid, preserved

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[198] Walter Sickert, "Vanessa Bell*," Burlington Magazine,* July 1922, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 47.

strangely and ambiguously in a liminal material and conceptual space.

Earlier *Echoes* demonstrate that this overlapping and disintegration of surface was a recurrent interest for Sickert, for example *The Private View* (1930) [Fig. 21] where he superimposes thinly painted figures - grandmother and grandchild merged at the knee - or in *The Young Englishman* (1933-4) [Fig. 22] where figures blend into each other in a thick, turbulent facture.

In *The Seducer* (1928-30) [Fig. 23] we have an even closer precedent for the clothed man-woman pairings to which Sickert turned in *Echoes* such as *Holocaust*. Here the figures inhabit an openly fabricated painterly space, a non-place, the scene quickly dashed in dilute oils on top of a room blocked in with dry and patchy paint. This is a Victorian room meshed with something modern, the walls reminiscent of the colour forms in a Bloomsbury abstract. To the right we have a man entangled with his surroundings, tied to the surfaces around him in a profusion of lines, the space between him and the woman corrupted by dry flicks of paint. The colours of his waistcoat and jacket rhyme with the walls behind, while the tails of his coat seem to mimic the table cloth. Hard to tease apart, colours act to mute difference, or rather to slip surfaces between objects. Even the sequence of this translation in paint is muddied as his legs overlap and the soles of his shoes stutter and double. The

uncertain figure at the far left provides a proxy for the viewer - surprised, on the back foot, the paint itself takes on a hesitancy. The black lines of his leg and shoulder seem to waver, part transparent to the floor behind them, part confused with the line of the coat. While the exposed grain of the canvas leaves his coat flickering with flecks of white, the shadow of his arm is a wash which fills in the grain, giving the character a ghostly, transparent aspect. By working with the depth of the canvas weave itself, washes and dry-brushing alternately activating the rise and fall of the canvas in its smallest dimensions, Sickert leaves the painting something both transparently material and barely present. Paint falls over and into the recesses of the support, such that the figures seem to waver - to fade away as well as insist on their presence through the same redistributed material of paint. As Vanessa Bell claimed of the *Echoes* as a whole: "[The Echoes] fall between so many stools they hardly exist."[199]

This brings us to what was, for Sickert's critical audience in the 1930s, a central and problematic quality of these paintings. What does it mean, Bell's ontological and epistemic description of the *Echoes*? At first glance it may read as hyperbole, an exaggerated dismissal. We might even agree with one of Virginia Woolf's fellow diners that what is being said of

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[199] Regina Marler ed., *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 1993), 364.

Sickert is yet another conversational "exaggeration, a dramatization."[200] However, her description is more than a simple negation - these paintings have the appearance of objects without homes, images on shifting foundations: but what does it mean for a painting to "hardly exist"?

Here we move thematically from the painterly stratigraphy of landscape to the pictured interior, from Chapter 1's example of *Echoes* in one specific topical context, to discussion of the *Echoes'* conceptual core. I now want to consider the critical discursive field in which the *Echoes* were plotted in greater depth - a discourse which figured these paintings as paradoxically more and less than themselves.

Vanessa Bell was not alone in describing the *Echoes* as contradictory creations inhabiting a liminal space, 'hardly existing.' Both contemporaries and later scholarship ran into trouble trying to articulate these works, encountering categorical and existential difficulties. However, Bell's description provides us with a productive way into these paintings. For contemporaries the principle stools these canvases fell between were 'Modernity' and the 'Victorian': "modern pictures, scientific",[201] yet of a kind which "brings in the old world to redress the balance of the new".[202] Caught

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[200] Virginia Woolf, *Walter Sickert: A Conversation* (London: Hogarth Press)1934, 9.
[201] 'Mr Sickert at it again', *Manchester Guardian* 14 Nov 1934.
[202] *Manchester Guardian* 14 Nov 1934.

between the Modern and Victorian, the *Echoes* proved hard to discern - the paintings seem to fade from the senses at the very moment that critics tried to isolate what the images referred to: intelligent and "scientific," they "look so *modern*"[203] and yet are the work of a "'transcriptist'...of a bygone age."[204] Sickert himself was read as problematically Janus-faced, critical rhetoric proclaiming exaggeratedly divided appraisals of his innovation and nostalgic hoarding. Critics were struck by these paintings' "sheer pictorial wizardry,"[205] but also found them hard to reach as they were "crammed with Victorian bric-a-brac".[206]

Moreover, on the one hand Sickert, as we have seen, was labelled as "Peter Pan,"[207] frozen in the past: "[he] has returned to the days of his youth";[208] "Sickert's mind seems to be coloured by a regretful brooding over the vanished jollity and stuffiness of Victorian times."[209] Yet, while he 'broods', on the other hand he also 'surprises'.[210] Sickert is also a "Peter Pan" who becomes ever more youthful over time: "a gaiety and vivacity which are not often to be found in the artist's earlier work"[211] In the shared language of Sickert's proponents and

[203] [emphasis original] *Apollo* Jan 1934.
[204] *Nottingham Journal & Express* 14 Nov 1934.
[205] "Sickert's English Echoes - His Wit and Genius," *The Scotsman* 11 May 1931.
[206] *The Scotsman* 11 May 1931.
[207] *Glasgow Evening Citizen* 7 May 1931, and also verbatim in *Belfast Telegraph* 7 May 1931.
[208] *News Chronicle* 8 May 1931.
[209] 'Sickert's English Echoes - His Wit and Genius', *The Scotsman* 11 May 1931.
[210] 'An ARA Springs a Surprise', *Evening News* 9 May 1931.
[211] *The Daily Mail* 29 April 1931.

opponents 'Sickert' is merged with the *Echoes*, returning to his youth through the material process of painting. 'Sickert' is made *old* by brooding on his *youth,* but vice versa *young* by returning to the *old,* an anthropomorphic figure of the material (mediating) operations of the *Echoes*. Instead of a unidirectional causal relationship between artist and artwork, precedent and appropriation, there are contradictions and entanglements. Instead of an artist producing an artwork, the two are superimposed, uncomfortably resting upon each other, and so too the visual qualities of the Victorian and the interwar.

Seeing these paradoxes at work in the material memory of these paintings will help us to draw on contemporary discourse to help explain how and why critics responded this way to the *Echoes*. Let us compare *Summer Lightning* (1931-2) [Fig. 24] with a contemporaneous work by another artist working between low-art and fine, past modes and present: Rex Whistler's *The Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats* (1926-27) [Fig. 25]. I juxtapose here a small figure hesitating at a countryside fence without a narrative and an immersive narrative landscape mural encircling the modern Tate Britain's restaurant interior. These are two paintings out of time, through which to begin thinking about issues of nostalgic appropriation and fictive encounters.

These paintings were considered by many to be decorative 'amusements' predicated on the adaptation of English art history from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. While Whistler

might represent a youthful career cut short, and Sickert a career that for some could have been cut shorter, they shared a reputation for 'youthful' energy, creativity and engaging in playful controversies, while at the same time utilizing period content. Both held interests in the theatre, English tradition, technical innovation and institutional developments in the Tate Gallery. Both painted around the time Sickert began his *Echoes*, these works quickly garnered praise and institutional acceptance to different degrees as fashionable contemporary English painting, Whistler completing "The most amusing room in Europe"[212] for the Tate Gallery at the recommendation of Henry Tonks, and Sickert's *Summer Lightning* being acquired by the city of Liverpool for the Walker Art Gallery at the extraordinary price of "several hundreds" of pounds.[213] *Lightning* transitioned from commercial to institutional painting within only a year of its first exhibition - both paintings were therefore a success.

Yet as images and as material objects they differ dramatically. Whistler offers the viewer a pastiche of styles, from Rococo to late-eighteenth-century sports painting, inviting the beholder to sit surrounded by a scene of a fantastic hunt. The artist consciously mixes the exotic and nostalgic with precedents from English fancy painting to eighteenth-century

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[212] *The Telegraph* (1927) quoted in Laurence and Ronald Fuller, *The Work of Rex Whistler*, (London: Batsford, 1960), 2.
[213] Walter Sickert to Gwen Ffrangcon Davies, Tate Letters - n TGA 888/10 12 December 1932.

colonial scenes, Watteau to Chinese landscape painting, even

inserting modern bicycle riders into this open space.[214] The

journey unfolds between majestic and pastoral buildings in an

episodic narrative of the chase, where viewers (attentive

diners) are invited to identify with a picnic in the foreground

[Fig. 26] invoking Gainsborough's *Mr & Mrs Andrew* (1750). This

is a unified narrative space that narratologists would term

"continuous style," *Pursuit* synthesises heterogeneous stylistic

fragments into a cohesive and relaxing linear narrative.[215]

  In contrast to Whistler's continuous narrative, one of

confident and fabulous relationships between the human and the

animal, Sickert provides a strained interpersonal encounter,

between figures obstructed by the terrain, not facilitated by

it. Rather than a well-defined exotic coexistence, figures in

Lightning dissolve into painterly surfaces, the man a barely

legible mesh of mark-making. An image without its original

caption, without a 'before' or 'after,' *Lightning's* referent is

cropped on the lower edge bringing the viewer in closer, but

denying the viewer narrative time. If there is any movement or

progress at all in *Lightning*, it is a stuttering advance on

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[214] Scholarship on Rex Whistler remains sparse, though the artist's brother expands on Rex's artistic influences. See Laurence Whistler, *Rex Whistler: His Life and Drawings,* (London: Arts and Technics, 1948), 91, 95. For an overview of this specific mural see also Clare Willsdon, M*ural Painting in Britain 1840-1940,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 368-370.

[215] Franz Wickhoff, quoted in Wolfgang Kemp, David Britt trans., "Narrative," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Nelson Robert and Schiff Richard, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 62-65

foot, whereas Whistler's touristic hunters travel by a historical panoply of leisurely transport: from chariots to bicycles. The fluid left-to-right legibility of Whistler, with his clear-cut romantic use of line, creates a panorama at eye-level to survey from the seat of a restaurant chair, whereas Sickert's closely cropped, thin and dry paintwork implicates the viewer in a much more intimate and fragile encounter with the past. One can be quickly scanned or read like text, while the other causes the viewer to hesitate, pensively. While the picnicking couple in *Pursuit* offer the viewer a safe proxy ensconced within the picture plane, Sickert's heroine refuses the gaze of both the male figure and the audience, even though her feet intrude on the viewer's space.

Sickert's paintings gave a problematic second life to ephemeral sources which were discarded, even at risk of fire such that they "hardly exist," *Pursuit* was in a very literal sense built with the capacity to survive a disastrous flood.[216] Sickert's work traps the viewer in a fragile and problematic space, far removed from the easily accessible narrative that structure's Whistler's *Pursuit*: *Lightning* is a single source fractured into planes in a slowly spread and arid paint surface that proves hard to navigate, whereas Whistler welcomes the viewer into a legible interior fusing together multiple sources

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[216] *In Pursuit* was submerged in two feet of water during the River Thames Flood of 1928.

to do so. Moreover, the character of their respective content sets them even further apart.

Whistler offers us an almost medieval story set in a pseudo-eighteenth-century vista. Sickert, by contrast, provides an ambiguous and halting confrontation in the confines of a cropped nineteenth-century illustration. Whistler's mural immerses its audience in fashionable 1920s nostalgia while Sickert confronts his viewers with an unfashionable return of the Victorian. Indeed, as we will return to in discussion of the National Trust, the operative binary here is often between the accepted 'Georgian' which Whistler evokes, and the often excluded 'Victorian'. Whistler therefore works *with* the grain of what Joyce identifies as an extensive and wide-ranging interest in period revival, and Sickert against it.[217] Where Whistler provides an assured nod to art history, recuperated in 'decorative' form and function, Sickert digs up low-art and recuperates it as high art in a less confident and assertive mode. Where *Pursuit* fits with the space of the gallery and its codes of meaning, *Lightning* instead hangs within it as a resistant and uneasy object.

In light of this contrast with Whistler's cohesive if eclectic escapism, how does *Summer Lightning* function? In the mute static air of *Summer Lightning*, we can see why critics felt

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[217] Simon Joyce, *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 67.

the *Echoes* slipped between accepted categories of reception. Sickert's inexpressive paint was indeed seen as lacking dialogue - communication seemed to be blocked both within the painting as well as between viewer and object: "no conversation appears to be passing."[218] What remains "falls between." Recent scholarship, however, remains fixated on the model of an overly simplistic and unproblematic line of communication between Victorian and Modern elements in the *Echoes,* that of conventional artistic appropriation or influence. In these readings Sickert takes what he wants from his 'source' [Fig. 27] and discards the rest - the more discarded the better.[219] The Victorian illustration persists only as a referent, a subaltern, and for Shone and Baron's later accounts the *Echoes* are only redeemable insofar as they differ from their sources and are made new within the rules of modernism: "Sickert used these Victorian themes and designs only as springboards."[220]

Corbett's work stands apart in its attention to the ambivalent outcomes of Sickert's process - the artist's project here is construed as less confident, more fraught, but still part of wider modernism and concerned with a fixed hierarchical relationship between 'source' and painting. Corbett's focus is on the artist's relationship to modernity in which the past

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[218] *Evening Express* 14 Nov 1934.
[219] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 123.
[220] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 122.

seems fragmented, attempting to escape the "attrition" of modernity, to "rescue meaning" from it.[221] However, audiences in the 1930s did not perceive a recovery of narrative or meaning in these images, but instead a problematic encounter of Victorian subject and Modern paint. These paintings worked against themselves, performing as both "modern" and yet "old" to "redress the balance of the new."[222]

As Corbett notes, tonal and narrative clarity are dramatically reduced in Sickert's transcription of his source, John Gilbert's *The Unexpected Rencontre,* yet Corbett's reading is in line with previous scholarship where mediation is taken as evidence of a formal interest in source material – modernist anxiety, but purely with the technical devices of Fauvist colour and Victorian materialism.[223] However, the painterly treatment of this fraught surface does not purely obstruct ideational content, but renders it semi-opaque, partially restoring the culturally sublimated Victorian, with thin paint, all surfaces suspended on the visible grid of enlargement. This self-reflexivity, the self-declarative means of production, resists the viewer while the cropping pushes the foreground into the viewer's space. Rather than alienating beholders from a self-sufficient modernist plane the viewer is both pushed and pulled

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[221] Corbett, *Walter Sickert,* 58.
[222] 'Mr Sickert at it again', *Manchester Guardian* 14 Nov 1934.
[223] Corbett, *Walter Sickert,* 52.

by this image. We are drawn into the foreground, only to be stopped at the fence, the cool palette and denuded detail of this painting invite us to press into it, but also make us aware of its resistance. We feel and remember in a stage-like space, but the backdrop which sets the scene also resists our entry.

The central figure of *Summer Lightning* appears to be alienated from the 'Little England' beyond the fence, while the background figure appears to be cut from the same material as the landscape itself. The man stands as a ghostly after-image in washed-out colour, materially distanced from his 'lover' whose hand brushes the border between foreground and background, an insecure and provocative tactility centred on a liminal space. Her fingers trace the edge of the wooden gate, perhaps an echo of the grid of transcription, and a gesture to the material depth of the work as the bare under-drawing of the hand meets the thicker facture of this obdurate fence. On closer inspection, for all the flattening of fictive space in the transmediation, the hand is further from the fence than in the Gilbert engraving - hovering, its shadow glancing off the side of the rough-hewn timber. In multiple facets there is play back and forth in this painting concerning a near-tactile encounter with the past. At the levels of material, pictured content and Victorian/Modern ontology this is charged with the meeting of opposites, and the friction of the exchange.

We can get a better handle on this sense of friction by considering a related example of how an image which connected modernity with material memory might be expected to perform in wider visual remembrance practices. By looking at aspects of personal memory-making in the 1920s and 1930s we can begin to understand how and why viewers might try to engage with Sickert's provocatively tactile encounters with the past. As a popular contemporary medium, let us consider the widespread advertising footprint of Kodak and the portable camera as a popular apparatus of memory. It heralded a period of accelerating capacity to preserve and transport the personal and emotional past.[224] If, as Susan Sontag argues,[225] travel photography informed tourists what, where and how to remember, how did the *Echoes* inform viewers to sense the Victorian?

An advertising image from 1928 [Fig. 28] mirrors the composition of *Summer Lightning* both iconographically and formally, a ghostly apparition of traditional Englishness confronts a female observer, but here the 'Kodak girl' is armed with the memory prosthesis of the camera. She fights the fear of losing the English imaginary, of losing a past that the text warns us could run away like "water through your fingers." She faces the figure in anachronistic peasant dress head-on as she

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[224] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1977), 23.
[225] Sontag, *On Photography*, 55.

prepares to capture the balanced pyramidal composition before her.

Photography, spread by user-friendly cameras and cheap half-tone printing, had become a widespread popular pursuit in the 1920s – Sickert himself owning a Kodak.[226] Advances in mobile photographic technology added a temporal dimension to sight-seeing, and the collecting of 'places' as photographic objects.[227] During the war, companies had marketed the idea that photography could arrest the passage of time, creating objects that preserved the dead as alive, and after the war they continued to proffer stability in contrast to urban life.[228] Like Alison Light's Janus-faced modernity, Kodak offered simultaneous sameness and difference, assurances that time moves forwards but never passes, capitalist marketing – eternal youth, but also an escape from a stuffy Victorian atmosphere.[229] Here the past was rendered the object of the new, something reducible to the needs of the young, and opposed by the material and procedural opacity of Sickert's images. In *Lightning's* resistance to straightforward reading there is a change in the hierarchy and sequence of historical moments. Where amateur photography indexed time as an eternal present, *Echoes* brought the index of

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[226] Donated to the Tate Gallery Archives, TGA 971/18 Sickert, Walter Richard.
[227] Kenneth I. Helphand, "The Bicycle Kodak," *Environmental Review* 4:3 (1980): 24.
[228] John Taylor, "Kodak and the 'English' Market between the Wars," *Journal of Design History*, 7:1 (1994), 33.
[229] Taylor, "Kodak and the 'English' Market between the Wars," 33.

the past into contact with the modern in a manner which leaves the image 'youthfully' original, but 'broodingly' of the past.

In the same year as *Summer Lightning* was first exhibited, Kodak launched a global photography competition for genres of imagery which used to be the purview of illustration in the nineteenth century, such as "occupations," "interiors" and "portraits." This indicated how photography was replacing the dying medium of illustration, while at the same time we find advertisements such as [Fig. 28] drawing on much of the immersive narrative potential of nineteenth-century problem pictures, a genre which Sickert's work evokes but renders mute.[230] Indeed, the appropriation of these visual strategies of evocative narrative and problem-solving by marketing agendas such as Kodak's was largely responsible for the decline of artistic and critical interest in the problem-picture, a genre widely associated with commerciality and femininity from the 1910s onward.[231]

Contemporaneous with the *Echoes,* Kodak released "verichrome" film, branded as its most "reliable yet," with the capacity to capture memory with certainty and clarity. "Kodak gave several assurances: an eternal happy moment; the illusion

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[230] Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Mass Culture at the Turn of the Century,* (New York: Verso, 1996), 199.
[231] Fletcher, Pamela M., "Masculinity, Money and Modern Art: The Sentence of Death by John Collier," in *English Art 1860-1914: Modern Artists and Identity* eds., Corbett, David Peters and Perry, Lara, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 98-100.

of unravelling time; reliable film; and a machine which worked itself."[232] In comparison, the 'machinery' of Sickert's painting seems far less 'reliable.' Indeed, while many attributed the *Echoes* to Sickert having: "returned to the days of his youth,"[233] as we saw in Chapter 1 some observers were quick to point out that the *Echoes* could not be relied on to refer to personal memory and instead had a more complex relationship to social memory: "these Victorian tableaux go back further than memory."[234]

This becomes appreciable in the contrast of these images [Figs. 24 and 27]. Sickert presents us with an apprehensive painting, one which merges the stuffiness of the Victorian (feminine) interior with the airiness of the New Woman outdoors. The shadow of Sickert's protagonist is broken up as it hits the fence, serving to reinforce the solidity of the foreground as distinct from the washed-out flatness of the middle-distance, while in the Kodak advert the shadow bleeds into the field of the image captured by the Kodak Girl and integrates her with the scene of the pre-industrial. The latter, leading the viewer through the drive of wind and sun at the back of this New Woman, offers a reclamation of the old by the new. Where the Kodak Girl dwarfs the object she captures, the woman in *Lightning* remains

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[232] Taylor, 'Kodak and the "English' Market between the Wars," 36.
[233] "The Youthful Mr Sickert - Victorian Melodies in Paint," *News Chronicle* 8 May 1931.
[234] William Plomer, "Mr Sickert's Exhibition," *The Listener* 9 March 1938.

level with the ghostly apparition she cannot touch, and rubs against the painting's limits - its frame, grid and fence. The advertisement's scene, by contrast, is safely ensconced within the text. There is no overt cropping, the composition is balanced, the main figure grounded and stabilized by the shadow that stretches across the road into the picturesque village. This path eases the viewer into the image, in contrast with Sickert's foreground barrier.

If *Lightning's* machinery also operates itself, its machinations are more complex, hesitant and tactile. If Kodak demonstrates the synthesis of Conservative modernity in the production of cohesive narrative imagery, Sickert rubs Victorian and Modern against each other - the New Woman displaced by the old, the obsolete combined with the progressive. While Kodak's advertisement promises the chance to access and order the past for the benefit of the present with its trademark promise 'you press the button, we do the rest', *Echoes* demand a much more active viewer to collaborate and reflect on the act of materially constructing meaning in the absence of narrative. The painting uses the displaced Victorian to unravel contemporary advertising print culture, and problematize the logic of how personal memory was being captured and encoded by the Kodak generation through the rough substance of paint. Instead of a guaranteed relationship to the past, *Echoes* present a fraught encounter in which the new is already old and the old already

new. No memory is anchored by this object, instead a play between past and present distorts the commercial logic of the "eternal present."

Even this *Echo's* title exacerbates a sense of commercial and referential excess, but through yet another medium, popular fiction. "*Summer Lightning"* overlays Gilbert's Victorian meeting place with a reference to Wodehouse's 1929 novel of the same name. In prose, albeit playfully, the fear and return of wild youthful dalliances are continued in the love affairs of the present as a central character writes their memoirs, narrating their memories and bringing them to life even while refusing to learn from past mistakes. In the end 'Galahad' agrees to abandon the memoir, suppressing the past, in order to allow his fellow characters to form relationships in the present. Sickert, however, does not let go of his ambivalent connection to the past, but opens up his work up to even more degrees of reference. As a title, "Summer Lighting" is not only recycled from Wodehouse but was recycled *by* Wodehouse, used before twice in England - in G. F. Hummel's 1929 novel, and that of W. E. B. Henderson in 1922. In choosing a literary title already second-hand, Sickert allows his work to open a web of allusions in place of a fixed narrative from his pictorial referent, connections which bring media and time into proximity by referring outside of painting.

The gap which critics saw in these canvases, that of falling between ontological categories, was interestingly also read as an excess of reference - one described using the language of consumerism. The *Echoes'* mobility becomes again displaced onto Sickert's agency, in a manner similar to the operation of the Peter Pan metaphor we encountered among contemporaries in Chapter 1. Sickert's commercial success threatened to spill out of the frame, described like a contagion eliding the difference between fine paintings and ephemera: "Everything he touches, his merest drolleries, his scrap-book scribbles, even the contents of his waste-paper basket are scrambled for by collectors."[235] Even Sickert's supporters found these paintings compromised in terms of authenticity and marketability as well as timeliness: "And we are grateful to him (as to Autolycus) for his brilliant two-penny coloured 'counterfeits' of the penny plain original woodcuts which delighted our forebears - five or six decades ago."[236]

While dismissive, the perceived vitality of these paintings was another facet of their problematic excess. Rather than rebuilding the aura around artefacts through their mediation into fine art, as Corbett suggests, the admittance of Victorian ephemera into the commercial gallery circuit of the 1930s had

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[235] "Sickert's English Echoes - His Wit and Genius," *The Scotsman* 11 May 1931.
[236] "Richard Sickert - The Indian Summer of His Art," *Morning Post* 11 May 1931. Autolycus was the son of Hermes in ancient Greek myth, said to be an undetectable thief, and bearing connotations of mischief through Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale.*

the opposite effect, posing a threat to future painting. There

was concern even that the *Echoes* might copy themselves - that

the works might infect the rest of the art market if they were

not delimited by the artist 'Sickert':

> Sickert, at the Leicester Galleries, shows more of his
> variations upon Victorian themes, taking old prints, after
> Gilbert or Kenny Meadows or Adelaide Claxton, and juggling
> about with them, making them tremendously vital and witty,
> and startling in colour. It is the best of fun, and it is
> painting of a high order, but I sincerely hope that it
> does not lead to a fashion for repainting lesser-known
> illustrators. What is delightful in one man (when he is
> Sickert) would become intolerable with Tom, Dick and
> Harry."[237]

Here 'Sickert' is marked out as an author function vested

with the hope of limiting the 'vivacity' of these paintings, the

propagation of paint. In his symbolic personage, both

contemporary critics and recent scholarship hoped that 'past'

and 'present', 'low' and 'high', 'Victorian' and 'Modern' might

be synthesized as in the cohesive montaging of pasts as we have

seen in the imagery of Whistler and Kodak - Gainsborough's

picnickers and the Kodak girl. The immediacy of touch promised

by Kodak - the simple "click" of the button by which the hand

can capture the past - becomes an extended and coarse friction

of ontological and material surfaces in Sickert, a reciprocal

tactility where the machinery is on view but the locus of agency

is unfixed.

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[237] "Sickert's Work," *The Scotsman* 14 Nov 1934.

If Sickert's canvases suggest opposition to the kinds of synthetic and narrative memory objects offered by contemporary photography and decorative painting, while playing on their conventions, what project did this transgress? Why were certain orderings, erasures and hierarchies of historical and personal memory important in the 1920s and 1930s? To answer this, we must turn to the Great War, and the long shadow it cast on practices of 'remembrance'.

Sickert's *Echoes* represent a period of Sickert's work contemporaneous with a fresh engagement with recent history in the form of war remembrance in prose and poetry following a long discursive silence where: "...for most of the twenties the war had not been significantly imagined, in any form."[238] The foremost historian of First World War historiography, Jay Winter, persuasively argues that as a critical term "memory" has become over-saturated with meaning, and with regard to the performances of memory post-1918 we should think in terms of "remembrance" as social practice, focussing on agency and seeing memory as "more process than product."[239] Winter goes on to argue that the First World War had a significant and dynamic impact on practices of personal and collective memory-making, which can be analysed performatively in its cultural manifestations from

[238] Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined*, (London: Pimlico 1990), 424.
[239] Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Yale University Press 2006), 4.

cinema to the continent-wide spread of memorial sites.[240] Memory

work, understood critically in the twentieth century, was an

active process of remembrance which constructed memory, not

primitive recollection. Moreover, an evolving understanding of

collective memory was coextensive with Sickert's own development

during Winter's first "generation of memory" from Freud to

Halbwachs: "That work of collective remembrance was everywhere

in evidence in Europe between 1890 and 1920."[241]

This cultural obsession with memory was spurred on by the

problems of mourning in the aftermath of a war whose dead were

not only quantitatively huge but often hard to physically

locate, and this idea of the displaced dead was often translated

in cinema into the motif of the war dead uncannily returning.[242]

As historical discourse began to reflect on the war, initial

accounts struggled to map this absent demographic, this lack of

bodies. The first privileged commentaries were first-hand

witnesses, and in the 1930s major wartime figures like Churchill

and Lloyd George wrote memoirs in an attempt to absolve

themselves of guilt, adopting the tone of Greek tragedy to

convey the impossibility of morally culpable agency in an arena

of supra-human forces.[243] However, even provided these first-hand

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[240] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 78.
[241] Winter, *Remembering,* 22.
[242] Winter, *Sites of Memory,* 19.
[243] Jay Winter, *The Great War in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 2005, 174-175.

accounts and framing devices, by the 1930s there was a growing appreciation within popular history writing that "no text can convey fully the idea of what the infantry went through."[244]

These issues with being able to safely and comprehensively narrate the history of the war, the problem of accounting for its loss, situating its protagonists or even distinguishing truth and falsity, resulted in the construction of hard limits in remembrance. For the arguably proto-fascist modernist Wyndham Lewis - no friend of Sickert's - a topographical simile articulated the feeling of the war's breach in history that nevertheless resonated with many: "To us, in its immense meaningless shadow, it appears like a mountain range that has suddenly risen as a barrier..."[245] In *A War Imagined,* the historian Samuel Hynes reflects on this commonly identified problem present in both personal and general histories of the War in the Interwar period – the sense of discontinuity and a concern with the representational limits of historical narrative, which he identifies in Read, Ford, Sassoon and Brittain. History, for many interwar cultural figures, was no longer available to order and appropriate: "History was not merely there to be told; it would have to be remade."[246] This sentiment, and the practical problem of remembrance, is found in

[244] Winter, *The Great War,* 177.
[245] Wyndham Lewis, "Children of the New Epoch," *The Tyro: A Review of the Arts of Painting, Sculpture and Design,* 1 (1921), 3.
[246] Hynes, *A War Imagined* p.431.

fictional, autobiographical and ostensibly general/objective history writing of the period 1926-33, synchronous with Sickert's *Echoes*. During this period, Hynes argues, the general silence of nearly a decade was broken in the socio-political context of the General Strike and Depression, and consensus myth-making formed a view of the war as a historical caesura – fragmented, incoherent and destabilizing memory of the before and after.[247] In this context remembrance in the early 1930s was a difficult, complex and politically charged project, which struggled most with recuperating the decades leading up to the War.

Amid this new sensitivity to the limits of the historical recapitulation of trauma amid literary circles Sickert was engaged with, and in light of the work of photography and advertising in attempting a sublimation or denial of loss, images which problematized the viewer and author's relationship to the past carried a critical significance. Where Sickert's work is read as the intersection of past and present, a jostling together of artist and source, rather than the product of cause and effect, this signals familiar problems for a viewership confronting the fragmentary nature of history in the aftermath of the war, as well as problems for the middle class consumer attempting to elide the resultant ruptures between past and

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[247] Hynes *A War Imagined*, 424.

present. As history writing became the process of charting fractures - the territorial division of time into the pre-war and post-war,[248] Sickert's mobilization of hesitant, shifting Victorian rooms filled with "Victorian bric-a-brac"[249] in a modernist aesthetic implied a different kind of material engagement with time, The *Echoes,* as I argue, mobilized a language of material memory which linked those remembering to the history of the war which could not be written.

Sickert's tactile and transmedia representation of ephemera engages practices in a wide field of war remembrance at all registers of society, not just at a textual level, but in the form of things and objects. Significantly, the First World War saw an explosion in material objects of memory, a subject being explored with vigour as the War moves into the disciplinary terrain of archaeology with the turn of the century, heralding a new interest in its material culture.[250] Alongside memorials, ephemeral objects of memory connected individuals to larger monuments in the forging of collective memory - notably letters and photographs, the: "braiding together of family history and national history."[251] For Sickert, making highly tactile paintings of Victorian artefacts - sourced from book illustrations, photographs, *carte de visite* and even ointment

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[248] Hynes *A War Imagined*, 434.
[249] "Sickert's English Echoes - His Wit and Genius," *The Scotsman* 11 May 1931.
[250] Nicholas J. Saunders, ed., *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War*, Abingdon: Routledge 2004 pp.1-3.
[251] Winter, *Remembering,* 2.

lids[252] - a middle class involved in intricate practices of material remembrance would provide an alert and attentive audience to the material memory of his canvases. Moreover, these paintings could capitalize and comment on the capacity of objects increasingly to index the past through affect. The anthropologist Fsabio Gygi goes so far as to argue That First World War was instrumental in a widespread return of signification by "presentation," or representation by material objects along the lines of relics.[253] Trench art as an example, from carved gun stocks to engraved shell casings, preserved traces of human touch in objects of industrial detritus.[254]

Yet this experience seems to contradict a reading of the war as a 'meaningless' gulf in history. Here lies the powerful and unsettling experience the *Echoes* elicit: remembrance involved a loss of narrative memory, but the persistence of things. For audiences primed by the contexts of remembering the Great War, the contradiction of history as incoherent and yet materially present was an important part of the reception of any art objects as ambivalent and emphatic as Sickert's. The friction between the "difficult to see" and the "held in the hand." But what were institutions doing with these artefacts,

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[252] Sickert's *Suisque Praesidium* (1927) was transcribed from the lid of a pomade pot, see Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 503.
[253] Fsabio Gygi, "Shattered experiences - recycled relics: strategies of representation and the legacy of the Great War," in Saunders, *Matters of Conflict* pp.72-3.
[254] Gygi, "Shattered experiences…", 75.

these things? How did the mobilization of the Victorian feed back into popular perceptions, and differ from remembrance of deeper and more immediate pasts? Before we can establish fully how these paintings operate we need to bring in a third facet of remembrance, beyond personal memory in the interwar and social memory of the War to remembrance of the pre-war: the position of the 'Victorian' in the heritage industry. With Winter's definition of remembrance in mind, and contemporaries' difficulties with framing historical narratives in the aftermath of the war, how did Victorian *Echoes* reverberate in the remembrance of the pre-war? Artistic engagement with pre-war English historical roots largely commented on two very different times and materials to Sickert's choices, and treated them in the context of a different kind of narrative historical time, characterized by strong performances of authorial presence and less critical conceptions of progress.

Strategically, in opposition to high-society nostalgia for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, more *avant-garde* modernists turned to the Neolithic past - these were the two primary, and often antagonistic, historical touchstones for the culture war of the 1930s. Harrison sees the significant impact of prehistoric artefacts on British inter-war Neo-romanticism as providing "symbolic indices" for artists' previously held interests [Fig. 29], rather than fresh impulses or agencies in

themselves.[255] They provide material for imaginative play in his account, rather than signifying as indices or operating as rebarbative things. There is no problematic back and forth between object and artist, no notional uncertainty or fragility of material presence as we find in the *Echoes*, where the use of the Victorian is alternately dominant or subordinate to the Modern, and renders the artist alternately old and youthful. Even if Paul Nash attributed an animism to the Neolithic objects he encountered, his position as author was never compromised by his material. While it has been argued by established scholarship that the use of found natural objects and megaliths was part of a strategy of naturalizing continental movements, analyses such as that of Sam Smiles have emphasized modernist practices which saw modernity as continuity rather than rupture with the past.[256] Indeed, in Smiles' account, modernists found it necessary to defend abstraction against accusations of regress using the analogy of "refinement" and development over a long historical duration. In the prominent scientist Desmond Bernal's defence of Hepworth, we find the commonly used Other of the Victorian against which abstract modernism is defined as progress in the refinement of meaning.[257] In this context the Victorian was a much more peripheral and agonistic material for

[255] Harrison, *English Art and Modernism*, 295.
[256] Sam Smiles, "Equivalents for Megaliths 1920-50," in *The Geographies of Englishness*, eds. Corbett et al., 215-220.
[257] Smiles, "Equivalents for Megaliths 1920-50," 200.

an artist to deploy, and its fragile ephemera represented very different material to the tangible permanence of the megalithic.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Victorian was outside of what was considered fashionable at a time when English economic and imperial identity was threatened and turning to deeper historical precedents to reformulate itself - for the purpose of which either the eighteenth century or the Neolithic were available. However, the vilification of the Victorian was not universal, and the variety of responses to the Victorian in the interwar era point to ways in which the Victorian could signify in this period. Harold Acton and the poet Brian Howard saw the Victorian as potentially part of a camp revival.[258] There were even fringes, such as that inhabited by the proto-fascist travel writer Robert Byron who saw the Victorian as an alternative to the cultural canon of Bloomsbury.[259]

An *Echo* such as *The Woman's Sphere* (1931-2) [Fig. 30] can be read as an explicit counter-point to Bloomsbury's rejection of the Victorian, notably the nineteenth century's policing of public and private spheres, the nuclear middle-class family and denigration of the commercial.[260] In this painting Sickert

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[258] Joyce *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror*, 50-53.
[259] The most salient example of Byron's work on these lines was Robert Byron, *Imperial Pilgrimage,* (London: London Transport 1937).
[260] Joyce, *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror* pp.18-20. For more on Bloomsbury's rejection of Victorian intorjection of public morality into private life see Miles Taylor and Michael Wolff, *The Victorians Since 1901: Histories, Representations and Revisions,* (Manchester: Manchester University

focuses again on an uneasy relationship in a private domestic context, here generalized to 'the woman's sphere,' in a manner which pairs gender with a space of painterly patinas. The viewer's eye flits from flock wallpaper rendered Matisse-like, to carpet rippling under the weight of an empty chair in the manner of Vanessa Bell's pre-war work. The implicit 'sphere' is given loose form by the irregular halo of light casting impossible shadows and into which the pendant portraits of corresponding male and female ancestors fade. The wilful independence of the seated woman, far removed from the demure bonnet-wearing predecessor above her, is also signalled by her vacating the chair in the foreground and turning her back on her husband and her eye towards the newspaper, which becomes a potential reference to the source of the John Gilbert image itself as well as wider worldly awareness. Again we feel the dry atmosphere where 'no conversation passes,' discouraging us from virtually availing ourselves of the chair, but this also signals two contradictory impulses tied to the Victorian by both its proponents and critics.

Here we see the segregation of gender and the alienation of bourgeois life abhorred by Bloomsbury, but also its slightly comic subversion - a form of 'new woman' here engaging with the public sphere through the newspaper, leaving the bloated man

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Press, 2004), 253.

behind to conspicuously consume his lobster as a pale afterimage of the military figure above him. Perhaps this is his youthful portrait, or an ancestor who aspired to the central pictured landscape which, now in shadow, mocks the successors' diminished surroundings. This ambiguous space of dry paint and pale, shifting surfaces implies not only the essence of the Victorian but its fraying edges. By simultaneously elevating and unravelling the Victorian, paintings which "fall between stools" helped to expose the complex positions of the Victorian and its contradictory signification in the interwar period. Indeed, as part of the immediate past in the penumbra of the First World War, understanding the Victorian involved similar problems of comprehension to understanding the War:

> The history of the Victorian Age will never be written; we know too much about it. For ignorance is the first requisite of the historian——ignorance, which simplifies and clarifies, which selects and omits, with a placid perfection that unattainable by the highest art.[261]

This is the opening of a 'history' of canonical Victorians, each member of the pantheon a complex web of contradictions. There are echoes of the same epistemic problem in the words of Sickert's supporters where Frank Rutter speculated about the historical position of Sickert: "It may be doubted whether any age is able to perceive its own 'giants'..."[262] Even relatively

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[261] Lytton Strachey, "Preface," *Eminent Victorians: Cardinal Manning; Florence Nightingale; Dr Arnold; General Gordon*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918).
[262] Frank Rutter, "The Galleries. Royal Society of British Artists. Mr. Sickert's Genius," *Sunday Times* 11 Nov 1928.

ardent Victorian revivalists such as Evelyn Waugh struggled with the illegible ubiquity of Victorian mass culture - the problem was that appropriating or analysing the Victorian past was paradoxically made impossible in a modern moment because its artefacts were so present they were barely recognisable:

> The early Victorian tide in which, before luncheon, we paddled and splashed so gaily, has washed up its wreckage and retreated, and all those glittering bits of shell and seaweed - the coloured paper-glass weights, wax fruit, Rex Whistler decorations, paper lace Valentines, which we collected - have by late afternoon dried out very drab and disappointing and hardly discernible from the rest of the beach.[263]

This image of the broken objects of the past evokes their fragility, their lowly homogeneity, and the idea of a high-water mark measured in flotsam. When critics saw Sickert's work as threatening to spill into fashion and iteration without the unifying function of the artist, they express a similar anxiety about the loss of meaning in a cacophony of voices. Moreover, Waugh's quote suggests the idea of history as a process of ebb and flow which gradually erodes its material and mixes it to the point of indistinguishability, materials persisting but altered by friction.

In this light we can see correspondences with Sickert's 'landscape' *Echoes* and his sifting of artefacts, the excavating and reburying of Victorian material culture in paint, the

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[263] Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust: And Decline and Fall* (London: Chapman & Hall) 1934, 43.

breaking down and churning of its components to the level of

banal detritus. At first glance, a Gilbert-based *Echo* such as

The Wave (1931-2) [Fig. 31] seems concerned instead with

difference, a disconcerting colour-complimentary division

separating the curious and the fearful. However, within these

colours and along their shared border we behold the opposite -

pale green figures dissolve in the face of the wave they flee,

while what critics called the 'decorative' colour of purples and

reds is active in anchoring a fictive audience to the

foreground, as if they were sculptures of sand or rock. While

Echoes often generated bemusement or fascination through their

dazzling colour, the relationship of compositional elements

often caused confusion at their incongruence: "In *December,*

after a print of the last century, the markedly incompetent

composition of the original is scarcely modified";[264] "Does Mr

Sickert, like Manet of old, find great difficulty in working out

a composition?"[265] This formal confusion reflects problematic

conceptual and material confusions, where colour blurs spaces

and figures like the series as a whole blurs the Victorian and

Modern. As in *Summer Lightning,* harsh planar division seems to

pose an obstacle to recession, and bring elements of a potential

before and after into a hesitant resistance. Are the foreground

[264] "Recent Paintings by Mr. Sickert. Caprice and Assurance," *The Times* 2 April 1936.
[265] "Photo Copied by Mr Sickert," *The Daily Mail* 6 July 1935.

figures safe, or merely at one remove from the calamity? Will the viewer suffer the same fate as these green Victorians before the flow of the tide, or are they nothing but onlookers to history? An unnerving slice of violence between the calm 'registers' of foreground and background, these figures seem to already have been consumed by the sea, stained by the oncoming tide like the ghostly figure of the gentleman in *Summer Lightning.*

A girl in the foreground and to the right inhabits a similar position to that of the woman in *Summer Lightning.* Her gaze turning to the frame of the image she reaches out to touch a rock which has taken on the colour of the wave. Both foreground and background, solid and fluid, this combination of paint surfaces is something she barely touches, her shadow intruding to the point of occluding the rock, or shifting its situation, perhaps in Waugh's sense 'drying' it out. This compressed zone of liminality between times and materials is a point shared with *Lightning's* faint wooden gate, a point of latent exchange, an encounter both immanent and distant. This is neither the "placid perfection" of Strachey's visual metaphor for a perfect clarifying distance, nor the kinaesthetic immersion of Waugh's lost experiences of having "paddled and splashed" - instead this is a fraught tactility, an imperfect knowing more akin to touch than sight. This is a material knowledge of Victorian objects which imposes itself on the

viewer identifying with the girl, like an apparition, but more the imagination of touch - a give and take playing back and forth which involves making a mark as well as receiving an impression.

What we see here is therefore the tentative situation of a lost past which remains alien but ubiquitous. Viewers are engaged in sensing and remembering by reverberation, by 'echo'. Sickert reminds his audience that they, like he, see in the past what they project from the present, and receive an 'echo,' something in between. This bouncing, this friction between planes of paint, is the condition of ebb and flow which strikes Sickert's critics as a paradoxical falling between categories and times. Sickert wanted to signal the palimpsest of time in his work, the textural encounter of different times - the ache of almost touching - the bouncing of an echo between them:

> Thousands who will see this low-comedy design would not have seen it but for
> John Gilbert who inv. et del.
> Gorway who sculpst.
> me who have had the temerity to trace in paint the admired monogram JG[266]

This tribute reaffirms the intersection of different 'things' from across time, whose breakdown of hierarchy reaffirms the ambiguity of cause and effect in the echoing *Echoes*. These paintings express the idea of giving the memory of the past material presence in the form of objects that bear the

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[266] Walter Sickert quoted in Morphet, "Late Sickert, then and now," 102.

traces of their production and imply an imperfect but insistent encounter with traces of the Victorian. The hands of the past "trace[d] in paint".

Fascinatingly, a persisting Victorian theory itself offers a model which casts light on the affective properties of this encounter with material fragments of the Victorian in the 1930s: "The worst of taking a furnished house is that the articles in the rooms are saturated with the thoughts and glances of others."[267] This quotation from Thomas Hardy's biography of 1930 reminds us of the problems of possession and persistence surrounding the impressions of memory felt to dwell in objects. Sickert may well have met Hardy, a friend of the family of one of Sickert's closest friends and studio aides, Sylvia Gosse,[268] and, moreover, an author Sickert used as an exemplar in his writings on the need for popular art.[269] The hesitancy and opacity of the *Echoes* makes analogies to the sense of touch problematic, but we might find a better kind of metaphor for this operation in a different kind of 'sense perception' altogether. Hardy's death in 1928, coinciding with the start of Sickert's *Echo* series, was capped by a biography which indicates Hardy's melancholy and evinces the diffusion of a popular sense

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[267] Florence Emily Hardy, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 18.
[268] Parkin Gallery, and Maltzahn Gallery, *The Sickert Women and the Sickert Girls* (London: London, 1974).
[269] Walter Sickert, "The Language of Art," *The New Age* 28 July 1910 Robins *The Complete Writings*, 267.

of objects' capacity to transfer memories between generations, which Hardy had explored in *The Well-Beloved* (1897).

This so-called "Psychometry" was the study of the trace of past subjects on the material world of objects which live on in the present, and was popular and widely disseminated in both the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century (though excluded from mainstream scientific discourse).[270] Developed by parapsychologists such as W. H. Myers and Samuel Butler in the 1880s-1890s, the concept resonated with Victorian ideas of trauma, and the capacity of objects to register and transfer psychological states and ancestral memory was even propagated in the late work of Arthur Conan Doyle, such as *The Maracot Deep* (1929). Evolving at the same time as Winter's "generation of memory," as the literary scholar Athena Vrettos argues, a subtle and pervasive idea of psychometry remained popular, and conveyed the idea that tangible things could convey a range of displaced memories from the past.[271] As in the work of 1920s psychical researchers, the process was seen as a form of identification with the object, connecting with it through a kind of touch which could both register and receive memories.[272]

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[270] Athena Vrettos, "Displaced Memories in Victorian Fiction and Psychology," *Victorian Studies*, 49:2, Papers and Responses from the Fourth Annual Conference of the North American Victorian Studies Association, Held Jointly with the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism Annual Meeting (Winter, 2007): 199.
[271] Vrettos, "Displaced Memories…" , 202-211.
[272] Colin Wilson, *Beyond The Occult: Twenty Years' Research into the Paranormal,* (London: Watkins Publishing, 2008).

However, this process was also seen as potentially threatening. As psychometry was outlined in 1890s theories, not only were objects thought of as being able to convey memories, but the origins and limits of these memories were uncertain and unsettling. Contemporary subjects were composed of the fragile fragments and impressions of material objects as much as vice versa: "[Objects] become, with different degrees of intimacy, parts of our empirical selves. ... [If lost, we feel] a sense of the shrinkage of our personality, a partial conversion of ourselves to nothingness"[273]

Underlying this problematic effect on identity in time was a focus on the fragile, 'ghostly' presence of material memories. Often these reified memories seemed to flicker between the present and the absent, and between sense - like sight but not quite sight, touch but not quite touch: "...visions of absent people come and go before us as faint and fleeting shadows, and the notes of long-forgotten melodies float around us, not actually heard, but yet perceptible.[274]"

Almost the perfect description of an 'echo'. This idea that identity in the present was contingent upon the fragile objects we use, and that these objects embodied volatile historical memory, were prevalent for much of Sickert's life and lingered

[273] James, William. *Principles of Psychology*. 1890. 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1950), 201.
[274] Samuel Butler, *Unconscious Memory*, (London: Bogue, 1880), 105-7.

at a popular level in the interwar period. Against the backdrop of remembrance of the war, the Victorian and deeper heritage they articulate an anxiety that identity dissolves into the world of objects, that identity is lost in contact with the material world, that: "we are rooted into outside things and melt away into them."[275] For Butler, trying to locate the self in a world of objects resulted in "nothing but confusion and fusion.[276]" Like Vanessa Bell's accusation that the *Echoes* fell "between so many stools they hardly exist," this model highlights how the *Echoes* demonstrate the complexity of negotiating a past too close to see but too far away to touch. Sickert's work makes tangible the mutual construction of past and present in a way which the "faultless" apparatus of the Kodak avoids, and articulates the ambivalence of remembrance in the aftermath of war as both something which cannot be narrated but which has left a material legacy.

To conclude this chapter on Victorian interiors, before we progress to discuss the deeper resonance of the dead for Sickert in Chapter 3, there remains a final interior we must consider, one which houses shared concerns bringing together the Kodak, the War and the Victorian in interwar remembrance. The Country House was both home to Hardy's "saturated" objects and the setting of a dozen *Echoes*. By the 1930s the *Echoes* were being

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[275] Butler, *Life and Habit,* (London: Trubner, 1878), 80.
[276] Butler, *Life,* 79.

viewed by established 'heritage consumers,' emblematic of the

wider domestic tourist culture marketed to by Kodak and

facilitated by the growth of the National Trust.[277] Pervasive

anti-Victorianism prioritized the reclamation of Georgian

architecture as an efficient, clean aesthetic compatible with

modernity for an elite minority, the kind evidenced in Rex

Whistler's work, to the exclusion of the rooms in Sickert's

work. Moreover, many country houses were evacuated after rises

in inheritance tax and their surfaces were altered for modern

uses: schools and hotels.[278] The re-ordering of the past to meet

the needs of the present was reflected in claims of efficiency,

reminiscent of the promises of the Kodak camera. In 1926 the

Council for the Preservation of Rural England campaigned for an

ordered countryside, redressing what it saw as the chaotic

inefficiencies of Victorian planning.[279] The 1936 National Trust

Country House Scheme drew little public success, and instead we

see the Country House being repurposed to become both functional

tourist amenities, and fictional tropes - a place of

displacement where the modern came to inhabit the old, and where

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[277] 'Heritage consumer' may be a recent marketing phrase, and a broad one, but this group is identifiable and has its origins in the 1920s as even recent practical studies are quick to note: see Richard Prentice, 'Motivations of the heritage consumer in the leisure market: An application of the Manning-Haas demand hierarchy', *Leisure Sciences: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* 15:4, (1993): 273-290, and Klaus-Peter Wiedmann et al., 'Drivers and Outcomes of Brand Heritage: Consumers' Perception of Heritage Brands in the Automotive Industry' *The Journal of Marketing* Theory and Practice 19:2, (March, 2011): 205-220.
[278] Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 258-308.
[279] Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home*, 267.

Sickert's practice of bringing the 'old world' to 'redress the balance of the new' stood in strong opposition.

As we see serially repeated in Agatha Christie novels,[280] the Country House becomes a stage for the nouveux riches, where murder mysteries created death without mourning, modernized mansions becoming sites of horror displaced.[281] The traces of past inhabitants haunt these places in film, literature and cartoons, but often in a generalized form, exchanging the sense of threat and the contextual importance of nineteenth-century ghost stories for a more general and ambiguous figure, what Mandler calls the "dim spectre of power departed," the echo of a dwindling upper class.[282]

The figure of the 'spirit' became a trope of displacement in a time when anxieties surrounding the loss of heritage objects abroad was acute.[283] In a 1932 *Punch* story, later made into the film *The Ghost Goes West* (1936), ghosts are figures which protect their homes, even when their home is shipped to America brick by brick - the very material components of a building contain their memory.[284] While the sale of paintings and

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[280] A strong contemporary example being Agatha Christie, *The Peril of End House,* (London: Collins Crime Club 1932).
[281] Raymond Williams, *Country and the City*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 249-50.
[282] Mandler *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home*, 259.
[283] David M., Wilson, *The British Museum: A History,* (London: The British Museum Press, 2002), 128.
[284] René Clair, Eric Keown, Geoffrey Kerr, Robert E. Sherwood, *The Ghost Goes West,* Directed by René Clair (London: London Film Porductions, 1936). The film was immensely popular, the highest grossing film of 1936: see Sedgewick, John, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A choice of pleasures,* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000).

antiquities to America by dealers such as Joseph Duveen represented the New World appropriating the Old,[285] the *Echoes* stage a psychometric kind of encounter by which they bring in "the old world to redress the balance of the new"[286] – indeed *Idyll* itself brought the Victorian to the New world when it toured Chicago and Pittsburgh for six months in 1936. The fear of the flight of material, of its displacement physically and temporally, was one which resonates with Sickert's work, which contrasts the generalized ghosts of historical displacement with the particular affective traces of the Victorian.

In [Fig. 32] *Punch* satirizes the indifference of younger generations (to whom Sickert propagandized) to what remained of the past, articulating a meeting between times and cultures which appears resonant of the psychometric. The man hikes, the ghost walks – this country house interior is the site of a failed recognition, an incomplete encounter. What the hiker fails to heed is written on the coat of arms, "Je Reviendrai" *[I'll be back]*, yet while this ghostly return represents a cohabitation of past and present, they remain distanced by light and shade. The ghost is a negative reflection of the man, he is an absent figure only given shape by what is engraved around him, and his aloof hand dangles, barely visible, just out of

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[285] A resurgent interest in the eighteenth century among American collectors contributed to this perceived flight of cultural heritage. David Gebhard, 'The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 22:3 (1987), 109-148 See also Wilson, 135-136.
[286] "Mr Sickert at it again," *Manchester Guardian* 14 Nov 1934.

reach, like the scopic relationship of the tourist and the tourist site the tourist "can hope to see but never touch."[287] The strangeness of traces of the past in rooms since re-purposed manifests in curiosity but also, ultimately, misrecognition.

Sickert's work taps in to a similar sense of material memory, and indeed draws on the volume of print ephemera from the dying medium of press illustration of which *Punch* was one of the last remnants. His Camden Town work had been exhibited next to *Punch* Cartoonists Phil May and Charles Keene in 1928, and the *Echoes,* which draw on illustrators of "back numbers of *Punch*" repeatedly stage dramatic encounters between two figures in compositions similar to [Fig. 32]. If we compare the room in *The Seducer* [Fig. 23] to *Punch's* meeting-place, we see another confrontation of figures from the past. The men, like the "Olden Time ghost," seem projected, separated from their background by the use of the substance of paint - quickly dashed in dilute oils on top of a room blocked in with dry and patchy paint. The uncertainty of the far left figure provides a proxy for the viewer - surprised, on the back foot. The paint itself takes on a hesitancy. The black lines of his leg and shoulder seem to waver, to move out of rhythm with the interior, part transparent to the floor behind them, part confused with the line of the coat. While the exposed grain of the canvas leaves his coat

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[287] Joyce *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror*, 73.

flickering with flecks of white, the shadow of his arm is a wash
which fills the grain in, opposing the materiality of paint to
the image being transcribed through layers of paint feeling each
other out. Paint falls over and into the recesses of the
support, such that the figures seem to waver - to fade away as
well as insist on their presence through the same material of
paint differently distributed.

The interior in which the figure attempts to stand remains
incoherent and flattened, the floor a morass of painterly
stains, blurring with the background wall, while these walls
themselves take on the aspect of a Bloomsbury abstract. This is
a fusion of Modern and Victorian, the past bleeding into the
present and vice versa: "we are rooted into outside things and
melt away into them."[288] What seems like faltering paint work,
however, animates these figures, like its imagined audience, and
in different ways - unsettling the man to the left while tying
the one on the right to the room in a tangle of lines, the space
between him and the woman corrupted by dry strokes of paint. The
colours of his waistcoat and jacket rhyme with the walls behind,
while the tails of his coat approximate the table cloth behind
resulting in visual confusion at first glance. Even the sequence
of this translation in paint is muddied as his legs overlap and
the soles of his shoes stutter and double.

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[288] Butler, *Life,* 80.

Moreover, even the appellation "Seducer" is unfixed: the figure on the right appears to be caught in the act, yet his upright posture seems affronted by the newcomer. The figure on the left seems to accuse, but remains caught between stepping forwards and back, his hand ambiguously pointing across the space or grasping at the air. Blurring into the indecipherable painting in the background, and seeming to cast a strange shadow of exposed ground across the wall, this hand replicates the kind of thwarted touch found in *Lightning* and *Wave,* surfaces brought almost impossibly close together – the figures echo each other like doppelgangers, the Victorian on the left, the modern on the right. The phrase "I'll be back" is hard to attribute to a figure in a space that echoes back and forth like this - nostalgic and youthful, Victorian and modern.

"The Seducer" here is both the Victorian object and the desires of modernist paint with its frisson of tactility. This painting was hung in the Saville Gallery exhibition where Bell first saw the *Echoes* falling "between so many stools they hardly exist,"[289] and what it provided for its audience was a dissolution of historical identity in something close to a psychometric encounter with a history too recent to either erase or assimilate. Too distant to see, to close to touch, this is how the *Echoes* echo.

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[289] Regina Marler ed., *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC 1993) p.364.

The contradictions in these paintings negotiate painterly and affective material memory of the Victorian and the Modern in terms of a kind of 'echoing' back and forth. They bring different material surfaces into proximity with each other through the removal of the perceived buffer of authorial control. Through this they contrast with remembrance predicated on appropriation or elision as exemplified by the 1920s amateur photograph, and reveal contradictions involved in remembrance of the War and pre-war heritage. The motif of the Victorian private sphere with figures in silent conversation brought this issue of material thingness in history into sharp relief in relation to the interwar middle class family, the caesura of the Great War and the fundamental problems of relating to, and differentiation from, the close Victorian Other. By utilizing metaphoric, ironic and material relationships between the textural surfaces of the Victorian and the present, Sickert disrupts a wider field of remembrance trying to establish continuities and discontinuities, by embodying historical continuity as a kind of remainder accreted between a Victorian and Modern which constructed each other. In the next chapter we will see how Sickert takes this materiality to an extreme, focusing on the limitations of paint and remembrance and the thingness of material memory, in paintings of the dead.

The subject of painting is, perhaps, that it is not death. It is, perhaps, nothing more.[290]

"Death," in relation to portraiture, was a subject towards which Sickert took a very Sickertian attitude: ambivalent, contrarian and tragi-comic. We first encountered Sickert's ambiguous double-negative in Chapter 2 when we were developing an understanding of the limits and problems involved in engaging or erasing the material traces of the past. Building on the context of remembrance, discussing the position of the dead body in late Sickert's oeuvre will allow us to see Sickert's paint at its most opaque and frustrated, at the limits of material memory. Sickert's self-portraits and *Echo* portraits have traditionally been read as discrete projects,[291] but as David Peters Corbett notes, similar processes of alienation and isolation can be detected in both Sickert's representation of others and of self.[292] This chapter addresses the questions of why audiences felt both compelled and repulsed by these paintings, and why the dead body is at issue in iconic paintings sometimes referred to as "reincarnations."[293]

Having discussed *Echoes* in terms of the material memory of the 'landscape' and the surfaces of objects, playing on the

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[290] Walter Sickert, "Vanessa Bell*," Burlington Magazine,* July 1922, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 47.
[291] Baron's Catalogue Raisonné discusses portraits as distinct from Echoes and catalogues them as such, See Baron *Sickert* 2006, 502-544.
[292] Corbett *Walter Sickert,* 64.
[293] 'Richard Sickert - The Indian Summer of His Art," *Morning Post* 11 May 1931.

material layering and ambiguous contact and friction between Modernity and Victoriana in chapters 1 and 2 respectively, this chapter now turns to the material nature of the body remembered, and a series of 'paintings of the dead' which I here describe with the working definition of 'posthumous portraiture'. Sickert's late portraiture practice included commissioned society portraiture and speculatively painted celebrities which enter discussion in relation to Sickert's movement away from a pre-war focus on depicting audiences to icons in chapters 4 and 5. However, I argue that we can learn more about the materiality and broader social context of Sickert's late work through a comparison of *Echoes* of long-dead iconic Victorians and contemporaneous existentially fraught self-portraits framed with themes of death and resurrection.

1932 was a high-point of Sickert's career, pivotal for this production. Convalesced and remarried Sickert was prolific and profitable. He achieved provocative success at the RA, with his "Picture of the Year," *The Raising of Lazarus,* while concurrently at the Beaux Arts Gallery Sickert had a strong showing of both his post-photographic painting and *Echoes*, including a number of posthumous portraits. I argue that anxiety surrounding an excess of reference and opacity of paint in these 'resurrected' bodies stemmed from a friction between Sickert's work and changes in public performances of mourning: the forgetting, as well as the remembering, of the dead. An aspect

of this can, I argue, be illuminated through the model of the X-ray being applied to portrait analysis the 1930s, another form of ambivalent excavation. Beginning with an *Echo* which sets the scene for these Sickertian encounters, I consider Sickert's personal context and the context of Victorian death worship in relation to his painting of *Anne Sheepshanks*, before contrasting this with changes in the landscape of mourning and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War. After the *Echoes* I turn to the contemporaneous spectacle of *The Raising of Lazarus* (1929-32), and investigate how its unusual reception and visual qualities intersect with representations of the dead, before nuancing our understanding of posthumous portraits through concurrent developments in X-ray analysis of Old Masters. These posthumous portraits 'fall between' in ways deeply related to Sickert's other *Echoes,* but also with particular relevance for our understanding of his material treatment of the body which will be central to chapters 4 and 5. To begin, however, let us consider a surprising encounter with death, which at first glance seems far removed from the opening of Lazarus' tomb.

In June and July 1933, Sickert hung this rather innocuous looking painting, *The Gardener's Daughter* [Fig.33] in London's Beaux Arts Gallery. It hung next to works from across Sickert's career, from the Music Halls to the *Echoes*, and shared the same space as Sickert's posthumous portrait of Degas as well as his

iconic *The Raising of Lazarus*.[294] Its *naif* style, its broad and

bright palette, and the apparent youth of its figures, have led

to its omission from serious consideration by later scholars,

and could imply a 'decorative' nostalgia. Yet there is something

odd about the space its figures inhabit in this: "resurrection

of mid-nineteenth century engravers on wood."[295] A strange space

both within the painting, in the matte purple and brown

backdrops around the figures' extremities, and *between*

paintings, sandwiched on the wall as it was between the *Echo*

Grover's Island from Richmond Hill and the pre-war painting

Palazzo Papadopoli, Venice. This is no portrait, but

intriguingly, it tells us something about Sickert's approach to

portraiture.

    The Gardener's Daughter's title can be read as a reference

to an early Tennyson poem of the same name - a melancholy

rumination on love, with a climax concerned with death and

representation, and in particular the portrait of a painter's

dead love. In the poem, the protagonist is a portraitist

reflecting on a love affair with the inhabitant of a nearby

paradisiacal garden. He seeks to render beauty in painting, but

the result is a portrait of the dead. At the poem's close it

becomes clear that now all that remains is this veiled painting

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[294] Exhibition Catalogue - 1932 Beaux Arts June-July - 'Exhibition of Paintings
by Richard Sickert, ARA'
[295] *Western Morning News and Mercury* 28 April 1932

of a woman now deceased: "Make thine heart ready with thine eyes: the time/ Is come to raise the veil. Behold her there,/ As I beheld her ere she knew my heart."[296]

Sickert had praised Tennyson in print before, referring to his work when he claimed "No paint can add to a thing already completely expressed in words".[297] However, while in Sickert's eyes paint might not be able to add to text, later in his career Sickert saw its capacity to subvert it. Sickert's painting defies the narrative of *The Gardener's Daughter* - its figures too child-like to be the narrator and Rose, and this mode of encounter seems farcical. As opposed to a quiet, rapt approach to an object of desire, here a tomboy startles a subject they seem equally surprised to see, one who appears trapped, straining in her chair, rather than a free spirit prone to vanishing into one of Tennyson's stanzas. The 'gardener's daughter' is confronted by a daughter in the garden, like a child's rebus. If *Summer Lightning* presented a melancholy image with a faintly comic and polysemous title, here we have what looks like the reverse - a tragic title involved in an inscrutable joke. One Victorian image played off against another through the medium of modernist paintwork. If Tennyson narrates

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[296] Alfred Tennyson, *The Gardener's Daughter: and Other Poems,* (Edinburgh: Nimmo, 1842), 27.
[297] Walter Sickert quoted in 'The Gospel of Impressionism', *Pall Mall Gazette* 21 July 1890, reproduced in Robins *The Complete Writings*, 77.

the meeting of lovers, Sickert instead depicts a child's escape - caught in the act.

In *The Gardener's Daughter*, short, arid brush-strokes cast foliage and figures in sharp relief, with an odd *contra-jour* light. Its figures seem to inhabit different worlds. The eponymous daughter sits on the threshold, the liminal fence, caught in-between but acknowledging their counter-part with an ambivalent expression. Both these figures are girls performing inside and outside of Victorian mores, and the aspidistra signals that their environment is one of Victorian middle class domesticity. The other girl is cast in a ghostly pallor, ensconced in her wheelchair like a statue, a strange icon of Victoriana, marooned in what looks like a fantasia of Victorian plants. Sickert's mute purple, applied after the figure, separates her from the rhythmic pattern of foliage, silences her, distances her within this shimmering, flattened portrait space - separated from the gardener's daughter by a stretch of declarative brushwork.

In comparison to a typical Victorian example such as Frank Stone's 1850 painting [Fig.34] of the same gardener's daughter, Sickert stresses his paint and his pastiche. Against a slick, varnished cabinet painting with a fixed linear narrative, Sickert's diffuse, rough brushwork and ambiguous theme stands in marked contrast. Sickert's middle space of suggested leaves also bares traces of the grid of transposition. This is a fluid space

that almost pushes these figures out of the frame. Not only does this image occlude the rose bushes and cedars that feature in previous illustrations of Tennyson, and reverse the visual hierarchy of man and woman of the kind we observe in Stone, but it also reduces and defetishizes the eponymous character. Where engravings and paintings of the nineteenth century projected depth to signal the approach of the narrator-suitor, and centrally framed Rose, here the viewer is presented with an oddly flattened space, a collaging of different paint surfaces that breaks up the scene and exposes its artifice. Where Stone presents a coherent and linear narrative approach to a reflective poem, Sickert disposes of fixed directions and singular references, leaving behind the depth of the painted surface. Where illusionistic depth would conventionally preside at the centre of the composition, we find our eye is arrested by a wall of dense foliage.

Sickert therefore invokes Victorian poetry, but negates and complicates the Victorian visual culture surrounding it. However, his painting as "resurrection" - to borrow an epithet from the *Western Morning News and Mercury* – also responds indirectly to the wider theme of 'death.' In discussing Tennyson's poem and its ramifications for painting, Carol Christ sees a nineteenth century conceptual connection between art and necrophilia - an attempt to achieve a desired connection with

the dead through paint.[298] At its climax a veiled posthumous portrait is taken to represent the body and its lived relationships in full. In Sickert, by contrast, a substitution of image and word complicates ekphrasis, pluralizes referents. Where Tennyson attempts to elide the difference between the woman's body and the artist's reconstructed memory of it,[299] Sickert proposes a strange juxtaposition of difference - not just between source and painting, image and title-text, but within the space of the painting itself. Where the Victorians used the portrait of the dead as a means of articulating the tension of sitter and portraitist, as a migration of life from subject to image that both killed and preserved the body, in Sickert's pastiche mobilization of a lost past we see a kind of excess, an exaggeration and de-centring. Yet if Tennyson's *The* "Gardener's Daughter" (1842) concerns the problem of a representation substituting for what it represents - occluding and expressing it, repeating it but displacing it - so too does Sickert's. His *Gardener's Daughter* declares itself, but also twice displaces its subject through paint and text.

Between paintings from Sickert's older and recent past production hangs this painting of an unknown John Gilbert engraving with the title of a poem about displacement and death.

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[298] Carol Christ, "Painting the Dead: Portraiture and Necrophilia in Victorian Art and Poetry," in *Death and Representation*, eds. Goodwin, Sarah Webster, and Bronfen, Elizabeth, (London: John Hopkins University Press 1993), 135.
[299] Carol Christ, 'Painting the Dead,' 142.

A spectrum of loose patches of colour recreate a disjointed picture of the past from synthesized elements - Gilbert and Tennyson confront each other in a tense and unstable simulacrum of the past. In the conjunction of Modern and Victorian, the Victorian is further broken against itself, representing more of a general and less of a particular. Why is Sickert opening up the Victorian in the aftermath of the Great War, resisting its narratives of preservation? What historical continuities and disjunctions does this kind of painting react to? "What these artists would think of Mr Sickert's 'plagiarism' if they came to life again is a question open to doubt - it would perhaps involve a libel action."[300]

Sickert had often promoted the appropriation of the past, but his articulation of the results could be melancholy. Part of his defence of his practice interestingly revolved around examples of the absence of the subjects painted by great masters during a painting's production -- a sitter or a subject being displaced or even returned from the dead: "Students of painting will remember that Alva had been dead some years when Velasquez painted the Surrender of Breda."[301] In an odd turn of phrase, the capacity of painting was seen as a vital and sustaining

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[300] "Mr Sickert's Merry Mood," *The Daily Mail* 15 May 1931.
[301] Walter Sickert, "Artist and the Sitter," *Daily Telegraph* 16 August 1934. In considering Sickert's thematics of death and his contemporary interventions in the Royal Academy, one should also note the R. A.'s retrospective of 14 late members, shortly before Sickert's statement, in 1932-3, which included some of Sickert's late contemporaries such as Sir William Orpen.

practice, but also banal and ambivalent: "The subject of painting is, perhaps, that it is not death. It is, perhaps, nothing more."[302] His practice both is and "is not" death. A problematic state of being, entirely preoccupied with what is not death, but possibly constituting nothing other than death itself - a logician's nightmare.

Before considering other posthumous portraits, it should be acknowledged that 'death' was important to Sickert on a thematic and personal level, and that this ambiguous statement was more than a flippant remark. In the interwar period Sickert suffered multiple losses - his closest comrades in painting, Degas, Spencer Gore and Harold Gilman, all died in the 1910s, a loss of both his mentor and his disciples. Shortly thereafter, Sickert's second wife died, and so too his mother between 1920 and 1922, which cast Sickert into long-term depression. Even with his remarriage in June 1926 his mental health was complicated by physical health the following month where he felt close to death, and lay in dire financial straits.

In the literature, 'death' is framed as the characteristic of a discrete episode in Sickert's life, one which was overcome through his remarriage, and authorial prowess, in the late 1920s - "a fierce gusto for life vividly expressed in his art"[303] - but

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[302] Walter Sickert, "Vanessa Bell," *Burlington Magazine,* July 1922, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 47.
[303] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 117.

this narrative of the artist-hero denies both the affective persistence of loss, and the potential agency of the posthumous portraits themselves. Even before Christine's death, paintings had come to resemble corpses for Sickert: "They are like still-born children".[304] In the aftermath of such loss and amid the wider context of increasing memorialization of the Great War's dead, to turn to painting images of the dead (from Degas to his Godmother) and biblical themes such as *Lazarus,* was not a trivial or arbitrary strategy but one with resonances for a wide range of audiences.

During the Great War, shortly after Gore's death, Sickert had begun painting death at a remove - a series of gravestones in Chagford [Fig. 35], lit contra-jour in the manner Sickert often framed figures. By the eve of a Second World War, Sickert was exhibiting paintings of photographs of the dead and the staged body of the dead as part of the culmination of a morbid career. We can start unwrapping this development by turning to a photograph we have encountered before [Fig. 17], where we see a frail Sickert performing in front of his painting of the deceased: *Portrait of Painter's Godmother Anne Sheepshanks of Tavistock Place London and London Road Reading* (1931-2) [Fig. 36].

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[304] Walter Sickert to Schweder, Letter, January 1922 TGA.

The work is based on one of many photographs Sickert kept of his great-aunt, who was involved in his early upbringing.[305] A kind of *Carte de Visite* taken in a photographer's studio, this tradition of small portrait photographs (multiples taken simultaneously from a single exposure) were in terminal decline after the passing of Queen Victoria.[306] The rise of amateur photography in the 1920s and 1930s, and even the spread of automated booths such as the Photomaton from 1926 onwards, contributed to the decreasing popularity of this form of studio portrait.[307] Therefore, in translating this image into paint, Sickert remobilizes a dead format, scaling it up to larger than Cabinet Card size, larger than the largest variant of the *carte de visite*. This painting dwells on the sumptuous surfaces of Victorian dress, but arrives at a figure that stands more as a cut-out than a rounded body. She is more shrouded in Victorian effects than embodied by them. Re-mediated, dead media remains more dead matter than a resurrection of the sitter, emphasizing twentieth-century associations of the gross materiality and commerciality of the bourgeois *carte*.[308] Though this work (now in

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[305] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 530.
[306] "Cartomania" was at its height in the 1860s, declining by the end of the century, see Rachel Teukolsky, 'Cartomania: Sensation, Celebrity, and the Democratized Portrait,' *Victorian Studies,* 57:3, (Spring, 2015), 463.
[307] Pierre Vaisse, 'Portrait of Society: The Anonymous and the Famous', in *A New History of Photography* ed. Michel Frizot, 2nd ed. (Koln: Koneman, 1998), 430.
[308] Geoffrey Batchen attributes the decline of the carte de visite to the transparency with which they embodied capitalism, "capitalism incarnate" Geoffrey Batchen, "Dreams of Ordinary Life: Cartes-de-Visite and the Bourgeois Imagination," in *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots*. eds. J. J. Long, Andrea Noble, and Edward Welch, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 81.

private hands)[309] can only be accessed in monochrome reproduction, it represents Sickert's interest in "colour and light" over "anatomy"[310] in its emphasis on remediated surface over reconstructed interior.

Formal, vertical and balanced, it seems Sickert's only compositional alteration in transcription was a slight cropping of the margins. While this brings the viewer closer to Mrs Sheepshanks, she retains an 'echoing' distance by playing a quality of tactile proximity against the remove of its referent. A painting like a photograph like a society portrait painting, this image seems to take the viewer back to a time when photography and painting were part of a spectrum of image-making before more finely delimited cultural distinctions of medium-specificity in the 1920s.[311] This remediation of a 'private' photograph for public consumption initiates a chain of historical prompts and slippages, declaring a history of exchanges between these media: commercial and artistic, staged on the body of the dead woman, stretched between a small *carte de visite* and a full-length society portrait.

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309 See provenance in Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 530.
310 Walter Sickert, "Modern Painting," *Colour* Jan 1929.
311 Here I draw on Foucault's exploration of the hermaphroditic image in the nineteenth century, when photography covered a broad range of image-making practices, and the growth of medium-specific definition of photography with the onset of the twentieth century. See Foucault, Michel and Deleuze, Gilles, *Photogenic Painting: Gerard Fromanger,* ed. Sara Wilson (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2001), 95-100.

This subject's ghostly face is close to being engulfed by lace and chiffon - her fingers are painterly highlights undifferentiated from fabric. The subject is engulfed and compressed into a single surface. The artist's Godmother wears the accreted historical and material layers of a body which transitioned from the Victorian to Edwardian eras. Fabric stippled and dragged over fabric, dry tonal layer folded over layer, free from definitive lines but fixed in position by the dryness of facture. She is a composite object woven together from dry, roughly-scrubbed paint. This sitter is made into a photographic index, pictorial icon and typographical sign, Sheepshanks name sharing the fictive plane of the artist's signature. The subject is emphatic, doubled by the artist, but the paint hangs to the canvas like a dry skin. Shrouded in Victorian affects as much as given form by them, Sheepshanks ghostly face stares out at us from lace and velvet, her body a compressed collage of dry painted patches. Sickert layers media and material to create images which were both texturally dense and evacuated of content.

While Sickert's portraits of living celebrities were often met with adulation, his resurrection of Victorian personalities – with the specificity of portraiture - was critiqued. Critics didn't want these bodies to return, but they were drawn here into ambivalent encounters. These portraits were seen, paradoxically, as both a wasteful investment of energy, but also

a quick and facile exercise. Their manifest commerciality, combined with the elevation of marginal subjects, leaves portraits which are barely portraits, both more and less. In the words of a critic from the Saturday review writing of a similar posthumous *Echo*: "But we still ask why anyone with his powers should spend energy in painting such a portrait from a photograph as *The Tichborne Claimant*. There is no student who could not achieve fifty such pictures in less than a week..."[312]

What did these images possess or lack which generated ambivalence and dismissal in contrast to his celebrity portraiture? What is the significance of 'death' if, in Sickert's words, "Death and death only is the great sifter of art"?[313] I argue that Sickert sees death, 'the great sifter,' as central to an art of appropriation, one wherein the appropriated is both manifest and occluded, and that these 'portraits' mediate death and the dead body. To investigate this we need to consider the historical transformations surrounding Sickert to which his art responds, in particular cultural representations of the dead in the early twentieth century.

In the 1930s Walter Benjamin eloquently distinguished the interwar from the Victorian era in its relationship to death – in the time of Sickert's *Echoes* he saw modern subjects as "dry

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[312] Adrian Bury, *Saturday Review* 16 May 1931.
[313] Walter Sickert, "The Tate Gallery," *The Times,* 30 Dec 1929 repr. in Robins *The Complete Writings*, 596.

dwellers of eternity" because "today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death."[314] He argued that by hiding and disguising death our lives lacked narrative - life had been evacuated of the visual presence of death crucial to structuring life in the nineteenth century. The Victorian era, in contrast to the interwar, was fascinated by relics and representations of the corpse. The nineteenth century saw the advent of private cemeteries and necropolises and their mass visitation.[315] Extravagant funerals and public displays of mourning characterized the Victorian approach to mortality.[316] Such was the Victorian obsession that no fewer than 45 acts of Parliament were passed between 1852 and 1899 to regulate burial.[317]

Importantly for our analysis of Victorian bodies between the wars, Lutz observes a huge volume of material death culture in the nineteenth century which was diminishing in the twentieth century.[318] The Victorian strategy for coping with mortality in modernity had been to resist the erasures of death with the material presence of artefacts, and to reinforce the idea that the subject persists through an emphasis on relic culture and

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[314] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations,* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 94.
[315] Julian Litten, *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral Since 1450*, (London: Robert Hale 1988), 171.
[316] John Kucich, "Death Worship among the Victorians: The Old Curiosity Shop," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 95 (1980): 4-10.
[317] James Walvin, "Dust to Dust: Celebrations of Death in Victorian England," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Fall 1982), 353.
[318] Deborah Lutz, "The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewellery, and death Culture," *Victorian Literature and Culture,* 39 (2011):128.

the concept of an irreducible self.[319] From hair jewellery to vials of tears, Victorian mourning involved close bodily contact with the dead, which permeated the discourse of the living to the degree that it created a market for black-edged stationary.[320] Mourning dress and elaborate funeral processions, replete with veils and mutes, embodied and performed the dead body physically. Indeed, no iconic life encapsulated this more than Queen Victoria's own decades of mourning for her deceased husband, Prince Albert.

Sickert's confusing 'resurrection' of the Victorian dead included both personal and national icons, it engaged a history felt by the public. *Queen Victoria and Grandson* (1936-40) [Fig. 37] connects the Empire before and after the war by foregrounding a royal ancestry. While Bloomsbury thinkers would emphasize a rift between the Victorian and the Modern, Sickert explores material links - his paint catching a piece of photographic ephemera in fragile skeins of brushwork. Almost an icon painting infused with a kitsch domesticity, this painting seems to refute modernism while areas of exposed canvas nevertheless invoke Matisse. The frayed quality of its paint surface signals its contingent and contemporary presence, while Victoria bears a warm maternal posture common to promotional

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[319] Lutz, "The Dead Still Among Us," 127.
[320] James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing 2000), 194.

photography of her and made even more intimate by the cropping of the frame. However, for a viewer in the time of George V, it is the grandson who draws the eye - this double portrait is a condensation of medium and genealogy, the past mixing with the present and affording the monochrome photograph the dubious vitality of low-saturated colour. A woman in mourning dress is a legacy, the dark shadow of the white-clad king-to-be that already 'is,' Victorian death placed in the context of inter-war life.

To gesture to an ambivalent union of George and the shadow of the great dead matriarch was particularly provocative in light of the cultural differences surrounding the treatment of death before and after the death of Victoria. The spread of photographic prints allowed for new representations of the dead even as mortality, and the elaborate funerary practices the historian John Kucich terms "death worship," declined.[321] Photography had made portraiture accessible to a mass middle-class audience, and with the collecting of calling cards and the spread of post-mortem photography a wide demographic grew to treat photographs as intimate handheld tokens of identity and tools of taxonomizing ancestry and criminality.[322] For early Victorians an intimacy with the subject was key to notions of

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[321] Kucich, "Death Worship among the Victorians," 58-72.
[322] Joanna Woodall, "Introduction: Facing the Subject." in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject,* ed. Woodall, Joanna, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) pp.6-7.

authenticity and likeness, however, with the increasing use of photographic precedents in society portraiture in the early twentieth century John Gage argues that confrontation took the place of intimacy in asserting portraiture's claim to likeness.[323] A medium which in its formative decades had brought the dead close to the living through techniques such as Spiritualist double exposures, now manifested in a form of rapid amateur photography marketed to a young demographic as apotropaic. A medium which could elide the difference of life and death now iterated memory in order to keep death at bay.

   With this assertion of life and occlusion of death, some historians have claimed that the Great War resulted in a "breach with the Victorian Christian way of death."[324] The exigencies of wartime morale, and the impossibility of repatriating the war dead led to a decrease in the length and spectacle of mourning rituals. Not only was the funerary workforce diminished by the demands of war, but black crepe and mourning attire such as we find in the dark dress of the eponymous *Queen Victoria and Grandson* were practices actively discouraged both during the war and in the decades that followed.[325] In contrast to the concrete

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[323] John Gage, "Photographic Likeness," in *Portraiture,* Woodall ed., pp.120-128.
[324] See Pat Jaland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996), 3; Kucich p.71, and Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) pp.20-23.
[325] Lisa Kazmier, "LEADING THE WORLD: THE ROLE OF BRITAIN AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN PROMOTING THE "MODERN CREMATION" MOVEMENT," *Journal of Social History,* 42:3, (Spring, 2009): 564.

visual presence of the dead body in Victorian culture, "Naming" became the predominant ritual for signifying the dead after the Great War – an abstraction of the dead removed from locality and physicality and displaced to plaques and yearbooks.[326] Private grief was seen to conflict with national concerns – the need to remember at a remove and as a collective was reinforced by attacks on personal mourning.[327]

Yet there remained a tangled admixture of Victorian inheritances at work in this context. Part of what Sickert's painting of Victoriana achieves is to draw attention to the material persistence of the Victorian in the post-great-war world, though its significance and specificity had changed. Since the 1990s scholarship on early twentieth-century remembrance practices has indeed stressed intriguing continuities through the Great War. Jay Winter set forth the argument that scholarly emphasis on modernity obscures continuity in modes of thought.[328] In many instances the War accelerated existing trends. Pat Jaland cites the secularization of Christianity in the 1870s as the first turning point in this direction.[329] The National Funeral and Mourning Reform Association, which called for the streamlining of mourning

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[326] Thomas W. Laqueur, "Memory and Naming in the Great War," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 152.
[327] For example, plans to convert graveyards into parks for veterans and fatigued workers such as we find in the *Daily Chronicle* 26 May 1926
[328] Winter, *Sites of Memory* pp.54-78.
[329] Jaland, *Death in the Victorian Family,* 528.

practice was founded in 1875, and the Cremation Society of England the year before. Spiritualism, while Victorian in origin, even found its peak popularity in the 1930s.[330] Sickert's society was facing a historically novel trauma with an eclectic mix of strategies and legacies.

The 1920s was a decade in which images of the War dead increasingly tended to be rendered symbolic, the body substituted for by sculpture on a colossal scale with the profusion of permanent cenotaphs and, predominantly, memorial sculptures in the majority of conurbations.[331] This was a response to fundamental difficulties in representing the dead body following the war. Over 200,000 soldiers' bodies were never recovered,[332] leading to the representation of soldiers by substitution and abstraction - the exemplar being the 1920 interment of the 'Unknown Soldier,' a single anonymous body which was taken to signify the excessive quantity of missing bodies.

This was all the more affective for the manner in which these bodies had disappeared, dissolving into matter. What the historian Santanu Das terms the non-transcendental "slimescape" of no-man's-land characterized the imaginary of those on the front - mud in the war had constituted a threat to subjectivity,

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[330] See Jenny Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) pp.12-13.
[331] Winter, *Sites of Memory,* 103.
[332] Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's bodies in Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion 1996), 232.

homogenizing all in its reach.[333] In the aftermath of the War, "formlessness, the body dissolved into matter" was an even more terrifying proposition than an open encounter with the dead body whole.[334] In reaction, memorial discourses largely portrayed the war dead as intact, but absent, Joanna Bourke arguing that the ritualistic interment of "Unknown Warriors" were metaphors "of purification, so as to deny the fact of putrefaction."[335] The dead were actively sublimated in multiple ways, aimed at avoiding a confrontation with the thingness of material remains.

David Cannadine reflects on this in stressing the creative responses to loss such as the explosion in Spiritualism, and the belief in a disembodied connection to those in heaven without the mess of corporeality.[336] Spiritualist practice was even more visible in the 1930s: The Spiritualist's National Union recorded 309 affiliated societies in 1919, and 500 in 1932.[337] Rhetorically similar official representations often involved the reassuring trope of the "sleeping dead," which Goebel argues allowed for a democratized performance of suffering where representations of the dead acted as symbols of personal

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[333] Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35.
[334] Gabriel Koureas, *Memory, Masculinity and National Identity in British Visual Culture, 1914-1930*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 107-8
[335] Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 210
[336] David Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain', in *Death and the Enlightenment*, ed. Joachim McManners (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1981), 230
[337] Jenny Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000), 13

rebirth, where dead fathers and sons might return some day.[338]
Accelerated by this desire for purification, cremation also
increased exponentially throughout the inter-war period, and
scattering ashes became a common practice from 1920 - the
material and conceptual antithesis of the Victorian lead-lined
coffin which preserved within it the liquid putrefaction of the
corpse. Vocal cremation promoters framed personal grief as
destructive and selfish, as we see in Physician to the King Sir
W. Arbuthnot Lane's paper to a 1931 Cremation Society
conference:[339] "Psycho-analysis has shown only too clearly the
vital importance of deleting from the mind as quickly as
possible, and especially from the young who are so
impressionable, any event that has caused them horror, or great
sadness."[340] This predominantly secular set of practices and
perspectives found resonance with Spiritualism in precisely this
attack on personal grieving - the central principle of
Spiritualist practices being the claim that the dead still
existed, and thus mourning should cease.[341] Like an act of
prestidigitation, the material body was displaced.

Sickert, however, persists in a material practice of
mourning, and muddies these purifications of the putrefied body.

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[338] Stefan Goebel, ''Re-Membered and Re-Mobilized: The 'Sleeping Dead' in
Interwar Germany and Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39:4, Special
Issue: Collective Memory (October, 2004): 497
[339] Sir W. Arbuthnot Lane, quoted in Kazmier, 566.
[340] Arbuthnot Lane, Cremation from the Public Health View (London, 1931) p.2.
[341] Margaret Mitchell ed., *Remember Me: Constructing Immortality, Beliefs on
Immortality, Life and Death*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 53.

His portrait of his idol Degas [Fig. 38] was painted at the same time as the iconic First World War Field Marshal Douglas Haig was being laid to rest, and exhibited alongside *Sheepshanks* and *Raising of Lazarus* in the Beaux Arts Gallery in 1932 and 1933. The catalogue reprinted a short explanation for Degas' youthful appearance: "shown as the artist first knew him."[342] The figure of Degas, in iconic profile, is taken from another *carte de visite* [Fig. 39] and given the co-ordinates of Sickert's first encounter with his much admired model of draughtsmanship. Yet the portrait combines layers of imagery from multiple times and sources even more transparently than Sickert's *Echoes* of landscapes and interiors. The subject's pose here invokes a range of resemblances: the Victorian physiognomic mugshot, Roman and Renaissance profile portraits which immortalized emperors and the dead. Reminiscent of both Piero della Francesca's *Duke of Urbino* and archives of the criminal body, Sickert draws together multiple historical referents into a single body and displaces that in turn onto an ahistorical backdrop. This extensive sifting and recomposing of visual culture helps explain how the painting demonstratively: "shows Sickert's old mastery - great mastery one might say"[343] for contemporary viewers, but as a 'document' of Sickert's meeting with Degas

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[342] Exhibition Catalogue - 1932 Beaux Arts June-July – "Exhibition of Paintings by Richard Sickert, ARA."
[343] *Western Morning News & Mercury* 28 April 1932.

it's indexicality is problematized, expanded to include other times and media.

The subject is both allusive and illusive, dense paint burying the photograph and Degas' oblique gaze deflecting the viewer. This is an icon less confrontational than *Tichborne* or *Sheepshanks*, it refuses to acknowledge the viewer. Even more intriguingly, this closely-cropped figure is displaced onto a 'naively' painted 1920s backdrop reminiscent of Sickert's contemporary *Echo* style. Degas' eye-line cuts across this strange fictive horizon just under the horizontal line of a curtain. The paint combines and compresses three layers like Sickert's late theatre paintings - Victorian photo-portrait, inter-war leisure scene, and between them the rough indication of a theatrical veil. This painted cloth, inserted between times, materials and imaginaries, both shrouds and exposes the background. Sickert suggests spatial depth only to face the viewer with a fictive screen where the source photograph had placed the sitter in front of a blank wall. Placing the contemporary behind the past, the Victorian and the Modern are collaged together, confusing their priority and adding to the rich density of this surface, but also confusing signification with the messy logic of paint.

With *Degas, Queen Victoria* and *Anne Sheepshanks* Sickert made paintings which were both iconographically intimate and historically general, creating dry compound spaces where

different histories brushed against each other. In making photographs material, Sickert took the immediacy of Victorian relic culture (based on the premise of reaffirming the self) and turned it on its head, rendering subjects material but general, unchained from their index. *Sheepshanks* stands like a projected cut-out, a flat fragment, while *Degas* is left as an artefact lost in front of an alien landscape.

Neither purified abstract nor concrete relic, these are an amalgam of index, icon and symbol, text and image, past and present operated across different registers of personal, national and art-historical time. *Victoria* and *Degas* insist on their presence, yet they do not acknowledge the viewer, emphatic and anachronistic their bodies are dry, muted paint. They stake a claim to art-historical grandeur by reference, but also a kind of commercial excess in their reproduction that, for critics, "a student" could perform. Looking at the reception surrounding one of Sickert's most provocative painting of the dead will help us understand how Sickert's paint rendered bodies dense in both the sense of excess and opacity. What was the materiality of these bodies, what kind of resurrection did they achieve, and how did viewers articulate their engagement with this period of Sickert's *oeuvre*?

To grapple with these paintings' excess, and the manner in which they play on developments in the representation of the dead, we need to consider one of Sickert's most spectacular and

problematic successes: *The Raising of Lazarus* (1929-32) [Fig. 40]. Contemporary with the production and display of *Sheepshanks* and *Degas,* this painting presents the viewer with an exemplar of complex and interrelated problematics, and garnered wide and sustained reception in the press. It became a platform by which critics spoke more generally about the position (or perceived 'lack' of a position) taken by the artist in his new phase of work.

As with *Tichborne Claimant* the speed and ease of this painting's execution jarred with the years taken to complete what could be "executed by a student in less than a day," while it's choice of subject puzzled audiences. *Raising Lazarus* exemplifies the excessive and ambiguous materiality of his posthumous portraiture as articulated in critical arguments about what was identified as its 'vitality' and 'mystery'. As the darling of the 1932 Royal Academy exhibition, it dominated the room of "moderns," and was approached by its audience as something disguised which needed to be 'unwrapped.' Exploring this in light of the previous two chapters' consideration of how audiences were frustrated in their attempts to excavate or feel their way through these paintings' surfaces, will bring us to a greater appreciation of the function of one of Sickert's greatest late works and the wider category of posthumous portraiture.

Lazarus is the second painting made from a composite photograph [Fig. 41] featuring Sickert as Christ at its apex, a lay-figure wrapped in funeral garb, and a close friend and painter as onlooker. The photographs were themselves re-enactments based on Sickert's memory of the mannequin's delivery. This image has been multiplied - doubled again and again. The product of two montaged photographs of an uncanny mannequin corpse and painted twice. *Lazarus* was itself reproduced lithographically in a limited number by Sickert - not only was this a shrewd financial manoeuver, but it also intriguingly repeated critics' problems with the originality of this troublingly doubled work: "Mr Jack Aldridge laughingly confessed that when he saw one in an exhibition of Mr Sickert's work, he took it to be an original."[344]

Over two metres tall and nearly a metre wide, the painting's radical format was roughly the size and proportion of a casket or coffin,[345] tilting its bodies out into the viewer's space as if we gaze down into an excavated grave or up through the dizzying door of a mausoleum. Indeed, 'Lazarus,' Sickert's lay-figure, was wrapped in funeral cloth, and housed in a coffin as a dramatic and provocative storage solution.[346] Saturated

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[344] *Worthing Herald* 14 May 1932.
[345] While produced to order, the average size of an English or Canadian adult's casket between the 1860s and 1920s has been estimated at 84 inches by 28 inches, see Brian Young, *The Respectable Cemetery,* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 47.
[346] As brilliantly demonstrated in its display at the Fitzwilliam exhibition *Silent Partners* 14 October 2014 to 25 January 2015.

colour complementaries punctuate the dramatic chiaroscuro, shimmering surfaces and unintelligible space drawing the onlooker in only to disorient them with a hint of the sublime: "The canvas is long and narrow, and the figures stand out from the dead black background as though they were revealed in one terrific flash of lightning."[347] It elicited praise and condemnation from its private view and subsequent displays, announced as "Picture of the Year" by the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Herald* but "indeterminate" and "weird" even under this positive title.[348] The *Telegraph* was so effusive in its praise that it published four dedicated articles in the space of two days: "This is, without a shadow of a doubt, the real picture of the year."[349]

Auctioned for the support of Sadler's Wells Theatre, this was on one level a publicity stunt of grand proportions, a performance to abet performances, and controversy was at its heart. Those lauding the work sometimes employed a manic vocabulary, excessive in their praise: "arresting by the newness and boldness of its colour scheme and is a veritable Tour de Force in the way it defies all the laws of ordinary harmony in its composition";[350] "glorious colour

[347] *Evening News,* 30 April 1932.
[348] *Daily Herald,* 30 April 1932 and "'Picture of the Year,'" *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 30 April 1932.
[349] R. R. Tatlock, "The Picture of the Year, Sickert's superb 'Lazarus,'" *The Daily Telegraph* 30 April 1932.
[350] 'Mr Sickert's Puzzle,' *The Daily Mail* 30 April 1932.

harmony...exquisite design...throws everything else in the Academy into the shade...I do not exaggerate when I say that no other European painter could have invented anything even to compare in colour with this"[351] Conversely for negative critics it was problematically empty, all surface effects, and 'gloomy' rather than dazzling: "The gloom of Mr Sickert's tall painting, which follows in shape the elongation of a swathed white corpse...";[352] "In this contribution to the Royal Academy, there is neither inspiration nor pictorial interest.[353]" This was a sensational and divisive painting.

For Sickert's supporters 'colour' was the key term, holding a magnetic and affective power for the beholder: "The marvellous phosphorescent effect of the green grave-clothes holds the eye and gives one a moving sense of mystery and awe. Here surely is the quality of imagination! Here surely is power!"[354] For detractors, this sense of mystery and 'awe' remained, but became unsettling because of its "indeterminate draughtsmanship"[355] lacked definition: "The effect of the picture may justifiably described as weird...";[356] "...criticism will incline to the view that the surprising part is its audacious sketchiness."[357]

[351] R. R. Tatlock, "The Picture of the Year, Sickert's superb 'Lazarus,'" *The Daily Telegraph* 30 April 1932.
[352] *Western Morning News & Mercury* 30 April 1932.
[353] "Sickert Disappoints," *Sunday Dispatch* 1 May 1932.
[354] Stewart Nicholson "'Lazarus' Academy Sensation - modernist painting of the miracle - artist as christ," *Daily Dispatch* 30 April 1932.
[355] "'Picture of the Year,'" *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 30 April 1932.
[356] R. R. Tatlock, "The Picture of the Year, Sickert's superb 'Lazarus,'" *The Daily Telegraph* 30 April 1932.
[357] "Sickert Disappoints," *Sunday Dispatch* 1 May 1932.

While spectacular, it seemed to lack significant and coherent form and finish.

In this critical discourse, reference to colour and line were expressions of the central contested qualities of its 'vitality' and 'mysteriousness'. It was both living and dead, awe-inspiring and mystifyingly empty. Life and death were metaphorically at stake, the painting's stark contrast was capable of reflecting critically on moribund objects and institutions around it: "Nothing else in the gallery can live with it...";[358] "It is by superior vitality, and not by brighter colour alone, that this painting makes the rest of the room - though it contains some good or goodish pictures - look like a museum in the wrong sense of the word";[359] "The nearest thing to life in their exhibition is Sickert's picture of raising Lazarus from the dead. Some one ought to set about raising the Academy selectors from the dead.";[360] and (in an article titled 'Stone Dead') "The Royal Academy Exhibition is a mirror of dead art. It is a dumb show. Not a sign in it of the vitality and vigour of the modern young artist."[361]

At the 'radical' fringes of a conservative Academy, *Lazarus* was able to apply a unique pressure on the art world, at the same time as it elevated the prices of Sickert's *Echoes* of the

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[358] *Sunday Referee* 1 May 1932.
[359] "Mr Sickert," *The Times* 30 April 1932.
[360] "Stone Dead," *Sunday Express* 1 May 1932.
[361] "Stone Dead," *Sunday Express* 1 May 1932.

dead. Filling a niche and overflowing it, the dizzying colour contrast and vertiginous space of "An eerie scene"[362] was almost frightening in the manner it: "dominates the largest amount of wall space ever given by the Academy authorities to the 'modernists.'"[363] Sickert's scene of resurrection was painted alongside his 'portraits' that returned the Victorian dead, and hung alongside them within a year of its first display. With this powerful language the critics performed on *Lazarus* an intensified form of the critiques they had given to Sickert's other representations of the dead – from the divisive quality of technique and facture to the relevance or irrelevance of the content: "Here the colour harmony is of such dazzling splendour, the pattern so intrinsically exciting, that the subject, the interpretation of the scriptural theme, becomes absolutely immaterial."[364] The way it elicited discussion of "vitality" and "sense of mystery"[365] therefore in many ways amplifies the problematics of the 'echoing' *Echoes*.

Indeed, while the doubly estranged and ambiguously absent content of the *Echoes* was often elided, or expressed in highly generalized terms, with *Lazarus* Sickert had given his audience an arena for discussing the complexity of his late work in detail – an environment for critical play. It provides the

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[362] *Eastern Daily Press* 30 April 1932.
[363] Stewart Nicholson "'Lazarus' Academy Sensation – modernist painting of the miracle – artist as Christ," 1932, *Daily Dispatch* 30 April.
[364] *The Observer* 1 May 1932.
[365] *Western Morning News & Mercury* 30 April 1932.

historian with a window onto art critics' engagement with the stuff of paint. The elaboration of a 'sense of mystery' posed problems of excess for critics, who located multiple puzzles of identity and anatomy which resisted naming. There would be no incontrovertible memorial plaque to contain and distance the operations of this work, not even at Sadler's Wells, for Sickert would even separately sell reproductions and the 'original' painting cut from the wallpaper of his studio. *Lazarus* brought critics' thoughts on the *Echoes* to a head, focusing it on a single shrouded figure, and yet refused to yield a body which was specific, which could be defined.

At the private view, Sickert performed this frustrating game of identification in both the painting and in the flesh - arriving without the beard that made him identifiable in the painting: "Some people who have seen recent photographs of Mr Sickert clean shaven may be puzzled by the news that the bearded features of the figure of Christ in this picture are a self-portrait";[366] "that the Christ is apparently a self-portrait of Sickert himself".[367] The ambiguous appearance of Sickert-Christ surprised viewers who felt the need to point out: "the features are actually those of the artist himself."[368] However, just as

[366] *Daily Dispatch* 30 April 1932.
[367] *Daily Express* 29 April 1932.
[368] Stewart Nicholson '"Lazarus" Academy Sensation - modernist painting of the miracle - artist as christ' 1932, *Daily Dispatch* 30 April.

crucially, the character performed by Cicely Hey provoked equal measures of exasperation and interest.

Where the technical procedures involved in creating and distributing the painting performed multiple doubling operations, Hey's figure itself seemed to perform a double function, it seemed to stand for two figures - which sister of Lazarus was she? "It is not a problem picture, but it contains a problem. Is the female figure in the foreground Martha or Mary? I confess I am not certain about that.";[369] "The figure of the woman in the picture presented a puzzle in all. 'Is it Martha or Mary?' they wanted to know."[370] Sickert would not tell. While this was an established avant-garde strategy for hooking an audience, it adds yet another element to this painting's excess. Indeed, this uncertainty of identity, this compounding of the painting as photographs, prints, paintings and figures and artist of indeterminate appearance and identity represented with indeterminate colour forms, was compounded even further by a yet more unusual problem of anatomy.

Sickert performs a sleight of hand, or perhaps more literally, an 'excess of hand'. As the *Daily Express* stressed, "the left hand of the Christ in the picture has six-fingers and the suggestion of a seventh.[371]" The anatomy of the body itself

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[369] "Academy Picture of the Year, a Sickert Problem," *The Daily Telegraph* 29 April 1932.
[370] "Mr Sickert's Puzzle," *The Daily Mail* 30 April 1932.
[371] *Daily Express* 29 April 1932.

appeared to be in excess in this confusing image of resurrection. Rather than affirmative and authorial, this work was transgressive and ambiguous. Extra fingers, and the very notion they might go unobserved, provoked great anxiety among the critics who could not believe that of the thousands of members of the public who saw the painting, and the hundreds of artists around it on varnishing day "only one of those artists then noticed that extra finger."[372] The *Sunday Express* even went so far as to print out an informal interview with Sickert at the private view wherein the critic is staggered by the obfuscation of a consummate and loquacious performer: "Was it an accident, or was it deliberate?...Mr Sickert is the only man who knows, and he refused to say, in fact he refused several times."[373]

Sickert's refusal to explain or even acknowledge the presence of "too many" fingers was framed by a sense of detachment and a referral to the object: "I am an artist, not an art critic. It is the critic's business to talk about pictures, not mine. My work hangs on the walls of the Royal Academy - go and look at it, and say what you like about it. Don't come to me."[374] The surface of this painting perplexed and ensnared critics looking for the 'missing body', a fixed text or function hidden beneath the 'coarseness' of the paintwork: "But Mr

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[372] "Why did you do it, Mr Sickert?," *Sunday Express*, 1 May 1932.
[373] *Sunday Express*, 1 May 1932.
[374] Walter Sickert quoted in "Mr Sickert," *The Times* 30 April 1932.

Sickert, this is not a matter of criticism. It is a matter of fact. Why-... All we want to know is - why?"[375] Sickert's position seems clear - this matter of fact was there for all to see on the surface of his painting, there were no tricks.

This obsession with Sickert's fingers runs in marked contrast to a lack of references to the eponymous body of Lazarus itself - the mannequin which is both the subject of the painting and the object of questionable 'facts' [Fig. 42]. Another of Sickert's artefacts that has devolved to Bath, this lay-figure-corpse is only ever referred to in the context of mistaken identity - its funerary shroud disguise and the anecdote of Hey's "terrifying" encounter where she mistook it for a corpse,[376] an encounter this painting seems to repeat. This proto-body performs an ambiguous role in Sickert's studio. For an artist working from squared-up two-dimensional referents, and with no indication the lay-figure was used for its original function, the affectation becomes significant. It is a substitute body, clothed in cloth, photograph and paint - a hidden term barely more than matter.

The body here is the material - the stuff of art history – and excessive in its referents. The painting, for all its startling newness, invokes a number of precedents and references

[375] "Why did you do it, Mr Sickert?," *Sunday Express*, 1 May 1932.
[376] R. R. Tatlock, "The Picture of the Year, Sickert's superb 'Lazarus,'" *The Daily Telegraph* 30 April 1932.

in both composition and title, to the Western canon – from
Mantegna to El Greco and Caravaggio, Rembrandt to Van Gogh.
Lazarus echoes a range of references without fully embodying
any. A multiple made from a composite photograph, this painting
as a whole takes the form of a signifying body thickened by
allusive paint and yet empty of a definitive narrative.
Sickert's fingers are a metonym for paint shrouding the canvas,
a cryptic provocation which delivers no truths beyond the
surface of the painting. Viewer's expose their anxiety of
indeterminate and extensive reference by obsessing over the
artist's extra digits. The body is too much and too little, a
shroud which invokes compound mysteries, which both occlude and
express. In a humorous poem, a satirist elucidates how this
operates in the context of the Royal Academy's margins:

> We know them well, those trim and clerkly things/ Flat and
> unprofitable simulacra,/ Those classic burnt-sienna
> offerings,/ Like Ancient Rome without the Via sacra,/ Maybe
> the clerk is worth his salary,/ But what is Sickert doing
> in this gallery?/ ...And making art itself a palimpsest,/
> with one new work imposed on all the older?/ the rest are
> fair game for the critics' raillery,/ but what is Sickert
> doing in this gallery?[377]

Sickert returns an ambiguous vitality to this gallery's
display of simulacra, he foregrounds the mysteries of paint
through the *topos* of the dead body. The shrouded mannequin
floats as a figure beyond touch and beyond understanding but
also an imposing and emphatic presence. Shrouded by paint as

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[377] James Hall, "First Prize," *Week-End Review* 4 June 1932.

much as its funerary garb, the dead body is as concrete as its companions, but hidden. Paint buries its subject at the same time as it attempts to embody it. Perhaps this is all that resurrection is - massed material, the broken anatomy of generations, the opaque medium of oil paint. Not a return, not a coherent continuity, not a representation, but a body reconstructed inadequately after the rupture of death.

A comparison was made at the time with what some saw as a much more 'adequate' body and satisfying artistic performance - the Royal Academy's previous "Picture of the Year," John's portrait *Viscount D'Abernon* 1927-31 [Fig. 43]. Augustus John was often forwarded as Sickert's competitor for title of "modern master,"[378] and in 1932 *Lazarus* was directly compared, unfavourably, with John's portrait of the previous year.[379] John's grand manner body fills a much less dramatic composition. With a full-length sitter in eighteenth-century regalia that acknowledges the viewer, it displays confidence and coherence in contrast to fraught and spectacular mystery. Indeed, one of the key problems critics found in *Lazarus* when compared with *D'Abernon*, was the speed of Sickert's "indeterminate draughtsmanship" - its appearance of rapidity apparently contradicting the long duration of his working method: "The most

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[378] "John v. Sickert: Which is the Greater Artist," *Sunday Dispatch* 23 Feb 1930.
[379] "Sickert Disappoints," *Sunday Dispatch* 1 May 1932.

important picture of the year is Sickert's eerie painting, *The Raising of Lazarus.* This, I was told, took him the whole year...";[380] "...criticism will incline to the view that the surprising part is its audacious sketchiness."[381] As with *Tichborne,* and in contrast to the rapidity with which he executed *Miss Earhart's Arrival* of the same year, a degree of disbelief centred on his invisible effort, inscrutable paint that openly declared the mark of the brush but which only hinted at what was buried, as if the subject were stalled in the condition of becoming.

Interestingly, this might seem to betray similarities with John's work, which took even longer to execute and which also deployed a surface of quick *bravura* brushwork. Indeed, John and Sickert both use "dazzling" contrasts of light and dark and red and green, with figures looming out of a dark and indeterminate ground. El Greco was potentially a shared point of reference for colour and intensity, The National Gallery acquiring his *Agony in the Garden* in 1920, a painting described with the same title afforded to both Sickert and Johns as a "Modern Old Master".[382] Yet for critics it was *Lazarus* and *Lazarus* alone that was "a long, upright, coarsely-painted affair."[383]

[380] *Daily Herald* 30 April 1932.
[381] "Sickert Disappoints," *Sunday Dispatch* 1 May 1932.
[382] *The Times* 24 June 1920.
[383] "Mr Sickert's Fun," *News Chronicle* 30 April 1932.

The reason for the distinction in the eyes of the critics was more than technique, it was the difference in subject, and more precisely *Lazarus'* dizzying play of indeterminate identities. Rather than reaffirming the vitality of its subject, it hides, doubles and displaces it in a precarious space between life and death. The viewers' gaze circulates between darkness and dazzling colour, masquerades and funeral shrouds. Where *D'Abernon* meets the viewer's gaze, *Lazarus* buries it. While *D'Abernon* wears sumptuous fabrics affirming his identity and status, Lazarus is obscured, bound by a painterly shroud that both reflects and obscures the index of the photograph. *Lazarus* is an excessive body, but one that buries its references in paint rather than articulating them through it. Sinking time and identity into his paint surface, Sickert buries and ferments the dead in a way which returns a strange unfinished material memory for its audience. As in his portraits, Sickert does not so much displace the dead, as show it to be both more and less than a body.

To an even greater degree than Sickert's portraits of the Victorian, *Lazarus* situates the viewer in a complex and disconcerting space - a quality far removed from the stable sharing of fictive space between viewer and subject that we see in Johns' *D'Abernon*. As a viewer, we only slowly situate our perspective. We look in on this act of resurrection but we are secondary to this scene, acknowledged by none of the figures. We

are voyeurs - light streaming from our space through the opened door of Lazarus' tomb, the picture plane. Our eye seeks out visual gratification, but is met with this impossible body. Frustrated desire dogs the erotics of this spectacle. There is no body to *be* the object of desire, that which is presented to us is a bandaged mannequin, one inert material enclosing another.

Brilliant whites are activated by their contrast with golden creams and chiaroscuro depths, This surface shimmers. A declarative body of paint, behind this sheen of matter there is nothing but the implication of wooden bones and the emphatic presence of indeterminate facture. The fictive space of this scene further compresses and distorts Lazarus, a cast shadow from the foreground figure cutting away at the body's legs. What appears at first appraisal to be empty negative space on closer inspection becomes an illegible but implicit limb. Another occlusion which begs an undeliverable substitution - the figure is veiled in layers of paint, fictive cloth, light and shade, but there is nothing beneath these layers.

What this shadow highlights then, is a common component of Sickert's transcription from photographs. As a tonal translation from the black and white referent, there is no necessary sequence to the application of tones- they can be more discrete marks than blended flow, with more fixed and independent co-ordinates than painterly developments felt for through

application or learned through mistake and correction. A figure does not have to be sketched in before it can be painted over, there is no necessity to work in and out of the ground. What is important to glean from this is that this patch of shadow on the canvas was a compositional element from the beginning, not an added effect. Modelling is the product of discreet tonal patches which require far less order in their application than Johns' more academic Slade-instilled method, whose sequence of sketches, under-painting, wet-on-dry and wet-on-wet paintwork builds up a stable pyramidal figure. Sickert's painting from photographs builds up its dry layers more as a mosaic, setting skeins of paint beside each other like bricks in a wall: both together and discrete, the composition hinging on no single element but instead hanging together in a grid-like arrangement of mutual support and multiple redundancy. The material has a logic of its own which renders what it represents uncanny.

The way in which this composition has been flattened is further highlighted by comparison to the photograph. Where Sickert and the head of the lay-figure should be cast into relative shade, they are instead afforded the same luminosity as those elements originally in the line of illumination. Confusing, compressing and flattening, Sickert's composition bends light. More specifically, in terms of the result, the cast shadow over the corpse's feet and the spread of light on to Sickert's otherwise receded features has the effect of warping

the composition, undoing foreshortening, and placing the viewer in an uncertain position between what appears to be alternately a lateral, perpendicular perspective like that of Johns' and a bird's-eye point of view. While the use of light emphasizes Sickert's position as Christ, and even renders the scene more legible, it also disorients the viewer. If the viewer identifies with the foreground figure, they imagine themselves as upright and parallel to the picture plane. If, however, the viewer positions themselves with regard to the play of light, the image is perpendicular to the picture plane, and seems to hang at an improbable angle.

The viewer's relationship to this painting is thus made manifold, frustrating, opaque, and disorienting and this relationship is echoed in the relationships of the figures. Like *Portrait of Painter's Grandmother*, skin merges with fabric, and Christ's hands are just as formless as the material they figuratively attempt to wrestle into life. Indeed, this image also plays on the history of surgical paintings, the shocking revelation of the interior of a body undergoing a post-mortem. Rather than a resurrection there is only an unclear and formless attempt at exhumation. While Sickert echoes Mantegna's *Lamentation of Christ*, perhaps a comparison with a surgical arrangement highlights the provocation which Sickert performs regarding death.

Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Deijman* (1656) [Fig. 44] opens the head of a man for visual display. Unlike Sickert, who hides and suspends his swaddled 'corpse,' Rembrandt opens his body up - visually distinguishing its layers from skull to skin through composition. While Rembrandt uses foreshortening to push the corpse into the viewer's space, Sickert disorients and trips up the viewer, bringing them into the space of the painted corpse. *Anatomy* is visually open and immediate. *Lazarus,* by contrast, inverts this hierarchy, bringing the viewer to the painted 'stuff' of the corpse while also frustrating their encounter with it.

To draw together our understanding of how the corpse-like representation of a dead personage can be both present and invisible, excessive and empty, we can turn from the visual precedent of dissection imagery, to Sickert's interest in another medical and artistic technology - the X-ray. Through this we can better understand how Sickert's paint can affect a viewer's proximity to something they cannot fully 'grasp' or comprehend, something that echoes. There is precedent for scholarship drawing connections between modernism and x-rays, but through the idea of cubism rendering the invisible visible.[384] I am instead more interested in the way that X-rays

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[384] For examples see Bettyann Holtzmann Kevles, *Naked to the Bone: Medical Imaging in the Twentieth Century,* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1997), 126. And the more guarded Elkins on x-ray crystallography in James Elkins, "Art History as the History of Crystallography," in idem, *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 24.

by the 1930s had given new visible depth to paintings, but
conservators remained frustrated in their attempts to make the
material legible. The viewer's access to the history of an old
master's painting could be as much obscured as facilitated by x-
rayography[385] and its inability to differentiate or penetrate
different materials.

For contemporary viewers concerned with establishing
meaning and provenance in painting, discourse surrounding the x-
ray linked concerns of the body and the canon, paint and flesh.
Having looked at the Victorian and Great War contexts, a
consideration of x-ray photography in relation to art analysis
in the 1930s can provide insights into what Sickert's often
opaque layering of the painted body demonstrated in the wider
visual discourse of the art world.

Picturing the dead was intimately associated with x-
rayography. At the turn of the century a surge of interest in
the discovery of new 'rays' went so far as to raise questions at
the margins of the scientific community about the potentiality
of contacting spirits. As Friedrich Kittler argues, in the early
twentieth century new media often provoked discussions about
subjectivity which were articulated in terms of ghosts, and the
possibility of communication with the deceased.[386] Indeed, with

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[385] A period term for the range of practices utilizing x-rays. See
Kennedy North, "Authentic Paintings" / "Patience in Modern Scientific
Research," *The Daily Telegraph* 28 February 1929.
[386] Covered in his introduction to *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Kittler goes
on to argue that new photographic technologies rendered the living themselves

greater specificity Mary Warner Marien demonstrates that the X-ray's association with death was widespread, and so too were its links to networks of desire, emblematizing both Eros and Thanatos in Thomas Mann's great novel about the self in modernity, *The Magic Mountain* (1924).[387] "Psychical Research" in interwar England even toyed with the trope of the x-ray in the field's attempt to normalize paranormal research.[388] In the context of rising Spiritualism and powerful continuities and displacements involved in remembering the dead in the 1930s, there was already an association between X-rays and resurrection.

More directly, Sickert himself engaged in press discourse surrounding the use of x-rays applied to paintings. This seems to have followed similar motivations to Sickert's stated interest in the use of other photographic technologies in the 1920s and 1930s as both precedents and tools of verification. After Sickert wrote an attack in the *Daily Telegraph* aimed at collectors he was deemed to be bribing experts to authenticate the artist behind their paintings ("paying by results"), a press debate ensued about establishing 'facts' hidden in paintings. Sickert called for the use of X-rays: "The scientific researches

uncanny, reified versions of themselves. See Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1999), 17.

[387] Mary Warner Marien, *Photography, A Cultural History* (London: Lawrence King Publishing 2002), 216.

[388] Harry Price, "The Man with the X-Ray Eyes: Kuda Bux," *The Listener,* 7:VIII (1935).

into the authenticity of paintings connected with such names as Professor Lawrie and Mr Kennedy North." Because, as Sickert continued, "They introduce the element of certainty and will eliminate the expert who is paid by results."[389]

North was a restorer and Keeper of the King's Pictures, who developed experimental X-ray equipment, and this thread of discourse on how to see inside paintings and through the material layers of time, is traceable in press cuttings Sickert collected of what followed, now held in the Islington Family Collection: "The use of X-rays, ultra-violet rays, and microphotography are in their infancy, and accurate diagnosis and knowledge of their laws can only come from long, laborious study";[390] "Beneath the pictures of practically all the Old Masters and many others often lie other pictures, sometimes more beautiful than the one which meets the eye."[391]

Aesthetics and experimentation were underlying tropes here, for a technology which was first used on the body, and originally employed in medical treatments which became standardized during the First World War. In the late 1920s this spectral technology was first put to use by major galleries probing very different kinds of body - oil on canvas. They uncovered the traces of their production and the echoes of

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[389] Walter Sickert, "Authentic Paintings. 'Whistler' owners plan to 'pay by results'" *Daily Telegraph* 27 February 1929.
[390] North, "Authentic Paintings" / "Patience…" 1929.
[391] H., J. S., "Hidden Old Masters," *The Daily Telegraph* 28 February 1929.

material invisible to the casual observer. Indeed, Kenneth

Clark's administration of the National Gallery saw the

establishment of a physical laboratory [Fig. 45] under Ian

Rawlins which first applied x-rays to the national collection in

in an effort to assert the provenance of masterpieces.[392] The

thicker the paint, the darker the x-ray, allowing researchers to

decipher the stages of a painting's development provided the

layers were consistent in depth.[393] However, the technology's

utility remained uncertain:

> Of late the subject has received some attention in the
> Press. On the one hand there has been much inaccurate
> overstatement as to its possibilities and uses, while on
> the other it is regarded with suspicion or dismissed as
> not being worthy of consideration by the serious student
> of pictures.[394]

Indeed, x-rays were often associated with 'invisibility' at

a popular cultural level, rather than with their capacity to

reveal.[395] The rays made flesh invisible at the same time as they

rendered bones available to the beholder. Like paint, the

technology both occluded and reconfigured what it represented.

X-ray analysis of painting was a contentious and loaded

discourse for a society which perceived its pre-industrial past

as 'veiled' and was struggling with the trauma of loss on a

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[392] Jonathan Conlin, *The Nation's Mantelpiece: A History of the National Gallery,* (London: Pallas Athene) 2006 p.153.
[393] David Carrier and Robert Cavalier, "Theoretical and Practical Perspectives on Technology and the History of Art History," *Leonardo*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1989) p.246.
[394] Kennedy North, "Old Masters and X-Rays," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 56, No. 325 (Apr., 1930) p.194.
[395] Marien, *Photography*, 218.

national scale. Establishing 'matters of fact' with regards to the representation of the dead body was thus a major concern, and one which Sickert was aware of when he rendered them a quagmire in *Lazarus* and his posthumous portraits.

Towards the end of his career, an article in *The Listener* even placed Sickert's Victorian photograph-based paintings firmly in the very frame of the "new vision" x-rayography enabled, discussing his: "adaptations from photographs and his recreation and his re-creations of Victorian subjects" in relation to the impact of new imaging technology: "nobody need pretend that photography is an art. It is a highly developed craft that has greatly influenced our ways of looking...has given us new views - consider, besides the cinema, the aerial, the infra-red and the x-ray photograph..."[396] Locating this quality in Sickert's avoidance of "lifeless formality" in his portraits, the author William Plomer made the analogy even more directly: "The camera has created for us a poetry of the instantaneous, and Mr. Sickert has found a way to write the poetry with a brush."[397]

Yet while Plomer saw Sickert as harnessing the properties of a craft to an art, we have seen in these works how illegible this 'poetry' could be - a mixing of surface and interior. This is the 'poetry' of the X-ray. It is compounded in a photographic

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[396] William Plomer, "Mr Sickert's Exhibition," *The Listener,* 9 March 1938.
[397] Plomer, *The Listener,* 9 March 1938.

process shared by both Rawlins and Sickert: multiple plates must be overlaid and re-photographed together to complete an x-radiograph of an entire portrait, creating a dense and mysterious palimpsest [Fig. 46]. Composite photography connects the x-ray across its surface, while the x-ray exposure itself connects the painting in depth. Here we can see a visual and methodological similarity with Sickert's process [Fig. 47], where, as in the *Echoes,* his grid connects and differentiates the painting across two dimensions, while the exposure of underpainting in dry levels of facture manifests its layers in depth.

However, X-radiography is also indiscriminate and excessive in what it images, confusing the material layers of a body - giving form to the nails and woodgrain of a panel painting more clearly than its *pentamenti*. Curators in the 1930s were finally able to access paintings as fully three-dimensional objects, not just a surface, but their access was complicated, presenting different depths, stages or 'times' of a painting simultaneously.[398] Like the x-ray, *Lazarus* and the portraits of the dead present dense surfaces, assemblages of fictive fabric, skin and paint. When Sickert talks of the x-ray's "element of certainty", he is directing our attention from the 'critics' and

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[398] Joseph Padfield, David Saunders, John Cupitt and Robert Atkinson, "Improvements in the Acquisition and processing of X-ray Images of Paintings," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin,* 23 (2002): 63.

'experts' to the body of paint, that enigmatic material that persists. When Sickert spends a year painting a work that appears almost *alla prima* at its surface, he renders the material history of the painting fully manifest at a level we can see, like an X-ray. However, like an X-ray photograph, this simultaneousness leads to confusion about the staging and identity of the painting's contents - the body is both dead and 'vital', it is the obdurate material of paint, both expressive and opaque.

Turning back to the strange *Echo* with which we began, *The Gardener's Daughter*, unlike Tennyson's poem, does not unveil a hidden face or original body, but brings together a multitude of materials across time. Satirizing and eliding referents, this painting generates mystery both dark and comic and so tasks the viewer with the problematic parsing of paint. Here the dry fragments and layers which separate the figures and also bring them together, aligned with the grid of transcription - neither resurrecting the past nor replacing it, but showing how at a material level multiple times coexist.

Sickert's work did not stress legibility or authenticity but the messiness of death, and as we have seen ran in opposition to the interwar logic of the memorial, but let us end with a final example of importance to the artist. Disorientating and densely material, *Lazarus* is a dazzlingly strange and rich image to observe in the context of shifting representations of

death. Indeed, along with Sickert's other posthumous portraits, *Lazarus* was painted during a period of intense controversy surrounding a major memorial statue of the leading British commander on the Western Front - Field Marshal Douglas Haig. The sculptor pursued a classicizing aesthetic, termed "sculpturesque" against the grain of realism desired by the public in 1928-9.[399] For a statue addressing the cenotaph photographic realism brought forward issues of excess and obsessive detail which could threaten the elevation of the dead. D. S. MacColl was ambivalent but poetic in articulating his anxieties about the intense demands photography now made of Haig's commemorative sculpture: "A cloud of witnesses, with photographs in their hands, deny any likeness of form or character to the Man, and when he has been through the mill, veterinary surgeons and riding masters take up the song against the Horse..."[400] It was a debate in which Sickert intervened at the same time as he was painting *Lazarus*, arguing that millions: "will groan if their pride and desiderium and mourning are to be made into a demonstration of this theory of aesthetics... it is Haig we want, the very spit of him."[401] Photographic precedents were part of this material representation, and Sickert defended

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[399] Contemporary press accounts emphasise this outcry, see *Daily Mail*, 12 September 1929; *The Times*, 12 September 1929.
[400] D.S. MacColl, "The Haig Monument," 1929 in MacColl, D. S. *Confessions of a Keeper*, (London: Alexander Maclehose & Co., 1931), 345-46.
[401] Walter Sickert, "The Haig Statue," *The Times* 29 July 1929 reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 589.

their use in the work "at the disposition of the artist," to add to this 'spit,' against objections that the statue should try and restrain the unforgiving naturalism of photography and instead conventionally code and idealise the dead. This "cloud of witnesses" desired a realism, but one which the photograph endlessly deferred when the likeness of the dead was rendered in bronze on Aberdeen granite. Sickert did not desire elevation, but rather a baser kind of materialism. *Lazarus* and the posthumous portraits work to reinsert the material memory of dead matter into the post-great-war era attempting to forget the Victorian and elide the trauma of war. Indeed, insofar as *Lazarus* engages a persistence and incomprehensibility in the death of icons, its white funeral cloth echoes the white funeral dress and pall of Queen Victoria herself.

Sickert's posthumous portraits offer something of the formless 'spit' of posthumous likeness – a material memory without indexicality, a specific if problematic reference to the repressed Victorian and not a generalised abstraction or sublimation. This is a problematic fusion of Victorian fascination with bodily relics, and the post-war ubiquity of conventional memorial iconography - but less than a body, and more than a name. These posthumous portraits are dense almost unreadable palimpsests of media, where materiality and imagery both occlude and express their subject, shrouding it.

To conclude, Sickert successfully exploited an art world niche on the edge of conservative-modernity. Sickert neither sublimates his subjects, nor offers access to the real, but instead offers the body as a kind of material palimpsest of memory. These palimpsests posited problems for both the conservative art world and aspects of remembrance and historical identity at a national level. Against institutions' foreclosure of representational access to the historical dead and attempt to reify the old masters, Sickert performs a problematic kind of 'resurrection' which declares that material memory was never as clear nor as distant as many contended.

Sickert's paintings employ photographic technology and iconicity relating to First World War memorial culture, but corrupt it with the material thingness and indexicality of Victorian death culture without its reducible specificity, stressing the opaque but declarative nature of paint. They show that the body persists, but as an incoherent material – both dazzling and indeterminate, a dry painterly shroud that binds and expresses the body at the same time as hiding it. Like the strange simultaneity and confusion of time in the x-ray, Sickert forces his viewers to remain at the surface, entangled with the painted body. For all that *Lazarus* compresses the vital and the deathly, the puzzles of time and identity, Sickert affectively frustrates desire, refusing resurrection: "The subject of painting is, perhaps, that it is not death. It is, perhaps,

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nothing more."[402] A confusing note to end on, perhaps as its author would have liked it – painting is here death and not death, neither more nor less, but the ineffable remainder. It is neither a complete displacement nor revelation of the real dead body, but an indeterminate material. As a 'resurrection', *Lazarus* is incomplete, both present and absent, a dense and opaque shroud, the material memory of the dead can offer us nothing more.

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[402] Sickert, Walter, "Vanessa Bell," *Burlington Magazine,* July 1922, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings* p.47.

Section II

Chapter 4: Painting in Flight

In the previous three chapters we focused our discussion on Sickert's *Echoes* and the Victorian aspect of material memory, perhaps the most marginalized of Sickert's bodies of work, but his topical paintings based on contemporary press photography also mobilized materiality creatively and provocatively for contemporary audiences. In this chapter and the following, I address the materiality of Sickert's paint in relation to new media and celebrity icons, and develop our discussion from Sickert's invocation of historical time to a greater focus on the time of painting itself. In these paintings, the time of contemporary events and technologies is even more crucial for our contextual understanding of Sickert's photo-paintings - the time of powered flight and cinema. Sickert's material memory continues to offer its audiences an indeterminate physical rendering of history, using paint to indicate content which cannot be expressed fully in any medium. He renders the present moment strange, thing-like and ambiguous in critique of sensational and positivist accounts of mass culture. To an even greater degree than in the *Echoes* of Chapter 2, the paintings explored in the concluding chapter embody a kind of tense hesitation which helps to indicate the limits of mediated memory through the transmediation of filmic images.

First, in this chapter we widen our understanding of Walter Sickert's material memory through consideration of the artist's post-photographic work concerning international spectacles and

anxieties which surface in their reception. Focusing on *Miss Earhart's Arriva*l (1932) [Fig. 48], I contextualize work which has previously been dismissed as topical painting devoid of social comment, side-lined much like the *Echoes,* by exploring their mediation and relating canvases to discourses surrounding heavier-than-air flight in the early 1930s.

This chapter argues that *Miss Earhart's Arrival* is the site of three intersecting technologies - paint, plane and photograph - and that its intermediality raised doubts surrounding the capacities of these media, and by intruding the materiality of paint into the field of international celebrity the painting questioned attempts to displace and frame recent historical events. To demonstrate these problematics surrounding Sickert's material memory, this chapter will first examine historical associations surrounding the representation of this image's subject matter, long-distance powered flight, before looking at the specifics of its production and the implications of the press discourse which received it, and finally resolving the co-ordinates of the three media at work in relation to contemporary politics. By a process of sustained looking, I explore this painting, further nuanced by reference to *The Tichborne Claimant* (c.1930) [Fig. 49] and *Baron Aloisi* (1936) [Fig. 50], in order to extend my examination of late Sickert's appropriation strategies to consideration of his work on press photography. Here a material hesitancy surrounding the word 'arrival'

constitutes the key to understanding issues of material time and becoming which are at stake in these paintings, and Sickert's wider practice.

Sickert's interest in imperial identity and the international is detectable in a variety of works from the 1930s, from the Victorian Australian scandal drawn upon in *The Tichborne Claimant* (1931), to the international crises surrounding Mussolini's imperial expansionism in *Il Barone Aloisi* (1936) which Sickert produced as a gift for the Italian Government. By inserting material memories into international spectacles, we will see how Sickert rendered the 'virtual,' 'material.'

Before engaging with *Miss Earhart's Arrival* (1932), reflecting on a painting of the year previous can give us an initial insight into how material and methodological issues of displacement, and the condition of 'unfinish,' relate to thematics surrounding international media spectacles. This painting also provides a connection to the previous chapter which helps us move on from posthumous icons to the embodiment of living celebrity, and conveys to us some of the wry scepticism with which Sickert viewed notions of technological progress in the inter-war period.

At first glance, *The Tichborne Claimant* [Fig. 49] opens itself up to the viewer as a loose modernist painting reminiscent of the soft, lightly-applied pastel-coloured brush

marks of Bloomsbury. The landscape, built from patches of colour, scattered over plain under-painting and bare canvas, is reminiscent of Cézanne and Fauvism, while also being fragile and hesitant in handling. Sickert critiqued Cézanne repeatedly, and used his example as a foil to his own practice, a means of distinguishing his position from Bloomsbury, and justifying his method of remediating sources. Painting from life, Sickert claimed, could not transcribe the present moment, just as he supposed Cézanne could not hope to represent "such a fluctuating spectacle as a game of cards."[403] At first glance then, stylistically this painting seems to displace its author, to appear both authentic and inauthentic. Sickert plays with painterly languages, questioning the authorial function of paint and instead placing it in the service of describing the ephemeral through mediation. This was an artist who intriguingly disavowed Cézanne but owned a book on Matisse from the 1920s until his death.[404] This painting, with its thin application of diluted oils, was scratched onto the canvas with a small brush as almost a distillation of post-impressionism. It hangs in the viewer's eye like a collage of painted fragments that shimmers

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[403] Walter Sickert, "Mr Lawrence's Painting," *New Statesman* 24 August 1929, reproduced in Robins *The Complete Writings*, 592.
[404] Currently held in the Sickert Family Collection in Islington, Sembat, Marcel, *Henri Matisse: trente reproductions de peintures et dessins précédées d'une étude critique*, (Paris: Editions de la "Nouvelle Revue Franc̜aise »*, 1920).

with stretches of empty canvas, this is a hesitant and ambiguous depiction of celebrity.

The canvas exhibits internal conflicts both at a material level and at the level of content, its unusual and enigmatic figure. This subject appears mildly surprised, off-centre, his gaze vacant as if unwittingly caught in a snapshot. This man himself invokes a history of de-centring, problematic authorship and multiply-imaged celebrity and fashion. The figure is a translation of an 1860s photograph of Arthur Orton (an Australian butcher from Wagga Wagga), found guilty of perjury in 1873 London for impersonation, and laying claim to the Tichborne fortune.[405] The *cause celebre* generated a large press discourse, and a huge popular following in the 1870s. As a painting however, *The Tichborne Claimant* sets its celebrity bust against a dry, patchy Cezannesque even Matisse-like landscape, stripping it of contextual information. The viewer can no more easily place the figure in an English courtroom than they can on the Australian coast, a faraway land and a faraway time. Our only iconographical cues situating us in time and place are Victorian mutton chops and an indefinite lake or inlet, but even these elements appear mobile in the loose material memory of paint.

Displacements in material and method echo those of time and location - 'gaps' of exposed canvas are a key structural element

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[405] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 529.

of the painting. The grid used to transpose the photograph is left legible to the viewer, while the bare supporting fabric ambiguously signifies tonal highlights as well as emptiness. One and the same absence of paint thus denotes topographical peaks and negative space. Moreover, the pale pallor of "*Tichborne*" provides a smooth gradient where it meets instances of the bare canvas such that painting, underpainting and canvas form a continuum at the surface. The presence and absence of paint become hard to distinguish. Not only is the planning and transcription of the broad composition broken down to the constituent squares of its grid, but the paint surface makes its own incremental accretion of marks visible to the viewer. Each mark that textures the canvas to imply hills and water is the product of fleeting pressure and leeched oils, evidencing an almost abrasive touch. This canvas declares its artifice while the same procedures evidence the condition of alienation between its elements.

Moreover, while Daniels argues that this painting illustrates the relative power of painting over photographic technology,[406] Sickert transcribes and accentuates the photographic retouching of the figure's profile in the source, therefore acknowledging and reinforcing the constructed nature

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[406] Rebecca Daniels, "Richard Sickert: The Art of Photography," in *Walter Sickert: "drawing is the thing*," ed. Matthew Sturgis, (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 2004), 27.

of imagery in both media. Paint here does not claim to excavate the true subject from 'behind' the photograph, but rather make us aware of the ever-present artifice of image-making. Sickert's is indeed the second artistic intervention after the original exposure. This is the trace of a *tracing* of a photograph, rough patches of colour now distil and diffuse post-processed lines made in 1873 on the photographic plate. This painting is not a consolidation of authorial power, but instead an object which defers its content, remediating and re-situating imagery without resolution: a Victorian-Modern, Australian-English subject not quite a photograph and not quite a 'finished' painting by academic standards.

With the appearance of an aging fresco of an aged con-artist, there are both resonances with Sickert's self-mocking portraiture in *Juvenile Lead* (1908), and with his interest in contemporary press sensations, one critic even describing *Earhart's Arrival* as being: "like a fragment of a magnificent modern fresco."[407] Tichborne's is a face out of time and place, and this painting's construction rhymes with the constructed nature of its pictured celebrity and its performer-artist. Sickert repeatedly argued that Orton was authentic, a man lost at sea at the furthest reaches of empire, and he even announced work on a book concerning the Victorian sensation just three

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[407] *New Statesman and Nation* 18 June 1932.

months after finishing *Earhart's Arrival*.[408] Sickert was thus staging his interest in authenticity and the historical limits of painting, in an image which was itself of confused provenance, concerned with alienation and displacement in both referents and facture. Here we can see that Sickert's play on the thingness of paint, its material memory, was both experimental and self-aware. A provocative image, unsettled in its ontology as well as its positioning between mechanically fabricated canvas and artistically retouched mass cultural photograph, Sickert would go on to harness these qualities in the service of his own spectacular press presence by painting and 'performing' *Miss Earhart's Arrival* (1932).

Having discussed the *Echoes* over the previous three chapters, it is worth recapitulating Sickert's market position and prestige in the 1930s. By 1932, Sickert was no longer a member of the pre-war avant-garde communities which represent the period of focus for the majority of Sickert scholarship. However, Sickert's position in the art world had risen dramatically – by making strategic use of institutional validation through the Royal Academy and his established London gallery circuit, his highest grossing works increased their market value by over 600% between 1927 and 1928.[409] Sickert was even out-competing formalist painters favoured by Bloomsbury,

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[408] "Versatile Artist," *Dundee Courier and Advertiser* 8 Sept 1932.
[409] *The Daily Telegraph* 7 July 1928.

the dominant modernist intelligentsia, by a substantial

margin.[410] In the same year, 1932, possessing both the titles of

Associate of the Royal Academy and President of the Royal

British Society of Painters, he was being represented in three

exhibitions simultaneously, while also courting press

controversy by innovating in his society's exhibition

procedures.[411] In May 1932 the press was still reeling from the

controversy of his *The Raising of Lazarus* when he drew huge

crowds to the Beaux Arts Gallery to see a painting of the story

dominating the news cycle - the first solo woman's flight across

the Atlantic.

Wendy Baron's account, however, is typical of previous

scholarship of *Arrival,* applying a formalist methodology to what

she describes as one of Sickert's: "unique records of topical

interest, it is improbable that Sickert's motivation was to

create a record of his own time or to make a social comment. He

was gripped by the way a particular photographic image could

capture a moment of high drama"[412] and simply "used topicality

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[410] In December 1928 a Christies "market test" drew 65 guineas for the largest Duncan Grant, while Sickert outdid all other modernists on show, selling a pre-war work for 660 guineas. See A. C. A. Carter, 'Rise of a "Modern" Artist - Increasing Value of Sickert's Work - Sadler Collection,' *The Daily Telegraph* 1 Dec 1928.

[411] Devizing an alphabetical system for hanging based on letters drawn by lot. This had its critics: "makes the exhibition very difficult to describe, much more to judge" 'Art Exhibitions,' *The Times* 5 Nov 1928; and supporters: "revolutionary scheme of hanging" *West Sussex Gazette* 16 Nov 1928, and defended by Sickert in a democratic appeal: "There are no humbler members of my society. Nor are there members who would consent to be described as 'of greater distinction," "Mr Sickert on hanging," *Morning Post* 6 Nov 1928.

[412] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 121.

for publicity potential."[413] In light of the fact that Sickert

possessed both a radical practice and considerable cultural

capital, dismissing the social significance of Sickert's photo-

based painting seems unjustifiable. Indeed, I argue this is a

further example of the research opportunities omitted by

biographical narrative-focused and Formalist analyses. This

reduced estimation of 'late' Sickert can be found, as we saw in

the introduction, in Richard Shone and Wendy Barons' landmark

monographs in the field of Sickert studies.[414] However, it stems

from the rhetoric of Sickert's contemporaries, the Bloomsbury

elite. Where Vanessa Bell had seen them as "idiotic," and Clive

Bell as "ridiculously feeble,"[415] Sickert's first historian,

Lillian Browse, would establish a lexicon framing them as

pathological symptoms: "deterioration", "tragic", "decline."[416]

This treatment of the late works as evidence of an artist in

decline would permeate the majority of post-war critical

perspectives. Moving past this limited and uncritical form of

appraisal, however, we can find the stunning potential and

cultural resonance of Sickert's remarkable painting from

photographic sources.

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[413] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 129
[414] Exemplified by Baron and Shone eds., *Paintings*, 1992, and the more recent Baron, *Sickert* 2006
[415] Clive Bell, 'Sickert at the National Gallery', *New Statesman and Nation* 6 September, 1941
[416] Lillian Browse, *Sickert* (London: Faber & Faber, 1943), 50

Miss Earhart's Arrival was scaled up from a photograph and displayed within just five days of Earhart's record setting flight across the Atlantic - a feat of 'history painting' which astonished critics with both its innovative source material and remarkable speed of production. To enrich our readings of 'late' Sickert, we need to position the artist in social context, and ultimately in relation to the technologies he engaged with.

In close proximity the work engulfs the viewer's field of vision with its radically wide format. However, once we are immersed in this canvas we find ourselves simultaneously distanced from it. The viewer identifies with the crowd, and owing to the cropped lower edge of the image we are situated within it, but we confront obstacles to our view in the visual noise of the rain and the dense agglomeration of figures. In a sea of mid-tones, their bodies a shared body politic, we see almost half the pictorial space left is under-painting exposed at the surface. Indeed, this painting is characterized by variegation in its surface - ranging from bare ground to impasto highlights. Even the underlying grid used in its transcription was visually present for the viewer at the private view on the 28th of May 1932.

The motifs implied by the painting's title only reveal themselves to us slowly. The aeroplane which defines and describes this composition is also diminished by it - reduced to functioning as a structural backdrop. Its almost architectural

presence, however, dwarfs the notational profile which constitutes the only trace of the eponymous aviatrix. As the most significant internal frame of the work, it is the motif of the plane with which we have to engage to fully understand the spectacle that, as a member of the crowd and of a mass newspaper readership, we are collectively 'witnessing.'

Arrival's intense materiality and self-declaration of means was all the more radical for its contrast to conventional fine art representations of aircraft. From 1929 [Fig. 51], *aeropittura* refocussed Futurist conventions on the articulation of flight as an active process, the rendering of the vehicle secondary to the description of motion, the span of flight in time.[417] Sickert's critical gesture towards Italian Fascism is only hinted at in his gift of the portrait of a frail League diplomat to the Italian state [Fig. 50], but stylistically his dark, grounded flight could not be more distant from utopian *aeropittura* and *aeropoetry.* In America, we find a large volume of utopian print illustrations dedicated to the grandeur of flight, but in contrast to both Sickert and Marinetti, it was a monumental flight of scale, foregrounding the plane, even floating cities as the colossal fetishes of science fiction.[418]

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[417] For an overview of the aesthetics and nested politics of *aeropittura* see Richard Humphreys, *Futurism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 70-77.
[418] I am thinking here of both the utopian architecture and aerial perspectives of the 1939 World's Fair, and also the more calamity-driven utopian and dystopian covers of publications by speculative fiction writers such as Hugo Gernsback, see Alan Lovegreen, "Aerial Homesteading: Aerofuturism in Interwar

In the British context however, Sickert's painting found neither its opposite nor equivalent. The aeronautical genre of painting had dissipated quickly after the end of the Great War. Paintings of flight being the domain of those with direct experience such as Nevinson [Fig. 52] and John Turnbull [Fig. 53], and minor landscape painters such as George Horace Davis. As a motif, the plane and airscape virtually disappeared from interwar British painting after 1920.[419] These were divergent attempts to picture a nascent technology, but these strategies nevertheless shared key differences to *Arrival*'s vision of flight.

What wartime and interwar modernist and academic representations share is a keen emphasis on flight as an empowering condition, and one described as an uninhibited and emphatically technological rather than social process. Nevinson's planes surge upwards, out of reach, while Balla's and Bruschetti's dissipate into forever-circulating vectors of force. Rivera's Detroit Mural of the following year too, presented flight in a state of becoming, heroic feats of production about to ascend. Sickert, however, represents flight as both grounded and as a social spectacle for consumption - the

America," *Criticism*, 57:2, Critical Air Studies: A Special Issue Edited by Christopher Schaberg (Spring 2015): 235-236. This utopian/dystopian exaggeration in representations of flight is a point I turn to next in powered-flight's wider political context.
[419] With the exception of their marginal appearance in Nevinson's apocalyptic paintings of the 1930s, see Michael J K Walsh, 'This tumult in the clouds': CRW Nevinson and the development of the 'airscape,' *The British Art Journal*, 5:1 (Spring/Summer 2004): 86.

aviatrix is present but disempowered, while the plane dominates but as an inanimate material object. Instead of dynamic vectors or atmospheric effects marking the power of flight, in *Arrival* we see in a dripping wing tip the trace of omnipresent rain – its raking lines inhibiting and obscuring in their function for both viewer and fictive flight. To contextualize what Corbett has referred to as a "troubling emotional tone"[420] in the work, we need to look at the wider field of flight's visual context.

As Luther Gore writes, outside of war, artists in the aviation genre had been largely restricted to illustration commissions.[421] Indeed, in the wider field of visual culture, we have to turn to illustrated news, marketing materials and speculative fiction to locate the visual presence of 1930s flight. As William J. Fanning argues, the quantitatively significant output of science-fiction in the interwar period drew on the content and logic of reportage and state politics in order to frame apocalyptic futures.[422] Non-fiction and fiction claims influenced each other, and the aeroplane's wonder-weapon status influenced early pulp fiction on both sides of the Atlantic, *Air Wonder Stories, Tales of Wonder* and *Blue Book*, where we see planes represented with immense power, even

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[420] Corbett, *Walter Sickert*, 62.
[421] Luther Y. Gore, "The Winged Paintbrush: Aviation Genre Art," *Leonardo*, 21:1 (1988): 72.
[422] William J. Fanning Jr., "The Historical Death Ray and Science Fiction in the 1920s and 1930s," *Science Fiction Studies*, 37: 2 (July 2010): 253-4.

inverting Sickert's motif to the extent that the ground itself ascends to meet them [Fig. 54].

Flight's exceptional potential for progress in the popular imagination was complimented by its superlative capacity for discord. Pre-war science fiction had broadly employed abstract threats, from unknown "fatal engines" in George Tomkyns Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking* 1871, to alien agencies in H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* 1898. However, by the interwar years air power was an explicit focus of dread and salvation in books such as J.F.C. Fuller's *The Reformation of War* (1923), Anderson Graham's *The Collapse of Homo Sapiens* (1923) and Dalton's *Black Death* (1934).

In contemporary newspapers, Baldwin's speech "The Bomber Will Always Get Through" resonated with fears in 1932 surrounding flight's capacity for rapid and invisible attack, a fear which could be evoked by all sectors of flight: "in civil aviation you have your potential bombers."[423] The ambivalences of speculative science fiction were reiterated in projective pieces in journalism, such as the *Illustrated London News*' visual response to Baldwin's speech. Its front cover pictured anxieties concerning flight technology's future, but in portraying "gas attack," it represented flight's imminent threat by illustration rather than photography, and the plane itself cannot be seen

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[423] Stanley Baldwin, "The Bomber Will Always Get Through" speech to the House of Commons, 10 November 1932.

deploying its payload or arriving in domestic airspace [Fig. 55]. The index of aerial attack is the same gas which obscures the sky, the faceless everyman of the future is victim to unseen aircraft.

This lack of visual presence was a current in more optimistic discourses as well, despite examples of *aeropittura*, for Futurists: "In theory at least, aeropoetry was meant to be heard and not seen."[424] While in advertising the plane itself was visually highlighted, the end of a plane's journey was rarely represented [Figs. 56-58]. In stock photography we find the plane on the verge of taking flight, rather than arriving, and photography seems to have largely avoided the subject of planes in the air. Portrayal of the commercial airplane in flight was left predominantly to graphic work and the production of art deco posters. Here the plane casts its silhouette over the world, a global map at the potential passenger's disposal - the plane is represented as encompassing vast distance and traversing it unidirectionally - always out-going, never returning. Like high-art representations, flight is articulated as progressive motion, and a process of becoming - a perpetual embarkation into the realm of the virtual, a theme reflected in press representations of Earhart.

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[424] Willard Bohn, "Visual approaches to Futurist aeropoetry," in *Back to the Futurists: The avant-garde and its legacy,* eds. Elza Adamowicz, Simona Storchi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 226.

In the 1930s, Imperial Airways was linking together the extremes of empire. Before transatlantic flight became commercialized, Australia was the limit of air-borne empire. With Britain at its heart, the edges of imperial control in every British map were North America and Australasia. Even more so than we find in *Tichborne*, Sickert's depiction of a trans-atlantic flight was capable of signalling the uncertainties and anxieties involved in consolidating the world's largest empire. In 1932 Imperial Airways had just opened the world's longest flight routes, to Delhi and Capetown, but dangers and the potential for mechanical failure inhibited commercial transatlantic flight until 1938. Indeed, accounts record the mechanical failures which dogged Earhart's flight. Photographing flight was indeed dangerous, and as a documentary medium it also courted historic failure as much as commercial success.[425] Press photography of "aviatrix Earhart" manifested, in this vein, as a displacement – Earhart as the safe surrogate of innovative heavier-than-air technology [Figs. 59-60]. Sickert's international icons, however, are not safe proxies for the

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[425] In other fields, such as aerial entertainment/wing walking, in-flight photography had begun to emerge c.1920 in the U.S., though this material was also being curtailed by Federal regulations concerning flight safety from 1929 (e.g. http://www.thehenryford.org/exhibits/heroes/barnstormers/lillianboyer_p3.asp accessed on 28 July 2014). The exploits of wing-walkers et al are also arguably distinct projects to document, for practical reasons, from feats of long-distance flight and cutting-edge technology upon which this article focuses, but it is important to note that some exceptions exist, and that general claims about photographic culture can only appeal to trends and not universals.

speculative fears of their present moment - his material

memories are more ambivalent and critical embodiments of events.

In this cultural and political climate, suffusing Sickert's

milieu and the popular press with which he engaged, the life-

size *Il Barone Aloisi* [Fig. 50] expresses something of the

existential crisis surrounding flight. As paintings engaging the

international circulation of images, a comparison of *Arrival* and

Aloisi can be revealing of the ambivalent properties and

functions of Sickert's method. In the latter a League diplomat

who fought for disarmament but had supported Mussolini, is

figured at the moment of his resignation. This painting

registers the turning-point at which the Abyssinian Crisis

precipitated the collapse of the Three-Power Conference, a

decisive event that pushed Mussolini towards Hitler and further

discredited the League as an organ of world peace. Aloisi's

image is here scaled up hundreds of times to History painting

proportions in dry impasto paint, rendering the *Daily Express*

19th August 1935 article "Mr EDEN SAYS 'GOODBYE'" into a hesitant

material body [Fig. 61].[426]

As an icon of mounting international crisis, this painting

signals a melancholy ambivalence about the threat of air-power

being tested in the Abyssinian desert, a liminal moment frozen

in time. In newsreels highlighting the principle media events of

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[426] "Mr EDEN SAYS 'GOODBYE,'" *Daily Express*, 19th March 1935.

the year, Baron Aloisi appears montaged with equal exposure to Earhart and other aviation celebrities - in paper and film the pair shared some of the same iconic space in discourse.[427] Yet, as a painted 'farewell,' this canvas might appear to be an inversion of *Arrival. Il Barone Aloisi* takes the wide frieze-like format of *Arrival* and rotates it 90 degrees, returning to its celebrity subject something of the iconic status stripped from Earhart in the noise of *Arrival's* composition. However, this central emphasis on the figure also draws attention to its stoop, its downcast eyes and faltering step. For all its monumentality, *Il Barone Aloisi* stresses the icon's fragility, its awkwardness in posture and paint. The diplomat's hair vanishes in its translation from the source, while paint carries the vagueness of his hands over from the photograph in a manner that further alienates him from his backdrop. In the original source high-contrast light blurs the distinction between hand and wall, visually fusing them as if the figure were retreating into a fresco. In paint they appear as unfinished as the venetian background, as if composed of the same frayed material.

Against an inchoate backdrop, staged in a claustrophobic space, this figure is displaced, like the dry surface of something unfinished or ancient. Indeed, the cut of the frame

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[427] For a typical example see British Pathé newsreels of the time, which montaged together celebrity and politics reminiscent of the continued relativizing effect of broadcast news throughout the twentieth century, e.g. *Review Of The Year 1935* (1935), British Pathé Online Film Archive, http://www.britishpathe.com, accessed on 10th January 2016.

here implies a severance – of diplomatic communication, of photographic source – in the cropping of its interlocutor, Eden. This is a "goodbye" left incomplete. As its source implies too, this story is ongoing and confrontational – as the *Daily Express* article reads "a clash at the League of Nations council meeting on September 4 is inevitable." The inevitable 'clash' and the subsequent war had already occurred by the time of the painting, and with its displacement of the figure to a Venice constructed from dissonant colour and exposed canvas, and depiction of a dazzling pocket watch which only serves to accentuate his darkly impenetrable body, we see Sickert's unravelling of narrative time and meditation on loss. This is celebrity without straightforward celebration - a gift that in part feels like a commiseration. 'Unfinished,' this is an icon of international politics that wavers in interfacing the past and the present. The figure is in motion, but without resolution, and Sickert suggests that this is the nature of the spectacular event in the time of mechanical reproduction and international exchange.

Indeed, Sickert's paintings' themselves performatively repeat their icons' international and transatlantic travel as objects of publicity and ambivalence. Sickert deliberately created *Il Barone Aloisi* as a gift to be sent to the Italian Government at a time when Italy was removing itself from international relations in the form of the League. It was a risqué gesture which, like the auctioning of *The Raising of*

Lazarus, made claims about the artist's own celebrity pretensions, as well as reinforcing the scope, relevance and market value of his work. How then does Sickert's material paint articulate the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic, how does he stage and embody this celebrity in a time of crises?

Arrival, too, was a painting which travelled, with its second and most prestigious public display, nearly a year and a half after its initial circulation in the press. At the Thirty-First International Exhibition of Paintings at the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, it was displayed alongside another of Sickert's celebrity photo-paintings *Conversation Piece at Aintree*,[428] the mirror of its arrangement in the Beaux Arts gallery the previous year. Moreover, the exhibition catalogue reveals that the painting had already been sold after only a small private view and the circulation of its reproduced image –– an unusually rapid sale for Sickert in this period, where exhibition catalogues reveal the repeat showings in commercial galleries of many late works, without sale, throughout the mid-thirties. Following the private view many papers noted that it was expected to be bought by an American, implicitly combining American and English audiences in their notion of potential reception. Considering *Arrival* sold even before it went on public display, the speed of Sickert's painting is already

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[428] A painting we will explore in depth in the next chapter.

indicated by the shifting display contexts of the object itself,
the spatial complement to its transposition of imagery between
media. Its first public exhibition was embedded explicitly in an
international context, from its proximity to gallery rooms with
American holdings to the site of the exhibition itself - the
United States. The very framing of the exhibition as
"international" underlined the function of its curation as a
transatlantic exchange, and the replication of its immediate
hanging context from London evokes the elision of both spaces.
Miss Earhart had synecdochically returned home through this
painting in 1933, but how does this relate to the wider
circulation of the aviator's image?

On the front page of the *Daily Sketch* from which Sickert
crops the image of Earhart [Fig. 62], we already sense the
interrelationship of international politics and sensational news
coverage. Four years before Aloisi's resignation over the
Abyssinian invasion and aerial bombing, Earhart shares print
space with photographed British soldiers, most likely in a
policing action in Iraq, a mandate Britain mainly ruled through
cost-effective air-power. Earhart's achievement, mediated by
discourse, was never an individual one restricted to technical
progress or the triumph of will over natural forces. Her triumph
was structurally entangled with ideas of patriotism and
international tension as well as communication and
reconciliation. In the aviation historian Robert Wohl's account

of interwar flight, a shift occurred in the framing of spectacles of flight from the "heroic" to the corporate, as a consequence of the commercialization and militarization of flight and the restructuring of the "flying fraternity" within the military.[429] Earhart's flight was seen as a watershed, as both a first and last: "Many have said that the last great spectacular feat of this sort which remained in aviation would be a solitary Atlantic crossing by a woman."[430] Her face floats in Sickert's work at the edge of an anticipated caesura, the aftermath of Lindbergh. As Anne Hermann argues, Earhart's reception was heavily constructed by George Putnam's PR promotion, rendering her a commodity denuded of agency: "Unlike Lindbergh, who resists being positioned as lone pioneer by invoking a brotherhood of fliers, Earhart functions as the copy of an image already in circulation."[431] Indeed, she earned the nickname 'Lady Lindy' from her resemblance,[432] having the opportunity to fly in 1932 because she embodied "the right image".[433]

Earhart's cultural capital as a celebrity reflected a transgression of gender norms in a new technological and social

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[429] Robert Wohl, *The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1920-1950*, (New York: Yale University Press 2005), 5.
[430] *Manchester Guardian* 23 May 1932.
[431] Anne Hermann, "On Amelia Earhart: The American Aviatrix as Dandy," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 34:1 (Winter, 2001), 86.
[432] Donald M. Goldstein, and Katherine V. Dillon. *Amelia: The Centennial Biography of an Aviation Pioneer* (Washington DC: Brassey's Inc, 1997), 55.
[433] American aviatrix and wife of former British Air Minister, quoted in Herrmann, "On Amelia Earhart," 76.

space - flight. The first airline attendants recruited in the U. S. in the 1920s and 30s were nurses, selected for their connotations of maternal care – as Delta's first woman flight attendant noted: "You might want to think that the concept of nurses being flight attendants was an altruistic one and maybe there was an underlying thought in this direction, but it was also a very fine public relations vehicle."[434] Indeed, as Tom Baum elaborates, an early binary was constructed between pilots, endowed with masculine authority and positioned as father figures, and the passive femininity of their passengers and attendants.[435] Earhart's subversion of this division introduced an articulation of the interwar 'New Woman' into a space of aerial exploration which was simultaneously emancipatory and reactionary as it approached the commercial logics of capital. Both passive and active, Earhart offered Sickert an image to materialize, a means of articulating the tensions and limitations of the international movement of images – the circuits of photography and flight.

While mention has been made, in the literature, of the painting's clear relevance to discussions on celebrity culture,[436] this has not sufficiently engaged with its

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[434] Birdie Bomar quoted in Tom Baum, "Working the skies: Changing representations of gendered work in the airline industry, 1930-2011," *Tourism Management*, 33:5 (October 2012), 1189.
[435] Baum, "Working the skies," 1193.
[436] Nicola Moorby, "Miss Earhart's Arrival 1932 by Walter Richard Sickert," catalogue entry, April 2006, in Helena Bonett, Ysanne Holt, Jennifer Mundy (eds.), The Camden Town Group in Context, May 2012,

complexities, or indeed, the manifest layering of imaging operations at work in *Arrival*. Sickert paints from a photograph of Earhart - a painting of a found image of a ready-made icon. Already in his choice of photograph, his intervention is in a literal sense extraordinary.

   In glamour shots promoting her flights [Figs. 59-60], Earhart is generally fore-grounded, elevated above the press, gazing over the horizon, about to embark. She is represented as a protean figure, enabled by a flying prosthesis which stands at her command, secondary to her iconic visage. If we compare this formula with Sickert's source image [Fig. 62], we see a celebrity marginalized, pursued by the spectacle she elsewhere dominates, mired in the body politic and constrained by her attendant plane. In the front page of the *Daily Mirror* [Fig. 63] we observe the body of Earhart whole, free from shadow, and active as an agent in various diplomatic and commercial spectacles. Instead of the *Daily Sketch's* similar and juxtaposed image of Earhart shaking the hand of Ramsay MacDonald, Sickert opts for cropping the already compressed mob of figures that crowd Earhart, blocking her as much as greeting her. In paint, Sickert reduces Earhart's active body to a passive head, while giving substance in facture and colour to brooding masculine figures which displace Earhart from the foreground. This

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http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/walter-richard-sickert-miss-earharts-arrival-r1135622, accessed 21 February 2014.

frustrates the viewer scanning for the eponymous subject in the
same move that frustrates the optimistic language of Earhart
Imagery. Rather than the virtual realm of the imaginary of
flight, Earhart is brought down to a material earth - 'arrival'
becomes a rhetorical denial of 'becoming.'

The first visual and material feature the viewer confronts
in *Arrival* is the rain. Each drop is a punctuating mote the size
of the heroine's face, dragged across the surface as if a tear
in its fabric. Indeed, the painting's power was experienced as
fiercely haptic by its critics, who stressed its disconcerting
power - "stinging rain," "vigorous, atmospheric...splashed
across with rain from the thunderous clouds overhead."[437] The
streaks of white across this canvas act in concert as marks with
a great deal of compositional autonomy – standing as a diffuse
layer of scumbled highlights, they play across all the other
forms and devices of the painting. In Sickert's transparent and
methodical working practice they supervene as the final layer in
a painting so thin it often bares its own ground. Their
dominance of the work is clear, and they confuse and fuse the
multiple figures whose order in recession has been heavily
obscured during the transcription of the photograph. This
painting works against its own legibility in the subordination

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[437] *The Scotsman* 13 Dec 1932.

of its content to the transitory and migratory brush mark, embodied by the raindrop.

In the photograph the rain is visually elided with the grain of the photograph itself, becomes indistinguishable, and in the painting it becomes the dominant filter to our view of the work's content, playing on the equivalence of brush mark and raindrop. Many of these droplets even 'penetrate' through to the under-painting, bearing dull brown haloes of the compositional space dedicated to them still visible to us at the surface. This is a painting which draws attention to the mechanical nature of its precedent at every turn, as well as its materiality.

This rain, this basic unit of the painterly process and reflection of photographic granularity, is almost a cipher for painting and photography. The medium's emphatic insistence on its own presence, a planned intervention in the very basis of the tonal under-painting, reifies the fundamentals of transcription. These marks are a reification of the construction of the image and its materiality which gestures to its cycle of reproduction.[438] *Earhart's Arrival* is a work which exists as a material object in suspension between two phases of press photographic circulation.

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[438] It is worth noting that while the ability to record rain with photography arguably reveals a degree of technical achievement and thus legibility. I argue that the visual analogy between the rain drop and the granularity of photo-reproduction in the press is compelling, and indeed the photo-press was a medium under competition from higher fidelity photo-journals, as well as the new media of wireless and early photo telemetry, creating a space in which visual noise was increasingly a marked term.

The rain, like the grid of transcription, is self-reflexive, but unlike the grid and its conventional associations of neutrality, drawing and academic objectivity, the rain embraces a materiality. Running obliquely to the grid, it brings the substance of paint, and the unit of the brush-stroke, to the fore, but by an iterative procedure which haunts the painterly surface with its photographic foundation.

Press commentary was quick to recognize and stress the painting's photographic precedent, for some an "impression...inspired by a photograph of the Atlantic Flier's landing",[439] for others "practically a copy of a snapshot."[440] *The Daily Sketch* even published the painting alongside their photograph, visually drawing an equivalence [Fig. 64]. Indeed, photograph and painting are read as almost interchangeable when the critic writes: "the photograph is still the better of the two."[441] However, only a lone *Morning Post* reporter pointed out what should have been obvious for the majority of journalists, but which escapes them: "The 'Arrival' shown at the Beaux Arts Gallery, 1a, Bruton-place, W., was at Hanworth in Middlesex and not made in the machine in which she flew the Atlantic..."[442]

While reporters occupied opposing extremes, whether they praised or decried the painting, their opinions were based

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[439] "Sickert 'Snap' in Oils," *Daily Express* 30 May 1932.
[440] "Brush and Camera," *Oxford Mail* 31 May 1932.
[441] "Artist Inspired by Photograph," *The Daily Sketch* 31 May 1932.
[442] "Mr Sickert's New Picture," *Morning Post* 31 May 1932.

fundamentally on the painting's seemingly strict adherence to its verified source. Yet the plane pictured belonged to the news corporation Paramount - Earhart was its passenger from Ireland to England, not its commanding pilot. What we observe in the critical discourse, I argue, is an effective elision between photograph and perceived reality.

The *Daily Express* and the *Oxford Mail* both mistakenly claimed the painting portrays her landing immediately after her completion of the transatlantic voyage, while the *Yorkshire Post* also attempts a confused reading of the painting's transparency when it asserts the pictured plane is Earhart's own, despite being of radically different design. Only the *Morning Post* asserts that "the picture does not illustrate 'an event of world-wide interest'"[443] -- and it does so to berate both Sickert and the critical reportage of him. When Sickert extended invitations to its private view with the non-descript header "Great New Painting," he primed his audience to expect something novel and historic, and with his title he instructed them in how to project content onto the canvas.

When he displayed a secondary flight of a different event, he provided a contradiction. That critics remained certain of this painting's 'truth' reveals a faith in photography independent of its object - treating it as a general quality.

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[443] "Mr Sickert's New Picture," *Morning Post* 31 May 1932.

The photographic quality of this "snapshot" painting allowed it to be read as effectively photograph-like and therefore 'reliable,' but also problematically redundant - the painting is not the "better" of the two media memories.

What then did the truth function of documentary photography 'mean' for these historical observers? Some major tendencies can be outlined regarding the documentary photographic still, however it is outwith the scope and size of this chapter to pursue a complete recapitulation of the nuances of contemporary 'photography' as a medium.[444] As John Taylor argues in his analysis of the interwar period, photography was being vested at a popular level with a host of functions associated with facilitating certainty and accessibility for viewers of its object, including the capacity to document experiences of youth and adventure, and return the sights of empire across great distances: "the great promise of the photographic industry was reliability."[445]

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[444] The literature on the ontology of the apparatus is too vast to list here (Barthes, Sontag, Berger, Nancy, Baudrillard, Flusser, et al), though more relevant for assessing contemporary beliefs are historical analyses - both those situating photography in the contemporary such as Benjamin and Kracauer and later scholars looking at media archaeology such as Kittler and Zielinksi. See Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936) in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 211-245; Siegfried Kracauer and Thomas Y. Levin, 'Photography' (1927), *Critical Inquiry*, 19:3 (Spring, 1993): 421-436; Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media,* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 118-115; Siegfried Zielinksi, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
[445] Taylor, "Kodak and the 'English' Market between the Wars," 29.

Almost from its inception, one of photography's roles had been as an "aid" to history,[446] and speaking in the 1930s on the centenary of its invention Paul Valéry offered a suggestive account of the indexical model of photography when he evocatively quipped: "COULD SUCH AND SUCH A FACT, AS IT IS NARRATED, HAVE BEEN PHOTOGRAPHED?"[447] While Walter Benjamin remained attached to the authenticity of the aura, the Frankfurt School was keenly aware that photography had assumed the role of an apparatus of memory, as we find in Siegfried Kracauer's 1927 essay "Photography."[448] This model of understanding time and truth, as Tachtenberg has argued, "takes the snapshot as its notion of adequacy, the equivalent of having been there."[449] With a clear debt to Barthes, Tachtenberg expands on the idea that from the late nineteenth century, for the collective imaginary photographs "confer nothing less than reality itself."[450]

Photography in 1932 was not only a key documentary medium, but was culturally loaded with 'truth' value, and considered a prerequisite for articulating the virtual as 'real.' As a historical documentary device, however, critical expectations of photography were being frustrated and confused when it came to representing the 'futurity' of breakthroughs in flight. When

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[446] Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence,* (New York: Cornell University Press 2002), 21.
[447] Paul Valery, Speech, *Centenary of Photography*, (1939).
[448] Kracauer and Levin, "Photography," 421-436.
[449] Alan Trachtenberg, "Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs," *Representations*, (Winter, 1985), 1.
[450] Trachtenberg, "Albums of War," 2.

Sickert's critics debated the presence of the photographic in relation to flight in *Arrival*, they were testing the associations and potentialities of the technologies involved against this conceptual background.

Furthermore, when it came to flight, cultural associations also came with intense political significance. To complete the provision of a sufficient context for Sickert's work and explain their confusion and interest where photography, flight and paint collide we will now conclude on the ambivalence found in wider political discourse on air power. On the global stage, 1932 was an important turning point for British attitudes to flight. Britain had employed aerial bombardment in 'policing' Iraq until its independence in 1932, the same year in which Baldwin gave a speech on the potential impact of aerial bombing on London and the League of Nations began debating the formation of a global aerial peace-keeping force of which Britain was a strong proponent.[451] As Baldwin outlined, heavier-than-air flight invoked awe for two principal reasons: its invisibility and its speed.[452]

Internationally 'flight' was associated with potentialities: diplomacy and war. It activated both a utopian and dystopian imaginary. Politics and military theory often

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[451] Britain faced disturbances across the empire during the interwar period, in Egypt, Turkey, Afghanistan and Iraq, heightening imperial anxiety and increasing the appeal of air-power. See Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2013), 170.
[452] Stanley, "The Bomber Will Always Get Through" 1932.

invoked highly wrought predictions about the capacities of flight often hard to distinguish from sensationalist journalism and science fiction of the period. Indeed, as Waqar Zaidi argues, discussion of international relations in the early 1930s was often bound inextricably with discussion of aviation – to the extent that the two terms "constituted" each other.[453] This coalesced, in 1932, around the League's Geneva Disarmament conference, which gave voice to a solution which had been building over the preceding years – the construction of an international air force.

At the same time, military theorists, enjoying a flourishing period of popular publication,[454] increased the stakes of the failure of peace in multiple works in the interwar period on both sides of the Atlantic: *The New Warfare* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1918); *"Neon," The Great Delusion: A Study of Aircraft in Peace and War* (London: E. Benn, 1927); Charles Dennistoun Burney, *The World, the Air and the Future* (London: Knopf, 1929) et al. What these reiterate, as Meilinger identifies, is the paradox of deterrence logic: "that airpower was a civilizing and humane instrument because it would make war

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[453] Waqar Zaidi, "'Aviation will either destroy or Save Our Civilisation': Proposals for the International Control of Aviation, 1920-45," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46:1 (2011), 151.
[454] Evidenced by multiple publications of fringe theorists who came to influence public thought to a much greater extent than military orthodoxy owing to this dynamic, see Philip Meilinger, "The Historiography of Air Power," *The Journal of Military History* 64:1 (2000), 470-1.

so awful that it was less likely to occur."[455] While some theorists disagreed as to whether aerial bombing had more impact materially or psychologically, consensus viewed strategic bombing with a sense of "horror and inevitability," the potential to decimate countries with impunity and render all other military arms redundant.[456]

Air travel, the vector of air diplomacy for Eden and Aloisi, was also a vector for aerial destruction. Flight was radically altering popular conceptions of time and space, both linking empire and threatening it with disintegration, loading contemporary events with 'futurity.' Five years earlier, Lindbergh was extracted from France by the military cruiser USS Memphis, and delivered, under 200 tonnes of confetti, to a reception in New York equal to that of a victorious general.[457] When Earhart received royal and prime ministerial receptions she too was involved in a reiteration of the links between institutional and military power and celebrity and flight. In the words of a liberal pressure group to *The Times*, which could have been taken from H. G. Wells *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), flight promised an inescapable binary state "Aviation will either destroy or save our civilisation."[458] Indeed, both of

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[455] Meilinger "The Historiography of Air Power," 470.
[456] Meilinger "The Historiography of Air Power," 471.
[457] T. A. Heppenheimer, *Turbulent Skies: The History of Commercial Aviation* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 22.
[458] Allen Clifford, founder of 'Next Five Years Group', speaking in 1933, quoted in Zaidi, "Aviation will either destroy or Save Our Civilisation," 162.

these potentialities bled into the front covers of The
*Illustrated London New*s [Figs. 55 and 65].

In Earhart this conflation of flight with utopian/dystopian
potential was contained by spectacular consumer culture – her
use in the marketing of fashions, her 'signing' of a Selfridges
window and the clamour of reporters at her arrival. Her plane
was literally dismantled and reconstructed inside a London
shopping centre, while Earhart was involved in a dialogue with
state spectacle: "The King and Queen ... sent a message of
congratulation to Miss Earhart on her Transatlantic flight."[459]
The *Gloucester Citizen* even stirred the public's obsession with
the fashions appended to her: "MISS EARHART'S NEW THRILL BUYS
FROCKS, HATS, AND STOCKINGS WONDERFUL FLIGHT."[460] However,
Sickert's painting picks up on the banal commodification of
flight at the same time as playing on the anxieties which
underlie it.

Taken as a whole in this atmosphere, the evocative word
choice of Sickert's critics deserves to be treated seriously as
indicative of these complex anxieties and coping strategies. If
photography was the medium of 'truth,' and flight the medium of
'possibility', Sickert would use the material memory of paint to
muddy the two. Indeed, Sickert's critics located technological
resonances not only in *Arrivals'* perceived origins, but in

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[459] *Evening Telegraph* 24 May 1932.
[460] *Gloucester Citizen* 23 May 1932.

Sickert's process. The genesis of the image was described in relation to flight, as if an act of 'flight' itself, eliding paint with its object in a lexicon which prioritizes 'transition' and 'journey' over completion: "his inspiration grew new wings,"[461] while the execution "required the same kind of power of endurance as the flight itself."[462] Yet for all this struggle, the image also fails to resolve, to 'arrive' in 1932, remaining a creature of press circulation like the event it describes, at best only "practically complete,"[463] and at worst "practically a copy of a snapshot."[464]

From its first moment of reception we find repeated predictions that it will be bought by an American buyer, as if its audience, its reach and potential were of the same register as flight: "It is anticipated that Mr Sickert's high-speed tribute to Miss Earhart may be purchased by an American, so that it may go to her country to remain for all time a permanent record of her triumphant flight."[465] Yet *Arrival's* American buyer never arrived. Ephemeral and transient rather than commanding, Sickert's method was being read as inadequately iterative, and fundamentally incomplete.

Moreover, attestations of *Arrival's* "snapshot" quality indicates that its method of production was also interpreted

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[461] *The Daily Mail* 31 May 1932.
[462] "High Speed Art," *Edinburgh Evening News* 31 May 1932.
[463] "Aviation and Art," *Daily Record and Mail,* 30 May 1932.
[464] "Brush and Camera," *The Oxford Mail* 31 May 1932.
[465] "Sickert 'Snap' in Oils," *Daily Express* 30 May 1932.

pejoratively as 'photographic.' While the notion of its photographic origin had been seized upon as a demonstration of the work's value and 'truth,' its photographic rapidity and mechanical technique of production drew scathing criticism. Critics attacked Sickert's thought process: "surrender of artistic conviction to topical interest,"[466] and working method: "Mr Sickert has taken a portion of the photograph "squared" it up on a long canvas, coloured it pink and blue, added large drops of rain and called it Art."[467] Emphasis was laid on his "unfinished working method of presentation,"[468] contesting the idea that this image met the criteria of 'art', and moreover suggesting that it failed to manifest, failed to 'become.'

Sickert's startlingly quick execution of a 'history' painting in five days resulted in feelings of unease, and the idea that such rapidity couldn't hope to represent its object however much it drew equivalence with its object's speed. Its very 'unfinish' seemed to reflect tensions surrounding the ambivalent potentialities of flight: "the picture as a whole makes it impossible to understand why the artist could not have taken a few weeks instead of a few days and produced something worthwhile."[469]

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[466] *The Daily Mail* 31 May 1932.
[467] "Artist Inspired by Photograph," *The Daily Sketch* 31 May 1932.
[468] *Oxford Mail* 31 May 1932.
[469] *Oxford Mail* 31 May 1932.

The notion of the 'unfinished' work dogged Sickert's relationship with the Royal Academy, and portraits such as *Rear Admiral Lumsden*, which was rejected by the R. A. because of such critique in 1927. Sickert had long opposed the smoothness of academic finish, and the fluid 'wriggle and chiffon' of Whistler and Sargent's *alla prima* surfaces, and in the ruptured dry-on-dry surface of *Arrival* the viewer sees the "untouched granulation"[470] of mark-making he proselytized. Baring its grid, ground, under-painting and impasto highlights all in the same frame, Sickert's simultaneity of material surfaces problematized notions of 'finish' by evoking the grain of paint and photography, as well as the fraught potentialities of flight.

With both the qualities of flight and photography associated with his speed of painting, in Sickert's work the trajectories of representation and the relationships between the three technologies were being unsettled. Common parlance is suggestive in indicating the miscegenation of traits between them: "The speed bug which brought Miss Earhart across the Atlantic seems also to have bitten Mr Richard Sickert, the artist."[471]

This painting fills our peripheral vision with its expanse, but remains oddly intangible. A fleeting moment rendered in

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[470] Walter Sickert, "Black and White Illustration," Lecture 30 November 1934, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 665.
[471] "High Speed Art," *Edinburgh Evening News* 31 May 1932.

rough paint, this painting is both impossible to ignore but not fully present. It stands as a material fact where its subject remains in doubt. We stumble our way through the work, waiting for it to settle, to cohere, but it resists. In foregrounding its process, its precedent and its hasty production, it makes us fully aware of the pressures of time in material terms. Once again the rain preys on our mind. To dry in time for the exhibition, five days from the publication of its photograph referent, these highlights would require 2-3 days to dry.[472] As the last addition to the work, the drying of all layers beneath them being their prerequisite, they reveal this painting was made at the speed of the material of paint. To be dry in time, the painting would have to have been executed in three days. However, tantalizingly, audiences may have received 'liquid' rain - three months later his *La Louve* would be exhibited before it was fully dry.[473]

The very intractability of oil – a famously fluid and malleable medium – is here a precondition of the work and our experience of it. In a sense, we watch paint dry; feel the tension of a liquid becoming solid. We are made aware of the necessity of this transmutation in the genesis of a painted image. In its accreted surface we see paint parsing photography

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[472] As a practitioner with ten years of experience in the medium, and given the thickness of facture, I feel confident in saying this is a conservative estimate.
[473] Indeed, we will explore this painting in depth in the next chapter. See R.R. Tatlock, "Sickert's New Masterpiece," *Daily Telegraph,* 6 September 1932.

and reifying flight - foregrounding a photographic precedent of an aircraft, but exposing it by a material method.

In *Arrival*, technologies rubbed up against each other - they were being tested materially and procedurally. In his 1934 Margate Lecture series we see Sickert's ontology of art rendered didactically in terms of process. He spoke affectively about what he saw as the problem of the hermetic surface, the erasure of the "traces of labour."[474] With the blending and smoothing of a conventional 'finish': "you are destroying the instrument you are using - you are vilifying it - you are doing to it something which is revolting because you are taking away its untouched granulation."[475] In this lexicon of disgust and betrayal Sickert reverses the academy's criterion of value – for him finish is an erasure rendering a work incomplete. Moreover, this litany of abjection is bodily – guilt, decomposition and touch – and emergent from over-working. The job of the artist is re-framed as that of preserving material knowledge. Indeed, picture and process are for Sickert indistinguishable – the painting is always already finished, only 'true' when it displays artistic "fumbling."[476]

Epistemologically, truth in painting is here a quantitative substance, accreted, a topography of facture in depth and not

[474] Walter Sickert, "Black and White Illustration," Lecture 30 November 1934, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 665.
[475] Sickert, "Black and White Illustration," 665.
[476] Sickert, "Black and White Illustration," 664.

the smoothness of a conventional painterly surface. In amending

a work, in obscuring its traces even by the erasure of the

under-drawing: "You are taking away the fact - the trace of the

fact that the black line touches the tops of minute hills on the

paper."[477] But, at a certain point, for every trace left another

is removed - traces above begin to obscure the traces below. For

Sickert painting is a material mnemonic process, and in his

Margate lectures he repeatedly called on his audience to "lose

yourselves"[478] in an iterative process which was partly an end in

itself.

The relation of Sickert's method here to photographic

reproduction is one of sympathy and antagonism: "Obviously

painters are not right substitutes for cameras because they do

not get the information better than in the photographs that the

Times publishes."[479] However, the aim is not the transcription of

information but the emergent properties of iteration at the

level of both repeated mark making and repeated appropriation,

an accumulation of error: "Drawing is the variation of different

forgers trying to forge a cheque."[480]

We might think of Sickert's proposal as the process of

making inaccurate copies of copies, and that this is necessary

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[477] Sickert, "Black and White Illustration," Lecture 30 November 1934, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 665.
[478] Sickert, "Squaring up a Drawing," Lecture 2 November 1934, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings* p.634.
[479] Sickert, "Underpainting," Lecture 9 November 1934, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 641.
[480] Sickert, "Squaring up a Drawing," 636.

and sufficient for a fine art object. The ontological basis of drawing and painting for Sickert lay in the preservation of their inherited errata - their material being in time: "They may deteriorate and they may not, but whatever they do, that passage from one to another is at least life in the sense that it is movement."[481] This 'life,' however, was as precarious as it was mobile - for every palpable mark declaring itself there was another obscured. Paint too, therefore, contained an ambivalence in its material character, one which could be read incrementally in each dry layer of Sickert's fraught surfaces. Sickert's painting was the measure of itself and itself a measure, one through which other media could be read. Confident in such painting's perfect imperfection, Sickert did not improve upon other technologies but rather questioned them by rendering them concrete, in the 'time' of painting, one mark at a time.

In *Arrival* we see paint "fumbling" in alien registers, the static made mobile, the traditional made photographic, the image displaced - complete but incomplete, thing-like. At the level of facture the painting breaks itself down, alternating layers of thin washes, dry skeins and impasto notes. Hung after five days of work, this painting seems to even stretch the pace, order and logic of painting. Paint, as Sickert's material measure of time, is pushed to its limits. *Arrival*, with its use of material

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[481] Sickert, "Underpainting," 643.

memory, betrays a problematic 'time'. "It is not time [in painting] that constitutes an achievement",[482] asserted the *Morning Post* - instead of capturing history *Arrival* indicated the impossibility of capturing the future by playing with the time of three technologies: paint, photograph and plane.

It is in the conjunction of source and process, "Truth" versus "Speed," that we see the full implications of Sickert's reception for contemporary discussion of technology and spectacle. *Arrival's* origin and production were both entangled with flight and photography. If we look at these press commentaries on Miss Earhart's lack of material finish and the specificity of its referent in conjunction, we encounter an intriguing contradiction - a tension in time between beginnings, duration and problematic 'arrival.' Sickert's painting was treated as a factual portrayal, not because it represented the event it claimed to portray, but because it resembled a photograph as a finished image, and benefited from photography's associations of veracity. However, when we look at press critiques which consider Sickert's process, the painting is read as dubious, incomplete and unintelligible because his process resembled that of a camera in its speed, mechanicity and 'unfinished' surface treatment.

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[482] *Morning Post* 31 May 1932.

For both those who claimed it was reliable and unreliable, the surface is loaded with conflicting conceptions of immediacy, which both validate and invalidate the work based on its relation to photography. *Miss Earhart's Arrival* generated friction between media – simultaneously convincing as an image since based on a photograph, but unconvincing because it treated painting like the act of photography and photography like the act of painting. Moreover, having drawn comparisons with its subject in the form of process and in its mobility as a transatlantic object, the painting also renders a similar problem for 'flight.' *Arrival's* speed is both a *bravura* performance and an incomplete one, while its pictured object is both unusually grounded and yet problematically displaced.

Both the qualities of photography and aerial transportation are cast into doubt when engaged by critics in discussion of Sickert's contradictory *Arrival*. In reducing these technologies to a material and haptic time, their inconsistencies were exposed. By constituting the site of contact between photography and transatlantic 'flight', the material memory of paint reinforces their reciprocal limitations. In the visual culture of the early 1930s aerial transport resisted photographic representation – with flight's implications of the 'virtual' and 'utopia/dystopia' photography focused on scenes of departure or humanizing proxy figures such as Earhart. In Sickert's work, the depiction of landing and debarkation undoes the conventional

logics representing this cutting-edge international spectacle. By engaging the ambivalent utopian/dystopian nature of flight in *Arrival*, ambivalent attitudes to the process of photography were laid bare – its mark a necessary criterion for historical truth, but its process too restricted to the world of the actual to render the virtual implications of historic flights, its problematic speed revealed in tension with the problematic speed of the Aeroplane.

These circulating doubts were made concrete in Sickert's painting, which indicated a gap in notions of representation. In *Arrival* we see the shadowy hulk of a contextualized aircraft looming over our view, rather than the emancipated silhouette of the plane available in poster advertisements.

Layering imaging operations with the facility that he layered paint, Sickert flexes the limits of his medium. Having evaluated the social-historical dialogues in which this image was involved, as well as how this project resonates with and is enhanced by an understanding of Sickert's paintings of international travel from 1931-1936, we see the potential extent of the implications of its material memory of 'time' in discussion of its impact on medium ontology. *Miss Earhart's Arrival,* more so than any other single Sickert canvas, engaged society's problematic relationship to its future, and the mediated international spectacle, through a speed of execution as problematic as international 'flight' itself. We can think of

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this painting's transmediality frustrating the realms of the virtual and potential, the consumer and the military, the photographic and the aerial. If flight was the medium of possibility, photography the medium of truth, paint was the thing which could corrupt both. What *Arrival* questions is not a singular transatlantic flight, but perhaps whether 'flight', with all its constructed possibilities, will ever arrive.

Chapter 5: The Stilled Image

> It is said that we are a great literary nation but we
> really don't care about literature, we like films and we
> like a good murder. If there is not a murder about every
> day [the press] put one in. They have put in every murder
> which has occurred during the past ten years again, even
> the Camden Town murder. Not that I am against that because
> I once painted a whole series about the Camden Town
> murder, and after all murder is as good a subject as any
> other.[483]

From the international spectacle of flight to the
spectacular body in film, Sickert held a fascination for the
shocking, and delighted in mediating and materializing society's
prurient interests. In this lecture to the Thanet School of Art,
Sickert invokes moving-images and death as objects of
entertainment: "we like films and we like a good murder." For an
artist more commonly associated with live performances and news
events, this seems like a strange pairing. The feeling is
enhanced here where Sickert, often self-described and identified
by critics and scholars as 'literary,' in this speech denigrates
literature's stature.[484] This cultural diagnosis is reminiscent
of Orwell's reflections on the late 1920s and 1930s in his
famous essay 'Decline of the English Murder,'[485] Here Orwell
bemoans what he outlines as a development in reportage, and the
media's approach to the sensational. The tropes of the English

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[483] Walter Sickert, "Colour Study: Importance of Scale," lecture at Thanet
School of Art, 1934, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings* p.656.
[484] Much to Roger Fry and Clive Bell's consternation, Sickert himself was prone
to defending "literary subjects" - though his own process differed markedly
from the precedents he invoked (See Walter Sickert, "John Everett Millais,"
The Fortnightly Review reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 581).
[485] George Orwell, 'Decline of the English Murder' *Tribune* Feb 1946.

murder were in decline, the old narratives seemed no longer to apply, and in their place was the reporting of spectacular instants. If we remove Sickert from his framing as a literary painter and ask how a popular obsession with films relates to murder and the stuff of paint, we can explore more fully the function of spectacular celebrity in Sickert's late photo-based paintings. Following the last chapter's discussion of the international event and celebrity in relation to photography and flight, we now turn to Sickert's use of the 'filmic' image to understand how material memory exposed and embodied a stilled strangeness at work in English celebrity. Here we encounter an intensified hesitation in the image, of the kind we have observed in different forms in previous chapters, which found even greater critical success in articulating imperial anxieties through the material mediation of new media.

As part of this project I want to explain Sickert's shift from the motif of the music hall audience to staged spectacle itself, and the relationship of his interest from media events to media icons (from murders to celebrities). I want to explore the central differences between the dramatic and the filmic. Too often Sickert's work has been read as literary or 'dramatic' where, I argue, something more simulacral and cinematic is at work. With a turn to the filmic image Sickert articulates a new kind of increasingly spectacular relationship of image to audience. While the tropes of the sensational 'English Murder'

were being disrupted and broken down, a complex strategy of simulacral re-mediation presented Sickert with a means of slowing and embodying icons for a time in which spectacle was displacing social life. A problem of representation in modernity, the nature and pace of these changes necessitated a shift from the artist's previous strategy of picturing audiences to materializing icons. Where 'murder' had once been Sickert's diagnostic of modernity, now 'film' would be the site of modernity, where spectacle and the body could be arrested and manipulated by the artist. Through material memory Sickert 'stills' the moving image and the spectacular body.

In order to begin engaging the complexities of these paintings and the genesis of their images, I will be further considering Baudrillard's model of the Simulacrum and the hyperreal which we first engaged with in Chapter 1. Theorists such as Francesco Casetti have used similar models to articulate the de-realization of urban experience, and the dilution of the sense of self in the wake of early cinema.[486] In *Simulacra and Simulation,* Baudrillard explores the potential form of an image in modernity: "a model of a real without origin or reality."[487] He identifies the simulacrum as a copy without an original, a product of modernity in which the image displaces the object in

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[486] Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century: Film, Experience*, *Modernity*. trans. Erin Larkin, and Jennifer Pranolo (New York, Columbia University Press, 2008), 21.
[487] Jean Baudrillard, trans. Shiela Faria Glaser, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press 1994), 1-7.

an intense and affective way for cultures characterized by ubiquitous mechanically reproduced images. The distinction between representation and represented becomes meaningless, the real and its simulation enfold each other - instead of reality and its image, there is only the hyperreal. In looking at the perceived 'immediacy' of Sickert's images, often many degrees removed from their nominal photographed subjects, I want to use Baudrillard's model as a starting point from which to think through Sickert's approaches to re-imaging in multiple media, before concluding on what the shortcomings of hyperreal celebrity might mean for audiences of the 1930s. In concluding this thesis with more of Sickert's theatre works, we will more fully explore the position of 'drama' in late Sickert, which was first broached in discussion of the backdrop in Chapter 1 and now returns in discussion of the iconic actress.

I will first consider *Jack and Jill* to anchor my subsequent discussion of actors and royalty. From the direct portrayal of film stars, to the filmic qualities of Sickert's renewed approach to the stage, I discuss a monumental painting of a fictive Queen, *La Louve,* to show how Sickert stages both a fetishistic and a pensive kind of imagery. After this I will consider the informal painting of first George V and then Edward VIII, and the controversies surrounding them to resolve my analysis. Through their successes and failures, I will locate the ways in which Sickert's paintings embody spectacular bodies.

Sickert had painted a cinema audience as early as 1906, in *Gallery of the Old Mogul* [Fig. 66], but it was not until the 1930s that we see the artist appropriating film stills as source material. To understand Sickert's use of film in the 1930s, we need to first consider his pre-war representation of cinema, and its early twentieth century art-historical context in Britain and America through salient examples such as: Malcolm Drummond, John Sloan, William Roberts and Edward Hopper. Comparisons with *Old Mogul*, and subsequently *Jack and Jill* [Fig. 70], will help us open up how Sickert's trans-medium paintings operate and develop as cinema itself developed from a nascent mass-medium before the war to a dominant one in the 1930s.[488]

In *Gallery of the Old Mogul*, the screened image is mostly obscured by the dark and dilute mass of paint which forms a faceless crowd. Unlike John Sloan's similarly arranged *Movies, Five Cents* (1907) [Fig. 67]*,* Sickert's crowd is wholly engrossed in the film, homogeneous and slickly picked out with turpentine-thinned paint. While Sloan's central woman addresses the viewer, an erotic entry point into a passive audience observing the spectacle of a kiss, the only eyes to return the viewer's gaze in Sickert's painting belong to the film itself. With detailed, wet impressionist marks, Sickert devotes most of the viewer's attention to the rich texture of the grey eye on the fictive

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[488] Amy Sargent, *British Cinema: A Critical History*, (London: BFI Publishing 2005), 113.

screen. By rendering the image cyclopean, the film character's gaze is ambiguous, encompassing both the fictive audience and the viewer of the canvas, absorbing them. In Sloan's image, however, it is the crowd which is reflexive. As the art historian Michael Lobel argues, the woman who gazes back at us demonstrates the agency of the crowd, and by extension the capacity of paint over cinema to allow a self-conscious spectatorship.[489] If Sloan's film image is a mirror for the erotics of the audience, Sickert's painting too concerns desire, but of a more threatening and ambiguous nature, the dark grime of paint. As Corbett distinguishes Sickert from Sloan, the latter assumes meaningful narrative structures characterize urban experience, while Sickert presents meaning as diffuse and opaque, perhaps unobtainable.[490] Painting's relationship to cinema is less empowered and less positive in Sickert's canvases.

In a later work painted by Sickert's student, Malcolm Drummond [Fig. 68], we see an audience subjugated to the light of the cinema. As Valerie Webb persuasively argues, *In the Cinema* (1913) is a reflection on the regimentation, class-colonization and increasing passivity of working-class male

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[489] Michael Lobel, "John Sloan: Figuring the Painter in the Crowd," *Art Bulletin* XCIII:3 (September 2011), 361.
[490] David Peters Corbett, "Difference, Similarity and the 'Anglo-American' in the Work of Walter Sickert and John Sloan," *Art History* 34:4 (Sept 1, 2011), 792-3.

audiences following the decline of the music hall.[491] While Sloan's audience is in many ways resistant to the cinema projection, as Lobel details, Drummond's is subject to it. Rendered static by an unseen image, the repeated profiles of the figures cast them as 'film-like,' sequential, ordered and iterated - a pacified mass rather than a collective body of agitation. *Old Mogul*, however, demonstrates a relationship different to both: one which has the screened image itself at its heart.

Webb uses Sickert's *Ambrosian Nights* of the same year in her comparison with *In the Cinema* - arguing through Raymond Williams that the pair illustrate the transition in middle-class perceptions of the working class as 'mob' to the working class as 'mass.'[492] Yet, more nuanced differences between the artists become apparent when we contrast the two paintings of cinema audiences. In *Old Mogul,* likely set in a different room of the same establishment in the same year as *Ambrosian Nights*, we are not confronted by an unruly mob, but instead follow their gaze - the path of least resistance through the paint.

Sickert's composition contrasts with the oblique angle to the crowd we see in Drummond, and to a lesser extent in Sloan. While the crowd consumes the majority of the composition, the

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[491] Valerie Webb, *The Camden Town Group: Representations of Class and Gender in Paintings of London Interiors,* (Guildford, The Parker Art Press, 2006), 94-5.
[492] Webb, *The Camden Town Group*, 94.

projected image is the central focal point. Its light draws us in while with the same gesture it casts the back of the crowd into tenebrous murk. In both Sloan and Drummond the crowd is made available to the viewer, framed as democratically self-aware entities in the one, and passive consumers in the other. In Sickert, however, the position of the crowd is more ambiguous, the play of power at once more sinister than Sloan and more complex than Drummond. Sharing a similar tone to the latter, Sickert goes a step further by suggesting that a circulation of looks characterize this spectacular event and its representation - the viewer looks at the audience, which looks at the film which looks back at both and perhaps beyond. The image offers resistance where Drummond provided an image easily scanned from left to right. Sickert, rather than subjecting the viewer's relationship with the canvas to the painter's eye, instead suggests an ambivalent confrontation with the otherness of the already mediated image. Instead of conveying either the liberation or domination of the audience in the face of film, Sickert homes in on a quality of the mediated image that confronts them. The fleeting gaze of the film star, caught in the flicker of small dense brush marks, is a new kind of inhuman urban visuality, and, thirty years later, Sickert returned to address it again directly, with the dry material memory of his paint.

In later life Sickert turned to painting celebrity figures from film imagery, suspending them in dry skeins of paint, such as in *High Steppers* 1938-9 [Fig. 69] and *Jack and Jill* 1937-8 [Fig. 70]. A pair of the 1930's top 100 celebrities,[493] E. G. Robinson and J. Blondell, *Jack and Jill's* odd double portrait gives us unique insight into 1930s cinema celebrity, one which reflected back upon its viewers.

This is a painting which suggests a variety of relationships between those inside and outside of the frame. The intimacy of contact between Robinson and Blondell is also reflected in the fabric of the painting, the tonal uniformity of the figures. While the composition is animated by the diagonal contrast of cold blue jacket and rich red hat, these also signal connections in material depth - echoing the two colours of Sickert's under-painting technique, which is exposed at the surface in flecks of skin and scuffed background. However, these figures are also connected to the viewer's space. Pale impasto faces look out from the painting, as if apprehensive of a third party. Her hand on his shoulder - their visages starkly lit from below. His half-smile and her bated breath - the paint is laden with thrill and suspense.

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[493] Both can be ranked 87th, in popularity, in terms of box-office sales. See Sedgewicks comprehensive STARSTAT model of public relationships with cinema stars 1932-6, exceptional in its quantitative analysis: John Sedgewick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A choice of pleasures,* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press 2000) pp.191-4.

To understand how these aspects of reciprocity and tension affected contemporary viewers, we need to understand the significance of these faces. Scaled up from a promotional photograph, this painting nevertheless figuratively references the film and plays with the mediated publicity of the film through promotional cards [Fig. 71]. By the mid-thirties film was a major cultural medium attracting huge daily audiences from diverse backgrounds,[494] but its impact on British painting of the period is little explored. The film in question, *Bullets or Ballots* (1936), is an example of popular Hollywood cinema which had saturated the British market in the interwar period, and stirred anxiety among the establishment. This wider phenomenon was read by many middle class observers as cultural colonization – an 'Americanization' which was seen to undermine native industry, even following the quota system introduced under the Cinematographic Films Act (1927).[495] More significantly for middle and working class viewers at the Leicester Galleries, while British film was partly continuing the English music hall tradition through inherited talent, American film was seen as a culturally alien element influencing the mannerisms of the lower

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[494] In the 1930s we see a rapid growth in the construction of cinemas and also cinema attendance, Sargent, *British Cinema,* 113.
[495] While recent revisionists have argued for the success of "quota quickies," contemporaries had varying concerns over the quality of British cinema and a trade imbalance in terms of film showings (1 British to every 4 America) see Linda Wood, "Low Budget films in the 1930s," in *The British Cinema Book,* ed. Robert Murphy, Second Edition, (London: British Film Institute 2001), 55.

classes.[496] Indeed, film represented a threat to national identity, and the power of its spectacle was viewed with exaggerated alarm in Parliament while Sickert was at work on the painting: "I rather assumed that the chief function of the cinema in this country was to accomplish what I am sure will never be accomplished, or even attempted, in any other way – the annexation of this country by the United States of America."[497] For Sickert, who had keenly absorbed English music hall culture, courted controversy over his mixed national origins,[498] and in many endeavours supported the idea of English cultural traditions in the 1930s, this choice of image seems significantly popular and provocative. In terms of both medium and the specifics of source material this was an image which engaged sensational and spectacular bodies, and had cultural, national and imperial implications for its audience.

We can better grasp the novelty of deploying this material through comparison to the relatively rare and generalized instances of contemporary painted representations of cinema in the cases of William Roberts' *The Cinema* (1920) [Fig. 72], and

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[496] Lawrence Napper, "A Despicable Tradition? Quota-quickies in the 1930s," in *The British Cinema Book,* ed. Murphy, 45-5.
[497] Mr R. W. Sorenson, House of Commons Debates, 1937. Quoted in Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in 1930s Britain*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 63.
[498] In 1918, surrounded by English officers, Sickert was quoted as saying: "And no one could be *more English than* I am - born in Munich, of pure Danish descent." Walter Sickert quoted in Anna Gruetzner Robins, "'Transplanted into British Soil': Sickert's National Identities," in *Internationalism and the Arts in Britain and Europe at the Fin de Siècle,* ed. Grace Brockington (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 27.

Edward Hopper's *New York Movie* (1939) [Fig. 73]. *The Cinema* has
something in common with Sloan's work - an almost vaudeville
atmosphere, the animated audience of a silent film (indicated by
the piano player behind the curtain) being its primary subject
in sharp, flat post-Vorticist paint. Harrison sees this as a
formal rather than critical abstraction of a working-class
scene, one made both more and less worthy by its "individual"
and "personal" treatment.[499] *Jack and Jill,* by contrast,
constitutes a depersonalized moment of the spectacular screen
itself. The tight cropping, to an even greater degree than in
the source photograph, radically differs from the even
application of Robert's style which embraces both fictively
three-dimensional and two-dimensional figures.

As a third co-ordinate to help triangulate Sickert's
canvas, Hopper's painting concentrates neither on the crowd nor
on the projected image, but on the isolation and segregation
within and between the two. Robert Silberman notes the contrast
with Sloan's *Movie, Five Cents* in the palpable isolation Hopper
employs: "using the theatre not as a showcase of spectacle but
as a backdrop for an interest in the spectator."[500] The uniformly
precise, tense and banal application of paint that describes
this space acts as a metaphor for a psychological state. Roberts

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[499] Harrison, *English Art and Modernism,* 158.
[500] Silberman, Robert, "Edward Hopper and the Theatre of the Mind: Vision,
Spectacle and the Spectator," in *On The Edge of Your Seat,* ed. Patricia
McDonnell, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 138.

and Hopper, unlike Sickert, only address the cinema projection obliquely. Figured and framed at a distant remove, the screen is cropped out at the extreme left, and the focus remains on the nearby human figures. Sickert, by contrast, sifts through the movie icons themselves. In hesitant patches and roughly scrubbed stretches he renders the celebrities alone on the material surface of the painting, as halted instants and bodies of interest in and of themselves, with no crowd to act as proxy or frame.

When Sickert exhibited the painting at his major one-man show at the Leicester Galleries in 1938, *Bullets or Ballots* was familiar to British audiences - ranked among the top 100 releases of that year,[501] and its stars were readily identifiable by the art press: "...in *Jack and Jill* (17) we find no difficulty in spotting Mr Edward G. Robinson."[502] The painting was an iconic statement, invoking popular subjects, and read by critics as "remarkably fine"[503] and "tirelessly inventive."[504] However, it was not without its problematics. The conventional caveats levelled at Sickert late in his career returned, with permutations, in the form of a perceived lack of artistic intervention in the source material and the unfinished quality of paint.

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[501] Sedgewick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain*, 274.
[502] *The Listener* 9 March 1938.
[503] *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 March 1938.
[504] *The Listener* 9 March 1938.

A troubling lack of artistic power is twinned with a lack of accessibility to the work: "It is a lazy method of going to work, and I believe it robs his painting of a good deal of intimacy, but Sickert has earned the right to be lazy."[505] In this manner some critics were interested in downplaying and excusing the work. However, *Jack and Jill* could also be seen as exceptional. The *New Statesman and Nation* singled out *Jack and Jill* as one of the finest paintings on show, distinguishing it from other photograph-based works which are deemed "slight," but still situates it in a narrative of decline: "It must, alas, be admitted that unlike Titian, Mr. Sickert does not go on painting better and better every day."[506] Equally intriguing, for a painting with such a novel and popular premise, *Jack & Jill* was largely ignored following its first exhibition, in which most copy was dedicated to one of his more compositionally conventional, lightly painted and much less topical landscape paintings, *Broadstairs.*[507]

Why was *Jack and Jill* read as exceptional by some but ignored by others - seen as both 'lazy' and 'tirelessly inventive', unfinished and fine? There was a strong tendency, in criticism surrounding late Sickert, to make general comments about a wide diversity of paintings, or, to talk only of Sickert

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[505] Eric Newton, "Sickert and Wood: Lyric Poetry in Paint," *Sunday Times*, 6 March 1938.
[506] *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 March 1938.
[507] 'Recent Sickert Paintings' *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 Feb 1938, was fairly typical in reading *Broadstairs* as "perhaps the finest thing in the show".

paintings by 'type' (i.e. source material) without much

reference to the material specificity of a canvas, and this

generalization is still evident in 1938. After 10 years of

Sickert developing and nuancing his use of photographs and

engravings, they were still considered to be: "painted from, one

might say, 'any old thing,'"[508] "instances of how he can use

almost any means to achieve his pictorial end."[509]

As we saw in Chapter 4, Sickert's material memory of

celebrity plays with slowing and materializing ideologically

loaded technologies through the intersection of multiple media,

and this strategy returns in *Jack and Jill*. As well as confusing

the distinctions of photograph and paint, *Jack and Jill* also

suggests the murky relationship between film and both. These

celebrities are icons of a film, but this 'still' is not a frame

from the cinema, instead it evokes the hesitant quality of an

instant in the feature film. Taken from a promotional shot,

these celebrities have migrated from film to painting via

photography. Indeed, the fast, loose and high-contrast qualities

of this painting, given the non-specific title "Jack and Jill,"

seems to suggest a general filmic quality rather than simply to

reference a particular film. Even the colours of this canvas

could signal the medium of film to an increasingly cinema-

[508] *Apollo* 1938.
[509] Eric Newton, 'Sickert and Wood: Lyric Poetry in Paint', *Sunday Times* 6
March 1938.

literate audience. Silent films had long used artificial colour filters to convert whole scenes to red or blue.[510] But by the late-twenties and early-thirties, before the development of trichrome subtractive colour, the precursor of full colour cinema began to employ red and blue receptive emulsion layers, rendering all scenes in both colours.[511] This early two-colour cinema thus finds its echo in Sickert's *camaieu* method. As Sickert reduced his palette, so it came to approximate the *expanding* palette of film, further relating itself to the environment of mechanical reproduction. Here we have the "any means," the "any old thing" - the hyperreal.[512] This painting draws attention not only to its own artificiality, but also to the mechanisms by which cinema immerses its audience and naturalizes its images, through the material memory of paint.

This painting both is and isn't what it presents itself as being, it embodies multiple media. Its title refers to neither the actors nor their characters. It's tonal focus still invokes

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[510] Scott Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow: Colour Design in the 1930s*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 2-3.

[511] By 'colour cinema' I here refer to emulsions reacting to light rather than the post-process tinting mentioned earlier, see Frizot, Michel, 'A Natural Strangeness: The Hypothesis of Color', in *A New History of Photography*, ed. Frizot, 411.

[512] Closely related to the "simulacrum," in Baudrillard's thought, the "hyperreal" describes the effect and affect of an image of an image in a regress that replaces the 'real' with the image, most clearly recapitulated at the beginning of *Simulacra and Simulation*. Important for an understanding of this painting, is an implication here that the object is displaced in the act of looking at it, such that knowledge of the world in the time of modernity, increasingly becomes indistinguishable from knowledge of its simulation. In painting, as in the application of a scientific model, the image replaces what is being investigated, rather than "revealing" it. See Baudrillard, Jean, trans. Shiela Faria Glaser, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1-7.

its monochromatic precedent, and even its bichromatic colours speak more of a process of tonal transcription between mechanical media than a metamorphosis of the 'original' into paint. Indeed, the photographic element was read as implicit by viewers: "It amuses him to translate a black-and-white studio composition into feigned atmospheric colour."[513] It plays with the material of film both employing more immediacy than Hopper, and also keeping the beholder at a greater remove - this double 'portrait' is a painting of a photograph of film stars outside of their film. Indeed, the image seems to have been arrested from the film: the pose, attire and iconic faces of the lead roles taken from the film and displaced first into a staged *carte de visite*, and then into the tenebrous depths of paint. A painting of a photograph of characters from a film which itself alleged it was based on an un-verifiable 'true story' [Fig. 74], this canvas is both stubbornly material and deeply simulacral.[514] Re-iterated and translated through so many registers and frameworks that all narrative is whittled away from the image, and its genesis obscured until it becomes a moment adrift, this leaves the celebrities' gleaming faces hyperreal.

Indeed, the dramatic lighting of the source image becomes a central aspect of the painting. By cropping the edges of the

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[513] *Apollo* 10 March 1938.
[514] Promotional trailers made much of the claim that the film was taken from press stories, see [Fig. 74].

cast shadows, the light almost seems to emanate from the faces. They radiate the flash of the camera, expressing the conditions of studio lighting on their skin. Reflecting the mechanics of the staged photo-shoot, we might say they even take on the aspect of faces illuminated in the glow of the cinema - the film stars themselves seem to be spectators, perhaps caught in a mirror. Like the *Old Mogul's* returned gaze of the screen, and unlike the discrete, passive screened images in Sloan, Roberts and Hopper, this painting withdraws what at first it seems to offer. If we watch the stars, what do the stars watch?

Looking closely, Robinson's face has even been slightly reoriented by Sickert, who eliminates his right ear, changes the shading of the nose, and adds a cigar all pointers suggesting a gaze parallel to Blondell's. Where the male figure once confidently shared a look with its assumed male viewer, it now looks past him. Instead of inviting an identification with a strong protagonist defender of a subordinate woman, the viewer sees in the painted figures a shared interest in something beyond the picture plane, to our left. While not feminizing the male figure (who, after all, now flaunts a cigar), both faces in the image seem to withhold information, retaining a distance from their observer. They know something we do not. Indistinct smudges of paint render Robinson's eyes ambiguous, and indifferent material - his gaze might encompass us, but it shares nothing with us.

Sickert activates a complex series of relationships and exchanges which both wryly acknowledge and dismiss the viewer in the same hesitant moment of material memory. It is as if we have taken a physical step forward in the gallery of the mogul, and joined the crowd looking at the stars, but what is behind us? What do the stars see?

By holding a dark mirror to film, this painting is involved in a circuit of looks, just as it circulates between media and materials, and the viewer is made mindful of what is missing, the 'before' and 'after'. Sickert's post-photographic paintings were often referred to as 'snapshots,' and the association with materializing an instant in time was key. Capturing part of a greater whole, *Jack and Jill* was even seen as informative.[515] Not informative of the stars, but of "cockney life" more generally, as if lifted from a narrative which it both implies and denies.

Although not taken directly from a film still, but rather from a still of a film, it has the quality of an image from a reel, a frame from a sequence. It implies the images that came before it, and indicates with suspense the images that might come after it: an arrest, a puff of smoke, a blink, as if the paint surface might snap into another configuration. Indeed, if we read these stars as beholding 'film', as much as the painting is suffused with the filmic medium itself it gestures not to the

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[515] "Recent Sickert Paintings," *The Daily Telegraph* 24 Feb 1938.

self-sufficiency of the image but rather its self-conscious position in a chain. With its flickering paintwork and muted high-contrast palette, painting is as much part of the circulation of the image as film, and neither is its end. The stars watch time pass from the vantage of inanimate material paint.

A significant element of what Sickert's work achieves is brought into relief by discussion of Michael Lobel and Katherine E. Manthornes' shared interest in the relationship of painting to film in the context of Sloan.[516] The antipathy which Lobel fosters towards Manthorne's interpretation echoes a recurrent problem in discussing Sickert's inter-medium works. In Lobel's account, Manthorne can be critiqued for reducing Sloan's art to "replicating cinema," ignoring its qualities "as painting." However, in subordinating the filmic to the painterly in his own account, Lobel continues a problematic medium-essentialist binary - paintings 'of' film either 'are' film or 'are' painting in these accounts, not an admixture. In scholarship on Sickert too, the argument concerning his 'photograph-based' paintings follows a similar line in both contemporary criticism and later scholarship - either the objects he creates are 'mere' copies of photographs, or they are 'redeemed' by the painter's vision as

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[516] See Lobel, "John Sloan: Figuring the Painter in the Crowd," p.360 and Katherine E. Manthorne, "John Sloan, Moving Pictures, and Celtic Spirits," in *John Sloan's New York (Delaware Art Museum)*, eds. Heather Campbell Coyle and Joyce K. Schiller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 150-79.

oil paintings. Media are put into conflict where they could be
thought with together. In *Jack and Jill*, I argue, we see not the
triumph of painting over film nor its reduction to it, but
instead a conversation between them, a kind of 'filmic
painting', the simulacral life of the image in the 1930s
exposed.

It has been suggested that *Jack and Jill* - and the motion-
picture-based *High Steppers* with which we will conclude - are
exceptions, and they are framed as marginal and supplementary by
Sickert's principal historians.[517] However, I am interested in
probing the material memory of 'film-like-painting' as a
significant property connecting a wide range of Sickert's work
concerning spectacular celebrity bodies. Sickert's transition
from transcribing audiences to transcribing found-images, I
argue, is also in part a transition from the dramatic to the
filmic.

Painting a violent detective and a racketeer is not
unexpected of an artist like Sickert. When we take into account
the fact that this movie centres on a murder, then the 'typical'
aspect of *Jack and Jill* reveals itself, a thematic connection to
his Camden Town production. Moreover, for Sickert this painting

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[517] These paintings are often lumped together with other post-photographic
works from the last ten years of Sickert's life, part of the wider narrative
of decline in the artist' 'vision and judgement', epitomised by Browse who
sees them as frivolous, see Lillian Browse, *Sickert* (London: Rupert Hart-
Davis) 1960. Shone sees them as oddly anonymous for an artist who enjoyed the
cinema, erroneously considering *Jack and Jill* to be Sickert's only painting
from a film still, see Richard Shone, *Walter Sickert* (Oxford: Phaidon 1988).

stands at the point where the public interests intersected: "It is said that we are a great literary nation but we really don't care about literature, we like films and we like a good murder..."[518]

Rather than pale after-images of Sickert's pre-war work, we can find a subtle visceral quality and prurience in Sickert's post-photographic painting which develops, rather than shies away from, the dark material of the Camden Town Murders. By looking at an earlier painting of an actress, we can better grasp how the suspenseful intersection of "murder" and "film" inflects our understanding of Sickert's interest in material outcomes from stage and spectacle. In *La Louve,* I will argue that we see not a painting of drama, but a filmic painting of celebrity, one which is best explored by first thinking through contemporary film concerning theatre, before we return to the sticky stuff of paint.

Shot and released in England in 1930, Alfred Hitchcock's *Murder!* Dwells on the simulacrum of a crime, the situation where an audience might appreciate a murder as much as a film. The film exhibits multiple Hitchcock tropes: persecution, paranoia, anxious anticipation and the framing device of the theatre stage.[519] In this case, the latter is literal, and a shared

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[518] Walter Sickert, Lecture at Thanet School of Art, 1934.
[519] John A., Bertolini "Rear Window, or the Reciprocated Glance," in *Framing Hitchcock: Selected essays from The Hitchcock Annual,* eds. Sydney Gottlieb, and Christopher Brookhouse (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 234-5 23. For more on suspense in Hitchcock as a state of anxious anticipation,

interest with Sickert in this period.[520] Moreover, Hitchcock puts these shared Sickertian interests into a complex dynamic which Sickert both reflects and deviates from.

In a central scene [Fig. 75] police interview thespians back-stage, during a performance. As the actors switch in and out of character, confusing their interlocutors, the camera cuts to side-long shots of the stage and the edge of its backdrop. As characters go back and forth through this delimiting screen they go from darkness to light, from actor to character. These transitions splice accounts of the murder with the play's partial narrative, often mid-sentence. Moreover, actors talking to the police occasionally project their voice over the edge of the frame and into the play, bringing elements of the unseen play into the space of policemen attempting to deduce the sequence of events. Comedy permeates tragedy and vice versa in a series of exchanges, actors adopting and discarding material affects: costumes and personae. When actors return from the stage they begin taking off their costumes and continue where they left off, completing a circuit - the stage intrudes into the 'real' investigation of a murder.

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see Richard Allen "Hitchcock and Narrative Suspense: Theory and Practice." in *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida: Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson*, eds. Allen Richard, and Turvey Malcolm (Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 163-82.
[520] See Sickert's contemporary theatre works, for a particularly acute earlier example which also shares Hitchcock's dark and tense atmosphere see *Brighton Pierrots* (1915).

This circulation of images and information expands to incorporate the viewer by breaking the fourth wall. Watching a film of a performance we are made aware of the film's artifice, the film actors playing thespians. The camera alternates between a 'theatrical' composition, with the actors clearly visible and turned to the camera while in interview, and a view of the obscured area where those persons backstage are in turn looking: an oblique glance at the stage sharply cropped by set and curtains. The viewer's eye is thus always positioned between the stage and the investigation, as both blur into each other. Donning the uniform of a policeman one actor tries not to think about the murder, mere reference of which is powerfully affective: "Blood always makes me feel sick, even the mention of it."[521] Distinctions between representation and represented are erased – the circuit of murder-theatre-film becomes a simulacrum.

Jack and Jill condenses several of the devices of 1930s cinema which Hitchcock employed, from thematic suspense and sudden apprehension to the erotics of touch.[522] Much as Hitchcock's backstage actors look past the imagined position of the viewer to shout lines onto the stage, Robinson and Blondell

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[521] Excerpt from, *Murder!* Dane, Clemence, Simpson, Helen, Hitchcock, Alfred, Mycroft, Walter C., Reville, Alma, Film 35mm, Alfred Hitchcock, London: British International Pictures, 1930.
[522] For discussion of time and the sustained erotic tactile encounter see Sidney Gottlieb, "Hitchcock and the Art of the Kiss: A Preliminary Survey," in *Framing Hitchcock,* eds. Gottlieb and Brookhouse, 132-146.

gaze out over the viewer's shoulder. In both the spectator is left with an incomplete picture, and a sense of ambiguous sequence. While immersed in the virtual world of off-stage action, our perspective is partial. In both painting and film we know that something further is implied, but we can never fully know what comes next. If suspense is often theorized as a state of narrative anticipation in scholarship on Hitchcock, the hesitation and suspense of Sickert's paint is all the more halting and pensive for its complete erasure of narrative time and sequence.[523]

'Murder,' to both Hitchcock and Sickert, is the unknowable - their work concerns the 'murder' of meaning - and Sickert's mute paint takes this a step further than Hitchcock's film. As Orwell laments in the 'Decline of the English Murder', narrative clarity was perceived as dissipating with the decline of traditional English tropes, and replaced by spectacular instances.[524] Where illustrated accounts narrated the Victorian murder in the press, now photographic mugshots stood alone as images of murderous celebrities of unknown agency. For Orwell the effect of a Hollywood devoid of meaning was to reduce British convention to a fragmented series of motiveless images.

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[523] For example, Richard Allen assumes the premise that suspense is a narrative tool, predicated on the anxious anticipation of narrative events, see Allen "Hitchcock and Narrative suspense," 163. Sickert's "suspense," by contrast, as this chapter explores, is not that of narrative events, but the 'stilling' of the image with the material of paint, suspending narrative while retaining the sense of before and after which attends the 'filmic image.'
[524] George Orwell, 'Decline of the English Murder' *Tribune* Feb 1946.

Again, the cipher for the loss of narrative and meaning in modernity is the cultural spectre of 'Americanization': "They [the working class] go to see American stars; they have been brought up on American publicity, they talk American, think American, and dream American."[525] Americanization was synonymous with decline, and a national forgetting, against which British narratives were needed to fight the descent into meaningless spectacle. If American film was seen as colonizing and displacing British cinema, even re-writing the mannerisms of the lower classes, the representation of murder seemed to be undergoing a similar dynamic.[526] Thematically, murder was a subtle and intermittent element of Sickert's post-photographic work, but these paintings do refer back to a shared element of both murder reportage and film.

What *Jack and Jill* suggests is a 'moment', a fragment, a concrete yet ambiguous version of the basic unit of Hitchcock's films – the 'fragment' the director was both renowned and denounced for.[527] This focus on an instant in a series, the partial, a frame in a sequence of frames evokes the medium of film itself. The still image is the essential, if contradictory, basis of film's moving image. While Hitchcock uses this

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[525] *Daily Express* 18 March 1927.
[526] The middle classes repeatedly expressed concern for the influence of American film on Working Class behaviour, see Murphy, *The British Cinema Book* p .46.
[527] Thomas M. Leitch, "The Hitchcock Moment," in Gottlieb and Brookhouse *Framing Hitchcock* pp.180-2.

fragmentation to take apart drama, Sickert interrelates film and painting to explore performance and the still image. Rather than saying Sickert paints celebrities or stage productions, I argue it is more accurate to say that Sickert paints the 'stilled' image.

His interest is in the moment, not the narrative but the frame which implies (but can never represent) the whole. "Murders are nippy things or not at all."[528] A kind of metonymic painting, its material facture is aware of time in modernity. In *High Steppers* we even see the idea of sequence and regress in the formal iteration of dancers on a stage, each repeating the same action, but frozen in time. Multiplied legs rhyme with the folds of a curtain backdrop and the multiplicity of the image as a still from a film, a promotional image and a painting. These 'filmic' paintings of cinematic referents are not alone, however, in this interest in the 'moment,' the still image and the mute matter of paint. Suspense, murder, time and drama are elements which connect this filmic quality to Sickert's other paintings of actresses, and it is here that we must turn to the process and materiality at work in *La Louve.* These filmic interests were already visible in Sickert's work of the early Thirties, and an analysis of *La Louve* (1932) [Fig. 76] can help us probe his material conjunction of the dramatic and the

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[528] Walter Sickert, "Colour Study: Importance of Scale," Lecture 16 Nov Margate School of Art 1936, reproduced in Robins *The Complete Writings*, 655.

filmic. *La Louve's* eponymous 'she-wolf' is a murderous queen in
the context of Marlowe's play *Edward II*. The basis for the
painting itself is a photograph of the Welsh actress Gwen
Ffrangcon-Davies - a rising star known personally to Sickert -
selected from a back-catalogue of portfolio images. This
selection signals again the backstage, as the actress stated in
interview - a quick pose made for the photographer credited at
the painting's base: Bertram Park.[529]

While displacing an actress from the stage was not unusual
in this kind of portraiture painting,[530] and contemporary critics
noted its invocation of nineteenth-century paintings of theatre
celebrities,[531] displacements in technology and time into
dazzling paint are what distinguish Sickert's intervention. This
photograph was taken in 1923, and here we see its image, squared
up and transposed, larger than life, onto a monumental canvas,
his first theatre subject since the mid-1920s.

Theatre in the Thirties was experiencing increasing
competition from the cinema 'talkie' - 400 British cinemas were
wired for sound in 1929, by 1931 there were 3537.[532] Sickert
himself had not only been witness to the changing landscape of
theatre in Islington, but also an active supporter of the scene,
selling *The Raising of Lazarus* for the benefit of Sadler's

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[529] Ffrangcon- Davies, in *Manchester Evening News* 6 Sept 1932.
[530] Paintings like John Singer Sargent's *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* 1889 are
precedents for portraits of actresses off-stage and in costume.
[531] *Western Morning News*, 7 September 1932.
[532] Sargent, *British Cinema,* 114.

Wells. Sickert's renewed interest in theatre, often explained by subsequent scholars with reference to a nostalgia for his youthful acting experience,[533] might better be understood by involving Sickert's awareness of media memory and mediation in the contemporary moment.

Theatre as a medium is loaded with problematics of memory, of iteration and repetition, and the relation of the physical to the textual. The distinguished Theatre Studies professor Marvin Carlson even describes the relationship of text to performance on stage as haunting and uncanny.[534] In the early twentieth century, theatre was experiencing a didactic split between performance and text, the moment of drama's embodiment, and the historicity of its narrative.[535] Interest in three-dimensional set design came to replace Victorian painted sets, and iconic actors became the guarantee of a successful performance, instead of the neo-classical privileging of the text. This separation of 'theatre studies' from 'literary drama', being enacted in theory and education by figures like Max Hermann in the 1920s, was part of the increasing cultural value of the spectacle of performance and large developments and extensions of stage design, rivalling the narrative as text. In Britain such a transition, exemplified

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[533] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 120-121.
[534] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press 2003), 16.
[535] Carlson has here worked on a lot of theoretical and historiographic trajectories in early twentieth-century theatre, effectively summarised in Carlson, *Theatre: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 53-69.

in the stage-focus of Edward Gordon Craig's avant-garde drama theory, diverged from the Victorian elevation of the 'purity' of the Shakespearean text.[536] Where Sickert claims England is a film-obsessed rather than a literary nation, he reflects a shift in British theatre to an interest in performance and the visual and away from strict fidelity regarding narrative text.[537] In painting, he enacts a displacement of interest in narrative to icon, working in the material hiatus of the spectacular.

Compared to *Jack and Jill, La Louve* received a major, and overwhelmingly positive critical response. Commentaries focused on issues of time, material process and provenance, amplified by noted qualities of size and its photographic nature. This painting was again motivated by the iconic quality of the star, and Sickert implicated photography as a factor in the memorable, screened quality of the actress: "One of the reasons Mr. Sickert never asked me to sit for the portrait is as he once said: 'I know your face so well, I don't have to have you before me to paint you.'"[538]

Figuratively similar to the heads in *Jack and Jill,* here we have another ghostly pale actress looking beyond the left edge of the canvas, part apprehensive part lost in reverie, strongly

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[536] Craig emphasised stage design, and a focus on the bodily performance of the actor in space, see Oscar Brockett and Robert Finlay, *Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre and Drama since 1870*, Second Edition, (Boston MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 446-456, and Glynne Wikham, *A History of the Theatre* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1985), 229
[537] Brockett, and Finlay, *Century of Innovation*, 446
[538] Ffrangcon- Davies, in *Manchester Evening News* 6 Sept 1932

lit against a pitch-black background. Once more, as in *Jack and Jill* and even *Summer Lightning*, we also see a focus on feminine touch clothed in stippled blotches and dry impasto - her heart and the roughly sketched letter, our eye drawn to her hands by the pendant's resounding note of green. Yet when we try and focus on these hands we lose them in the material fabric of the work, a similar dissolution in the stuff of paint stretched between media in *Barone Aloisi,* even *Portrait of Painter's Godmother*. Indeed, the fabric of the fictive dress, the fabric of the monochrome photographic precedent and the material fabric of paint all implicate each other in this object, like the shroud of *Lazarus*. This monochrome was appreciated as photographic by contemporaries, but interestingly its pale tones were also ascribed a richness and intensity. It was seen as photographic, but colourfully so: "It is evident that the painter must have had some sittings from the actress, but he has kept up the photographic effect by painting almost in monochrome";[539] "Venetian sumptuousness of colour (in an almost monochrome schema)";[540] "rich claret-coloured monochrome ranging from the deepest shades to the most delicate pale tones..."[541]

This *femme fatale* embodies the qualities of the spectacular icon: mediated, distorted and vivacious. The most sensational

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[539] "Mr Sickert and the Photographers," *The Guardian*, 16 Sep 1932.
[540] "Mr. Richard Sickert and Photographer," *The Observer*, 11 Sep 1932.
[541] P. G. Konody, "New Sickert Masterpiece; Miss Ffrangcon-Davies Portrait; Titianesque," *The Daily Mail*, 6 Sep 1932.

painting of an actress since Sargent's *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (1889) [Fig. 77],[542] *La Louve* afforded its subject an aura, a sense of iconicity larger than life. In part the effect was produced by its monumental physical size: "the full-length figure is well over life-size."[543] Its verticality was also read as imposing and elevating, accounts which mention dimensions of the canvas more frequently cite its height than width, and regularly overestimate by a foot.[544] Moreover, this was deemed a great technical achievement in combining photography and painting to exceed the limitations of both. Sickert both overcame issues of scaling from the photograph, and the more intrinsic problems of uncanniness associated with painting subjects larger than life-size: "Yet it was taken from a photograph. To have given a portrait so genuinely monumental a composition, without the slightest sign that it is a miniature greatly enlarged in size, is a remarkable achievement."[545]; "but the unpleasant impression which over-life-size portraits so often produce is here entirely avoided owing to the wonderful balance of the linear as well as the chromatic expression."[546]

The idea of restoring the aura to the photograph is an explanation which has been forwarded for Sickert's post-

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[542] Frank Rutter, "Mr Sickert's New Portrait: Sketch in the Grand Style," *Sunday Times*, 18 Sep 1932.
[543] "A Portrait by Mr Sickert," *The Times* (weekly) 15 Sept 1932.
[544] Most press commentators I reference refer to the painting as 8-9'' tall, and deem this exceptional.
[545] "A Portrait by Mr Sickert," *The Times* (weekly) 15 Sept 1932.
[546] Konody, "New Sickert Masterpiece" 1932.

photographic work by Corbett.[547] However, thus far this line of
argument sees this as a one-way transaction, the elevation of
one medium by another in the same vein as we encountered Lobel
and Manthornes' accounts of Sloan. Instead I argue that the
affective power of photographic technologies in these paintings
has been underestimated, and that the 'auratic' quality of these
works is not a product of the authorial subjugation of the
photographic to the medium of paint, but rather the productive
interlacing of multiple media in which qualities of the
spectacular and hyperreal in the Thirties are materialized: "The
portrait, in brief, is worthy of its emphasis on as a picture
exhibition in itself."[548]

The assumption of the importance of paint over photograph
has taken strength from connotations of Sickert's own language
which themselves suggest ambivalences: "The photographer has
done all the ground work for me. He has caught the life and
movement of the pose. So he deserves his name in a prominent
position."[549] Indeed, Sickert placed great importance in
'groundwork,' and its reciprocal relationship to surface,
proselytizing the idea that knowing the surface meant knowing
what lay beneath it. We find this in a lecture on
"Underpainting" in 1934 in which he extolled "cribbing," and

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[547] Corbett, *Walter Sickert,* 60-61.
[548] "One Man, One Picture," *Western Morning News* 7 Sept 1932.
[549] Walter Sickert, quoted in *Manchester Evening News* 6 Sept 1932.

emphasized the importance of multiple agents and material memory in the genesis of a work: "when things have passed through several hands, they assume another character."[550] The synergistic effect was noted in the case of *La Louve*: "For Mr Sickert's portrait of Miss Ffrangcon-Davies sets out to be a copy of a photograph...But there is much in the picture which no photographer, however skilled, could ever hope to catch."[551] More importantly, however, this was read as a kind of partnership in which the photograph assumed great importance. Sickert kept hold of a cutting of the *British Journal of Photography* which made precisely this claim: "In view of the discrimination between photographs and paintings which is made by the copy-right Act, it is to be hoped there will never be litigation in respect to the painting, for we fear that the intricacy of its authorship would present insoluble problems, even for the learned judges of the High Court."[552]

Indeed, critics noted that Sickert's own signature was "but barely readable" in the morass of paint in comparison to his dedication to the photographer, suggesting the equivocation of the importance of photograph and paint.[553] Authorship was put into question by both the framing of the picture with its fictive plinth and inscription, as well as by its photographic

[550] Sickert, "Underpainting" Lecture (Margate) 9 Nov 1934, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 642-3.
[551] *The Daily Telegraph* 7 Sept 1932.
[552] *British Journal of Photography*, 16 Sep 1932.
[553] Konody, 'New Sickert Masterpiece' 1932.

qualities, and critics were at pains to establish whose 'vision' this thing was - from investment in the 'genius' of the artist to suggestions of partnership. Amid the circulation and transformation of images, 'vision' and the 'look' were put into play and became potentially problematic:

> It does not matter whether Mr. Sickert looks at life or at a photographic representation of life. The vision is his own, and it is the vision that informs his brush and brings forth a superb work of art. But he sets a dangerous example in encouraging the man without personal vision and personal style to rely upon photographic evidence.[554]

Raised on a platform bearing her character's description, made larger than life and richly photographic, we see Ffrangcon-Davies as a virtual construct grounded in paint. The grid of transcription used to scale up the image is visible at the surface, a pedantic, overly-fine mesh that underlies loose washes and impasto slabs of monochrome paint, forcing a friction between image and facture. The image declares its thinness, its artifice and its origins, and yet creates concrete strength from these qualities. De-realized, yet vivacious, the pensive look of the figure across a matte black field, closely cropped at its sides, seems both human and more than human: "The poise of the figure has a Tintoretto-like monumentality, but the face and eyes suggest the latent powers of expression that make her supreme on the stage."[555]

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[554] "Mr. Richard Sickert and Photographer," *The Observer*, 11 Sep 1932.
[555] "Mr Sickert Again; Remarkable Combination of Art and Photography; Portrait of Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies," *Morning Post* 7 Sep, 1932.

Like *Jack and Jill,* she is pre-occupied with what the viewer cannot see, even though she bares so much of herself transparently, *La Louve* 'looks' with the same ambivalent suspense as *Jack and Jill.* While photographs of the actress were predominantly frontal shots, including the portrait reproduced alongside the painting in *The Times,* the cropping and choice of source means that Sickert's figure looks directly at its own frame like the contemporaneous *Summer Lightning*, while the hand to her heart also implies anxiety, apprehension and recall - memory work. Frozen in high-contrast light*,* statue-like, she looks onward and reflects backward, implying a before and after, while revealing nothing of narrative. It is a halted image which is aware and open about its genesis, it signals a material moment of transition. Between media, Sickert argued that images: "may deteriorate and they may not, but whatever they do, that passage from one to another is at least life in the sense that it is movement."[556]

As we found with *Miss Earhart's Arrival,* time was indeed at issue in this painting, both in its delayed representation of its subject, and in its length of production. Many critics noted that the painting was of an image from "nine years ago"[557]: "The portrait is perhaps a trifle belated, for it is nine years since

[556] Walter Sickert, 'Underpainting' Lecture (Margate) 9 Nov 1934, reproduced in Robins *The Complete Writings*, 642-3
[557] 'Mr Sickert's Best Work: Portrait without a Sitting,' *The Daily Mail* 7 Sep 1932

she played the part in the special performances given by the Manix Society."[558] Something of this belatedness was expressed and reinforced in its production. This was a material expression of both immediacy, and age. Since the work was painted in layers over an extended period, Ffrangcon-Davies noted that while she saw the painting develop in the studio, she never saw the artist paint, instead it accreted layers invisibly: "I never sat once for this portrait...I never once, however, actually saw him painting it."[559] The labour and time of production is stressed, but oddly obscure to us – every stage of painting is bared on the surface, and yet that surface was still wet at the time of exhibition. Tatlock, a high-profile art critic, noted that: "The painting of the picture has occupied the artist's time for many months, and his great task ended only a few days ago. When I first saw the painting the day before yesterday the pigment was still wet."[560]

Paintings, 'like' Murders, "are nippy things or not at all."[561] This is a delayed image, an image stilled, made material and ambiguous. Like a still from a film it implies the time before it and in front of it. It remains frozen in short, dry brush-strokes, like a halted figure displaced from a film. It

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[558] "Painted by Sickert," *Sunday Times* 4 Sept 1932.
[559] Ffrangcon-Davies, Gwen, quoted in *Manchester Evening News* 6 Sept 1932.
[560] R. R. Tatlock, "Sickert's New Masterpiece; Portrait of Miss Gwen ffrangcon-Davies; High Water Mark of Achievement," *The Daily Telegraph* 6 Sep 1932.
[561] Walter Sickert, "Colour Study: Importance of Scale" Lecture 16 Nov Margate School of Art 1936, reproduced in Robins, 655.

seems to think, but without drawing conclusions - a suspended and ineffable thought in paint, a material memory. As Sickert prescribed, the flickering paint is neither an exact 'measure' of its subject, nor a 'stable' self-contained simulacrum, but something that 'oscillates.'[562] This painting is neither the text of a play, nor its performance, but the manifestation of its star through visual media. It is a pensive image of an icon in hiatus. Backstage the viewer finds that 'murder' is but an act, a hiatus of meaning like one of Hitchcock's scenes. Or perhaps it is better described as a film trick, another prestidigitation of the order of *Lazarus*. It achieves more than the sum of its parts and as a consequence it drew hyperbolic praise: "Sickert in his old age has produced a picture I pronounce with perfect confidence to be far better aesthetically than anything achieved or likely to be achieved by any other living artist."[563]

To see how filmic painting manifested material memory in Sickert's wider portraiture practice we need look no further than his previous one-man show. In criticism of *La Louve,* another painting was invoked, *A Conversation Piece at Aintree* [Fig. 78]: "...it is not Sickert's first or most notable painting from a photograph. Quite the best portrait of His Majesty the King was done by Mr Sickert, two or three years ago, from a photograph in a daily newspaper. This was the sensation

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[562] Sickert, "Underpainting," 641
[563] Tatlock, "Sickert's New Masterpiece" 1932

of his last one man show."[564] As a third and final thematic category of Sickert's filmic painting, portraits of monarchs prove crucial for exposing the wider resonances of the materially stilled image.

The collaborative nature of Sickert's painting is highlighted again: "Acknowledgment to 'Topical Press Agency' - the agency which took the snapshot on which the study is based - is made in the top right-hand corner."[565] And its spectacular capacity to dominate an exhibition space is lauded effusively - as if the image were larger than life: "The chief attraction is the amazing, rather over-life-sized impression of the King...";[566] "His lightning impression of the King at Aintree blots out all other pictures near."[567] Like a divine intervention, a masterful 'exposure,' Sickert is said to capture an instant of nature and retain its vitality. Like *La Louve,* this relatively muted tonal painting was described as having a high intensity of colour: "a brilliant head of the King from a snapshot, yet exquisite in colour".[568] This bottled 'lightning', like the faces of *Jack and Jill,* seems even to emit its own light, described as notably "luminous."[569]

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[564] "Photograph Portraits," *The Star* 7 Sep 1932.
[565] *The Daily Sketch*, 21 Oct 1931.
[566] *The Guardian*, 30 Oct 1931.
[567] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 20 Oct 1931.
[568] *The Scotsman*, 13 Oct 1931.
[569] *The Guardian* 30 Oct 1931.

This element of intensity in the painting is related rather than opposed to its photographic qualities. It was read as more descriptive because of its self-imposed limits, the condensation of detail amplifying its effect: "it is only a head cutting against the head of another gentleman snapshotted at Aintree, but it is a brilliant piece of painting, possibly the right way to paint a royal portrait, the artist being set free from the personality of the august sitter[570] and the etiquette of the occasion." Again we see appeals made to the "snapshot" aspect of the finished painting, referred to in at least ten articles: "conveyed to the canvas that quality of spontaneity which one can get with a snap."[571] Like a frame in a film reel, Sickert again expresses his interest in the instant, closely cropped. Unlike contemporary paintings layered directly onto photographs like a veneer, Sickert was seen as having synthesized media and embodied the photograph: "A picture was removed from the walls of the Academy recently, because it was found to be painted over a photograph, but Mr Sickert does not paint over photographs, he takes a snapshot as the basis of his picture and makes a thing of genius of the amalgam."[572] This material "amalgam" was not merely photography improved by painting, but painting productively filtered by photograph: "In all his recent work the

[570] "The London Group: Mr Sickert's King George," *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Oct 1932.
[571] *Oldham English Chronicle*, 12 Oct 1931.
[572] *The Guardian* 30 Oct 1931.

world is seen from one angle only - as it were, by a red

flashlight, when all the other colours are lost in the glare.

Could we not sometimes have a simpler point of view?"[573]

As a condensed image of monarchy, it was displayed at a

time when the King was especially present in the collective gaze

of the public. In the historian David Cannadine's words 1931 was

the "most energetic use of the royal prerogative during the

King's entire reign."[574] George V intervened (for some too

extensively) in keeping together Ramsay MacDonald's government,

and even performed symbolic austerity upon his own house, taking

a 10% cut to his income. This King was also the first to make

wide-scale use of mass-media - from the first mass communication

from a living monarch in the form of lithographic messages to

PoWs in 1918 to the first empire-wide broadcast of a King's

speech in 1924 - in 1932 he even began the global 'Christmas

Speech' tradition.[575] The photographic source of Sickert's

painting dates from 1927, another delay, but by then George V

had already established the precedent of being filmed at the

races for mass public consumption.

A notable previous instance, in 1924, created spectacle on

a lavish scale, boasting 45 cameras at Aintree, "the world's

record number to be employed on one event", and many were

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[573] *Time and Tide*, 17 Oct 1931.
[574] David Cannadine, *George V: The Unexpected King* (London: Penguin, 2014), 89.
[575] Kenneth Rose, *King George V,* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983), xii.

pointed at the King leaving "nothing to chance."[576] To reinforce the spectacular and even simulacral nature of the event, the cameras even filmed themselves [Fig. 79] - the topicality and veracity of the news reel was thus protected by repeatedly capturing images. Indeed, the conventions of the format even fore-shadow every scene with a title card reflecting on what immediately follows: "The cheers of thousands greet the King's arrival!"

Perhaps what is most remarkable is how banal and undifferentiable the King is, in a sea of identical overcoats and bowler hats. Arriving by car and entering the throng with few attendants, the footage is striking in its informal display, the distinguished turned indistinguishable. An effect is thus created whereby the King is seen to be part of the mass, and yet also the iconic object of its affections, a constant balancing of the King as a member of the audience and also a free-standing spectacular icon. The film fights to preserve the significance of the British patriarch against the loss of meaning in modernity. No scene expresses this better than a shot of the King-as-spectator [Fig. 80]. With his iconic profile visible to the audience, we have an image close to Sickert's source, but still at a remove. Holding his binoculars, and cut with slow-

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[576] Intertitle, The Grand National 1924 News Reel, held in the British Pathé's digital archives: http://www.britishpathe.com/video/the-grand-national-1924 Accessed 20 Oct, 2015.

motion footage of the race, it is as if the King has a superhuman awareness of the event. Unlike in *Jack and Jill,* here we watch the king, and we know what the King watches with his commanding gaze.

In *Conversation Piece,* however, we have another of Sickert's complicated sequences of unreciprocated looks, and the quality of silent conversation evoked by the *Echoes.* Again, the figures do not return the viewer's gaze but instead indicate the unseen: The Major looks at the King, the King gazes at an indeterminate moment of the race, both informal and yet at the heart of a spectacle in the Royal Enclosure. With reference to the photographic source [Fig. 81], we can see that Sickert crops out a blurred hat in the foreground to bring the viewer on a level with the King, but keeps them at a distance with the head in Royal profile. As if the painting might cut like the film to a view of the race, we remain in suspense at the implicit race unseen and yet to materialize.

Sickert's painting won critical acclaim for its perceived daring - seen as oriented to a mass audience, yet without conceding to 'popular style' - this painting rendered the King as something both iconic and strange, even humorous: "It is by Richard Sickert, that giant of British art whose gusty humour is that of a true democrat.";[577] "a racy portrait of His Majesty the

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[577] *Daily Herald*, 29 Oct 1931.

King which makes no concession to popular styles and should yet have a wide appeal."[578] But this *frisson* was contentious, and detractors created controversy: "There is a disagreeable picture by Walter Sickert entitled 'By courtesy of the Topical Press'. In this the humour, if any, has hopelessly misfired."[579]

This reached a climax when the Art Galleries Committee of Glasgow refused to accept the painting as a gift for the Kelvingrove in 1932, shortly after the glowing London reception of *La Louve* because: "...the treatment of the subject was too modern."[580] A member of the committee claimed it was "not a good example of His Majesty", and that "we were of unanimous opinion that it did not do credit to Sickert's work."[581] However, this measured response did little to quell the press storm which followed. The *Evening Star* noted the "excitement" over its refusal,[582] which resulted in a surge of articles reiterating and critiquing the committee's reasoning: "not kingly enough"; "...because it is not 'majestic-looking'";[583] "It is too 'intimate' for their taste. They feel that the King should be represented as a monarch, rather than as a man..."[584]

Here we have the very problem of embodying the spectacular body - the king becomes accessible, embedded in the crowd that

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[578] *The London Mercury*, Nov 1931.
[579] *Yorkshire Post,* 12 Oct 1931.
[580] "Sickert Portrait of the King Refused," *Daily Herald*, 23 Nov 1931.
[581] Bailie Doherty, quoted in *Birmingham Post,* 24 Nov 1932.
[582] *Evening Star*, 24 Nov 1932.
[583] "Sickert Portrait of the King Refused," Daily Herald, 23 Nov 1931.
[584] "King's Portrait refused," *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 Nov 1932.

looks, but he must retain something of the virtual, an iconic

distance. The magic of film threatens to unravel into the banal

if the image halts, and Sickert's paint renders it concrete. It

was popular with the bulk of the mainstream press, but courted

distaste from art institutions. In the committee's words in

reposte to reporters:

> I understand that it was taken from a photograph, and if it
> had not been of the King it would not have received a
> second thought. If it had been a live portrait it would
> have been an entirely different thing. As a matter of fact,
> one would hardly know it was a Sickert work.[585]

Too close and yet too distant. Sickert's work, far from

restoring the conventional 'aura' to photography, added the

associated qualities of photography to painting. The implication

that a painting from life would be accepted ran in contrast to a

Press which found official portraits "too stagey,"[586] the

perceived mismatch between 'photography' and 'majesty' here

relates to excessive intimacy combined with a distancing

anonymity of style. Sickert's painting is the antithesis of a

film like *Royal Cavalcade* (1935) which Gill Plain describes as

montaging news reels and re-enactments into a confident linear

narrative of the Patriarch: "to construct a discourse of

nationhood."[587] In contrast, Sickert's painting comes dangerously

close to the 'meaningless' but powerful American use of the

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[585] Baille Doherty, quoted in "Glasgow Rejects a Sickert," *Manchester Guardian*,
24 Nov, 1932.
[586] "King's Portrait refused," *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 Nov 1932.
[587] Gill Plain and John Mills *British Cinema: Masculinity, Identity and Nation*,
(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 52.

medium. This canvas is both iconic and banal - the virtual embedded in the everyday. It enacts (rather than elides) the dissolution of the meaningful in mass media feeds of information.

Sickert's paint creates a space in which to think through the nature of hyperreality and the filmic moment. With stars and royalty at the heart of news imagery, they generate images, but risk uncanniness. This is a pensive, hesitating painting, and like *La Louve,* a delayed image.[588] Akin to a film still, it has the quality of an image isolated from a continuum, and begs the anxieties of an ineffable before and after. The King looks out at an unresolved race, both more than a man and less. Like the major, we only have an oblique view, a cross-section, a fragment.

However, Sickert's probing of the interwar monarchy was not limited to George V, and by the time of *Jack and Jill's* display, audiences were not only further familiar with the infant king in *Queen Victoria and Grandson,* but moreover his monumental but fragile treatment of Edward VIII. To understand where Sickert's strategy succeeds and fails, and how this resonates with not just photography and cinema but also the broadcast medium radio, I will discuss a controversial and less successful painting, one which differed markedly from *Conversation Piece* and *La Louve* in

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[588] Based on an image from 1927.

its acknowledgment of the photographic. Hung first in 1936, and later alongside *Jack & Jill* in 1938, *H.M. King Edward VIII* [Fig. 82] drew divided crowds to the Leicester Galleries.[589] While it too presented an iconic celebrity at "rather more than life-size,"[590] no attribution was made to the photographer and, as a result, the image of the monarch retained its 'majesty' at the cost of anxiety about its origins. If the painting of George V had been too intimate: "Certainly this criticism will not be levelled at the painting of king Edward VIII. for Mr Sickert shows the king as colonel-in-chief of the brigade of guards, and it is a full length portrait."[591]

However, for some critics this painting still failed to live up to what it portrayed: "the most important subject, but it is not his best painting."[592] In part this was framed as a lack of the 'richness' of colour which had been ascribed to Sickert's other mute tonal paintings. Where *Conversation Piece* was read as popular without conceding to popular style, *Edward VIII* was expected to be unpopular for stylistic issues primarily of colour: the *Daily Mirror* arguing the common man would dislike it because "The face is chalky-white - almost unpainted. The tunic is pale pink. The trousers are bright blue. The background is light brown"[593] The *Sheffield Telegraph* related the

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[589] "Unconventional Portrait," *Sheffield Telegraph*, 22 Jul 1936.
[590] "Mr Sickerts Portrait of the King," *Sunday Times*, 19 July 1936.
[591] *Cambridge Daily News*, 21 July 1936.
[592] *Morning Post,* 25 July 1936.
[593] *Daily Mirror*, 22 Jul 1936.

contentiousness of its colouration to its unconventionality:

"though many will not care for the way the artist has toned down

the scarlet of the tunic to a faded pink."[594] What is significant

here is that 'brightness' in the blue does not equate to the

'exquisite' or 'Venetian' qualities of *La Louve* or *Conversation*

Piece - not only did the pale palette compel viewers to read it

as washed-out, it was divergence from the 'actual colours' of

the Welsh Guards that was problematic. In short, when critic's

asked "Why isn't it finished?", their grievance lies with the

painting's failure to connote the spectacular. The painting does

not live up to the icon. What they imply when they say these

colours are pale is that they lack the hyperreality exhibited in

Sickert's other work. *Edward VIII* triggers the tension between

the iconic and the banal in a way which was unsettling for its

audience.

Why did this painting encounter more intense critical

aversion than previous iconic photo-portraits? The problem once

more seems to be located in the 'snapshot' aspect of its source:

"Unfortunately, the 'snapshot' upon which the portrait is

cleverly based did not give Mr Sickert an opportunity for

exercising his art in its most commanding style."[595] Rather than

drawing strength from the convergence of media, it appeared

weakened, and lacking an inscribed dedication to the

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[594] "Unconventional portrait," *Sheffield Telegraph* 22 Jul 1936.
[595] *Morning Post,* 25 July 1936.

photographer, it seemed to come adrift. This generated a storm in the press when Harold J. Clements, the photographer of the source image, insisted on: "pointing out that the picture was the same as his photograph, 'one of my own creations by which I earn my living.'"[596]

The press were unanimous, even excessive, in dismissing the photographer, but generated a large quantity of copy reprinting this contest of ownership and origin. Sickert's painting was distinguished from the photograph as much as possible in articles demeaning the photographer with emotive titles such as "Snapper Snarls".[597] Newspapers seemed to make much of displacing how mechanical and photograph-like Sickert's painting appeared to be through directing invective at the photographer. In a manner not too dissimilar to later scholarship, the painting could only be appreciated if it subordinated photograph to paint, but instead Sickert's thin, wan oil surfaces muddy the distinction.

The extent of these denials suggests an underlying anxiety, for, as we have seen, the painting is problematic in terms of its colour and uncanny appearance of 'reality'. The painting is neither merely a photograph, nor its masterful translation into painting, but something which flickers in-between. What it depicted was a hesitant figure, an image of Edward VIII which

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[596] Harold J. Clements, "The Sickert Incident," *Newspaper World*, 15 Aug 1936.
[597] "These Names Make News: Snapper Snarls," *Daily Express*, 24 July 1936.

might be considered typical. Young and uncertain, with a photogenic smile he lacked the confrontational stare and patriarchal beard of his father.[598] Indeed in Edward's first broadcast as King, the Pathé Gazette news reel affords us a glimpse of the King's gaze for only one second of a 146 second feature [Fig. 83], while BIF and Pathé documentaries such as *Edward VIII – Prince and King* depict him repeatedly but at a distance, head down or turned away from the audience.

Imaged in an instant, stepping across a liminal threshold, Sickert's figure embodies a snapshot's negative connotations - its ephemerality, its necessarily partial and incomplete nature. Rather than embody the belated, this work focuses more on stilling the fleeting representation - no span of years separating the painting from its source, indeed, according to the artist it was painted in a fortnight.[599] Sickert even painted another version within the year, exhibited as *The Duke of Windsor* at the Beaux Arts Gallery [Fig. 84]. Painted at speed like *La Louve*, *H.M. Edward VIII's* layers seem superimposed rather than composed, the sepia background is a ghostly homogenous brown, the figure almost dispersing on top of the

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[598] Edward VIII could be read as disarming, attractive and insecure, but remained a potent media icon, see Alexis Schwarzenbach, "Love, Marriage and Divorce: American and European Reactions to the Abdication of Edward VIII," in *New Dangerous Liaisons: Discourses on Europe and Love in the Twentieth Century,* eds. Luisa Passerini, Liliana Ellena, Alexander C.T. Geppert (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 151.
[599] Walter Sickert, quoted in "A portrait of the king," *Evening Standard* 17 June 1936.

ground before the viewer's eyes, like oil on water. This icon is made strange, but aggressively so. Bearing the mourning band for his father, this figure moves between times and between media, the figure appears to be projected in front of the picture plane to the extent the painting: "...makes him seem as if he were emerging from the frame."[600]

This quality of emergence, and of lacking an anchoring 'reality effect' seems symbolically compounded when paired with the slightly later and more fully 'finished' version. Like a pair of cropped film stills, they take an instant and dissolve it in paint. There is no sequence, only hesitant repetition, we watch the King but the King gazes back at the unseen. The painting implies time problematically - in the controversy with the photographer, it suggests a 'before' that audiences wanted to elide, while in its pale de-realized state it fails to invoke the 'present'. As a pensive image it seems to come undone. The image repeats rather than reflects on itself, it fails to provide space for the anxious viewer through either delay or the framing device of inscription. Materializing the icon renders it larger-than-life but also insufficient.

What does Edward VIII see? He looks obliquely at the crowd while held there in suspended animation. Unlike the safely re-imaged fiction of Hollywood, or the safely distanced figures of

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[600] "Mr Sickerts Portrait of the King," *Sunday Times*, 19 July 1936.

La Louve or *Conversation Piece*, *Edward* presents the viewer with the new, the present, halted. As a filmic painting, where my previous examples have opened a pensive space between media, the speed, thinness and iterative qualities of this canvas suggest an icon devoid of aura, provocatively close to an inanimate thing. Rather than begging a wider continuum, it points to the end of an era. It is a "nippy thing," but one which leaves its subject dissonant matter rather than preserved figure - a fragmented and motiveless image.

This speed and emptiness brings us to consideration of a new platform which utilized the monarchy in the interwar period, and exemplified the struggle and strains involved in embodying the spectacular - the ambivalent effects of the Empire's first radio kings. Sickert's paintings imply encounters, and the succession of the event by the spectacular, they gesture to new mass-media relationships in film and photography. But in their silent monarchs' faces they also imply Royal involvement in the growth of the wireless, and the boons and costs associated with it.

Though only King for a year, Edward had a much longer history as a disembodied voice. Long before his famous abdication speech, he was a vocal advocate for wireless technology as a tool of imperial collective identity and the propagation of patriotic narratives: "as the roads of the Roman Empire failed to keep pace with the requirements of the times,

so the modern communications are quite insufficient for a great Commonwealth of Nations which extends to all parts of the globe. The British Empire has more to gain than any other nation from efficient air communications."[601] Amid the devolution of power to the dominions and dwindling economic and military prospects at home, the speed and range of radio was seen by the BBC and Monarchy as an important tool of national and imperial cohesion - a super-structural fix to structural problems of decline.[602]

In reinforcing an imagined community on the scale of the British Empire, the monarchy and the BBC were interlinked, drawing legitimacy, exposure and mass audiences from each other.[603] Crucially, in the first Royal broadcasts, Edward VIII and George V were supportive in lending their cultural capital and reaping the investment. Royal speeches drew audiences in the millions, and cemented radio as an important medium of shared memory, able to engage the listener in mass 'audio-spectacle.' As well as a looping feed or wave it represented the instantaneous transmission of the present. Reports on the first broadcast speeches of the two royals at the 1924 Empire Exhibition commenting:

> For the uninitiated to imagine that broadcasting gives them
> the opportunity to hear spirited music and the spoken word

[601] "The Prince of Wales," *The Times*, 1 July 1921.
[602] The cultural importance of radio is being increasingly recognised in communication studies, and the imperial function of the BBC is the central thesis of Simon J. Potter, *Broadcasting Empire: The BBC and the British World 1922-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-3.
[603] Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity in Britain 1922-53* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 83.

is a very different thing to realising for the first time
that it enables them to take part in some ceremony, sixty,
one-hundred miles or even greater distances away. It gave
the sense of unity with a mighty people, the sense of
participation in an unseen event."[604]

As a counterweight to the Americanising threat of cinema,
radio provided symbolic unity and a regular ritual of Empire.
Yet, while radio held affective power and reach for a waning
empire, it also constituted a new empty territory to conquer,
and an oddly immaterial medium. Radio broadcasting experienced
problems filling the sheer breadth of time and frequencies which
the wireless made available.[605] Now that every instant could be
deployed in the production of meaning and collective memory,
pressure developed for a volume of material far in excess of
that required for daily newspapers. Royalty, as metonym for the
empire attempted to anchor the wireless, focussing listeners on
singular "unseen" events of significance. In his first Royal
speech, Edward began by uniting the new intimate technology with
the tradition of delivering public missive on succession:
"...science has made it possible for me to make that message
more personal, and to speak to you all over the radio."[606]

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[604] *Oxford Times* 25 April 1924.
[605] Alice Goldfarb Marquis argues that in both popular and elite cultural
contexts in the United States and Britain, the capacity of radio created an
unprecedented pressure to find material, see Alice Goldfarb Marquis "Written
on the Wind: The Impact of Radio during the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary
History*, 19:3 (July, 1984): 385.
[606] BBC Archives, Edward VIII's First Message to the Empire as King, National
Programme, recorded circa March 1936.

Radio could deliver a trace of the monarch without delay,
however it sacrificed the presence of the royal body itself. The
technology not only implied a voracious vacuum that needed
filling, but it could also produce something of the uncanny. The
disembodied voice could prove deeply unsettling for audiences.[607]
To mitigate this, a radio voice required a life beyond the
wireless, the voice had to be a reliable index of a physical
person, a role in which royal celebrity was repeatedly employed
but 'immediacy' still implied displacement, emptiness.[608] It made
an icon fast but incomplete, everywhere but nowhere. Personality
became the voice's guarantee, something undermined by the
indifference of Sickert's paint.

Sickert's belated and halted material figures re-articulate
the film and radio persona. He exposes this problematic
instantaneousness of broadcast media through delay and stasis,
lacking in "majesty." If this were a murder people would
struggle to find the body. Instead, this is the stalling of
"nippy" radio-wave and motion-picture, the reification of the
spectacle surrounding a disembodied event.

Film and radio impacted imagined communities' senses of
time and space ambivalently, and made promises of truth,
vitality and immediacy which Sickert critiques. New spaces of

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[607] Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 45.
[608] Alison McCracken, "Scary Women and Scarred Men: Suspense, Gender Trouble, and Postwar Change, 1942-50," in *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, eds. Hilmes, Michele, Loviglio Jason (London: Routledge, 2002), 185.

collective experience were opened, but this terrain was hard to narrate and embody. The figure of the King in mass media is in a sense always disembodied, lacking a dimension of time or space. Sickert takes the discrepancies between media to show his viewers the object of their fetishistic attraction as a material remnant. Paint in *Conversation Piece* and *H. M. Edward VIII* delays and halts the spectacle of celebrity, and in the stutter of his paintings we see the mass-media aura of these icons through a lens which revels in our prurient interest.

In the Pathé newsreel following Edward's first broadcast as King[609] we are given only a fleeting picture of the monarch, followed by a montage of various radio listeners in contemplation of the King's voice [Fig. 85]. Montaged with tropes of countryside and industry, this is both empire-wide and personal but the listeners have nowhere to look. They gaze off-screen to the left or the right like the figures in Sickert's paintings, audience to what isn't there. The BBC's coverage of King George's funeral remained wordless, and Sickert's mourning band on the arm of Edward VIII marks the silence of what could not be narrated.

As Sickert grounded 'flight,' so too he stills new media and the spectacular body. His indifferent paint renders the celebrity of new media alien and, thing-like material memories.

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[609] Edward VIII's First Broadcast to The Empire (1936), British Pathé Archives.

The pensive quality of Sickert's paintings is a rumination on the material thingness of new technology - a material recapitulation frustrating comprehension. His subjects look at a missing reciprocity between celebrity and audience, and the illusion of narrative meaning, mute skeins of paint. It is a pensiveness at the intersection of film, photography, paint and even radio, explored by cropping silent stills, leaving the material memory of sound and movement. The simulacrum is deferred, delayed and halted, the sometimes threating encounter is unfulfilled. The celebrity is not 'there', but their materialization in paint exposes the strangeness of the 'unseen event' and the hiatus of meaning involved in the spread of spectacular celebrity. Sickert's paintings possess no hermeneutic meaning, they are the material by-product of new media, revelling in the base matter of mass culture: "we really don't care about literature, we like films and we like a good murder."

The significance of Sickert's canvases lies in the indifference of the painting. In one of Sickert's last works, *High Steppers* (c.1938-9) [Fig. 69] we see a row of unseeing eyes, Sickert's closest work from film. A transcription of a film still reproduced in a newspaper,[610] this is an image delayed by eleven years, the film itself an adaptation of theatrical

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[610] "An Art English Girls Know Best," *The Evening News* 5 November 1927.

farce *Little Bit of Fluff*. As in *La Louve* there is little 'dramatic' quality to this staged event in Sickert's painting. Instead, speaking to problems of synchronicity and sequence this painting is a distillation of Sickert's body of filmic imagery.

Reminiscent of a Muybridge chronophotograph, we see here a suspended moment composed of suspended limbs. However, as a study of the body in motion, this is the opposite of Muybridge's experiment in reducing time to legible frames. These limbs are confused in the translation from the film still, becoming progressively harder to pair with their owners as the viewer's eye scans from left to right. This is not in fact a series of movements, but a shared instant where Sickert's dry, pale crust of paint halts and displaces the image.

Like *Jack and Jill,* the dancers' play of looks is ambiguous - some look out at a third party, while even the most frontal of faces seems to look past the viewer of the painting. The performers are out of synch, the discrepancy highlighted between the cacophony of bodies and the more regimented folds of the curtain. These High Steppers step 'up,' but do not step 'forward.' The painting's flattened stage does not give in to the advances of the viewer, but neither does it dominate them. It is an instant halted, a promise of intimacy unfulfilled. The viewer is left as a kind of voyeur, staring at the fetishized legs, women's' bodies angled for display to an imagined male

viewer. This is the fascination and alienation of the instant out of synch, frozen in murky paint.

When compared with Sloan's *Movie, Five Cents,* the viewer is not connected to the space of the painting by eyes which invite us, instead we sense interruption. Sloan's work is centred on eyes which look back at us, the film itself is left at the margins. Sickert by contrast brings us close to the fictive space of the screen, but then confronts us with indifference. In Sloan the film is a mirror for the audience, an imaginary they partake of without a loss of agency. In Drummond, the cinema audience is fully subordinated to the film unseen by the viewer, who retains distance and agency by assuming an oblique vantage point. In Sickert's paintings we are neither in control of the moving image, nor it of us. Sickert undoes the magic, shows the hesitant still image at the heart of the motion picture, and exposes the illusion of the instantaneous by focusing on the material memory of the instant. Celebrity is not there to consume or be subjected to, instead it stands precarious - halted. Sickert's paintings have neither the assumed coherence of drama, nor the imagined immediacy of radio, but instead offer the uncanny remainder, an anamorphic look at motion pictures through the material stillness from which they are composed. The media of spectacular society - of imperial pageantry, national pride, and invasive Americanization - was here interrupted, muddied and estranged.

We have developed our understanding of how the simulacral quality we encountered in Chapter 1 operates in Sickert's *Echoes* and photo-paintings, equally connected to issues of national identity and removed from concerns with 'drama.' These 'filmic paintings,' like *Earhart's Arrival,* critique new media by grounding it, stilling narratives of progress and potential. They hesitate like *Earhart* and the *Seducer* alike, stranded between times and echoing, barely present. Like the wider body of *Echoes*, they show the persistence of opaque and banal artefacts - indifferent matter active in different capacities across time.

As we reach the end of this thesis, Sickert's work remains productively diverse, but possesses definitive threads connecting the Echoes of chapters 1-3 and the photo-paintings of chapters 4-5. While the *Echoes* of Section 1 remain more engaged with historical time, and the photo-paintings of Section 2 are more focused on the time of transmission and transcription, these paintings are all interested in mass media's relationship to Englishness in both a national and imperial context. They share a concern with the potential for the old to comment on the new, and the unrealized potential of narratives of progress. In different ways they relativize media rather than fully translate one into another, exploiting gaps and qualities in-between and across media, and remain undeniably concerned with the ambivalent qualities of paint as both an expressive and

resistant material. Throughout we have seen how Sickert's practice mobilized non-narrative material memory, to expose the inconsistencies and erasures of history in multiple media through the dry and layered materiality of paint.

High Steppers, as much as the theatre painting *La Ci Darem La Mano - Don Giovanni* [Fig. 14] of the year before, was the embodiment of a promotional photograph in dry, indifferent paint. From stage fiction to photographic record to painterly interpretation, these transmediated images are simulacra rendered concrete and ambiguous things by the 'silent kingdom' of dumb paint. There is nothing 'behind' either painting: no truth, no narrative, no collective identity; no veiled past or tangible future; no 'Sickert legend' and no dead body. Instead, we have paintings which catch and concretize anxieties in media and their narratives.

Conclusion

> Through the haze of illness, Sickert was dimly aware that the great survey exhibition of his work, curated by Lillian Browse, had opened at the National Gallery in London, and that it was receiving a generous reception. It marked his formal canonization as an Old Master."[611]

> I resigned because a member of the RA when I asked why the portrait of Shaw was not accepted, said: 'We won't have Shaw in the RA.' Why? What is the matter with G.B.S., anyhow?[612]

These reports of Sickert at the end of his career respectively illustrate Matthew Sturgis' biographical conclusion on a Sickert who died penniless,[613] and Sickert's last revision of his own life in print. Two framings of Sickert inside and outside of the establishment, these lines demonstrate the contrast of a linear life narrated and a complex life performed. As this thesis argues, there is a depth and subtlety in the material stuff of Sickert's late production which previous scholarship has failed to recognize. The artist's canonization following Browse's retrospective has led to the construction of a 'Sickert' seen in the retrospective. Scholarship has previously perceived his later output as a legacy of earlier work: "as a continuation of, not a break with, his past as a painter."[614] This established, limited and teleological narrative is the outcome of Sickert's work being evaluated predominantly

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[611] Sturgis, *Walter Sickert: A Life,* 618.
[612] Walter Sickert, 'Epstein', *News Chronicle* 3 November 1937, reproduced in Robins, *The Complete Writings*, 688.
[613] An estate valued at £143 4s. 3d., see Sturgis *Walter Sickert: A Life,* 619.
[614] Baron, *Sickert* 2006, 123.

in the context of Sickert alone, reducing a large body of his late paintings to interpretative frameworks primarily developed to explain pre-war canvases. Works of the late 1920s and 1930s have been read in this light as the successes or failures of an aging artist. However, as these chapters have demonstrated, these paintings were also deeply engaged with the historical moment of their production, reflecting and critiquing continuity and change in English identity at both a national and imperial level. As paintings focused on materiality and mediation, these canvases subtly and powerfully encouraged the viewer to be sceptical of historical narratives surrounding the roots and possibilities of England and its Empire.

This project provides a far-reaching revision of our understanding of one of the most important British artists of the twentieth century, and offers Sickert scholars new insights and horizons for research as I shortly detail. First, however, a final word on methodology. An unsympathetic reader might consider there to be a tension in this thesis regarding the function and value of the 'artist' and their 'oeuvre.' At its outset my project deconstructed the canonical author-function of 'Sickert', but in the body of the text I have retained the coherence of the oeuvre for the sake of necessity. I have found that operating with a critical and selective approach to the coherence of the oeuvre has proven productive of a more extensive yet strongly integrated account of these objects and

their reception. Specifically, I argue my approach provides three interrelated advantages over fully rejecting the idea of a corpus united by its maker: the corpus offers a pragmatic and uncontroversial premise for research; its alternatives (either continuing the Sickert Legend or discarding the canon) remain impractical; and my expanded idea of 'Sickert' offers a significant positive contribution to Sickert studies and our understanding of interwar British painting.

I have shown how the privileging of the author-function has forfeited the inclusion of wider cultural contextualization in order to create a coherent but reductive narrative. However, in correcting for this we need to be aware of the complementary danger of forfeiting a coherent understanding of these paintings in embracing an exponential number of objects and explanations. I have found it more constructive to focus on more immediate questions implied by a practical grouping of material than to redirect resources to abstract meta-disciplinary questions of value.

Art history insists that texts explain paintings, and its assumptions of periodization, medium-specificity and canon have received critiques without locating fully viable alternatives for a radical departure.[615] Disciplines are necessarily based on

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[615] Many of these have been effectively collated as a series of thought experiments by James Elkins in James Elkins, *Master Narratives and Their Discontents,* (New York: Routledge 2005), 147-153.

fundamental axioms, which are taken to be primitive facts or premises, but as the persistent division between different humanities disciplines demonstrates, these axioms can be mutually exclusive and there is no objective vantage point from which to relatively judge their merit. Where for visual studies and cultural studies, in the words of Raymond Williams, "culture is ordinary", for art history it is extraordinary.[616] We choose our objects and we choose our contexts. As Bal and Bryson remind us, the infinitude of any object's contexts necessitates creative choice on the part of the art historian to isolate those which are more or less productive for research.[617] In order for claims to make sense in academia, the object of study (and the range of contexts taken as sufficient explanation) must be limited. In a situation where the justification for the object of study looks in every direction to be precarious, a method which allows *claims to be made* is preferable to admitting the task's impossibility on abstract philosophical grounds. What is most important, however, is what this can produce, and here my thesis demonstrates that a significant number of paintings can fruitfully be seen to function with nuance and critical power in an expanded set of contexts. In summary, the unity of this body of material is no less consistent and defensible than that

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[616] Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso 1989), 3-14.
[617] Bal and Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," 264.

afforded by author-function, while being more practical than a diffusion of my analysis, and a more productive compromise than that of current scholarship.

What then does this thesis offer the reader concerned with Sickert's paintings of 1927-1942? Sickert's late work, I argue, was just as powerful, socially relevant and critically engaged as his Camden Town period. My central argument is that these paintings used the material thingness of paint to reflect sceptically on narratives of Englishness. To conclude, I bring together the outcomes of my five chapters and indicate their impact on the field before highlighting areas for future research.

The material alienation of old and new media prompted anxieties in Sickert's audiences, especially concerning the nature and viability of the country's imperial and national identities. Throughout this thesis we have encountered tension between time and the object, activated by Sickert's effective play with material memory. His paintings suggest that the nominally 'expressive' medium of paint can obscure meaning rather than facilitate it. This capacity of paint to obfuscate understanding and affective immediacy, as well as embody it, acted as a means of materializing the strangeness of media artefacts - things which both connote their cultural moment and yet retain a materiality resistant to meaning. In the context of England's changing imperial identity, these paintings sparked

anxieties, and ambivalent readings of Britain's historical and imperial identity in the aftermath of one war and the economic hardship preceding another.

My chapter structure balances the diversity of images with their shared thematic and material properties. In order to fully explore the materiality of Sickert's paint, the first section considered motifs of Victorian domestic spaces and bodies, while the second looked at imagery of contemporary international spaces and bodies. Throughout my analysis we have seen connections between Sickert's late practice and national conversations on collective identity, heritage, remembrance, imperial affairs and celebrity in the five respective chapters. Connections to developments in visual culture and technology reinforced Sickert's dynamic relationship to the contemporary, from motorized transport to film, each in turn resonating with his paintings, and finding in them an ambivalent material embodiment.

Under these rubrics the first section looked at the dead thingness of past cultural ephemera and how the continued life of obsolete objects in Sickert's paint sparked uncanny reactions in audiences, questioning narratives of national origins and historical progress. The second section looked at how documents of present progress and potentialities held the same incompleteness, insufficiency and alien indifference, gesturing towards the thingness of new media. Sickert's paint was not

omnipotent, nor was it as frail as many scholars have assumed, but it was frustrated, experimental and incisive all the same. Collectively Sickert's paintings from press referents presented an alternate and very material kind of memory to the narrative connections and elisions being constructed through the press of the 1930s.

As a project, this thesis significantly contributes to the renewed critical attention being directed towards this canonical British artist in both quantitative and methodological terms. In terms of this thesis' impact, my intervention extensively revises our contextual understanding of late Sickert, re-evaluating a body of over 100 oil paintings. This thesis offers new opportunities for research into British Modernism, from augmenting our understanding of a large corpus of paintings significant to the London art scene of the 1930s, to nuancing our analysis of Sickert's *avant-garde* contemporaries. Additionally, it provides interpretive approaches for exploring how the materiality of paint could disrupt spectacles in the interwar period. In sum, this thesis contributes fresh analysis to the study of visual culture in 1930s Britain, and opens up a canonical artist for renewed investigation in the light of wider social and cultural contexts.

Sickert studies remains a lively field, and this thesis aims to inspire new research which might enrich our understanding of specific paintings by helping to redistribute

the scholarly attention given to Sickert's early and late work. Reappraizing the significance of this body of canvases opens the door to more focused case studies and specialized research into both late Sickert, and the wider community of British painting in the 1930s.

Moreover, "Material Memory: The Work of Late Sickert 1927-42" also offers four clear opportunities for increasing our understanding of Sickert's impact on post-war British painting. Firstly, while I do not have the space in this primarily historicist thesis to project the implications of Sickert's work beyond their initial reception, Sickert's late paintings themselves seem to entreat the art historian to consider their afterlives as things removed from their original function. His contribution to subsequent twentieth-century painting was profound, but remains to be fully charted, and the findings of this thesis can help us appreciate new potential connections and criteria by which Sickert's late work may have proved influential, allowing us to reassess Sickert's legacy. Rebecca Daniels' and Martin Hammer's recent articles help us to appreciate the effect of Sickert's method of transcribing images from photographs into paint on artistic practices after the Second World War, and it is my hope that we might nuance this by considering the implications of Sickert's late work and writings, and the ideas and provocations they offered for

painting in the 1940s-1960s, in greater social-historical

detail.[618]

Secondly, looking towards my future research and intended

publications, I plan to investigate individual paintings in

greater depth. Following my immediate concern to develop

material from this thesis into a book, and building on the

groundwork it establishes for understanding Late Sickert, my

intention is to contribute to Sickert studies through the

publishing of articles focused on specific canvases in depth.

Indeed, this is a project I have already embarked on in my

article on *Miss Earhart's Arrival* published in *Visual Culture in*

Britain.[619]

Thirdly, I would like to indicate two notable areas for the

expansion of Sickert studies. By opting to focus on Sickert's

public-facing and topical work based on the appropriation of

popular imagery, I have largely omitted discussion of late

society portraiture and landscapes, since I lack the space to

adequately investigate this. The reception of Sickert's photo-

based portraiture has a large discourse in the contemporary

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[618] See Rebecca Daniels, "Francis Bacon and Walter Sickert: 'Images Which Unlock Other Images,'" *The Burlington Magazine* 151:1273, Art in Britain (2009): 224-230 and Martin Hammer, "After Camden Town: Sickert's Legacy since 1930," in Helena Bonett, Ysanne Holt, Jennifer Mundy (eds.), The Camden Town Group in Context, Tate Research Publication, May 2012, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/martin-hammer-after-camden-town-sickerts-legacy-since-1930-r1104349, accessed 04 April 2016.
[619] Merlin Seller, 'Walter Sickert's Miss Earhart's Arrival: Collapsing Paint and Flight in a Topical Painting', *Visual Culture in Britain* 16:1 (2015): 1-24.

press, however, and is particularly interesting to the historian of reception, and landscape scenes in which the human figure is absent reinforce our need to appreciate the diversity of Sickert's late oeuvre.[620] Moreover these landscapes represent a distinct body of production which achieved popularity during the artist's lifetime, meriting their critical attention in the present day. This thesis has attempted to balance breadth with depth in order to create a starting point which, while not a comprehensive survey, is open and flexible enough to foster further research.

Finally, as a fourth potential avenue for investigation, scholars might consider how this project's findings impact our analysis of Sickert's *earlier* oeuvre. Indeed, Baron's assertion of the consistency of Sickert's practice might be more useful to the art historian when it comes to Sickert's late society portraiture and photograph-based landscapes.[621] These are also areas in which the role of photography was significant, and in light of this thesis we might want to re-examine the relevance and potential of re-mediating practices in Sickert's pre-war work where currently they are being read very much in the shadow

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[620] For example, here is the *Daily Express*' critique of Sickert's *Viscount Castlerosse* (1935): "At a hundred yards range, seen through a series of arches, it resembles a ship in full sail: a great billowing whiteness. But seen side-ways, say from Gallery Nine, it more suggests an expanse of spilled chocolate frothed with whipped cream.", "Academy Picture You Cannot Escape," *Daily Express* 4 May 1935.

[621] *Mrs Swinton* (1906) is both a high society portrait, and arguably Sickert's first major photograph-based work. See Baron *Sickert* 2006, 312-314.

of Degas. Indeed, as much as my research might inform readings of Sickert's legacy, my contextual approach could be extended to Sickert's pre-war painting in order to better understand correspondences with contemporary technological developments. Moreover, I have already commenced working in this vein in Chapter 5 where I discuss *Gallery of the Old Mogul* (1906) and the particular relevance of cinema to Sickert.

Overall my project offers fresh interpretive entry-points, areas for deeper research and a gateway to revisiting established areas of Sickert scholarship from a new perspective. To close then, let us return one final time to the gateway with which I introduced this thesis: *Temple Bar* [Fig. 1], painted two years before the artist's death on 22 January 1942.

This scene of a displaced threshold to the City of London epitomizes the strange materiality of Sickert's late work. For Baron and Shone's 'Sickert' this painting is his last painterly 'struggle', an image that the biographer Matthew Sturgis reminds us progressed slowly as Sickert's life waned.[622] However, rather than reduce this painting to a Romantic post-script, in light of my project we can read it as a dense and complex work relevant to English national and imperial identity.

This canvas, almost metonymic for Sickert's late corpus as a whole, is a reconstruction of a reconstruction left trapped in

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[622] Sturgis 2005, 618.

its scaffolding. The sepia tint of a faded photograph leaves a muddied motif in monochrome, an image buried, exhumed and buried again. Sickert's reduction of the painterly surface to a compressed, tactile and texturally rich plane reaches a peak of intensity in this painting. His working method performs an uncertain reversal of time: the grid of transcription re-drawn on top of the motif, which, much like the monument's physical relocation, questions the certainty and identity of the City at the heart of empire. Sickert's depiction of this gate is the mutable material memory of stone blocks and mortar, a thingness to which paint could give substance. His thick paint suggests that material both embodies and subverts our understanding of history. The time of remediation and execution in paint problematizes simple linear narratives of the past which the photographic referent represents, but also asks the viewer to confront their incomplete and forever partial understanding of history.

We might end our investigation of his late work with a note Sickert left in an art-historical book on an Old Master. This was an annotation in a margin concerning how Sickert wished to be memorialized: "In my case I presume a monument consisting of a Victorian grained deal chest of drawers & an aspidistra would be *indicatissimo*."[623] Provocative to the last, Sickert's late

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[623] Walter Sickert's annotation in Courtauld library copy, Moreau-Nélaton, Étienne, *Millet raconté par lui-même,* (Paris: 1921) vol iii, 88.

paintings bring together memory and material in order to

articulate the complex relationships and objects constructing

the English imaginary.

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town-group/valerie-williams-london-narratives-in-
photography-1900-35-r1104366

Material Memory: The Work of Late Sickert 1927-42

Volume II

Merlin Seller (MSt)

PhD Art History

University of East Anglia

School of Art, Media and American Studies

September 2016

Name: Merlin Seller
Reg. No: 100060872
School: Art, Media and American Studies (AMA)
Thesis Title: "Material Memory: The Work of Late Sickert 1927-42"
I certify that the total word count in this thesis (including bibliography and footnotes) is
88,281 words

Figures

Figure 1: Walter Sickert, *Temple Bar* 1940 (oil on canvas)
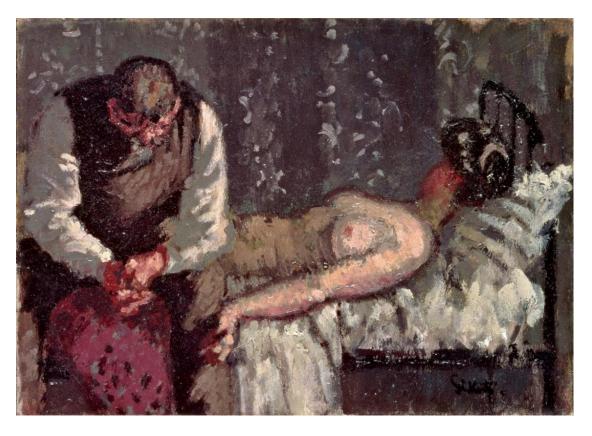
Figure 2: Walter Sickert, *What Shall we do for the Rent?* 1908
(oil on canvas)

Mary Ann Nichols, the second victim, is pictured here in the mortuary after her autopsy, her wounds discreetly covered.
© *Public Record Office, London.*

The Sickert sketch *Venetian Studies* brings to mind the murdered Mary Ann Nichols, whose eyes were wide open when her body was discovered. *Current location and ownership of original unknown.*

Figure 3: Photo source page from Cornwell, designed to illustrate the transparency of Sickert's art in describing his 'victims'

Figure 4: Spirit photograph, James Coates 1872

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Figure 10: Walter R. Sickert, *An Expensive Half Sovereign* 1931 (oil on canvas, col.)

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Figure 13: Walter Sickert, *As You Like It – A Theatrical Incident* 1937-8 (oil and canvas)

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Figure 17: Walter Sickert opening exhibition of the students of Bath June 1939. Islington Archives

Figure 18: Sickert in his studio with Lessore, 1938

Figure 19: Walter Sickert, *Portrait of Painters Grandmother Anne Sheepshanks of Tavistock Place London and London Road Reading* 1931-2 (oil on canvas)
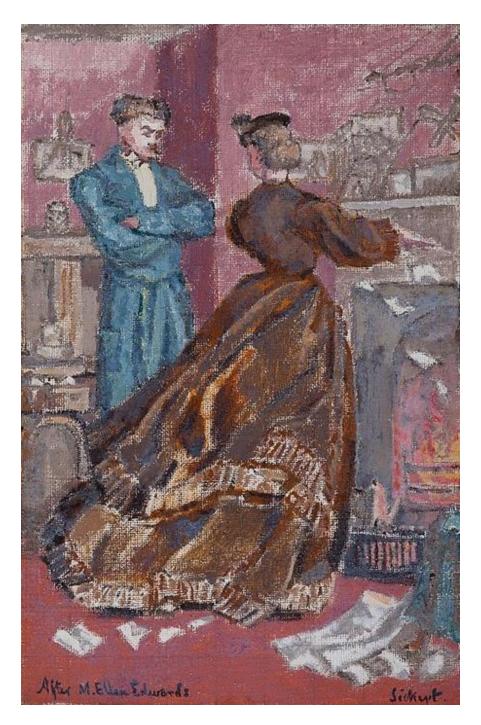
Figure 20: Walter Sickert, *The Holocaust* 1937 (oil on canvas)

Figure 21: Walter Sickert, *The Private View* 1930 (oil on canvas)
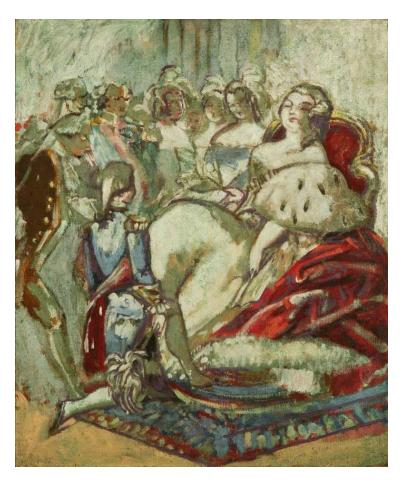
Figure 22: Walter Sickert, *The Young Englishman* 1933-4 (oil on canvas)
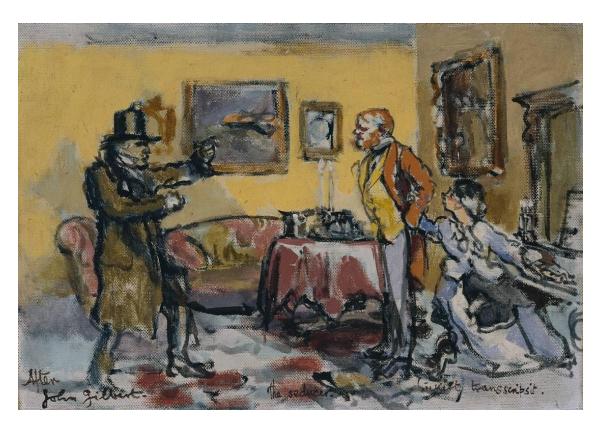
Figure 23: Walter Sickert, *The Seducer* 1928-30 (oil on canvas)
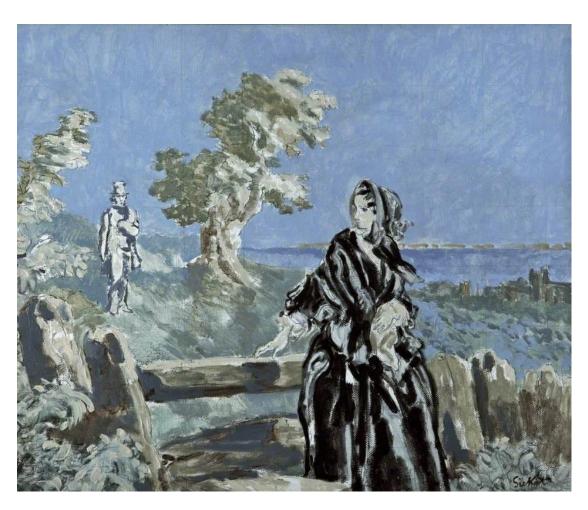
Figure 24: Walter Sickert, *Summer Lightning* 1931-2 (oil on canvas)

Figure 25: Rex Whistler, *The Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats* 1926-7 (mural)

Figure 26: Rex Whistler, *The Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats* 1926-7 [Detail]

A WOOD-ENGRAVING WHICH HAS BEEN "ECHOED" BY MR. RICHARD SICKERT IN ONE OF THE PAINTINGS REPRODUCED ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE: "THE UNEXPECTED RENCONTRE——" BY SIR JOHN GILBERT, WHO DID MUCH WORK FOR "THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS."

Figure 27: John Gilbert, 'The Unexpected Recontre,' published in *The Illustrated London News* (Tate Gallery Archives, London, wood engraving)

Figure 28: 'Click! Went the "Kodak"', advertisement in Punch, 30th May 1928
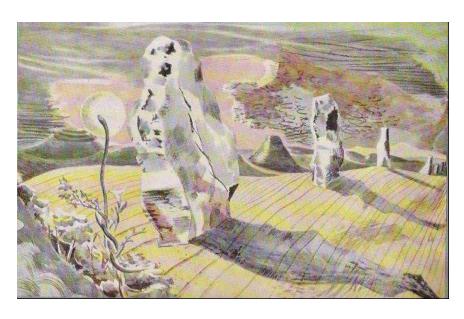
Figure 29: Paul Nash, *Landscape of the Megaliths* 1937 (colour lithograph)
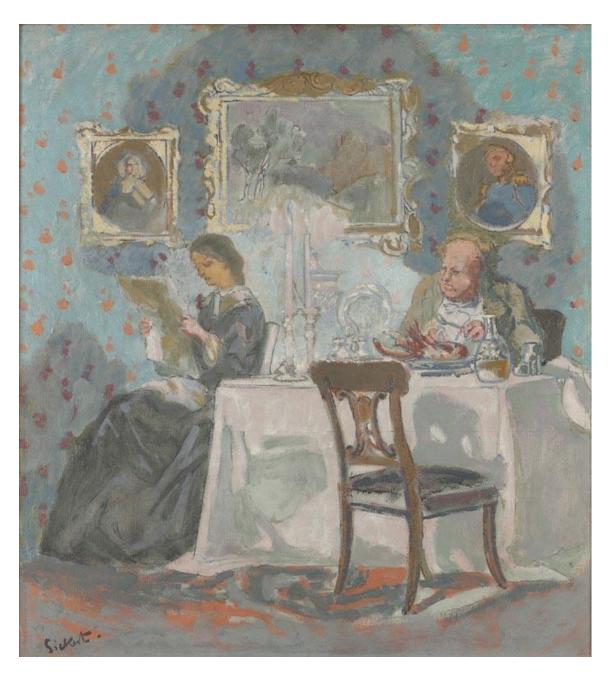
Figure 30: Walter Sickert, *The Woman's Sphere,* 1931-2 (oil on canvas)
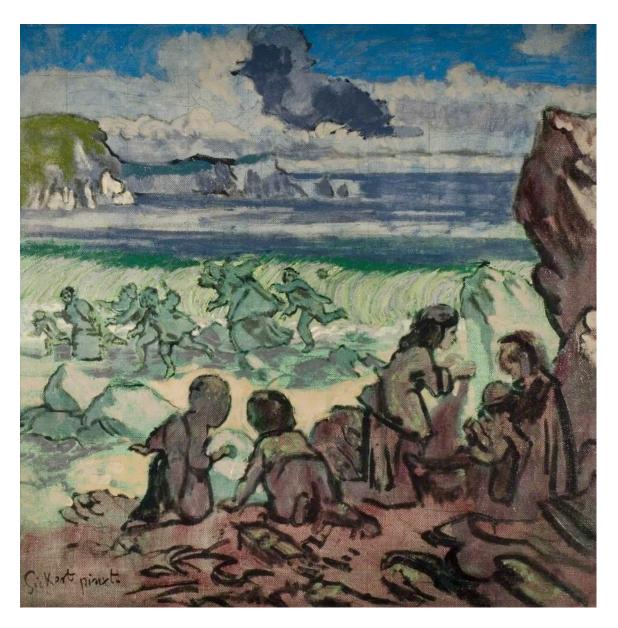
Figure 31: Walter Sickert, *The Wave* 1931-2 (oil on canvas)

[Several ancestral houses in the country are being converted into hikers' hostels.]

Holiday-maker (meeting the Family Ghost). "DO YOU HIKE?"

Ghost (haughtily). "NO, I WALK."

Figure 32: 'The modern hiker (in familiar uniform) meets the Olden Time ghost', in *Punch* 1932
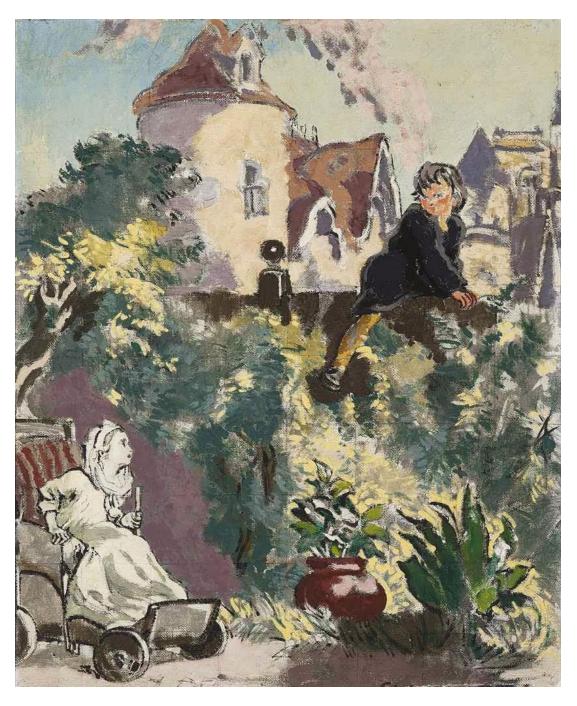
Figure 33: Walter Sickert, *The Gardener's Daughter* 1932-3 (oil on canvas)
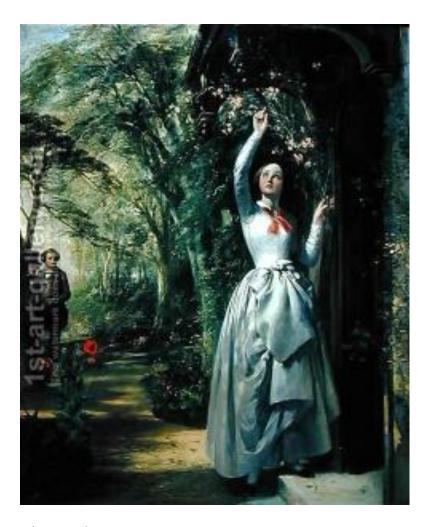
Figure 34: Frank Stone, *The Gardener's Daughter* 1850 (oil on canvas)
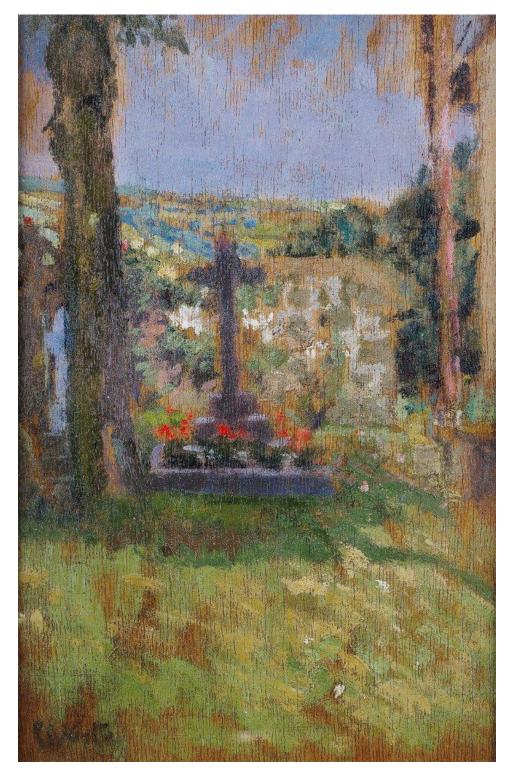
Figure 35: Walter Sickert, *Chagford Churchyard* 1916 (oil on canvas)

Figure 36: Walter Sickert, *Portrait of Painters Godmother Anne Sheepshanks of Tavistock Place London and London Road Reading* 1931-2 (oil on canvas)

Figure 37: Walter Sickert, *Queen Victoria and Grandson* 1934-6 (oil on canvas)

Figure 38: Walter Sickert, *Portrait of Degas in 1885* 1928 (oil on canvas)

Figure 39: Anonymous photographer (Barres), Edgar Degas(Profile) *carte de visite,* Dieppe c.1884 (photograph)

Figure 40: Walter Sickert, *The Raising of Lazarus* 1929-32 (oil on canvas)

Figure 41: Precedent photographic montage, Islington Family
Archives

Figure 42: Walter Sickert's Lay-figure, Bath Spa University

Figure 43: Augustus John, *Viscount D'Abernon* 1927-31

Figure 44: Rembrandt, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Deijman*, 1656 (oil on canvas, fragment)
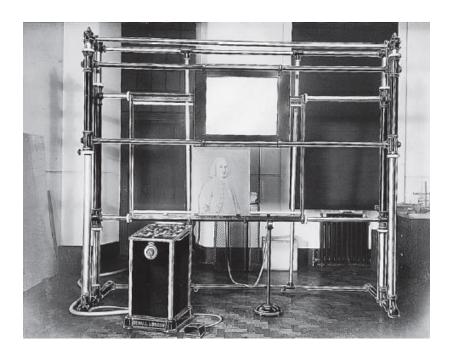
Figure 45: The equipment used for x-radiography at the National Gallery during the 1930s
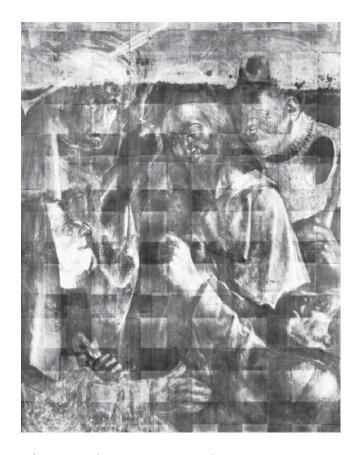
Figure 46: Bosch, *Christ Mocked* (NG 4744), Panel, 73.5 x 59.1cm

Figure 47: Walter Sickert, *The Raising of Lazarus* 1929-32 (oil on wall-paper)

Figure 48: Walter Sickert, *Miss Earhart's Arrival* 1932 (oil on canvas)

Figure 49: Walter Sickert, *Tichborne Claimant* c.1930 (oil on canvas)

Figure 50: Walter Sickert, *Baron Aloisi* 1936 (oil on canvas)

Figure 51: Tullio Crali, *Bombardamento-aereo* 1932 (oil on canvas)

Figure 52: C.R.W. Nevinson, *War in the Air*, 1918 (oil on canvas)

Figure 53: John Turnbull, *Air Fight*, 1919 (oil on canvas)
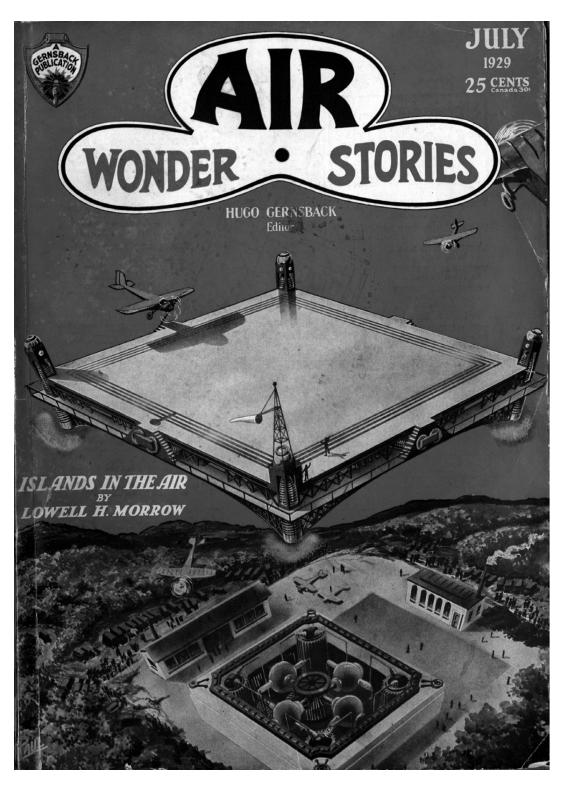
Figure 54: Frank R. Paul, *Air Wonder Stories*, no. 1 (1929), oil on board.
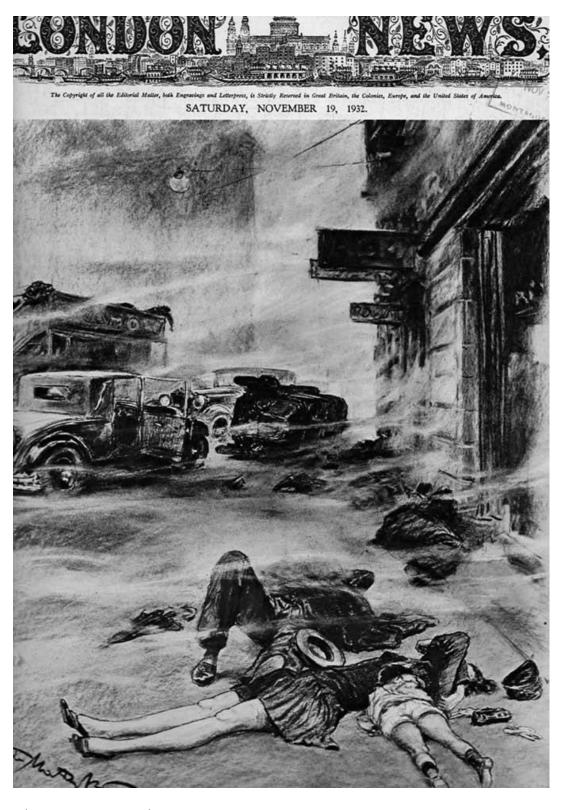
Figure 55: 'Aerial Gas Attack', front cover, *Illustrated London News,* 19 November 1932.
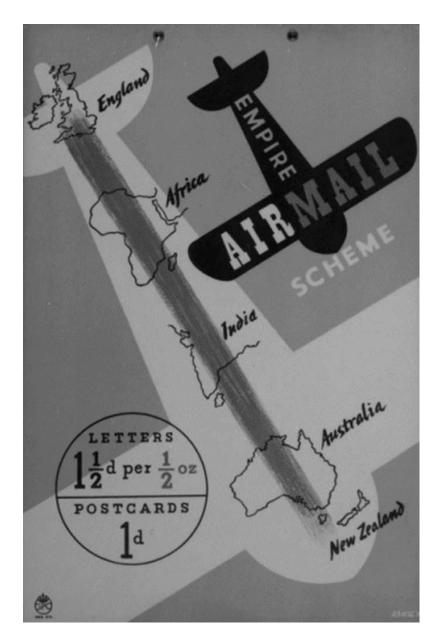
Figure 56: *Empire Air Mail Scheme*, Advertisement poster c. 1938.

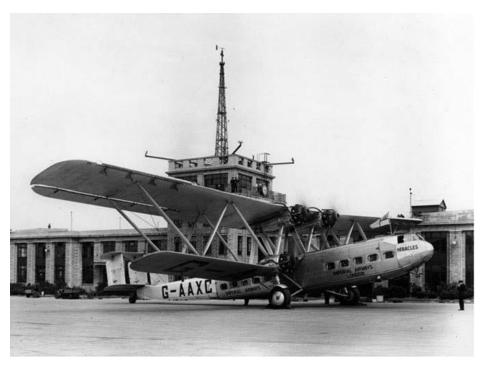Figure 57: Advertisement, poster for Imperial Airways, 1932.

Figure 58: Anon., stock photograph, Imperial Airways' Heracles
at Croydon Airport 1933.

Figure 59: Amelia Earhart, press glamour shot, 1932

Figure 60: Amelia Earhart, press glamour shot, 1932

Figure 61: 'Mr EDEN SAYS 'GOODBYE,' *The Daily Express* 19th August 1935 article

Figure 62: Front page [detail], *Daily Sketch*, 23 May 1932

Figure 63: Front page, *Daily Mirror*, 23 May 1932.

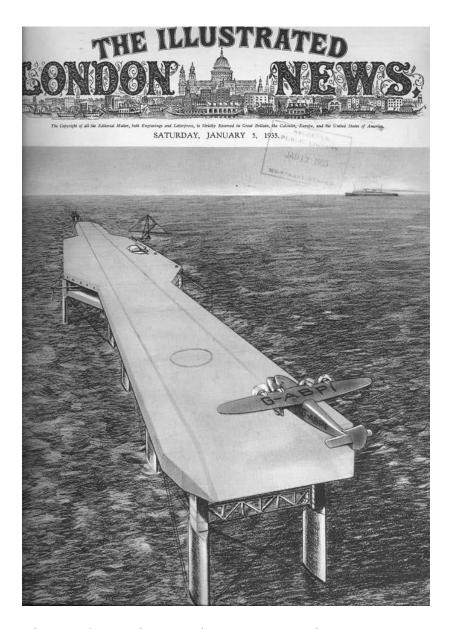Figure 64: [Detail] *Daily Sketch*, 31 May 1932.

Figure 65: 'Airport in the Atlantic,' front cover, *Illustrated London News*, 19 November 1935.

Figure 66: Walter Sickert, *Gallery at the Old Mogul* 1906 (oil on canvas)

Figure 67: John Sloan, *Movies, Five Cents* 1907 (oil on canvas)

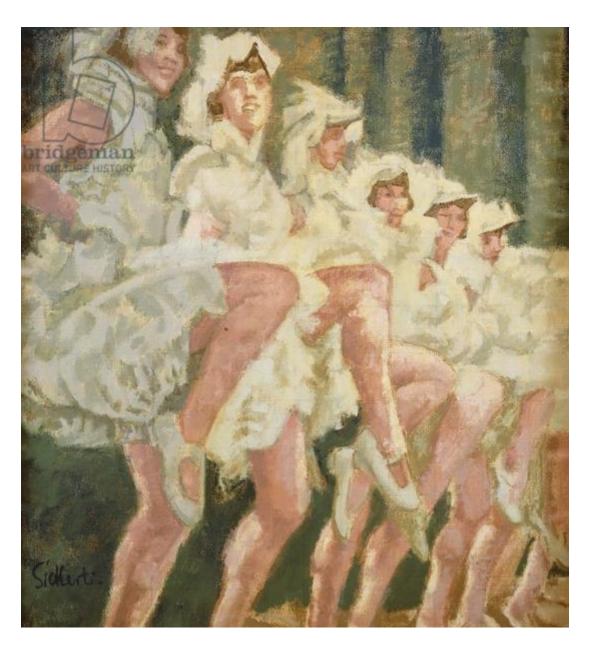Figure 68: Malcolm Drummond, *In the Cinema* 1913 (oil on canvas)

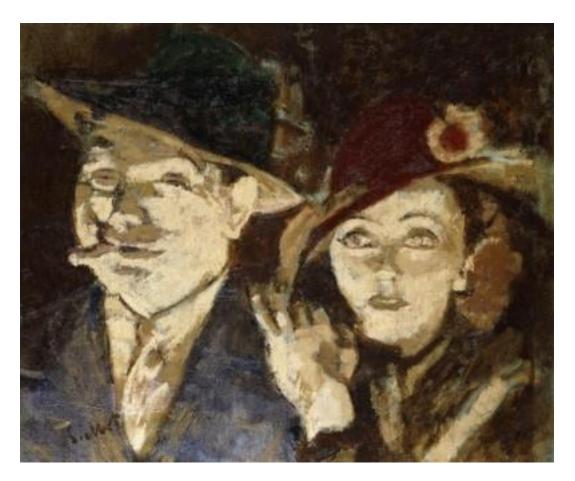Figure 69: Walter Sickert, *High Steppers* 1938-9 (oil on canvas)

Figure 70: Walter Sickert, *Jack and Jill* 1937-8 (oil on canvas)

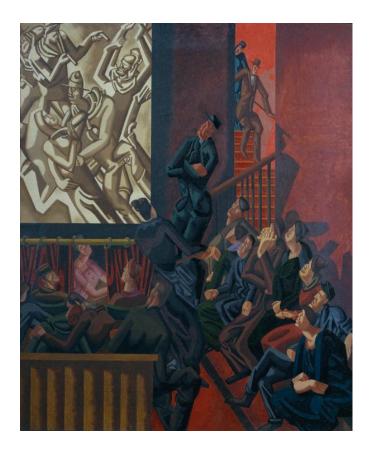Figure 71: Anonymous photographer, Promotional Card, *Bullets or Ballots* 1936 (photographic print on card, 8x10)

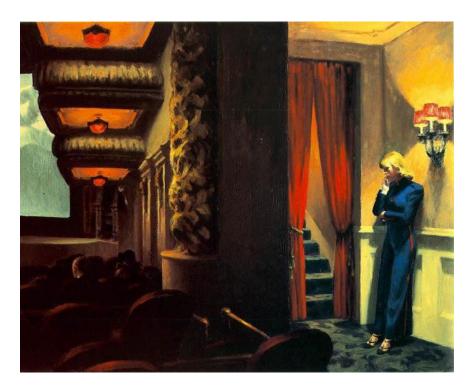Figure 72: William Roberts, *The Cinema* 1920 (oil on canvas)

Figure 73: Edward Hopper, *New York Movie* 1939 (oil on canvas)

Figure 74: Film stills, *Bullets or Ballots* promotional
trailer, 1936

Figure 75: Film Still, Alfred Hitchcock *Murder!* 1930

Figure 76: Walter Sickert, *La Louve* 1932 (oil on canvas)

Figure 77: John Singer Sargent, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth*
1889 (oil on canvas)

Figure 78: Walter Sickert, *A Conversation Piece at Aintree*
1929-30 (oil on canvas)

Figure 79: Still, *The Grand National 1924* 1924 News Reel, held in the British Pathé's archives

Figure 80: Stills, *The Grand National 1924* 1924 News Reel, held in the British Pathé's archives

SICKERT PORTRAIT OF THE KING AND THE PHOTOGRAPH FROM WHICH IT WAS PAINTED
Mr. Richard Sickert's finely impressionist study in oils of the King (on left) to be shown privately at the Lefevre Galleries, King Street, St. James's, and, on right, the newspaper photograph from which the portrait was painted. The King was photographed talking to Major Fetherstonhaugh, his racing manager, during a Grand National at Aintree

Figure 81: 'Photograph of George V and his racing manager, beside the painting upon which it was based', Daily Express 23 Dec 1930

Figure 82: Walter Sickert, *H.M. King Edward VIII* 1936

Figure 83: Still from Edward's first broadcast as King, the Pathé Gazette news reel, 1936

Figure 84: Walter Sickert, *The Duke of Windsor*, 1936-7

Figure 85: Still, newsreel, "King Edward VIII addresses the nation," British Pathé 1936