

University of East London Institutional Repository: <http://roar.uel.ac.uk>

This paper is made available online in accordance with publisher policies. Please scroll down to view the document itself. Please refer to the repository record for this item and our policy information available from the repository home page for further information.

To see the final version of this paper please visit the publisher's website. Access to the published version may require a subscription.

Author(s): Humm, Maggie.

Article Title: Vanessa Bell's Photographs: Modernism, the Maternal and the Erotic

Year of publication: 2002

Citation: Humm, M. (2002) 'Vanessa Bell's Photographs: Modernism, the Maternal and the Erotic', Published in Hansom, P. (ed.) Literary Modernism and Photography, Praeger, 2002 pp. 93-106.

Published version available from:

<http://www.greenwood.com/catalog/C7130.aspx>

ISBN: 0-275-97130-9

DOI: 10.1336/0275971309

Publisher statement: (not stated)

Information on how to cite items within roar@uel:

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/roar/openaccess.htm#Citing>

Vanessa Bell's Photographs: Modernism, the Maternal and the Erotic

Introduction

In November 1896 Vanessa Stephen, then aged seventeen, wrote to her sister Virginia describing a trip to Amiens which Vanessa made together with Thoby their brother. "We took a lot of photographs, but we haven't had time to develop any yet. We had chocolate and rolls in our rooms at about 8.30, luncheon at 12 of about 6 courses and dinner at 7. On Saturday we went to a very improper French play" (6). Bell's desire to describe her photographs first, before mentioning the potentially more fascinating "French play", suggests how important photography was to both herself and Virginia. 1896 was also the year in which Vanessa began drawing classes first with Ebenezer Cooke, then with Sir Arthur Cope, R.A. Bell's new attention to the combined visual spaces of canvas and viewfinder suggest that, for Bell, photographs would have a far greater visual value than simply as documents of holiday moments. Indeed photography became a passionate part of Bell's life. Throughout her entire career as an innovative modernist painter, Bell took, developed and mounted over 1,000 photographs into family albums.

In what follows, I look first at the gender specifics of modernism and domestic photography, then at the occlusion and misrepresentation of Bell's photography by art historians and her children, then at the impact of Roger Fry and Julia Margaret Cameron on Bell's work, and finally at Bell's photographs in detail and issues of objectification and the maternal. Vanessa Bell's photography provides an appropriate point at which to briefly examine broader issues of visibility and gender in modernism. For example, it is generally agreed that one of the key figures of modernity is the flaneur, or observing male stroller, free to move about the public space and be able to direct his gaze equally at women and at goods for sale. Griselda Pollock in Vision and Difference (1988) that the sexual politics of looking in modernist paintings, for example Manet's Olympia, utilise binary positions of looking/being seen, activity/passivity in which women figures are passive, the objects of an implied male voyeuristic gaze. But if modernism's most distinctive visual feature is an implied male spectator then what role has a female spectator? Can a female spectator/photographer produce a different way of looking?

The relation of Bell's photography, gender and modernism requires me to unpack this issue of how women and men look in modernism a little more. As the art historian Charles

Harrison argues, in 'Degas' Bathers and Other People', this issue was central to the "first period of the development of modernism in painting –say in the fifty years between 1860-1910" (57). Harrison suggests that by the 1870s, "the modernity of a painting's composition would be recognised by its representations of looking" (61). For Degas (as for Bell I would argue), photography furnished him with "powerful resources" for a critique of naturalistic conventions. But while photography could provide a modernist anti-naturalistic resource this leaves untouched the issue of gender. Certainly Bell's male contemporaries thought photography visually insignificant. Clive Bell, Vanessa's husband and one of Bloomsbury's leading critics of Post-Impressionism, dismissed photographs because "we expect a work of plastic art to have more in common with a piece of music than a coloured photograph" (349). Indeed Simon Watney in his landmark study of English Post-Impressionism argues that throughout this period, photography "served in England to define negatively what art was not" (20). In Fiction in the Age of Photography Nancy Armstrong goes further to argue that "the modernist concept of authenticity was a post-photographic way of imagining one's relation to the real" (246). It is true that photography frequently arranges space and figures in a two-dimensional surface narrative. As Graham Clark points out in The Photograph "the literal nature of so much photography would seem to place it at the opposite end of modernist aesthetics and philosophical inquiry" (110).

But, from a feminist perspective, Griselda Pollock in Differencing the Canon alternatively argues that modernist criticism should read "for the inscriptions of the other otherness of femininity , that is for those traces of the unexpected articulation of what may be specific to female persons in the process of becoming subjects- subjected, subjectified and subjectivised – in the feminine through the interplay of social identities and psychic formations within histories" (102). Domestic photography is a prime site of such "traces". Recurring features of Bell's photographs can be read as a photographic means of representing stratum of feminine subjectivity as I shall argue later in analysis of Bell's photographs. I feel that Bell's obsession with domestic photography (like many other modernist women) is a deliberate engagement in a form of representation outside of modernist formalism. If modernist women are said to write a modernism of the margins then domestic photography, the marginalia of the margins, occupies an odd conceptual space in any account of modernism (Friedman 1986). This is because domestic photography's properties, particularly in the hands of a skilled artist

like Bell, are often derivative of high art pictorialism and yet domestic photography carries the burden of the psychic in unique ways. Such composite image/texts both expose and resist modernist purity with autobiographical traces. In many ways modernist women's albums match Kaja Silverman's description of the ideal visual text as one enacting "heteropathic recollection" (185). That is to say, the heterogeneity of Bell's albums raise questions about art, memory and subjectivity. My intent is not to argue that photo albums possess some hitherto unrecognised authority, but rather that Bell's consistent attention to a continuum of visual media opens up a space for new ways of thinking about the visual and the psychic in modernism.

Bell's albums

The significance of Bell's photography derives partly from the significant place which photography occupies in Bell's life, letters and art. Bell's first camera, the Frena, introduced into Britain in 1892, was a film-pack camera. The Frena's technology was difficult to manipulate and required a careful camera operator. Bell's early photographs, for example of Queen Victoria's funeral, were not always successful. "The Frena went wrong somehow and they [the photographs] were not even taken" (7). Bell's later vest-pocket Kodak was an inexpensive light camera particularly popular with women. The Photographic News reported, in September 1905, that "thousands of Birmingham girls are scattered about the holiday resorts of Britain this month, and a very large percentage of them are armed with cameras" (Coe and Gates 28). Not only were the Stephen sisters dedicated practitioners but Vanessa and Virginia often wrote about photography. In a constant exchange of photographs Vanessa, Virginia and their women friends seem to be reinforcing their friendships and their identities particularly that of the maternal. Vanessa wishes "to gaze at the most beautiful of Aunt Julia's [Julia Margaret Cameron] photographs incessantly", the photograph of Vanessa and Virginia's dead mother (67). Photographs helped Bell to be maternal. Writing to Duncan Grant (her one time lover and father of her daughter Angelica) as "Rodent" in 1919, Bell tried to bring Duncan and Angelica close to her with photographs. "I've got some very good photographs of her [Angelica] and the other children which I'll bring up to show you" (232). Photographs were also an important aide-memoire. In 1938 Bell pleaded with Virginia Woolf "as for the Italian churches, etc: you meet with en route. I hope you're taking snaps of them. I find them more difficult to believe in than the patient spinsters" (445).

Bell's albums, like most family albums, preserve family moments: at Charleston, holidays at Studland, Cassis and elsewhere as well as portraits of family and friends. But the scale, range and constant repetition of these moments and portraits must also in some way preserve Bell's psychic and imaginative visual landscapes. Her images demand fresh ways of looking, readings which can draw on biography, psychoanalysis and cultural contexts. In her art Bell crossed multiple genres: portraiture, still life, collage, murals, ceramics, textiles, book designs at the Omega workshops and decorations at her homes in Asheham, Charleston and Bloomsbury. Similarly Bell's photographs have an equivalent multigeneric quality.

Conventional art history would describe such diversity teleologically, as if Bell 'progressed' from inferior amateur photo to professional high art abstract portrait. The art historian Richard Shone constructs Bell as a modernist in this way by privileging her paintings in his account of Bell's work (231). Even Val Williams's pioneering introduction to twentieth century British women's photography The Other Observers devalues Bell by calling her an "amateur snapshot" photographer and falsely claiming that Bell neither developed nor enlarged her work (79). Rather than being an "amateur", Bell's constant devotion to a range of photographic genres signals instead an attention to non-painterly experiences and viewpoints which could be artistically liberatory. Bell's éclectic switching from monumental portrait to banal snapshot may not be a sign of amateur 'slippage' but rather a mark of differentiation, a way of representing her subjects and herself with different connotations than only those of high art modernism. The album format allowed Bell to hold together the aesthetic with the personal and alerts us to the gendered nature of modernism. But the very ordinariness of photo albums is precisely what makes albums at once so potent as purveyors of gendered aesthetics, in the sense that albums are usually compiled by women, and so hard to read. Like other modernist women, including Gertrude Stein and Dorothy Richardson, Vanessa Bell seems to share an interest in, and preference for, the everyday repetitive moment, for serial forms as much as an interest in singular work. While some critics argue that repetition is the antithesis of modernism's defamiliarization of the everyday because repetition is an attempt to control time, Eysteinnsson claims that women modernists for example Gertrude Stein turn "repetition into a joyous mode of defamiliarization" (156). Bell's own discussion of the structure and syntax of repetitive photographs in her letters shows that, in Bell's mind photographs can be read as carefully as any other art. Thanking her daughter

Angelica in 1914 for returning Vanessa's 'snap-shots', Bell conceptualizes photographs. "I see two of mine came out, to my surprise. It's a pity they aren't better focussed as the composition is rather lovely. Some of those of you feeding A. almost had the effect of cinema on me, one seemed to see the movement going on from one to another" (483). Like other modernists, for example James Joyce and H. D., Bell loved cinema going and was fully aware of film's stylistic devices such as montage.

That the role of photography in Vanessa Bell's oeuvre is ignored or misrepresented by art historians is perhaps predictable because domestic photography is non-canonical. But particular choices of Bell's photographs by her children Quentin Bell and Angelica Garnett for their jointly compiled Vanessa Bell's Family Album (1981) is also hugely selective. The book is prefaced by an amusing, but very unrepresentative photograph of Vanessa photographing while wearing an immaculate and incongruous white hat and frilly pinafore. This image overemphasizes Bell's femininity, domesticity and class at the expense of her professional artistic expertise. Second, many photographs are badly cropped from the original sizes in the Tate Gallery Albums. The effect of the cropping is to distort Bell's careful artistic compositions which often utilize space, framing and distance in novel ways. It is true that Bell's photographs employ various conventions and genres and are too slippery to easily fit into the modernist paradigm of a progressive careerist's 'experiments'.

In a sense, Bell's very écclecticism, together with her devotion to seriality provides a key to answering questions about gender and modernism. Domestic photography is a gendered process because it often naturalises the social attributes of femininity. What I think we witness in the albums of Vanessa Bell and her sister Virginia Woolf are the tensions of gendered modernism: the ways in which everyday reality is a necessarily more contingent force in the thinking of women artists and writers and the ways in which this contingency might be represented artistically in repetitive, as well as écclectic forms particularly in domestic photography. As Laurence Rickels argues in Aberrations of Mourning the relation of photographic image to referent is always exceeded by seriality in photographic copies and this might productively admit he suggests 'the phantoms of photography which thus emerge on the other side of their pocket graves' (359). What I think Rickels means by seriality and photography is the idea that when photographs are multiplied (as in albums) we tend to look at photographs less for their referential qualities and more for possible references to the

presumed mentalities of photographer or subjects. Like the albums of her sister Virginia Woolf, Bell's albums 'pocket graves' resonate with the maternal.

Inevitably any art practice, whether a high art oil painting or domestic photography, is shaped by the dominant discourses into which it inserts itself, that is to say art practices have to dialogue, consciously or unconsciously, with available artistic conventions and 'permitted' ideological representations. And as Paul Hansom acutely pointed out to me, the very desire to produce art has its own psycho-class logic. To some extent Bell's albums must be shaped by her cultural milieu. The two Post-Impressionist exhibitions organised by the painter and critic Roger Fry, Vanessa's friend and one time lover, deliberately challenged traditional aesthetic tastes and values, and were described by Fry's contemporary Desmond MacCarthy as the Art Quake of 1910. For Bell, the impact of the Post-Impressionist exhibitions, was professionally as well as personally dramatic. Matisse's Le Luxe II inspired Bell's The Tub and her use of anti naturalistic colour as well as featureless mask-like faces (Robins 89). Similarly Picasso's Jars With Lemon and Gaughin's paintings are acknowledged sources of Bell's palette of colours and heavy outlines (Robins 104). It would be likely that such a period of intense interest in European modernism would similarly impact on Bell's photography. For example, Picasso's collages, his papier collé, might equally be a source of Bell's eclectic, free photographic compositions just as Isabelle Anscombe argues that Picasso's collages are the sources of Bell's Omega workshop marquetry (109).

But while a crucial technical and artistic inspiration, Fry's modernist aesthetics were, in some ways, in conflict with Bell's eclectic everyday vision. One of the central themes of Fry's modernism was an impulse to purify art. Although Christopher Reed, the art historian and cataloguer of the Courtauld Fry Collection, is now reclaiming the later Fry, in Vision and Design Roger Fry carefully distinguishes what he calls "natural life" from the superior "imaginative life" (24). Representations, according to Fry, have a self-contained, self-sufficient nature which could be understood through formal rules of perception. This shift in interest from the external world to the art product, to art rather than life, is problematic for a woman artist and photographer busily narrativizing the domestic. Fry's disciplined aesthetic vision seeking the pure experience of art was resistant to narrative. But the problem, for Bell, was one of reconciling formalism with intensely domestic and familial subjects and subjectivity, and her recognition that photographs always refer to life beyond the image.

In a very general way, photographs, particularly portraits, represent social and psychic relations as much as formal expressive relations. The act of selecting photographs for a family album impacts on different issues than the formally aesthetic including the significance of Bell's gaze as a camera operator and album compiler. Neither do family albums fit comfortably into the conventions of photographic theory which tends to fetishize the individual photograph and the individual photographer. As Patricia Holland argues, albums are repetitive, feminine forms (in as much as albums are most often constructed by women) not collections of seminal, masculine images (9). Indeed Pierre Bourdieu claims that photography albums preserve fictional versions of the gendered world, because photography albums immortalize a false sense of the psychic and social significance of each family group (129). In addition, as Walter Benjamin suggests, the enlargement of snapshots (Bell's constant album activity), reveals "entirely new structural formations of the subject [...] the camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses" (238-9). For example Bell's photographs of her children match Benjamin's idea that a modernist perception involves the reciprocal gaze 'the person we look at or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in return' than they match Fry or Bell's notion of a pure modernist disinterested (188).

Vanessa Bell's inclusion of the out-of-focus photograph together with careful portraits suggests wider familial and historical influences. Bell's first act, on leaving her father Leslie Stephen's family home for 46 Gordon Square, was to hang on her walls Julia Margaret Cameron's Victorian photographs of the Stephen family. Julia Margaret Cameron, Vanessa's great aunt, photographed many Victorian notables including Tennyson, Browning, Longfellow and Herschel together with family portraits between 1864 and Cameron's death in Ceylon in 1879. Throughout her career Cameron placed photographs in album compilation like those of Bell and Woolf. Violet Hamilton describes how from 1866 Cameron gave albums to family and close friends and sent others to Colnaghi, her London dealer (26). Although, unlike Bell and Woolf, Cameron gave whole album pages to individual portraits, she also bound her albums with purple and red ribbons like those similarly interlacing Woolf's Monk House Albums. Just as Bell and Woolf gave photographs to their family servant Sophie Farrell so Cameron gave her nanny at Freshwater small scale copies of Cameron's photographs and pencil sketches for a scrapbook. Bell matched Cameron's subjects and topics for example, photographing her daughter Angelica dressed as the actress Ellen Terry for Freshwater

Woolf's play about Cameron in which Vanessa herself played Cameron. The portraits of Angelica as Sasha taken to illustrate Woolf's Orlando somewhat resembles Cameron's notable A Study for the Cenci in May 1868. Talia Schaffer suggests that Angelica poses in a similar position and Bell places her in Eastern clothing against a muted background much like Cameron's portraits (43).

Bell's photographs are familial and autobiographically revealing in a wider psychic sense than simply as imitations of Cameron's portraits. In Modern Life and Modern Subjects Lisa Tickner discusses Bell's paintings of Studland Beach, painted at the same time as the photographs. Tickner notes "a certain psychological intensity" in the work and that Bell's abstractions and their "perverse melancholy" entail some form of "secondary revision" (121). Tickner goes on to suggest, very convincingly, that Studland Beach's dreamlike quality has to do with a "psychic charge that links Studland with Julia", Vanessa's mother (141). Encouraged by Tickner's turn from a formal reading of Bell's paintings, I feel that the photographs of Studland Beach also project psychological intensity, albeit in a tangential way to Tickner's discovery of maternal metaphors.

Two photographs vividly encapsulate this theme. Album 1 contains two photographs of Clive Bell, Vanessa's husband, together with Virginia Woolf taken at Studland Beach in 1910. In both photographs Clive and Virginia collude with Vanessa's gaze but both are passive and unsmiling. If we take the idea of each photograph as an image operative in terms of psychic signs we can look at what the patterns and arrangements of signs might reveal about Bell. In each scene the figures almost exactly mirror each other in positionality. Both sitters have right arms parallel to lower leg and both bend their right legs at the same angle. Such parallelism is reinforced by a pairing of shoes to the right of the frame as well as beach huts to the rear. In one photograph the raised seams of Virginia's gloves parallel the swollen veins of Clive's downward pointing hands. The deliberate parallelism of the gloves and the hand suggest a psychic 'excess'.

Bell's photographs depict Clive and Virginia's bodies not only realistically but also in intense parallelism as if Clive and Virginia's relationship is being unconsciously represented by Bell. After the birth of Vanessa's first child Julian in February 1908, Clive and Vanessa interrupted their sex life and Clive began to flirt with Virginia. Hermione Lee suggests that "from this time - May of 1908 - they began to play a game of intimacy and intrigue which lasted

for perhaps two years", that is until the Studland photographs of 1910 (249). The Studland photographs carry this hidden psychic narrative. Bell grapples, consciously or unconsciously, with psychic dilemmas which emerge in the repetitions and patterning of each image. As W.J.T. Mitchell suggests in Picture Theory, an account of the literary and textual aspects of picture theories, photographs can equally project a private point of view and materialize "a memory trace embedded in the context of personal associations" (301).

In other photographs Bell does adopt schema consistent with art conventions. For example some photographs forefront, in a sophisticated way, the surface opacity of the photographic image. Light creates figuration in Bell's photograph of Oliver Strachey, Lytton's brother, with a halo of light surrounding Strachey's head at Asheham (Album 2: 16). Bell deftly places her light source exactly at face level creating chiaroscuro for the lower figure - and endows Strachey with a sacral significance a technique common in Renaissance painting which Bell much admired. In the same album (2) the painters Walter Sickert and Roger Fry pose formally at Newington in 1913, each near a garden pillar capped with a round ball, at opposite sides of the frame. The photograph carefully places frame, volume and plane in tension with the figures in a structural form. Bell creates a parallelism between Fry and Sickert's very different body shapes (Fry is tall and thin and Sickert short and stout) by using formal perspective projection. She suggests a visual counterpointing and association between the figures through her structural composition and figure positioning.

In Album 3 Fry is photographed at Guildford in 1914 from a particularly low vantage point. The photograph has a symbolic, architectural energy. Fry's face is a central mass contrasting with the lines of his chair and the garden wall. There is space and depth in these photographs whose three-dimensional quality reveal Bell's sure knowledge of formal spacing and line. A similar relationship between figure and object is repeated in Bell's paintings, for example The Tub of 1917, about which Vanessa wrote to Roger Fry "I've been working at my big bath picture and am rather excited about that. I've taken out the woman's chemise and in consequence she is quite nude and much more decent" (209). While The Tub may draw on Matisse's Le Lux I, and Bell may have known Degas' Le Tub (1886), Frances Spalding's more detailed observation of the painting whose bath tub "so severely tilted up towards the picture plane that it creates an almost perfect circle", could be an exact description of the tub position in Bell's photographs (171).

Family tableaux and window framing are common pictorial devices which show Bell's understanding of artistic codes. But Bell's repetitions and her enlargements of particular photographs suggests the presence of other tensions than simply Bell's facility in translating painting codes into photography. Why did Bell need to represent herself as Madonna so frequently? Why are window frames so deliberately evident? As Frances Spalding points out the window motif "may reflect on her need for domestic security and on the protected position from which, because of her sex and class, she viewed the world" (153). But also the photograph of her mother Julia Stephen which Bell treasured most of all, is a photograph in which Julia is leaning against a window. In addition Julia Margaret Cameron's major portraits are of women as Madonnas. There is a constant synchronisation of the psychic, the pressure of the autobiographical, together with art conventions throughout Bell's work. To try to fit Bell's repeated photographic and pictorial motifs neatly within a formal modernism negates the pressure of the psychic which equally shapes Bell's work. It is as if two languages often co-exist in the photographs. As Roland Barthes argues in his analysis of photographic messages, photographs can create a "free exchange" of messages. Barthes' example is of the way in which photographs always contain "denotation", that is mythical uncoded messages and "connotation" or specific messages (19). Bell's photographs problematize modernist connotations with autobiographical denotations.

That tension between formalism and expressivity, between artistic convention and intimate autobiography becomes immediately a more problematic issue in Bell's photographs of her naked children. A fresh and powerful engagement with issues of childhood in literature, the arts and education marks Bell's moment of modernity. As Fineberg points out there were many exhibitions of child art at the turn of the century and artists looked at how children drew "as a stimulus to their own work" (5). The American modernist photographer Alfred Stieglitz promoted an exhibition of children's drawings in 1912 at his Little Galleries, Fifth Avenue which a contemporary Sadakichi Hartmann claimed "was like a commentary on modern art ideas, it recalled some elemental qualities that art has lost and which might do much, if attainable at all, to imbue it with a fresh and exquisite virility" (644). In 1917 Roger Fry wrote articles and exhibition catalogues promoting children's drawings collected by their tutor Marion Richardson. Almost all the modernist movements including expressionists, cubists, futurists and the artists of the avant-garde Russian movements all hung the art of children alongside

their own pioneering exhibitions in the early years of the century. Modernist photography shared this enthusiasm. For example Edward Weston made nude studies of his children particularly Torso of Neil in 1925. Clarence White placed naked boys in classical settings in his Boys Wrestling 1908 and Alice Boughton made nude compositions of children in Nude 1909.

The physical and mental well being of children were key issues of concern to educationists at the beginning of the twentieth century. 'Mothercraft' was introduced into the English language in 1907 by Dr John Sykes, founder of the St Pancras School for Mothers, in his concern for infant mortality. J.M. Barrie's Peter and Wendy was published in 1911 by which time Peter Pan "had become such a universally acclaimed cultural phenomenon" and itself had an authorized school edition in 1915 (Rose 47). Women writers shared this ongoing and interconnected interest in child psychology and development. Five of Alice Meynell's twelve books of essays, in particular The Children (1897) and Childhood (1913) "invoke a behavioural rhetoric close to contemporary child psychology "(Frawley 35). Meynell subsequently wrote an introduction to a collection of Cameron's photographs. Bell was herself interested in early childhood development and education and attempted to set up and teach a nursery school at Charleston. Together with Clive Bell, Vanessa painted a nursery at 33 Fitzroy Square.

But the first and important thing to say about Bell's photographs of her naked son Julian, as well as those of her other children Quentin and Angelica, is that Bell only begins to photograph her son naked, not conventionally as an infant but as a young male approximately eight years old. In Album 2 there are erotic photographs of Julian alone spread-eagled across the French windows at Asheham, emphasizing the spectacular quality of his to-be-looked-at young, firm body. Other powerful photographs, again taken at Asheham in 1914, place Julian in chiaroscuro, half-hidden under a shadow of dappled leaves just touching his penis. Sunlight falls on Julian's belly and his face is partly in shadow. The photograph does forefront what Abigail Solomon-Godeau calls a typical erotics of the fragmentary (263). That is to say the photograph isolates parts of Julian's body in a sexually coded way - a common convention in pornographic photography . Two slightly later photographs continue to utilise these devices. In one Julian stands, legs apart, pensively looking downwards away from camera while sunlight falls fully on his naked figure. In the other Julian and Quentin are rolling naked

together on the lawn with Julian poised over Quentin lips distended as if to kiss. The whiteness of both boys' bodies gives each child a further to-be-looked-at specular quality. Such photographs evoke what Jacqueline Rose describes as "the necessary presence of the one who is watching" (3). In a later photograph, Angelica's friend Judith Bagenal is photographed lying prone, her arm obscuring her face. She is objectified, as it were 'available' to a spectator's gaze since Bell obliterates any specificity of daily objects and clothes. Quentin Bell remembers the chemist Boots' refusal to print certain of Bell's photographs "would Mrs Bell please mark those rolls of film which contained images unsuitable for the eyes of the young ladies" (Garnett 10).

The last decade dramatically highlighted issues about the representations of children's naked bodies and how we should spectate or not spectate such bodies. The problematic nature of spectating naked children currently occupies many disciplines including psychoanalysis and legal studies as well as art history. Many contemporary women photographers also frequently use their own and friends' children as naked models for example Sally Mann, Alice Sims, and Susan Copen Oken. Sally Mann photographs the daily lives of her three children in intimate poses and scenes for example a wet bed or her girls' mimicry of women's make-up and appearance. The children's naked presences are substantial and full of vitality. They are self-possessed caught with an "utterly characteristic thought" in collusion with the mother as camera operator (Price 79). Mann's photographs, like Bell's, "explore the nature of family love, maternal love and child response" through sequencing the developmental processes of childhood (80). The images are corporeal but the sequencing and development of Mann's images produce scripted narratives of childhood rather than voyeuristic distancing.

Similarly Bell's children are clearly comfortable in her world. While, as Lindsay Smith rightly points out, the child's relation to the album is compounded by a lack of agency, the juxtaposition of sometimes out of focus snapshot with erotic portrait in the albums, unsettles the erotic photographic gaze (5). Bell's photographs of childhood narcissism could as easily be read as reflecting back to the child the narcissism he so earnestly desires and needs to perform. As Jacqueline Rose argues in the context of writing "it is a way of 'knowing' the child. Loving the child and knowing the child - the idea is one of an innocent attachment" (20). Bell photographs reciprocal moments, interconnections between her children and between

Bell and her children. Each child seems to exchange what anthropologists would call the intersubjective moment. As I read them, Bell's photographs are innocently erotic because she portrays the children as children complete with their dirtiness, their awkward gestures and pretences at adulthood even if the sheer saturation of their bodies moves in another direction. There is no soft focus, no glycerine, no muslin obscuring their world. Bodies are not isolated in tight spaces, subjected to harsh illumination or an unreturnable gaze.

Often in Bell's photographs it is children, not adults who have an active gaze for example in the photograph of a naked Angelica standing next to the fully clothed Roger Fry. Angelica looks actively at Fry while Fry is carefully not observing the naked girl. The photograph does not centre any implied relation between clothed adult male and naked girl since Fry avoids the gaze. Kaja Silverman describes how, psychoanalytically, the mother/daughter relationship is one of identification and desire and the endless interchangeability of their positions (132). Reading Bell's photograph from within Silverman's framework it could be said that the photograph shows the possibility of interchangeable subject/object viewing positions with Angelica substituting for Bell rather than voyeurism. Vanessa might be describing Angelica as an erotic stand-in for Bell in a letter to Roger Fry in 1923. "I send you a photograph of myself and Angelica to remind you that any rate that there is one very lovely and witty and brilliant and charming creature to be seen in Gordon Square" (273). There is a harmony of counterpoint in the photograph achieved by Bell's careful spatial composition which brings the two figures into a visual dialogue. The photograph is frontal. Bell brings Angelica and Fry visually towards the foreground into an area of potential intimacy but keeps each sufficiently apart. The contrapuntal difference of the naked Angelica and fully clothed Fry is counterbalanced by their opposite relation to Bell's point of view. Modernism offered Bell aesthetic co-ordinates and by aestheticising the potential voyeurism of camera/spectator Bell is able to safely handle the potentially erotic image.

Vanessa Bell's photographs seem to function simultaneously as creative prequels to paintings, as formal artistic representations in themselves, and as autobiographical and emotive expressions of her psychic and family concerns. These functions are not necessarily antinomic to each other but reveal the tensions of a woman modernist. Vanessa Bell's albums are marginal to conventional art history but a particularly pertinent site of struggles between the public and the private, between the formally expressive and the everyday

moment which occur in other modernist women's work. Vanessa Bell's photography brings into modernism's formalism the autobiographically repetitive and other identifications. As Luce Irigaray suggests, identification "is never simply active or passive, but rather frustrates that opposition by the economy of repetition that it puts 'into play'" (77). Bell's everyday 'playful' world with her children at Charleston interacts with modernist aesthetics in Bell's work not only in terms of subject matter (the albums mixture of formal monumental portraits together with expressive snapshots) but in each albums' composition in itself, Bell weaves together her public and private aesthetics through repetition.

From a feminist perspective, it could be argued that Bell perhaps turned so frequently to photography because photography allowed her the freedom of duality. While paintings also contain multiple meanings albums, in particular, are by definition intensely personal, acknowledging the everyday repetitive world of women and children while at the same time Bell's albums contain experimental portraits offering a testing bed for Bell to judge the 'significant form' of her subsequent paintings. Bell's combination of the repetitive personal with the avant-garde make her albums a representative site of gendered modernism.

Works Cited

- Anscombe, Isabelle Omega and After. London: Thames and Hudson, 1981.
- Armstrong, Nancy Fiction in the Age of Photography. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999
- Barthes, Roland Image-Music-Text (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977)
- Bell, Clive Art. London: Chatto and Windus, 1914.
- Bell, Vanessa Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell. ed. Regina Marler. London: Bloomsbury, 1993.
- Benjamin, Walter Illuminations. London: Fontana, 1973.
- Bourdieu, Pierre Photography: A Middle Brow Art. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.
- Clarke, Graham The Photograph. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Coe, Brain and Paul Gates The Snapshot Photograph. London: Ash and Grant, 1977.
- Eysteinnsson, Astrudur The Concept of Modernism. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Fineberg, Jonathan The Innocent Eye: Children's Art and the Modern Artist. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

- Friedman, Susan "Modernism of the 'Scattered Remnant': Race and Politics in H. D.'s Development" in H. D.: Woman and Poet. Ed. M. King. Orono Maine: National Poetry Foundation.
- Frawley, Maria "Modernism and Maternity: Alice Meynell and the Politics of Motherhood", in Unmanning Modernism eds. E.J. Harrison and S. Peterson. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997.
- Fry, Roger Vision and Design. London: Chatto and Windus, 1921.
- Garnett, Angelica (ed.) Vanessa Bell's Family Album. London: Jill Norman and Hobhouse Ltd; 1981.
- Hamilton, Violet Annals of My Glass House: Photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996.
- Harrison, Charles "Degas' Bathers and Other People" Modernism and Modernity. 6:3 (September 1999): 57-91.
- Hartmann, Sadakichi "The Exhibition of Children's Drawings", in Camerawork eds. S. Philippi and V. Kieseyer. New York: Tascheni, 1997.
- Holland, Patricia "Introduction: History, Memory and the Family Album", in Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography eds. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland. London: Virago, 1991.
- Humm, Maggie Feminism and Film. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.
- Irigaray, Luce Speculum de l'autre femme. Paris: Editions Minuit, 1974.
- Lee, Hermione Virginia Woolf. London: Chatto and Windus, 1996.
- Meynell, Alice Essays. London: Burns, Oates and Waterbourne, 1930.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. Picture Theory. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994.
- Pollock, Griselda Vision and Difference. London: Routledge, 1988.
- , Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art Histories. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Price, Reynolds "Afterword", in Sally Mann: Immediate Family, Sally Mann. Oxford: Phaidon, 1992.
- Reed, Christopher "Through Formalism: Feminism and Virginia Woolf's Relation to Bloomsbury Aesthetics", in The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf ed. D.F. Gillespie. Columbus, Ohio: University of Missouri Press, 1993.

- Rickels, Laurence Aberrations of Mourning. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988.
- Robins, Anna Gruetzner Modern Art in Britain 1910 – 1914. London: Merrell Holberton, 1997.
- Rose, Jacqueline The Case of Peter Pan. London: Macmillan, 1994.
- Schaffer, Talia "Posing as Orlando", Genders 19 (1994) 26-63.
- Shone, Richard Bloomsbury Portraits. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Silverman, Kaja The Threshold of the Visible World. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Smith, Lindsay The Politics of Focus: Women, children and nineteenth-century photography
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.
- Solomon-Godeau, Alice Photography at the Dock. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press, 1991.
- Spalding, Frances Vanessa Bell. London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1983.
- Tickner, Lisa Modern Life and Modern Subjects. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Watney, Simon English Post-Impressionism. London: Studio Vista, 1980.
- Williams, Val The Other Observers: Women Photographers in Britain 1900 to the Present
London: Virago, 1994.