

• I N T R O D U C T I O N •

Mapping Gwen John: Lives, Lines and Images

Picking up beautiful children
at Tenby, to draw and adore
on the sands, we stood looking
at the children, the sea and the shore

...

On leaving the Slade, I lived in a small room
Over a mortuary in the Euston Road
And then, alone, in a cellar in Howland Street
making water-colours of cats.

...

Ida Nettleship, Gwen Salmond and I
shared a top flat in the Rue Froidveau.
I knew Rodin ... well. Corresponded with Rilke
Never met Proust. Attended Whistler's School.

...

Dorelia came with me. Journeying
by way of Bordeaux and Toulouse
we made our way to Paris.

...

alone now, often alone
alone, now, always.

Pearce (1996, 67-7)

In his poem *To Dieppe: A Lifescape*, Brian Louis Peirce (1996) has drawn a literary portrait for Gwen John, who irrupted as an event in my project of writing a genealogy of women artists. Indeed, my interest in John's life and work unfolded in unpredicted but passionate ways. In the beginning she was not even included in my genealogical archive. While working with fin-de-siècle women artists' life documents however, I read Janet Wolff's essay "Rodin, Rilke and Gwen John in Paris" (1994) and I instantly became interested in finding out more about the grey female figure in Wolff's essay. A research

grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the University of East London allowed me to delve into John's letters and papers in Wales and Paris and the rest is the book.

But what was it about Gwen John that made her such an intriguing figure within my overall project of writing a feminist genealogy of the female self in art? Maybe it was the fact that something just did not seem right in the way her life was portrayed by art historians, biographers and critical theorists. Indeed, the discourse of the recluse who escaped the bohemian circles of London and the tyranny of her brother Augustus' extravagant personality, only to submit herself to a torturous life of unconditional love for the famous sculptor Auguste Rodin, seemed to saturate the stories about and around her life. As briefly summarised by Cecily Langdale (1987, 1) in the very first line of her monograph on John: "Sister of one flamboyant genius and lover of another, Gwen John was herself a recluse who created in artistic isolation." Similarly, John's interiors and portraits of solitary women have been used as the visual background for the discourse of the recluse. In this light, her art has been discussed and appreciated in close interrelationship with her letters: decontextualised extracts or even lines of these letters have literally been used as captions for her paintings and as starting and/or concluding points of exhibition catalogues. "Gwen John: An Interior Life" was the title of a catalogue of an exhibition series¹ drawing on the following epistolary extract: "I may never have anything to express, except this desire for a more interior life."² This line has become the master phrase, supposedly encompassing all that John was and did.

As my analysis will show, there are of course different approaches in how John's life has been represented and how her work has been appreciated. Her biographer Sue Roe has pointed out that John "has always seemed a mysterious and shadowy figure within the history of British painting ... a mystical creature who hid from the world and saw nobody." (2002, xv) Roe's biography dismantles this representation, arguing instead that John lived an eventful and creative life. It was therefore moments of this counter discourse around a woman artist's life that I was interested in excavating, through a genealogical analysis of her letters and visual images of her paintings.

Clearly, my approach has not been that of the biographer's: I am not interested in presenting or rather constructing a sequence and coherence in a life, any life, since genealogy, the theoretical plane within which this book has been written, suggests that this cannot be done anyway. As a Nietzschean concept redeployed in Michel Foucault's work (1986) and as "the art of cartography" according to Gilles Deleuze (1988, 44), genealogy does not look beyond, behind or under the surface of stories to uncover hidden truths or

“the real self” of the biographical subject. The genealogical analysis is tracing multifarious ways that these stories work, creating a diagram of how they connect with each other in constructing an image of a life or a subject.³

Within a genealogical framework then, John’s archive has been explored, not in terms of hidden meanings and not as the search for truth about what she “really” thought or felt about art, work, love, and human relations. The quest was about how her letters made connections but also created oppositions with fin-de-siècle polyvalent discourses around femininity and gender relations. This is the genealogical strategy of remaining on the surface of narrative analysis: the act of treating narratives as multiplicities of meanings, and of creating a map of how different stories connect with other stories, discourses and practices in shaping meanings and in constituting the real and ultimately the subject herself—Gwen John the solitary mystical figure in British Art History.

As a set of methodological strategies genealogy posits the task of “descent” (Foucault 1986), a move backwards revealing numberless beginnings and multiple changes; this move will enable the genealogist to trace points of “emergence” (1986), critical space/time blocks wherein linear discursive continuities are disrupted and new or transposed discursive lines and practices emerge.⁴ To do this, the researcher has to draw a diagram of the complex discourses, ideologies and histories within which the genealogical strategies will be deployed. This diagram has been defined by Foucault as *dispositif*, a system of relations that can be established between heterogeneous elements, discursive and non-discursive practices, “the said as well as the unsaid.” (1980a, 194) Deleuze has further described the *dispositif* as “a tangle, a multilinear ensemble” (1992, 159), composed of lines and zones that distribute the visible and the invisible and are thus difficult to be determined or localized. Given the heterogeneous and complex constitution of any *dispositif*, the genealogist can indeed draw on an immense variety of data and approaches. What is to be remembered is the fact that the more the analysis breaks down practices, the easier it becomes to find out more about their interrelation, while this process can never have a final end.

In this light the research archive around John was initially comprised of two extended bodies of correspondence: her letters to her life-long friend and fellow student at the Slade, Ursula Tyrwhitt⁵ and to her lover and mentor Auguste Rodin.⁶ There were also a publication of selected letters and notebooks (Lloyd-Morgan, 2004), two biographies, (Chitty 1987, Roe, 2002), three exhibition catalogues (Anthony d’Offay 1976; Langdale and Jenkins 1982; Jenkins and Stephens, 2004), a catalogue raisonné (Langdale, 1987) and two critical appreciations of her work (Taubman, 1985; Foster 1999). As the

research went on creating more connections, the archive expanded and finally included numerous academic essays, short biographical sketches and letters of “significant others” in John’s life, to which I will refer throughout the book. In thus working with the multiplicity of textual and visual sources that comprise the research archive, I have charted its “narrative matrix” (McQuillan 2000, 10), creating an *assemblage*⁷ of narrative lines and visual images interwoven around power relations and forces of desire. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptual vocabularies (1983, 1988) *assemblages* in my analysis are taken as entities of heterogeneous components that can make multifarious connections, which I will chart and analyse throughout the book.

Making Cartographies of Power and Desire

Emulating the conventions of the biographical discourse, I would start by giving the following details: Gwen John was born in Haverfordwest of South-West Wales in 1876 and her life trajectory initially seemed to follow the tide of a number of young talented women who made their way in the world of art at the turn of the nineteenth century. Coming from a middle class family, she was encouraged to develop her interest and talent in painting very early in life by her mother Augusta, who had received some sort of art education and “continued drawing and painting up to the time of her marriage and to some extent afterwards.” (Holroyd 1996, 10) John’s mother died when she was only eight years old, but her influence has been acknowledged in her brother’s autobiography, *Chiaroscuro*: “My mother would no doubt have been helpful, but she died when I was a small child, after, I fear, a very tearful existence.” (1954, 2) After Augusta’s death, the family moved to Tenby, a seaside town also in South-West Wales. During the holidays, Gwen John, together with her sister Winifred and her two brothers Augustus and Thornton, would roam the “coastal places around Tenby [where] they sketched on the sand.” (Roe 2002, 9) According to her biographer, Gwen would make “rapid drawings of beached gulls, shells and fish on stray pieces of paper, or sometimes in the margins of the frontispiece of the book she was reading.” (9)

Early artistic influences and practices were important, but it was definitely John’s years at the Slade, where she studied art between 1895 and 1898 that marked her life as an artist. As Alicia Foster has noted, the time John spent studying at the Slade “is considered to be a golden era in the history of the school.” (1999, 10) Founded in 1871 as part of University College London, the Slade was an institution departing from the conventions of the Royal Academy of Art and modelled upon the teaching methods of the French

ateliers. There were no classes as such, only courses of study: drawing from the antique and life; sculpture; painting from the antique and life; composition; perspective and lectures. Women were included in all of these courses, although “ideas of sexual difference were manifested at the Slade in the segregation of male and female students into separate rooms for the most important aspect of Slade training, life drawing.” (Foster 1999, 11) As Jane Hill has further commented, on the whole “students were not encouraged to mix even in the corridors or the lawns” (2000, 13); the Antique Room was actually the only studio where men and women students could work together.

Notwithstanding the dominant ideologies of sexual difference, the Slade was the first art school to allow women to work from a life-model in the UK; it had therefore become popular amongst women “who made up approximately two-thirds of the students at this time.” (Foster 1999, 10) John joined this vibrant community of young aspiring women artists and despite her shyness, “she was popular and dearly loved by those in her immediate circle.” (Roe 2002, 14) Indeed she developed life-long friendships with some of her fellow students at the Slade, both women and men, which went on even when she moved to Paris permanently in 1904. Her correspondence with Ursula Tyrwhitt carries traces of a strong friendship that was sustained through the force of the epistolary discourse. Moreover it was in the company of her friends Gwen Salmond and Ida Nettleship—who was to become her brother’s first wife⁸—that John first went to Paris between autumn 1898 and early 1899 for a short period of study at Whistler’s academy *Carmen*, which had just opened.

The role of the Slade has been well documented and discussed from a variety of perspectives.⁹ Women artists from the Slade have also left their own life documents about the Slade experience, both published and unpublished.¹⁰ What is interesting to note however, is that John’s experience of living in London and studying at the Slade was geographically very close and yet culturally and existentially so different from her brother’s, who had immersed himself in the bohemian artistic circles of cosmopolitan London. These differences cannot be simply reduced to John’s “shy character.” As feminist theorists have persuasively argued, the European bohemian circles were saturated by strong classed and gendered discourses and practices.¹¹ It is within this *assemblage* of patriarchal *segmentarities* and in the continuous interface of *striated and smooth spaces* that women artists’ spatiality, professional careers and life trajectories have to be mapped and analysed.¹²

Indeed John’s way of life in London was non-sensical and unintelligible amongst the bohemians. In the four years preceding her move to Paris (1899-1903), she was living in a series of gloomy London flats one of which has been

described by her brother Augustus as “a dungeon ... into which no ray of sunlight could ever penetrate.” (in Langdale 1987, 21) John’s obsession with living literally underground in the company of her cat puzzled and problematized her bohemian friends in London, who labelled her as a recluse. This marginalization however, also worked as a force of *deterritorialization*. As a young woman trying to pursue her artistic aspirations and live independently, John left behind the suffocating spaces and places of London. As she was writing in her notebook on July 7th, 1923:

You are free only when you have left all.
 Leave everybody and let them leave you.
 Then only will you be without fear.¹³

As I will further discuss in Chapter Five, escaping fear John undertook some wild walking adventures in the French countryside, which ultimately ended up in Paris. Her move to Paris however, was not to be an intermission in an artist’s life as it was the case with many of her contemporaries. Paris and later Meudon, a nearby suburb, was to become her home for the rest of her life. As she was writing to Rodin: “I was very troubled, since I had dreamt that I was in England and I could not come to you in Paris. Before going to sleep I was thinking of my brother and how he was making me miserable in England and how I was miserable in England.”¹⁴

John’s move to Paris in 1904 and her decision to live and work in France for the rest of her life is marked by an important event: her encounter with the sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917). John met Rodin in 1904 while posing for “the Muse to Whistler,” a monument commissioned by the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers.¹⁵ Rodin was already famous at that time, with a vibrant community of young artists from all over Europe gathering around him and his studio.¹⁶ The great German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) was among them; he had actually moved to Paris in the early 1900s having been commissioned to write Rodin’s biography. Rilke also worked as Rodin’s secretary for a short period between 1905 and 1906, staying in the sculptor’s workshops in Paris and at the *Villa de Brillants* in Meudon, where Rodin lived with his life-long companion Rosa Beuret since 1893.¹⁷

John was of course neither the first nor the last lover for Rodin,¹⁸ for her however, Rodin became a great love in her life, albeit not the only one. As I will further discuss in Chapter Six, during the ten years of their relationship 1904-1914, John would write passionate love letters to Rodin twice and sometimes three times a day, two thousands of which are now housed at the Rodin Museum Archives in Paris. What has to be noted here is that John’s love affair with Rodin has been overstated in the way her life has been

presented and discussed. Rodin died in 1917, at the point when John was reaching her maturity as an artist. As I will further discuss throughout the book, John went on living in France, painting, exhibiting and falling passionately in love well after Rodin's death. This is how her flamboyant bohemian brother Augustus painted her portrait in response to art historian John Rothenstein, who had depicted her as "chaste, subdued and sad" in his 1952 book on *Modern English Painters*:

Gwen and I were not opposite but much the same really, but we took a different attitude ... She wasn't chaste or subdued, but amorous and proud. She didn't steal through life, but preserved a haughty independence, which some people mistook for humility. Her passions for both men and women were outrageous and irrational. She was never "unnoticed" by those who had access to her. (in Tickner 2004, 32)

As I noted earlier, John's encounter with Rodin was an important event in the artist's life that initiated a series of other events and certainly her decision to settle down in France. I will discuss the philosophical notion of the *event* in relation to John's letters in Chapter One. What I want to stress here however is Alain Badiou's conceptualization of love as an *event* for the encounter of difference not to be conflated with the experience of the other: "In reality, there is for me the encounter with the other, but an encounter is not exactly an experience, it is an event, which remains totally opaque and has no reality other than in its multi-formed consequences inside the real world." (2009, 28) What I therefore argue is that "the opaque event" of John's love for Rodin has left its traces in the many letters she wrote to him but it cannot be reduced to the contents of these letters, neither can John's life—or indeed anybody's life—be constrained within the limitations of the epistolary form as a sub-genre of life narratives. In Chapter Two, I discuss in detail the relationship between epistolary narratives and life-history research, focusing in particular on how subjectivities can be constituted within the limitations of the epistolary genre.

Considered within such limitations, John's letters vividly chart an epistolary geography of a young woman artist's real and imagined spaces in modernity. Her Parisian rooms in the area of Montparnasse are focal points of this epistolary geography. When she first settled down in Paris, John lived at 19 Boulevard Edgar Quinet for two years; in 1906 she took a room at 7 Rue St Placide, which was rather dark and cold and following Rodin's encouragement and financial support, she moved to 87 Rue du Cherche-Midi in 1907, the room she loved and painted most. In 1909 she moved again to 6 Rue de l' Ouest and stayed there for a year. In 1910 she rent a flat at 29 Rue Terre-Neuve in Meudon, keeping the Parisian room as a studio till 1918. Finally in 1929 she bought a plot at 8 Rue Babie, Meudon, but only moved there in 1936, just three years before she died. John's Parisian rooms are particularly

important in her epistolary geography, since they were the addresses her letters to Rodin were written from. What my analysis suggests in Chapter Five is that there is an interesting agglomeration of spaces and places in John's auto/biographical geography bringing together her room, the Parisian boulevards, cafés, and public gardens, the countryside around Paris, the river Seine and the coasts of Brittany. This spatial *assemblage* creates a plane of analysis within which John's *nomadic paths* and *lines of flight* are being charted.¹⁹

John's spatiality is thus marked by displacement and movement; what however remains an interesting continuity in her life since her subterranean years in London is her relationship with her cat or rather the many cats she lived surrounded by. In Chapter Seven, I discuss John's relationship with her cats, drawing on the many letters that she wrote about and around them and making theoretical connections with Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) notion of *becoming animal* as a *line of flight* in the cartography of nomadic subjectivities.

While living in France, John wrote many letters to her friends in the UK. As already noted, these letters carry traces of the importance of friends in her life and mark the salience of women's friendship in the genealogy of the care of the female self.²⁰ Her correspondence with Ursula Tyrwhitt (1878-1966) is particularly revealing in this context. The two women met while studying at the Slade and although they followed very different trajectories, their friendship and correspondence went on till the very end of John's life. Tyrwhitt was "an elegant, sophisticated girl" (Roe 2002, 15) and Augustus John had fallen in love with her.²¹ She was older than the other girls at the Slade, since it had taken her some time to persuade her family and mostly her father to allow her to study art. Although she did not follow John's wild adventures, she often visited her in Paris, became her confidante and supported her both emotionally and materially by sending her money and clothes especially during the difficult years of the First World War.

As I will further discuss in Chapter Three, the two women often exhibited together at the New English Art Club (NEAC), which was founded in 1866 as an alternative exhibiting society, counterpoising the rigidity and conservatism of the Royal Academy of Arts. NEAC was dominated by Slade tutors and from the beginning had strong links with the Parisian scene. As Foster has commented however, despite its progressiveness, "women artists were excluded from its administration and were also a marginal presence among exhibitors." (2000, 173) John exhibited there until 1911 when she became disillusioned with the increasing conservatism of the society. She actually stopped sending her work there, around the same time that NEAC was challenged by the *Camden Town Group* among other avant-garde art groups of the period, as I will further discuss in Chapter Three. Tyrwhitt's relationship with the NEAC was

different: in 1913 she was elected as one of its members in recognition of her artistic achievements.

Not only did the two friends follow different career paths, but their personal lives also took very different routes. Tyrwhitt got married to her second cousin Walter Tyrwhitt who was also a painter, when she was forty years old. They never had children and travelled a lot, spending “every summer in Oxford and every winter in a rented villa or apartment somewhere abroad.” (Thomas 2007, 128) Tyrwhitt painted mostly flowers,²² for which “she possessed a great gift.” (127) Indeed her floral watercolours were greatly appreciated by her contemporaries and she was exhibiting and selling regularly.

Contrary to Tyrwhitt’s comfortable life-style, John went through hard times particularly at the beginning of her life in Paris: to make ends meet, she had to work as a model, mainly for women artists. Her biographer has particularly noted her decision to refuse her father’s support, after an insulting incident while he was visiting her in Paris:

Edwin had come to Paris to look into the matter of Gwen’s allowance. She had arranged a small supper party putting on a new dress designed by herself from a dress in a picture by Manet. The picture was possibly the “Bar at the Folies Bergère” and the dress probably displayed more of his daughters neck and forearm than he was accustomed to see. He greeted her with the words, “You look like a prostitute in that dress.” She replied “I could never accept anything from someone capable of thinking so.” (Chitty 1987, 49)

The incident of her rift with her father signalled John’s decision to work as a model so as to support her career as an artist. As I will further discuss in Chapter Three, in the context of her life as a young artist in Paris, John created a series of nude self-portraits. What is particularly significant about these self-portraits is that they make a forceful synthesis of the woman artist nude in the act of producing images. These nude self-portraits further visualize the dilemmas and ambivalences that many women artists would face in search of an identity at the turn of the nineteenth century and unravel the complex interrelations between, gender, class and culture in the autobiographical constitution of the female self in art.

John’s letters reveal that she was very unhappy and frustrated by the fact that she had to work as a model, with the exception of course of her modelling sessions with Rodin. However an American patron, John Quinn, appeared in John’s life around 1914 and his patronage had a major impact upon the course of her career as a professional artist. Quinn was a New York based lawyer, “who was hugely active in promoting and supporting writers ... and wanted to build a substantial collection of contemporary European paintings.”

(Roe 2002, 124) As Roe further notes, Quinn knew major literary figures of the early twentieth century modernist scene, including W.B. Yeats, Maud Gonne, Madox Ford, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce. Within the Parisian artists' colony, he also had contacts with Erik Satie and Guillaume Apollinaire and was supporting, amongst others, Constantin Brancusi, André Derain, Pablo Picasso, Georges Rouault, Henri Rousseau and Marie Laurencin. (124) In recognition of his contribution to the French artworld, he was awarded the Legion of Honour in 1919.

Quinn was introduced to John's work in around 1910 by her brother Augustus and became instantly interested in acquiring some of her paintings. He offered her an annual regular income with the promise of getting any three paintings she could produce within a year. Quinn did not mind waiting for her to feel satisfied with her work: "Take your time with it. Whenever it is ready, at your own time ... let me know,"²³ he would write to her while waiting. This combination of financial security and time lenience was a huge boost to John's career and lasted till 1924, the year of Quinn's untimely death, which deeply shocked and saddened her. As expressed in a letter to Quinn's partner, poetess Jeanne Foster with whom John had developed a dear friendship: "I am always anxious, fearing that you don't react enough against your own sorrow. What you say about your love for him is lovely. As for the quotation of Tourgueneff, it is not for you. You have to do a lot of work, of poetry and other writing."²⁴

Quinn died two years before John's 1926 major retrospective exhibition at the New Chenil Galleries in London, a landmark in her living career as an artist. Paul Cézanne's notion of sensation would be the epigraph John chose for the catalogue of this exhibition: "I have always had the wish to organize my work, my thought, my life and as Cézanne said my sensation. The power to suggest connections between ideas and objects has always been the point of art."²⁵ As I will further discuss in Chapter Four, John was deeply influenced by Cézanne in the late phase of her work. Living in Paris she was of course at the heart of new artistic movements, experiments and innovations that would have a significant impact upon her. As art critics and historians have pointed out, her art techniques changed dramatically during her years in Paris, abandoning the academic conventions and constraints of her education.²⁶ In her letters to her patron Quinn and her artist friend Tyrwhitt, John would repeatedly comment on the Parisian art scene, being equally interested in the old masters and unconventional artists like Henri Rousseau. The following passages from a letter to Quinn written on August 22, 1911, beautifully illustrate her multifaceted interests:

There have been several interesting events here this year: an exhibition of Dutch pictures, with one or two fine Rembrandts. Gabriele d' Anunzio had a play in Old French, but the French critics will not take lessons from M. Gabriele d' Anunzio.

In the *Indépendants* a man named Rousseau had a collection of pictures, which you would be very interested in, I'm sure. He was a *douanier* and at fifty year old he felt he must paint and so he painted, not knowing at all how to paint. His pictures are very remarkable works, as you can imagine, but they are works of art ... The other exhibitors in the *Indépendants* are just mad people.²⁷

Being at the heart of artistic innovations and experiments, John could not help being dismissive and ironic of the dominant artistic trends in the UK. As she was writing to Tyrwhitt on June 6, 1917 after having visited *The British Gallery of Art* in Paris: "It seems nothing has changed in the 'Royal Academy' nor ever will. All other human institutions have some movement, but the 'Royal Academy' is superior and alone."²⁸ In a different letter written in February 1918, she would further declare: "I feel I don't want to see any English pictures again, except those by two or three artists."²⁹ John's letters further show that she was not uncritically accepting any new movements either. As revealed in a letter to Tyrwhitt written on March 7, 1912, she was not sure whether the *Futurists* were "real" artists although she had found them "amusing" and "talented":

There are some painters who call themselves "Futurists" exhibiting now, I should like you to see them ... They are very amusing, and have great talent I think. I don't know whether it is art. ... The school of Matisse is far far behind and most academic and conventional beside them.³⁰

Even when John did not like certain paintings, she was still interested in considering them as part of a kind of history of artistic development that was important to keep a record of: "I think your Picassos very fine, though they have no charm for me" she was writing to her patron Quinn on December 18, 1921, adding that "it is nice having them as an example of this phase of his development, as well as for other reasons."³¹ John's letters that were written around the time she had reached her maturity as an artist, also carry signs of a clearly formed artistic judgement and a newly found confidence in the value of her own work, as in the following letter written to Quinn on May 9, 1922:

I saw a painting by De Segonzac in the Salon d'Automne which interested me very much and I liked it very much. I should like to meet him. Perhaps you would take me to see him this summer or autumn ... I don't think I told you that when I went with Mrs Foster to see the pictures you have bought at Pottier's I was very pleased and proud of my *Mère Poussepin*. I thought it the best picture there, but I liked the Seurat landscapes.³²

John's interest in innovative trends in art went on till late in her life: "I saw the Chagall again yesterday" she was writing to Tyrwhitt on July 17, 1930 "I think you were wonderful to like Rouault and Chagall so much, at once."³³ Clearly Tyrwhitt remained the friend John could share thoughts and mutual artistic tastes with till the end of her life; this was something she was finding difficult to do even with her beloved nephew Edwin who eventually became her sole heir: "Edwin asked me if Chagall is mad, and when I told him Rouault is, I think, the greatest painter of our day, he gave a snigger of contempt for me."³⁴ Indeed sharing thoughts about her favourite painters would become an epistolary form of expressing affection and friendship:

I am not surprised you like Chagall and dreamt of him, or thought of him one night, when I think of the little croquis (sketch) you sent me in a letter, of some people at a fair. It is rather like a Chagall, but Chagall is calm and natural au fond, though people can't always see that, because of his subjects and his fantasy.³⁵

What is particularly interesting about John is that although living and working in Paris, she chose not to mingle with the bohemians; she never had the experiences that some of her compatriots like the Welsh artist Nina Hamnett wrote about.³⁶ When her American patron introduced her to Brancusi and to De Segonzac she was delighted. However she was not so enthusiastic about the party they attended together afterwards: "As to the dinner and the party after, I am not accustomed to parties, they were lovely, but I am not used to them and I like other things we did better" she wrote in a thank letter to him on October 29, 1923.³⁷ In Derrida's line of thought (1981, 55), John developed a kind of "participation without belonging—a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set."

John's life-style but also her art technique remained unique and unrepeatable and her persona has been registered as an enigmatic obscure figure in British Art History. "I write to have no face," Foucault (1989,17) has famously written, quite unsuccessfully so, as we all know. John's unsigned paintings and undated letters could be taken as her own attempt to paint so as to erase her name—have no face—but she was eventually as unsuccessful as Foucault in *becoming imperceptible*. In writing this book I have tried to take seriously this will of *becoming imperceptible*. My approach to John's letters and paintings has been theoretically and methodologically driven by Foucauldian and DeleuzoGuattarian analytics and politically oriented to the feminist project of re-imagining women as historical subjects. In working with John's letters as multiplicities of stories and meanings I have tried not to impose order and sequence in their unexpected contingencies and encounters. In this light I have let the force of John's epistolary narratives to create a rhythm of

their own and it is through this rhythm that the chapters of the book have emerged in an order that is circular rather than linear and can make *rhizomatic connections*³⁸ within and amongst them. The way I have presented these themes in this introductory chapter is indeed circular with various rondos and refrains and I will leave you, reader, to create your own rhythm of reading.

Notes

- ¹ These exhibitions were held at the Barbican Art Gallery in September-November 1985, the Manchester City Art Gallery in December 1985-January 1986 and the Yale Centre for British Art in February-April 1986.
- ² NLW MS 21468D, ff.72b-73.
- ³ See Tamboukou 2008 for a full exposition of a genealogical approach to narrative analysis.
- ⁴ See Tamboukou, 2003b for a detailed discussion of the Foucauldian concepts of “descent” and “emergence” in the genealogical method.
- ⁵ National Library of Wales.
- ⁶ Rodin Museum Archives, Paris. The letters are in French and their translation is mine.
- ⁷ The notion of the assemblage is Brian Massumi’s translation of what Deleuze and Guattari (1988) have theorized as agencement, a noun which comes from the verb agencer which means “to put together, organize, order, lay out, arrange” (Deleuze 1997a, 183); these notions are probably more complicated than just assemble and this is why some commentators have suggested that the term does not have a suitable English equivalent.
- ⁸ After her marriage to Augustus John, Ida Nettleship stopped painting seriously. She died in Paris in 1907, while giving birth to their fifth child.
- ⁹ For feminist discussions, see Foster, 1999, particularly Chapter One, London and the Slade, 10-18.
- ¹⁰ See, Thomas 1996 and Taylor 1986.
- ¹¹ There is in fact a rich body of literature around the fin-de-siecle artistic communities in Europe and women artists’ modes of existence within them. For feminist discussion of women artists’ relation to the urban spaces, see amongst others, Parkhurst-Ferguson, 1994; Parsons, 2000; Perry, 1995, 1999, Pollock, 1988; Ryan, 1994; Wilson, 1991, 1995; Wolff, 1990, 1994.
- ¹² I draw here on a range of DeleuzoGuattarian concepts: “segmentarities” and “smooth and striated spaces” that will be explicated further on in the book. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, 1988)
- ¹³ Lloyd-Morgan 2004, 130.
- ¹⁴ MR/MGJ/B.J5, undated letters with an address.
- ¹⁵ The monument was never cast in Bronze, since it was eventually turned down.
- ¹⁶ At the time John met Rodin, his studio was at 87 Rue de l’ Université, but in 1908 it was moved to the historical building of the *Hôtel Biron*, which became The Rodin Museum in 1919, two years after Rodin’s death.

- ¹⁷ Rosa Beuret was a seamstress, but also a model for young Rodin. Although they lived together since 1864 and had a son together, who was never acknowledged by Rodin, they only got married in January 1917. Beuret died from pneumonia three weeks after the wedding and Rodin followed her in November of the same year; they are both buried in the garden of the Villa de Brillants, another site of the Rodin Museum in France.
- ¹⁸ There are of course many biographies of Rodin's life and his stormy relationship with the sculptress Camille Claudel has been widely discussed and analysed by biographers and art historians. For an excellent exposition of this relationship in life and in art, see, Claudel and Rodin: Fateful Encounter, exhibition catalogue by the Musée National des beaux-arts du Québec and the Musée Rodin, in collaboration with the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Fondation Pierre Gianadda in Martigny (2005-2006).
- ¹⁹ "Nomadism" and "lines of flight" are interrelated concepts in Deleuze and Guattari's analyses (1983, 1988) that I will discuss in detail in Chapters One and Five.
- ²⁰ For a discussion of women's friendship in the care of the female self, see Tamboukou, 2003a, particularly Chapter Five, "Technologies of the Female Self".
- ²¹ See Augustus John's portrait of Ursula Tyrwhitt at:
http://www.bridgemanartondemand.com/art/189163/Portrait_of_Ursula_Tyrwhitt
- ²² To get an idea of Tyrwhitt's paintings, see
<http://www.artnet.com/artist/668714/ursula-tyrwhitt.html>
- ²³ Cited in Roe 2002, 125-126.
- ²⁴ October 24, 1924, in Lloyd-Morgan 2004, 138.
- ²⁵ The statement is actually one of the thoughts of Maurice Denis. (Tickner 2004, 39)
- ²⁶ See Bustin 2004, for a detailed discussion of John's later art techniques.
- ²⁷ Lloyd-Morgan 2004, 69.
- ²⁸ NLW MS 21468D, ff.100-1.
- ²⁹ Ibid., f.113b.
- ³⁰ Ibid., ff.69a-69b.
- ³¹ Lloyd-Morgan 2004, 123-4.
- ³² Ibid., 127.
- ³³ NLW MS 21468D, f.176.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid., ff.177-8.
- ³⁶ See, Hamnett 1932.
- ³⁷ Lloyd-Morgan 2004, 131.
- ³⁸ The rhizome is an important concept in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy (1988) configuring horizontal and surface relations between disparate elements and unsettling fixed structures and positions.