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## Memory, Photography, and Modernism: The “dead bodies and ruined houses” of Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*

P.S. The war has already given us two delightful footnotes to *Three Guineas*: (1) the announcement by the B.B.C. on the day that war was declared that the King and his Household had donned military uniforms, and (2) the picture of the King broadcasting on Xmas day wearing an Admiral’s uniform.

—Letter to Virginia Woolf from Shena D. Simon, January 1940 (Snaith 2000, 163)

**I**n their essay “The Double Helix,” Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L. R. Higonnet argue that a temporal or spatial expansion of war’s boundaries occurs in imagistic form in “the landscape of the mind” (1987, 46). If we pursue, they suggest, “the situation of women in relation to war, *mentalités* take their place beside ideologies, and both tend to displace diplomatic and military historiography” (46). While it would be wrong to assume that women’s *mentalités* occupy a “purer” space outside of official chronologies, tautologically the lived effects of history must appear in images and memories as much as in political discourses. By examining how gender or sexual difference figures in modernist visual and memory construction in narratives about war, we can see more clearly the connections among gender, memory, and representations.

Virginia Woolf was particularly fascinated by the connections between memory and photographs. This fascination might stem from the ways in which photography both carries gendered memories, for example in maternal photographs, and also illuminates a symbolic world.<sup>1</sup> Woolf was highly conscious of the gap between the artificial symbolic images of war

My thanks to Julia Watson for her careful comments on an earlier version of this essay. Special appreciation goes to my two anonymous reviewers for their astute critical comments on the later draft.

<sup>1</sup> I describe Woolf’s representations of maternal memories in her photo albums in Humm 2000.

and personal memories. Throughout her life she contrasted the accuracy of private memories of war with deceitful public history. “No one who has taken stock of his own impressions since 4 August 1914, can possibly believe that history as it is written closely resembles history as it is lived, but as we are for the most part quiescent, and, if sceptical ourselves, content to believe that the rest of mankind believes, we have no right to complain if we are fobbed off once more with historians’ histories” (Woolf 1988, 3).

My aim in this article is, by examining the role of photography in Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, to demonstrate one major way in which photographs and visual memories can reveal a gendered subjectivity.<sup>2</sup> I specifically discuss the differing textual mechanisms with which Woolf counters a masculine patriarchal world as represented by five published newspaper photographs: a general, heralds, university professors, a judge, and an archbishop.<sup>3</sup> These newspaper photographs are juxtaposed with the feminine “affect” of the narrator’s visual memories of photographs of fascist atrocities sent to British supporters during the Spanish Civil War by the Republican government, which are not reproduced in the text.

In her edition of *Three Guineas*, Michèle Barrett suggests that the function of the published photographs is to ridicule “patriarchal, hierarchical dress codes,” and Barrett usefully argues that the photographs are “closely drawn into Woolf’s underlying theme” of the symbolic function of dress (1993, xxxi). However, Barrett overlooks Woolf’s descriptions of the absent photographs, which act in dialectical tension with the five visible photographs. In response to Barrett’s reading, in my view it is the absent photographs or, rather, the narrator’s memory of these photographs, that in a major way shape the narrative of *Three Guineas* and its dense visual plenitude. That is to say, Woolf’s “radial” method subverts a masculine photographic narrative of public events with the affect and self-reflexivity of her narrator’s visual memories.<sup>4</sup> The battle between Woolf’s memorial

<sup>2</sup> Recent critical work on the interstices of writing, photography, and memory in terms of gender has grown exponentially: Marianne Hirsch’s now classic text *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997) follows the pioneering collection edited by Jo Spence and Patricia Holland, *Family Snaps: The Making of Domestic Photography* (1991). Significant are Mavor 1996; Evans 1997; Davidov 1998; Smith 1998; Evans and Hall 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Although after its initial publication, many subsequent editions of *Three Guineas* did not contain the photographs, all now do so.

<sup>4</sup> I am taking the term *radial* here from John Berger, whose photo-narratives reassemble differing aspects of subjectivity in a radial rather than linear manner (1997). In *Ways of Remembering* and his other books, Berger seeks to dissipate modernity’s splitting apart of the private and public by returning to photographs as sites of memory.

descriptions of absent photographs and the published photographs pinpoints Woolf's political aim in *Three Guineas*: to link the patriarchal Othering of women, particularly our bodies, and fascism. It is as if Woolf's differential photographic constructions encapsulate her aesthetic battle with the symbolic.

In Woolf's writing we find traces of a different form of memory, one drawing on corporeal affect, much like Frigga Haug's contemporary liminal memory (which occupies the space between ideology and alternative experiences), and one that, by making the reader into a witness, opens up, as Shoshana Felman suggests, "the imaginative capability of perceiving history—what is happening to others—in one's own body" (Felman and Laub 1992, 108; see also Haug 2000). The relationship between visual memories and the symbolic is a complex psychoanalytic process, the focus of a vast range of contemporary film, literary, and photographic studies. In terms of the *photographic* symbolic, Christian Metz argues that photographs are part objects, memory fetishes acting as both index and icon of what *was*, and are therefore much closer to their referents than is film (1985). *Three Guineas* displays photographs as both index and icon: narrator memories of absent photographs of the Spanish Civil War, memories to which the narrator continually returns, together with published photographs of the public, patriarchal world, a world that Woolf attacks in the argument of the text. Roger Poole in "‘We all put up with you Virginia’: Irreceivable Wisdom about War" mistakenly argues that Woolf's descriptions of the atrocity photographs from the Spanish government have the kind of "false objectivity about them that Swift displays in *A Modest Proposal*" (1991, 98). In my view, Woolf describes the absent photographs with such unmotivated vividness that, rather than a Swiftian intellectual irony, the photographs produce a powerful emotional response in both Woolf and her reader.

The published photographs, of lawyers, church leaders, academics, and the army, are fetishes of the symbolic that Woolf counters with her written inner memories of the absent, dead bodies of Spanish women and children. Paradoxically, the public photographs become timeless dead icons of patriarchy, while the narrator's repeated mnemonic of the absent photographs of the Spanish dead becomes a lively vehicle enabling Woolf to develop her attack on patriarchy. The Spanish photographs index experiences unacknowledged by patriarchal culture. While these photographs are not gendered in essence, although they do feature the domestic and children, the narrator's memory and her own bodily responses to the photographs are marked by gender difference. The recurring memories

of the photographs in *Three Guineas* both produce sexual difference and represent the ideological effects of sexual difference.

The published photographs are copies of some of the newspaper photographs that Woolf collected together with press cuttings, quotations, and letters in three scrapbooks dating from the early 1930s.<sup>5</sup> Like their five visible companions, the absent photographs also have a dialectical relationship with Woolf's scrapbooks, which contain a great deal of material about the Spanish Civil War, including a pamphlet, *The Martyrdom of Madrid*, a lengthy eyewitness account by Louis Delaprée, written during November 19–20, 1936, about the bombing of Madrid. In the pamphlet's "Scenes and *spectacles*" (my emphasis), Delaprée movingly depicts horrific images of destruction. "How could one forget the image of that child lying dead on the breast of a dead woman, in the middle of a pool of black blood?" (Woolf 1931–37, 16). Delaprée might equally be describing a photographic image in which blood, because red, would necessarily become black in a black-and-white print. Woolf's unexposed black-and-white memory pictures of dead bodies and ruined houses act as an epigrammatic mnemonic of the theme of *Three Guineas*, a prose picture of the indissoluble link between the physical violence of fascism and patriarchal tyranny to women and children in the private home.

### Reading *Three Guineas*

Woolf emblemizes the contrast between the public newspaper photographs, which are a visual history of institutionalized patriarchy, and her memories of absent photographs in two very different narrative modes. In Woolf's analysis of the public photographs, her own body, or rather that of the narrator, is largely absent. Indeed, the narrator frequently comments on the difficulties posed by that absence. Yet the narrative of the absent photographs has an indexical contiguity both to the narrator and to the arguments Woolf makes about women's bodies, childbirth mortality, and wartime atrocities. The dominant histories in the visible photographs, to which Woolf has no physical access in the text and which are icons of masculine ideologies, are a convex mirror of Woolf's memories of women's bodily, social, and economic inequalities matched by the violence in the absent photographs. *Three Guineas* is then a dense, composite image/text that exposes and resists dominant histories with Woolf's

<sup>5</sup> The three notebooks of newspaper clippings and related materials that Woolf compiled for *Three Guineas* are part of the Virginia Woolf Monk's House Archives in Sussex University Library.

active, alternative forms of memory. The photographs, both absent and visible, are the intellectual center of gravity of *Three Guineas*, spaces of bodily contradictions that match Woolf's narrative work of political contestation. Woolf shows how a long history of patriarchal controls over women's bodies leads to military fascism, and the two kinds of photographs highlight this trajectory.

Contemporaneously, and still today, *Three Guineas* is a radical, anti-patriarchal, antifascist, and pacifist work. Woolf's argument is that war can only be prevented with gendered changes in education, employment, and intellectual life. She connects fascist military oppressions with the marginalization of women in general and creates the Outsiders Society, the disenchanting daughters of educated men, to challenge political certainties. Adopting a triadic epistolary narrative, Woolf gives two guineas to fictional proponents of women's educational and economic freedoms, gifts that in turn require her to give a third guinea to pacifism. These separate freedoms, Woolf understands, are completely interdependent. Fascism begins in the private, patriarchal home: "The public and the private, the material and the spiritual, for they are inseparably connected" (Woolf [1938] 1993, 271).

Woolf's contemporary diary is immersed in news about the Spanish Civil War. There are twenty-four references to the war, and although *Three Guineas* is in part inspired by Woolf's nephew Julian Bell's decision to drive an ambulance and his subsequent death, only nine references are to him. The first entry in November 1936—"Madrid not fallen. Chaos. Slaughter. War surrounding our island"—instinctively links external European aggression with a sense of home as "our island" (Woolf 1985, 32). Woolf was particularly moved by the plight of children. In June 1937, she sat on the platform at a meeting organized by the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief in the Albert Hall in order to raise funds for the Basque refugee children, and Woolf describes it with visual intensity. "A long trail of fugitives—like a caravan in a desert—came through the square: Spaniards flying from Bilbao, which has fallen, I suppose. Somehow brought tears to my eyes, tho' no one seemed surprised. Children trudging along" (1985, 97).

In her diary Woolf deliberately connects the writing of *Three Guineas* not only with emotional Spanish images but also with her body. Woolf describes the process of writing in her customary intensely embodied rhetoric. Although at proof stage Woolf claimed to be "bored with the book," *Three Guineas* had been "a spine to me all last summer" (1985, 130). Like the mothers Woolf describes in chapter 3, whose time "occupied in childbirth is under modern conditions—remember we are in

the twentieth century—only a fraction” (268–69), “*Three Guineas* was the mildest childbirth I ever had” (148). No book had “ever slid from me so secretly and smoothly” (149). If by March 1937 Woolf feels that writing *Three Guineas* is like “drawing that cart across the rough ground” (67), equally in writing Woolf discovers self-embodiment: “I felt flame up in me 3Gs” (80). By October 1937 *Three Guineas* “spurted out” of Woolf “like a physical volcano” (112).

### **The absent photographs and memory**

*Three Guineas* is structured by nine references to “dead bodies and ruined houses” in which the narrator’s differing “looks” trigger Woolf’s individualized political analysis of patriarchy. Woolf’s first account of the absent photographs is worth quoting in full.

Here on the table before us are photographs. The Spanish Government sends them with patient pertinacity about twice a week. They are not pleasant photographs to look upon. They are photographs of dead bodies for the most part. This morning’s collection contains the photograph of what might be a man’s body, or a woman’s; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig. But those certainly are dead children, and that undoubtedly is the section of a house. A bomb has torn open the side; there is still a bird-cage hanging in what was presumably the sitting-room, but the rest of the house looks like nothing so much as a bunch of spillikins suspended in mid air. These photographs are not an argument; they are simply a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye. But the eye is connected with the brain; the brain with the nervous system. That system sends its messages in a flash through every past memory and present feeling. When we look at these photographs some fusion takes place within us; however different the education, the traditions behind us, our sensations are the same, and they are violent. (Woolf [1938] 1993, 125)

The absent photograph functions as a transactional act of memory between narrator and spectator. Woolf achieves this transaction by means of specific, vivid details. In the absent photograph the ruined houses resemble a child’s game of “spillikins,” a domestic game.<sup>6</sup> The “certain”

<sup>6</sup> Spillikins is a very common European children’s game in which a collection of thin pieces of wood are thrown into a heap and players must pull off as many as possible without disturbing the rest, in which case the turn passes to another player.

bodies are those of children, and the houses still retain “a bird-cage,” itself often a compelling metonymic referent of Victorian women’s private seclusions ([1938] 1993, 125). In addition, the narrator chooses to examine these photographs on a domestic table, not in the public spheres of street or library. Woolf takes up this tea table image with similar intent in a later antiwar essay, “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” (Woolf 1961). As Helen Cooper, Adrienne Munich, and Susan Squier argue, the essay “dismantles the dualistic figuration of war itself. In locating her concept of ‘mental fight’ at the tea table . . . Woolf redefines the front” (1989, 22). By its very absence, and by its anonymity, such a photographic memory becomes a generic picture. Such an image directly engages readers/spectators. Hopefully, none of us will be bombed, but certainly many of us have played spillikins. The imagery in the absent photograph encourages us to connect our private histories to those horrific public events. The children’s anonymity in the memory pictures draws in any spectator who loves children. So that Woolf’s final peroration, at the close of *Three Guineas*, connecting the public world of war with the private world of women—“the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other”—is compelling precisely because Woolf has textually anticipated such a connection through her carefully structured descriptions of the absent dead ([1938] 1993, 270).

Woolf subsequently abbreviates the detailed account into a single phrasal mnemonic occurring at nine further points in the text: either “the photograph of ruined houses and dead bodies” (Woolf [1938] 1993, 138), or “pictures of dead bodies and ruined houses” (154), or “photographs of more dead bodies, of more ruined houses” (162). The first passage, and its subsequent mnemonics, turn images of violence into memorials, into traces of past violence, and, through their sheer repetition, into a sense of violence to come. In some ways, of course, the absent photographs are themselves instruments of war because Woolf is describing propaganda sent overseas by the Spanish Republican government. All propaganda images aim to mobilize support through the display of totemistic emblems (Mitchell 1994). But the narrator’s memory of the photographs diffuses any ordinary instrumental propaganda by means of repeated qualifiers and an intricate interweaving of the visual into the verbal. Woolf’s work with these photographs is a genuine mnemonic. The emotions triggered by memory of the photographs demand a level of political action far greater than “an hour spent listening to speeches” (Woolf [1938] 1993, 126).

The next “memory” connects British patriarchal institutions directly with fascism as Woolf traces the “connections” between “the sartorial



splendours of the educated man and the photograph of ruined houses and dead bodies" ([1938] 1993, 138). Each memory scene builds heuristically on another by displaying both personal and public images of patriarchy and alternatives to those images in response to the "dead bodies and ruined houses." Each further memory of the photographs enables Woolf to envision more radical reforms for women. "Also consider these photographs: they are pictures of dead bodies and ruined houses. Surely in view of these questions and pictures you must consider very carefully before you begin to rebuild your college what is the aim of education. . . . Now since history and biography—the only evidence available to an outsider—seem to prove that," the narrator claims, "the old education" breeds no "hatred of war," then the new college must be "an experimental college" (Woolf [1938] 1993, 154–55). Each memory of the absent image gives Woolf the strength to move forward into a more complex social agenda, "the experimental college." To interpret a photograph is always to give it a past and a future.

Subsequent memories move the argument even further by switching Woolf's vision onward from a delimiting screen of championing equal opportunities because the masculine professional agenda only makes people "lose their senses" (Woolf [1938] 1993, 197). Remembering the photographs encourages Woolf to imagine new cultural and intellectual liberties in the Outsiders Society. The photographic memories are a performative process in which aspects of patriarchal culture and subject formation can be screened, refocused, and subverted. It is the photographic memories, not the published photographs, that mark each privileged moment in the narrator's disengagement with dominant culture. Woolf's key tactical maneuver in unifying this political work of deconstruction is to use her body. The narrator's bodily responses to the absent photographs make a compelling motif. No longer are the images prescribed propaganda; instead they directly strike the narrator's body, fusing "past memory and present feeling" (Woolf [1938] 1993, 125). The images connect the eye "with the brain, the brain with the nervous system" (125). Erin G. Carlston, in *Thinking Fascism*, agrees that *Three Guineas'* absent photographs mediate between mind and body but argues that this mediation provides "an emotional shortcut through rational argument" (1998, 159). In my reading of the text, the absent photographs, or memory pictures, are not an emotional *shortcut* but a complex mnemonic dramatically triggering Woolf's feminist epistemological opposition to the logic of capitalism.

### Kinds of memories

Some light can be thrown on Woolf's very physical activity of memory and writing by turning to Frances Yates's germinal account of classical and Renaissance visual mnemonics in *The Art of Memory* (Yates 1966).<sup>7</sup> Yates vividly describes the general principles of mnemonic learning in which the first step is to implant into memory both the content and sequence of an argument by visually encoding rhetorical sections onto features of buildings. Although Yates is discussing the use of memories of buildings as a grander philosophical project encapsulating classical and Renaissance cosmologies, her understanding that "inner techniques depend on visual impressions of almost incredible intensity" matches Woolf's need to reveal the human cost of fascism through repeated images of bodies and buildings (4). As Yates argues, such acts of memory are like inner writing and are likely to be much more successful if the imagined building is disfigured, as in Woolf's mental pictures of ruined houses. In these ways Woolf resembles a classical rhetorician as she moves her argument from point to point by means of reiterated memories of ruined buildings.

Freud also describes memory facts optically. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud describes sequences of the unconscious with camera images that photograph mnemonic traces, and in a case of female paranoia Freud identified a young woman's belief that she was being constantly photographed with the click of a camera shutter as a displacement of the clitoris (Freud 1966). It is precisely Freud's turn to the visibility of the unconscious from a concept of an "invisible" mnemonic that Luce Irigaray attacks as "the look becoming vision" (Irigaray 1993, 154–55). A tissue of invisible memories is lost, Irigaray claims, as soon as "a sort of photograph puts them into the world" (154–55). As my perceptive reviewer pointed out, *photograph*, for both Freud and Irigaray, stands for a metaphor, whereas Woolf refers to an unconscious memory of photographs that have a different ontological status. I should add, however, that when researching the most complete archive of photographs of the Spanish Civil War in the Marx Memorial Library in London, I found no photographs resembling those described by Woolf. What is at issue in these diverse reflections on memory and the visual is the significance of the invisibility of memory significations. Sight destroys the invisibility of things and there-

<sup>7</sup> Yates's descriptions of memory mnemonics are now widely drawn on in contemporary memory studies (e.g., Hutton 1993). I cite Yates here to show the marked similarities between Yates's and Woolf's bodily and domestic mnemonics.

fore destroys possible affect. The affect of the Spanish Civil War photographs is far more effectively captured in Woolf's memory traces than as published photographs because memory traces represent ongoing states or processes, not static, frozen images.

In "Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*," the French historian Pierre Nora describes how "unstudied reflexes" of the body can crystallize *lieux de mémoire*, places of memory, reflexes that very much resemble the narrator's bodily synapses in Woolf's *Three Guineas* (Nora 1989).<sup>8</sup> Nora's now classic opposition between history's "spectacular symbols" and memory's materialization in "images" and "the unstudied reflexes of the body" has been rightly described by Marianne Hirsch and others as "reified," but it is a very pertinent model of the figurative tensions in *Three Guineas* between published and absent photographs (Hirsch 1997, 22). Nora's essay constitutes a theoretical introduction to his ambitious collaborative work, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, of 130 essays by more than one hundred historians in three volumes undertaken between 1984 and 1992 to show how "issues of identity, memory and patrimony" supersede "any more monolithic understanding of history" (Parish 1999, 7).

Nora's distinction between history and memory closely resembles the elaborately gendered account of historical representations of sexual difference and time that Julia Kristeva develops in her essay "Women's Time" (1992). "Masculinity," Kristeva argues, is represented in history, which celebrates logical connections and linearity (the symbolic), to which Kristeva opposes "feminine" time, which is commemorative, monumental, and cyclical. "Female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilization" (Kristeva 1992, 216). Kristeva's "feminine" memory, which is repetitious and comparative, matches Nora's idea that *lieux de mémoire* contain an eternal present. Nora focuses on issues of the embodiment of history. "True" memory is crystallized in "the body's inherent self-knowledge," represented in Nora's concept *lieux de mémoire*, which he describes, with a very Woolfian image, as "shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded" (1989, 12–13).

Images in *lieux de mémoire* closely resemble Woolf's photo albums and *Three Guineas'* absent photographs because all share a "hybrid and mu-

<sup>8</sup> There are now many rich and sophisticated critiques of Nora's project (see Carrier 2000 for a summative account). I focus here on those images utilized by Nora that specifically match Woolf's images.

tant” optics of memory (Nora 1989, 19). For Nora, traditional history is too exterior, too obsessed with rituals that, paradoxically, mark a “society without ritual” (12). Nora’s binary division between recorded history/memory is reified but matches Woolf’s binary, her equally complex account of the public and remembered photography in *Three Guineas*. Indeed, Nora’s project encapsulates the very schema of *Three Guineas*: Woolf’s attack on dead, symbolic history in the visible photographs, from which women are physically remote, and Woolf’s endorsement of alternative, if invisible, memories through her bodily “reflexes” and contiguity to the absent photographs. Woolf describes history in the public photographs as an empty performance of patriarchal glorification, which is culturally privileged. Women are not constituted by this historical pageant. In some senses Woolf is constantly negotiating identities for women through “memory work” in opposition to this public history. Gender shapes the social imaginary of the narrator: “‘We’ a whole made up of body, brain and spirit, influenced by memory and tradition must still differ in some essential respects from ‘you’ whose body, brain and spirit have been so differently trained” (Woolf [1938] 1993, 132–33).

Woolf’s continual project, throughout her fiction, particularly in *To the Lighthouse*, is to suggest that family memories are somehow at the core of our identities and histories, particularly at the core of women’s identities. The implied photographs speak of domestic destruction, “ruined houses,” and the impact of fascism on the home and on the family. Rosemary Summer points to a similar example of Woolf’s photographic imagination in the “Time Passes” sequence of *To the Lighthouse*. The sequence resembles, Summer argues, “time-lapse photography which enables the reader to see entropy in process, invisible to the human eye” (1999, 17).

### **Photographs and the body**

The published photographs tell another story. These photographs appear to offer cropped, snatched images of public life immune to deeper readings. Woolf’s textual commentary on each photograph, together with her uneasy physical distancing from each image in the text, highlights their public abstraction. But, like their absent companions, the published photographs also carry a deeper visual plenitude. Jane Marcus cites Elizabeth Robins, the American actress, writer, and suffragette, as a source for Woolf’s “provocative but correct portraits of the powerful in *Three Guineas*” (1988, 144). Marcus points out that in *Ancilla’s Share*, published in 1924, Robins makes a vivid association between the social function of symbolic dress and patriarchal values. Woolf goes further in *Three*

*Guineas* to suggest the emptiness of symbolic history itself and that this emptiness represents a society entirely absorbed in its work of hyperreality.

The five public portraits resemble Nora's "history" at its most static. Unlike the reciprocal movements of memory from absent photograph to narrator and to reader that Woolf's description of the absent photographs' frequent circulation—"about twice a week"—pinpoints, the public photographs stand immobile (Woolf [1938] 1993, 125). The first image in *Three Guineas*, that of a general, is a full-frontal, individual shot showing the primacy of symbolic signs: the general's array of medals. The image seems unmediated. The second image of heralds also emphasizes the surface detail of uniforms. The third and fourth images of a university procession and a judge are wide-angle rather than medium shot. Neither photograph is a cohesive or integrated composition, and the effect of wide-angle is to shape perspective so as to impose a particular viewpoint on the spectator. Finally, the photograph of the archbishop is similarly monumental, utilizing a low camera angle. The archbishop's crook is given a greater iconographic import by the parallelism of a staff held by a figure at the rear of the photograph. In addition, the archbishop's public isolation has a visual referent in the photograph's brushed-out background.

The photographs are grotesque excessive performances of people trying to deny the effects of change. In every conceivable way these photographs match Nora's characterization of history as "ceaselessly reinventing tradition" to "an undifferentiated time of heroes" (1989, 8). As Nora suggests, history can only represent the past with spectacular symbols full of empty "medallions and monuments" (1989, 9). In *Three Guineas* the published photographs do not carry amplifying or antipodal subtitles. All commentary is located tangentially in the text in which the narrator positions herself as the representative voice of all dissenting daughters. The verbal language of the text and the pictorial language of the photographs are deeply antagonistic. Where the photographs represent an excess of immobility, the narrator takes differing descriptive vantage points that often resemble the camera angles of the modernist photographers Alexander Rodchenko and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy in a shared exploration of the visual and political potential of overhead views.<sup>9</sup>

Just as the daughters of public men have been forced to be invisible in public life, so too the narrator, their collective voice, is physically remote

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Rodchenko turned to photography in the mid-1920s, making radical transformations of perception with photographs that utilized new angles: "in order to teach man to look in a new way it is necessary to photograph ordinary familiar objects from totally unexpected viewpoints, and in unexpected positions" (Roberts 1998, 20).

from each photograph. From her angle “your world . . . undoubtedly looks queer” (Woolf [1938] 1993, 133). The narrator can only “enter on tiptoe” (133); she has a “bird’s eye view of the outside of things” (138) that “is not altogether encouraging” (138). As the narrator acutely points out, political memory should involve embodiment. “To prevent war we must try to penetrate deeper beneath the skin” (141). Watching the university procession is no easier. How “strange” this world appears “from our vantage point” (142) of inequality since such processions are observed as “so remote” (142). This displacement is not the same as Woolf’s later abjection of her own body, or displacement, in the famous mirror scene in “A Sketch of the Past.” Rather, in *Three Guineas* Woolf is attempting to contest a *patriarchal* displacement of women with the narrator’s very embodied reactions to a differing politics of the Spanish Republic.<sup>10</sup> At best women can only go “trapesing along at the tail end of the procession” (184). Rather than the absent photographs, whose contingent, affective scenes electrify Woolf’s bodily synapses, the public photographs lack affect. Portraits and spectator do not exchange looks, cannot exchange memories.

Woolf makes her sexual politics very clear not only by deconstructing the public photographs in the text but also by physically displacing the narrator’s body from the world she observes. The masculine “body” is openly diseased. Patriarchy’s infantile fixation is “an egg we called it; a germ. We smelt it in the atmosphere” ([1938] 1993, 255). Similarly “fathers in public, massed together in societies, in professions, were even more subject to the fatal disease” (266). The sequence of public photographs in *Three Guineas* in part matches Woolf’s method of ordering and mounting newspaper photographs in the scrapbooks, with some distinct and interesting omissions. Woolf does not transfer from scrapbook to text two very powerful photographs: a photograph, dated August 12, 1935, of a fascist with a resplendent skull on his flying jacket, nor a photograph of “Major Fey,” a powerful helmeted German soldier. Instead, Woolf ends *Three Guineas* with a scourging verbal portrait of fascism, imaginatively utilizing some of the pictorial presence of the scrapbook photographs. “Man himself, the quintessence of virility, the perfect type of which all the others are imperfect adumbrations. He is a man certainly.

<sup>10</sup> I am very grateful to Julia Watson for suggesting that I revisit Sidonie Smith’s excellent essay on Woolf’s different representations of the body in “A Sketch of the Past” (see Smith 1993). One of Julia’s own publications particularly pertinent in this context is her sophisticated analysis of subjectivity in Jo Spence’s photographs and other autobiographies (see Watson 1992).

His eyes are glazed; his eyes glare. His body, which is braced in an unnatural position, is tightly cased in a uniform. Upon the breast of that uniform are sewn several medals and other mystic symbols. His hand is upon a sword. He is called in German and Italian Führer or Duce; in our own language Tyrant or Dictator. And behind him lie ruined houses and dead bodies" (270). This verbal montage, like John Heartfield's several photo montages of the Führer, is a hybrid portrait. The image resembles the photographic cover of *Quack, Quack*, Leonard Woolf's attack on European fascism and fascism's philosophical antecedents in the writings of Spengler and others (L. Woolf 1935). *Quack, Quack*'s cover shows both Hitler and Mussolini in full uniform, resplendent with medals and in fascist salute. Virginia thought *Quack, Quack* "a very spirited attack upon human nature as it is at present" (Woolf 1982, 388). Woolf's choice of a verbal portrait over direct photographic evidence is, I feel, an ethical strategy, adopted to prevent us from identifying with the often compelling quality of fascist imagery. Woolf manipulates the verbal description to metaphorically highlight the main theme of *Three Guineas*. Just as the fascist is "unnatural," "glazed," and "tightly cased," so, in turn, he tightly cases women's bodies in the birdcages of ruined domesticity. Woolf's text stares back into the glazed gaze of fascism, denying this disturbing image any published vivid visibility.

#### **Image/text as essay**

The Otherness of the published portraits to Woolf's scene of looking, in opposition to the close physical relationship among Woolf, her interpellated reader, and the absent photographs, makes *Three Guineas* a profoundly innovative image/text. Image/texts, W. J. T. Mitchell argues in *Picture Theory*, break with the formal generic frontiers of narrative in their textual heterogeneity, their "multiple boundaries and frames" (1994, 190). The real question to ask, when confronted by such image/texts, Mitchell suggests, "is not 'what is the difference (or similarity) between the words and the images?'" but "what difference do the differences (and similarities) make?" (Mitchell 1994, 15). The difference, which the differences between verbal and visual evidence make, matters a great deal to Woolf. *Three Guineas* dramatizes the image/text differences as the medium of its analytical attack on fascist patriarchy. In this way *Three Guineas* breaks with the generic conventions that tend to govern essays that are purely narratives. It is true, of course, that narrative essays are not completely consistent. As Graham Good points out in *The Observing Self*, an overview of the essay genre, essays emerged in the late sixteenth century

*outside* of existing organizations of knowledge (Good 1988). But *Three Guineas*' composition by field and its collaborative narrative of the visual and the verbal bear witness to social issues in more dynamic ways than conventional essays. For example, in Theodor Adorno's classic, definitive account of the essay, "The Essay as Form," although he admits the "essay's affinity to the visual image" (170) and "the interrelation of nature and culture" (167), he summatively denies that the essay can break "out of culture into nature" (159) or address lived reality because "the essay honors nature by confirming that it no longer exists for human beings" (Adorno 1984, 159). Woolf's essays, on the other hand, have permeable boundaries. Woolf frequently fictionalizes in her essays, inventing "real" lives, characters who may carry her voice but who jump frequently "from fact to fiction" (Brosnan 1997, 138). Similarly, in her fiction, Woolf flows in and out of interior monologue and exterior description, producing a "certain permeability of self and other" (Nicholls 1995, 265).

*Three Guineas* shows how patriarchy ravages both the public and the private, both the symbolic body and individuals' bodies symbolized both by a lack of narrator relationality to the portraits and by her emotional testimony to the pictures of murdered children. Woolf's title choice *Three Guineas* over her working titles *Men Are Like That* and *Letters to an Englishman* reveals her discomfort with direct statement and preference for metaphor and metonymy. Woolf's recognition that militaristic history and patriarchal identity construction in the family work in tandem profoundly manifests itself in *Three Guineas*' conjunction of memory "pictures" and referential symbols of patriarchy. In "Uses of Photography," a response to Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, John Berger describes how photographs come to replace memory but also contain memory traces of subjectivity (Berger 1972). Crucially, in terms of *Three Guineas*, Berger links memory photographs with justice. Like Woolf, Berger believes that memory, and memory's photographic referents, imply "a certain act of redemption" since what is remembered about political history is saved from nothingness (54).

### Conclusion

Woolf discusses in detail the referents of both published and "private" photographs in order to do justice to women's economic and social invisibility. The repeated images in which women are absent in the present public world and in which masculine military genocide has created an absent, dead world are the constitutive core of *Three Guineas*' account of history and memory. Woolf's contiguous relation to the absent photo-



graphs and her bodily distance from the public photographs indexically construct the main theme of *Three Guineas*: Woolf's attack on the symbolic blindness of patriarchal traditions. The photographs are not simply adjuncts reflecting her textual feminism. The important features of *Three Guineas* are the narrator's embodiment, or lack of embodiment, in relation to photographic testimony and what such relationships can suggest about visual memories and history.

I believe that Woolf's deep knowledge of photography—her constant photographic practice, photo album construction, and the continued experience of being photographed throughout her life—inspired her to choose photography as a generative medium in *Three Guineas*. The interaction of photographs and narrative produces a more complex multiple text able to recast the problematics of patriarchy. Woolf had a very firm grasp of how photography can conceptualize the self against history, as both “I” and “not I.” Woolf's emotional investment in photography's multiple powers was shared by other modernist women. As Jane Gover explains, in the years leading up to *Three Guineas*, “photography, a male bastion before 1880, emerged as a career option and avocation for women” (1988, 17) who often “shared a willingness to flaunt social standards and expectations” (35). Modernist women's photography, in a continuum from the amateur to the professional, from popular culture to high art, “was less competitive” and “more communal” (Davidov 1998, 76). In addition, like Woolf, many modernist women were drawn to the power of photographic narratives. For example, *Dorothea Lange Looks at the American Country Woman* similarly sutures women and place in photographic stories that interweave image and text (Davidov 1998, 215). Modernist women photographers shared Woolf's focus on the personal in a “form of self-representation . . . a special language for expressing themselves” (Gover 1988, 133).

Rather than privileging, as critics frequently do, Woolf's narrative political analysis and seeing *Three Guineas*' published photographs as simply graphic documentation of this, what strikes me most about *Three Guineas* is Woolf's physical as well as photographic testimony. By juxtaposing the language of the body with two differing referents—the visible public icons and the absent private visual memories—Woolf's matrix of experiential fragments connects past with present in an unassimilable testimony. Although Picasso, Braque, and other modernist artists did create matrices of paint and other materials, as W. J. T. Mitchell points out, the impulse to reject mixed media “to purify media is one of the central Utopian gestures of modernism” that Woolf expertly disavows with her multigeneric work of feminist modernism (Mitchell 1994, 5). The photographs,

both visible and implied, together with Woolf's experiential responses to both kinds of photographs, drain power from patriarchal representations in order to suggest the reversibility of patriarchal structures. As Woolf incisively concludes, "we can best help you to prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods" ([1938] 1993, 272).

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