

# Aesthetic Investigations

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## Gestures of/at Art

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**Abstract:** An odd occurrence within a live model session is that the model, while nude, is drawn in a way which renders irrelevant the nakedness. Participants may focus on the model's face, or draw the pose while heavily blurring breasts or genitalia—the unveiling of which is, presumably, partly what the model is hired for. Why? If a live model presents an opportunity to study human anatomy or embodied gestures without the interruption of clothing, participants would likely focus upon parts which normally remain private. Instead, it is not rare to see sketches and work which could have been produced while permitting the model to wear swimwear or even substantial clothing.

Nudity's status within the artist-live model relationship will be one topic of this essay. Three additional questions will be (1) the model's motivation; (2) the degree of agency attributed to the model: for some, a mere prop; for others, a full-fledged performer; (3) the role of 'art' in the live model session given how much of it remains incomplete and not displayed.

## I. INTRODUCTION

It seems obvious to consider the interaction between an artist and a life model in terms of a relationship. Yet this premise is not self-evident. Some artists will relegate the model to the status of a prop, or dismiss a substantive distinction between drawing a person and drawing an object, or cultivate ways of looking at a live subject which intentionally undermine the intuitive focus on limbs or facial features. They will advocate training the eye to discern differences between form and cast shadows, regardless of whether these track the separation of body from background or pertain to the animate/non-animate distinction.<sup>1</sup> Another reason why substantive artist-model relationships may be called into question is that artists might deny that they are aiming to capture interiority. Models, too, may not subscribe to forging a meaningful relationship with artists. They may experientially be detached from the session, getting through the immobile poses without much give-and-take. Moreover, models are not necessarily consistently hired by the same artist and most live sessions involve groups, frequently with students, rather than with artists. And yet I will offer reasons for the importance to treat the artist-model dyad as a relationship. There is a trivial sense in which all entities are in some relationship with all other entities. In the case of the artist-model relationship, though, some of its qualities reveal non-obvious aspects of art more broadly.

I pose four questions pertaining to life-drawing sessions: the very point of nudity, the status of the incomplete or undisplayable art produced in many of these sessions, a person's motivation to model, and the status of their agency when they do so (II). My argument will explain how responding to these can advance by considering unique qualities of the artist-model relationship (III & IV). Throughout, my discussion will relate to the potential of this relationship. In other words, I do not plan to faithfully record what transpires in each life session ever held. Rather, I aim to articulate points relating to what such unique contact points can beget and how this relates to the four questions.

## II. THE FOUR QUESTIONS

The artist's motivation for drawing a nude appears obvious: access to the unconcealed body. Unlike the drawing of a commissioned portrait, the life session offers an opportunity for an uninterrupted study of human anatomy. Unlike a cadaver, the life model exhibits not just frozen anatomy, but the muscle work of a living body when holding a pose.<sup>2</sup> Obvious as it might seem, such a justification was not universally accepted: 'for the anatomy of the body and limbs, the academic figure is far from being an infallible guide', maintained Charles Bell in an influential book on drawing from the early nineteenth-century. Models holding intricate poses by deploying ropes will, Bell argued, display an inaccurate template regarding the actual functioning of muscles when the body is in motion. Models also tend to cater to the artist's attention when they pose, thereby making a travesty of the truth

they are hired to reveal:

I see them watch my eye, and where they see me intent, they exert the muscles. The painter, therefore, cannot trust to the man throwing himself into a natural posture, he must direct him, and be himself able to catch... what is natural, and reject what is constrained.<sup>3</sup>

Besides the question of verisimilitude, if unhindered access to nakedness were the primary point of the life-session, it is hard to explain why some of the art produced in such sessions disregards much of what the model is hired to reveal. Of the images reproduced in *The Artist's Model: from Etty to Spencer*, a book accompanying an exhibition held at the now York Art Gallery in the United Kingdom, only a quarter display full nudity, half avoid genitalia and the rest render nudity otiose.<sup>4</sup> Such unexpected de-emphasising of nudity harmonizes with my own experience as a member of a life drawing group for two years. Participants in a life session may lavish much attention upon a model's face, or draw a remote abstraction rather than a nude. Swimwear would have served the purpose. It may be that shunning nudity stems from conservative norms or from personal embarrassment. Perhaps such artists misunderstand the genre—the nude is not the subject of art, but a form of art.<sup>5</sup> Why, though, would avoiding nudity be the preference of a seasoned artist, when it cannot be explained away as ignorance or prudish unease?

Apart from the enigma of the mismatch between the nudity on display and the produced art, another unexpected aspect of life sessions is how much of it ends up in sketchbooks, is discarded or gifted to the model. William Mulready, a painter admired for his superb technique, was reluctant to sell his nude studies, even when Queen Victoria showed a strong interest.<sup>6</sup> William Etty drew nudes three times a week. At the time (the first decades of the nineteenth century), life classes were a study-stage for students at the Royal Academy and Etty's conduct was considered unseemly. Such was the degree of Etty's commitment to life drawing that he threatened to resign from the Academy, which ultimately capitulated. Concomitantly, he refused to sell his sketches. Etty's disinclination to regard these as art—when he died, eight hundred of his nudes studies were sold<sup>7</sup>—is also implied by his drawing them on millboard, often using the verso for a fresh attempt. His refusal to sell the drawings could be interpreted in various ways: Etty may not have regarded them as incomplete; he may have simply assessed that there would not be a market for these, or that disseminating them would tarnish his reputation, particularly among his paying clients. Regardless of how Etty himself categorised such drawings, his maintaining for many years a sphere of activity whereby work was made but never sold, suggests aesthetic gains, a value realised through the practice of creating unfinished art. Which?

The model's side of the equation is also not as clear as it might appear. Frances Borzello's attempt to deflate the various stereotypes associated

with models–muses, bohemian temptresses–emphasises, instead, the mundane properties of modelling: a low-paid job whose most important skill is the ability to sit still.<sup>8</sup> Casting cold water on popular fantasies is called for, but it weakens Borzello’s argument to the extent of being unable to account for the model’s unorthodox choice. In previous centuries, modelling may have been preferable to seedier alternatives. Nowadays, it need not be a mark of destitution. As a chosen occupation, however, it requires justification. The working conditions are often poor,<sup>9</sup> as exemplified by an online ‘Open Letter’ to employers of art models averring that [l]ife modelling in academic settings often involves lengthy project poses, rigorous anatomical scrutiny and sculpture students approaching the model with calipers for direct measurement’, thus denouncing the inferior compensation for such work.<sup>10</sup> Even when fairly remunerated, when the sitter is a woman, modelling could be experienced as collusion with patriarchal objectification,<sup>11</sup> a self-degrading complicity with a tradition of Western art–the nude–in which artworks appeal to men through a particular orchestration of the female body.<sup>12</sup> Given the availability of alternative sources of income, why would anyone subject themselves to being drawn nude?

Finally, how to conceptualise the model’s contribution to the artwork? While confessing to sometimes zoning out, meditating or falling asleep, models also insist that when sensing objectified, they suspect the artist of being blind to the model’s agency and therefore missing the point of drawing a live model rather than, say, drawing from a lifelike statue.<sup>13</sup> Aurélie Debaene takes such participation onto a different plane, arguing that models are performers, a claim which is not just armchair philosophising on her part, but draws upon her own experience as a life model and is corroborated by testimonials from other models.<sup>14</sup> Some sitters refer to the artist as capturing their energy or soul and feel that their poses somehow communicate this.<sup>15</sup> Common to such articulations is a belief in the influence of skilful modelling upon artists; hence the sense of collaboration. Yet, is ‘performance’ the right term for understanding and capturing the model’s contribution?

### III. THE MODEL-ARTIST RELATIONSHIP

Consider the following testimonials:

I confess. When I model, I feel beautiful. Even though I like my curly hair, long neck, and shapely collar bones, no one has ever described me as attractive. The five times in my life I heard a whistle in my direction I reacted by looking around to find the other woman. Yet on the platform, instead of throwing out my hip and seeing myself as a cow, I am a thick woman who bears children. I am all mothers. In addition, I would have less value as a model if my body conformed to some mass media definition of beauty.<sup>16</sup>

Sometimes there is that special moment when somebody actually draws you, and it just makes you look so extraordinarily beautiful, so you can't believe that's you. And some people actually see me that way. Wow, they see that.<sup>17</sup>

Consider Taylor's and 'Rachel's' experience of feeling beautiful, as well as Taylor's sense of standing for a type. Although articulated in terms of personal experience, 'feeling beautiful' transcends description, implying a prescriptive expectation or invitation or hope from the artist and the art. Taylor is not merely saying that—despite not conforming to some governing aesthetic benchmark—her body remains a worthy object of artistic representation. Rather, she refers to her beauty. It is as if something about the live session foregrounds unavailable types of beauty. Posing invites artists to discover and bring out the gap between that which is conventionally pretty and that which is beautiful, eliciting attraction without conforming to expected norms.<sup>18</sup>

Note how this differs from a familiar dimension associated with the tradition of the nude in Western art. Until the nineteenth century, it was a staple of this tradition to relate to the model's beauty not as represented but as imposed.<sup>19</sup> The drawing of nudes was understood as predicated on perfection, rather than on figurative imitation.<sup>20</sup> Yet Taylor and 'Rachel' are saying something else. Taylor liberally describes the discontinuities between her appearance and cultural norms of beauty. She does not credit artists for concealing these discontinuities. Artists show her as beautiful in another sense. To put this differently, she applauds the artists not on account of their flattery, but for their generosity. Flattery amounts to photoshopping features. Generosity means to actively search for beauty as that which someone presents. Beauty established via generosity overlaps with *agape*: a quality bestowed rather than found. Generous impositions do not collapse into fawning fabrications when founded upon properties the model manifests. The resulting effect—call it 'beauty'—is of a likeness that occasions magnetism: being drawn to the object, desiring to spend more time with it, being curious about its makeup and experiencing joy when relating to it. To model is to invite such attention and perhaps this is why the experience is often empowering and sought after by people drawn to model for artists.<sup>21</sup> Arguably, a model's motivation to be drawn (our third question) is partly trust in generous beauty-finding by artists.

Testimonials from actual models are important. Sometimes, though, fiction provides a no less insightful prospect into the modelling experience, which can take us beyond the limits of introspection. Given the unusual context of being naked while observed by clothed strangers, introspection alone is suspect, as it may involve shunning some thoughts, or being overwhelmed by others. The distance of authors from what they describe coupled to the need to faithfully track experiences, enables some literary renderings to com-

plement what models say. Among the numerous fictional descriptions of the model's experience,<sup>22</sup> consider this situation from *The Colony* by Audrey Magee:

He sat in front of her, then, closer than before, his face pitched forward, leaning into hers so that she could feel his breath, smell his smell, lavender, paint, and turpentine. She recoiled a little, but he followed, chasing her with his eyes, his pencil, pinning me down, holding me in place as he drew, looking intermittently at the paper, at the lines and curves on the page, then back at me, at my face, my eyes, scraping and scratching, as though trying to enter me through my eyes.

She smiled.

'I think I prefer the way the Frenchman comes in.'

'Be still, Mairéad'.<sup>23</sup>

This abrupt shift from a third- to first-person narrator chimes with the unmistakable aggression: a chasing pencil, eyes that pin down. While Mairéad appears to be forcefully penetrated through her eyes, she remains playful, jokingly comparing the artist's mode of soul-searching intercourse with the ordinary love-making she experiences with another man (a French linguist). Consider, too, the experience of being held in place, the invitation to freeze and how it might inform the third question (the desire to be drawn). Unlike photography, which captures segments of movement, figure drawing compels both subject and artist to configure artificial immobility. That which constantly shifts—a human being—must sustain a posture and be searchingly looked at, explored, while precluded from changing. 'Pinning down' has less to do with non-compliant psycho-aesthetic infiltration, and more with art's ability to induce a pause, to redeem the subject from the pseudo-comforting safety of incessant movement. Modelling, therefore, orchestrates a unique relationship between being and moving, between being and being looked at. That an artwork is being created is the excuse that enables two people to be locked into a live encounter whereby looking at another, at someone who will not move, overcomes the ephemeral manifestation of all embodied interactions. It is only at that point that art is made.

Nothing of this quality of pinning down, of intentionally ceasing to move, remains when depicting still life, landscape, or when drawing people from reference photographs. Art teachers repeatedly encourage students to draw from life and avoid settling for easily available images. Explanations for this penchant are not always clear. Sometimes it is claimed that the camera makes too many decisions for the artist, or that the time constraints—both of short and long poses—push artists to avoid the trap of detail. Yet the point lies elsewhere—in the nature of the live encounter. When putting together the testimonials and Mairéad's experience, it is possible to appreciate how the

session sets up an encounter involving watching and responding to a non-moving human being as well as the invitation this constitutes, perhaps by creating beauty from whatever is displayed, perhaps through other responses. Reference photographs do not establish such interaction. No one is sharing space and time with the artist. And it is this live quality which cannot be replaced by even exceptionally sensitive cameras or by drawing while abiding by tight temporal constraints.

Once Mairéad's experience reveals a relationship, the notion of being 'known' through the process of being drawn, becomes less persuasive. The artist's eyes are, indeed, 'entering' Mairéad, and this could suggest routes by which portraiture has been linked to truth. Artist Oscar Kokoschka, for example, expressed his intent in portraiture as trying to 'intuit from the face, from the play of expressions, and from gestures, the truth about a particular person, and to recreate in my own pictorial language the distillation of a living being that would survive in memory'.<sup>24</sup> Kokoschka's critics concurred, arguing that he managed to go beyond the presented self, reaching some deeper truth.<sup>25</sup> However, Mairéad does not relate to the artist's ocular hounding as granting access to some inner truth (her posing could be role-playing; the artist knows little about her). Rather, the invasive gaze establishes a connection, which is why it arrests, why it resembles intercourse. Interactions are neither true nor false, but real or weak, full or limited, deep or superficial, amplifying or confining, embracing or judgmental, comforting or harming, creative or barren. In Magee's description, being drawn spawns awareness of a bond sought and forged. Modelling means soliciting such contact.

Sometimes the vocabulary of truth and knowledge is, indeed, used in the novel, but, when scrutinised, is exposed as in fact designating interpersonal connection. When the artist draws Mairéad again—casting her as an Eve-type reaching for an imaginary fruit—we eavesdrop on her expectation that he would uncover some deeper essence:

Penetrating. Digging. Deeper and deeper. And I want him to have it, Mam [Mairéad's dead husband]. To find it. This thing that is mine. Though I don't know what it is. Only that it is. Somewhere. Buried deep in the softness of my breasts, my belly, my groin. I want him to unearth it, this thing, this thing that is me, beyond the beauty that everybody sees, beyond that, beyond too what Liam sees, what James [her son] sees, what Francis sees, what JP sees, what JP [JP is the 'Frenchman'] thinks he sees, closer to what it is that you saw, Liam, all those years ago, the truth of me as I was then, I want that unearthed, captured, and taken away. Far from here.<sup>26</sup>

This passage refers to some core, a vague 'thing that is me' that transcends the beauty which others perceive, something closer—merely closer—to what her dead husband intuited in their past. Bearing in mind that Mairéad

is a grieving woman who lost her father, brother, and husband in a single accident, the ‘truth’ she hopes the artist will reclaim goes beyond the artist’s conventionalised Eve, and yet references a woman prior to losing her Eden. The artist’s eye conjures the fantasy of excavation into a region of the self, overlaid by years of grief. She imagines the artist seeing her not as she presently is, but as she was in happier times.

When such lines are read as relating to contact rather than truth—art’s tendrils reaching for the mourned for, the recollected, the best, while suspending the truth-value of such content—Mairéad’s following words are no abrupt transition, but imply agency on the part of the model, our fourth question, but not the agency of a performer or collaborator:

Far from here on the white walls of a London gallery, men and women, with white wine, red wine, gin and tonic, a twist of lemon, pausing in front of me, the artist’s latest subject, his object, a creature of beauty unearthed on a remote Irish island, a place so far from civilisation that he had to row across the ocean in a handmade boat, expecting at the end of that treacherous journey to find only old hags with their toothless men, but instead he found beauty, the young sleeping woman, Eve in the garden, woman sitting, woman lying, woman after rain, and they, the sophisticated men and women of London, will toast him, his bravery, his intrepidity, kiss his cheeks, shake his hand, this great painter, this great English painter, this great English painter of Irish women, his work encapsulating the exotic spiritualism of the Irish as I stretch for his imagined apple, my breasts, stomach and the silver traces of my boy’s gestation rising and stretching with me.<sup>27</sup>

Mairéad’s mind discerns what the artist conceals, unearthing his self-glorifying illusions. His narcissism is already obvious at that point, so Mairéad’s articulation of his reveries of glowing accolades strikes as an accurate depiction of his inner thoughts. Despite the seemingly rigid layout—the predictable dichotomy of the artist as inquisitive subject vs. the model as known object—it is the model who is penetrating the artist, chasing and pinning down his self-flattering visions of professional triumph.

Debaene argues that the agency of models is that of a performer:

Models do not simply mindlessly sit and wait to be directed like a puppet-master plays a puppet. . . . In 2019, Dominic Blake was interviewed . . . about his work as a full-time life model. . . . Blake not only considers himself an artist, but he describes modelling as drawing in space. He is specifically requested by drawing groups and professional artists because he brings highly performed, geometric and contorted poses. . . . He is eloquent about how he



creates and prepares his poses, describing them as sketches drawn with his body. . . . Rooted in a rich history, [such examples] have changed how we understand modelling within the arts and encourage us to recognise how models have absorbed qualities from other performing arts such as acting, film and performance art, thus transforming their practice over time.<sup>28</sup>

Yet, the agency exhibited by Mairéad as a drawn subject is neither performance nor collaboration. Bidirectional epistemic access as part of the model-artist dyad amounts to his (she hopes) touching her yet-to-be-destroyed self, for her to mentally articulate his aspirations. Regardless of the emerging art, we are presented with an intimacy being established—at least in the mind of the model. The model's nudity and the mode whereby incarnating the pose begets memories of a body unsoiled by grief is one facet of this intimacy; another is the surfacing of the artist's naked ambitions. To force such intertwinings into epistemic terms—knowing the other, the truth of the other—mischaracterises the quality of fantasy, of unclarity, and of approximation. Mairéad is not simply reminiscing about happier times; the details of the artist's self-glorifications are not corroborated. The point is less mutual knowledge and more a nearing to something felt to be revealed in oneself or tapped in the other, even if it is not the truth about the other.

This relationship is not only irreducible to epistemic categories, but also to moral ones. Cynthia Freeland provides seven different conditions for what she terms subjectification in portraiture (respecting the person's autonomy, endorsing their subjectivity, not treating them as means, valuing their boundaries, presenting them as active and alive, not as a possession, and as unique and irreplaceable). Such conditions are, she argues, basically inversions of Martha Nussbaum's seven criteria of objectification.<sup>29</sup> One of her examples of subjectification is Gerhard Richter's portraits based on photographs:

While on the one hand, Richter's photograph-based paintings do explicitly refer or allude to the status of the images being depicted as images which are already in circulation and familiar, on the other hand they maintain a sense of the persons who have been implicated or even trapped in the circumstances that led to their being so depicted and displayed. There is more sympathy in the rendering, and this in turn suggests a greater conviction of the realness and independent psychological existence of the individuals being rendered (even if that remains unknowable or mysterious).<sup>30</sup>

Yet, from a standpoint that underscores a unique artist-model connection, Freeland's prioritising of moral over epistemic categories ('even if that remains unknowable') conflates symptom and cause. True, Mairéad's experience is inconsistent with feeling objectified, but the artist is, nonetheless, myopic to

the thoughts and feelings of others. Magee's novel presents a genuine artist-model connection, which revolves around neither interpersonal knowledge nor subjectification.

Finally, the diachronic nature of a novel enables one to note how Mairéad's accessing the artist unfolds in retrospect, after she has modelled for him several times. To conceive of the model-artist encounter as a relationship alerts us to the non-trivial role of time. The end of a session can be different than its beginning; the piling effect of a model drawn consistently over weeks or months will differ from that of a model drawn once. Like all relationships, artist-model ones are dynamic. One does not draw the same model twice.

#### IV. BACK TO THE QUESTIONS

I have suggested that the artist-model dyad establishes a relationship irreducible neither to knowledge nor to moral (non-objectifying) perception. For similar reasons, this relationship is also irreducible to facilitating emotional (empathic) links,<sup>31</sup> or to communicating psychological indeterminacy by setting in motion multiple incompatible interpretations,<sup>32</sup> both of which have figured in this discussion. All these scenarios could undoubtedly surface, and may even feel informative and accurate in relation to some artist-model work. Even when they do, however, settling for them risks over-psychologising the relationship. Subjectification, knowledge, empathy, and indeterminacy are all undergirded by a more immediate quality, the corporeal affects and responses they elicit when translated into an (oft incomplete) artwork, when 'artwork' is understood as a proposal for a way of seeing.

An illuminating analogy are erotic bonds. While these may—and often will—involve knowing more about the other, relating to the other morally or feeling for and with the other, substantial erotic bonds can exclude some or all three. Even a conjunction of the three does not establish a necessary or a sufficient condition. The playing out of an embodied drama sets apart erotic relations from friendship, a relationship which is meant to include all three. Bodies and their capacity to bestow and receive pleasure, as well as to serve as vehicles for trust, warmth, and affection establish values that transcend learning more about the lover, treating them decently, or empathising with them. Drawing a model, likewise, entails a response to physical appearance. You probably know nothing about your models after they leave. You have not intuited or conveyed their emotional life. You have not objectified them, but whether you did is beside the point. You are in sight of a revealed other. They will present their bodies in different ways, impacting you by the pose and what they bring to it, by the way they reflect light and how they cast shadows. And it is on this raw level that the puzzles of the life session should partly be analysed. Whether clothed or nude, the artist's motivation for drawing a model, our first question, is entering such a relationship with another. Such could also explain why artists can be interested in drawing a

friend or a partner. Besides saving on the model's fee, the artist extends a rapport with another by setting in motion an alternative conversation about whom they are.

The point of nudity, our second question, is that nudity decouples a body from ordinary manifestation of personality. Presenting an unmasked body undoes the divide between intimate and public. Nudity operates first and foremost on the model. Self-exposure, when mediated by nudity, relates not to identity but to one's presence as flesh and bone. The by-default erotic framing of such exposure is not categorically dismantled.<sup>33</sup> Models have claimed to sometimes intuit suppressed desire in a session, but to find it unobjectionable as long as it is channelled into art.<sup>34</sup> My point is that whether eroticism is suspended, marginalised, or instrumentalised by becoming art, the model's motive for collaboration and its particular status—our third and fourth questions—is to exert corporeal influence. Previous incarnations of the practice of life-modelling, which featured a spillover between modelling and prostitution, may have established alternative forms of bodily influence, as do contexts in which artists drew their nude lovers or life partners.<sup>35</sup> In all, a comprehensive conceptualisation of the model's impact upon the artist must consider not only their skill in posing, performative know-how, or the inner quality being imparted. The thereness of an unclothed body—its perfections and imperfections—its age, scars, wrinkles, stretch marks, skinfolds, tattoos—as well as what it elicits in a particular artist on a particular day—attraction, aversion, longing, jealousy, compassion, indifference, admiration, fantasy, desire—play some role in the model's collaboration. To behold an artist's depiction of my body is to witness my embodied impact on a sensitive creator.

The metamorphosis of the erotic framing through which naked bodies are regarded is a unique and potentially liberating quality of the modelling experience. It is, too, an unmistakable gesture of trust on account of several reasons. Firstly, the power-relation is hard to disavow: unclothed among clothed people, looked at while unable to look back, told how to pose, unable to fully control who will be drawing while participants often know in advance the model's identity—entering such imbalanced relations calls for trust. Secondly, the gendered makeup of group life sessions may also be disconcerting and trust-demanding: a female model may feel unnerved when drawn by a group largely composed by men. Thirdly, trust comes into play in relation to the post-session control of nude images, which can be irresponsibly circulated (online modelling during COVID-19 raised concerns over unauthorised recordings of life sessions). Fourthly, trust relates to the model's expectation of contributing to the making of art, to be found beautiful in the sense specified above, or simply to be processed through an other's creative prism: 'I would like to see myself from your point of view' is the phrase Isabella Mège favoured when approaching those photographers for whom she wanted to pose.<sup>36</sup> Demeaning drawings by competent artists could be experienced as

breaching such tacit trust. Freeland cites the following critical comment by Richard Dorment regarding a painting by Lucian Freud:

The model was chosen simply because her body provided Freud with an opportunity to paint rivers, mountains and gullies of flesh. She is a living, breathing, one-woman landscape. So repulsive is her body that Freud's relish in painting it feels chilling and even cruel. Utterly detached from his subject as a person, he shows a wholly carnal creature reduced to the properties of mass and weight. If in reality the model possesses personal dignity, enjoys a rich spiritual life or perhaps has a pleasant personality, Freud doesn't show it.<sup>37</sup>

Freeland sees in Dorment's reservation an example of an objectifying artist as noted by a critic. What Dorment objects to can alternatively be framed as Freud's abuse of trust, his dodging a relationship. The advantage of the latter framing is that it explains why the reservation is aesthetic, not just moral. If viewers implicitly search for a relationship with the model as part of an aesthetic experience, Freud is not merely mistreating someone, but also imparting superficiality.

Trust and the discounting of the erotic join the third previously mentioned unique quality of the model-artist relationship: how the model is made to pause; not just to pose. (Readers who would belittle how extraordinary this is are invited to imagine ceasing to move in some public context and being watched, even when fully clothed). Artificial freezing is required for portraiture at large, not only for live sessions. In the latter, however, pausing is braided to nudity and to the first kind of trust. Suspended in this one-of-a-kind manner, the trusting model is being looked at by strangers; often, by many of them. Life sessions thus create a zone in which one person, the model, is made to relate to their material visibility in a prolonged manner, while another, the artist, is invited to react. Artists may record, study, beautify, speculate regarding interiority, or plumb their own inhibitions, compassion, or jealousies while beholding the model. Whatever they do, such abstractions must ultimately transcode into concrete lines, colours, shadows, values, and shapes. Arguably, it is precisely the model's (relative) anonymity, and the ways whereby it plays down elaborate epistemic-moral-emotional imputations, that catalyses an alternative rapport with an other's body.

More can be said about the fourth question, the challenge of characterising the model's participation. Dance comes to mind as a useful analogy when trying to further grasp the aesthetic conversation between artist and model. After all, watching dance invites attention to bodies and to movement. Yet any parallelism is incomplete. Unlike dance, even skilful modelling is a prompt for art making, not a stand-alone art form. Beholding dance, moreover, applies to recipients of aesthetic offerings rather than to creators

of new ones. Movement or dance improvisation may afford more apt analogies, as these do involve creation induced by another's aesthetically-guided input. Regardless of whether movement improvisation qualifies as art, the problem with this second analogy is that unlike artists who translate what they behold onto another art, responsive contact improvisation deploys the same creative medium. Finally, analogies to dance or contact improvisation overlook the difference between a moving and a still body, and thus risk belittling the qualities unique to an artistic reaction to an unmoving life.

An alternative analogy for the aesthetic conversing between models and artists is the interpretative work of performing artists vis-à-vis a script or score. The lines an actor vocalises are present for everyone able to read them. The actor expends time, thought, and creative skill, transforming the lines into a convincing performance. Like the artist whose drawing is constrained by a particular pose, the actor is restricted by words. For both artist and actor, aesthetic achievement issues from actively filtering this input through a discerning sensibility which combines skill, experience, judgement, and the ability to affect another by what they create. Like musicians or actors, whose interpretations can refract and comment upon previous 'readings', artists, too, might be 'interpreting' a pose, while addressing a tradition of previous renderings. An artist may, for instance, allude to Botticelli's Venus when blocking a model, suggesting a dialogue with that painting. Once again, however, this third analogy breaks down. While models—unlike objects—can make a purposeful aesthetic contribution to the session, such agency amounts to influence, rather than to the independent artistic output created by the composer, the playwright, or the choreographer. The dissimilarity between two different sorts of impact—the energy and mood exuded by a skilful model versus the independent artwork which is a score—undermines the view of artists as interpreters of poses. Musicians interpreting a musical score or actors interpreting lines engage in a dialogue with authorial intentions. Whether faithful to these or not, whether these intentions be indubitably known or not, such a speculative dimension of a thoughtful 'reading' may only take place in relation to a work of art composed and appreciated independently of its performance. Artists who respond to a model's agency as captured in her pose, however, do not aim to reveal the model's intentions.

I regard as an advantage this inability to cast the artist-model dialogue into some other familiar niche in aesthetics. Artists are neither interpreting models nor looking at models as they would respond to dancers. Models are not performers, not because the skill set of an experienced poser is far less demanding than the mastery required in performing arts, but because the experience of effective display is different. Performers foreground interpretative and creative choices through what their bodies do. Models, by contrast, foreground bodies as such. This is why anyone can model (which is not tantamount to challenging professional modelling). The point is not the relative difficulty of skill sets, but the different experience of being watched, of creat-

ing an embodied sight which becomes metamorphosed into art. While posing might invite a quality of grace, there is nothing extraordinary about what the artist looks at.<sup>38</sup> One is standing, leaning, reclining, holding, lying down. The poses are banal: a hand on one's hip, an extended foot, a head glancing sideways. In tandem, a model being watched inhabits a state unlike any other: personality is irrelevant, intentions do not matter, and the erotic pull of a naked body is suspended. Something about the artist's eye turns even gender and age into nothing but interchangeable configurations of matter:

The cause of the smallness and roundness of a child's face is apparent from the little projection of the point of the jaw at the chin and the obtuseness of the angle behind. In the adult we observe a greater depth in the body of the jaw bone, and the teeth being added, the base of the jaws must necessarily be more separated, and of course the face lengthened. . . . Lastly, when the teeth fall out, in old age, the . . . alveoli. . . which grew up with them and supported them, waste away; and there remains nothing but the narrow base of the jaw. . . . The jaws are allowed to approach nearer to each other. . .<sup>39</sup>

To be examined in this way, to look at another living human being in this way, is unlike any other creative interface in aesthetics.

While the above applies to anyone being drawn, unique to the live session is how this conversation is, at best, implied by the artwork being made. The indifference of artists such as Etty to the output of the session implies that live sessions facilitate not the creation of art, but rather gestures at art. Like spontaneous 'jamming' by musicians, live sessions afford an opportunity to create incomplete art, untethered to the judgments of viewers or to expectations and hopes of paying clients—expectations which can play a cardinal role in painting.<sup>40</sup> The life session, thereby, carves out a creative space that nudges artists into a less heteronomous experience whereby they can behold bodies. Some of their sketches might become an inspiration for another painting or be finished later. Even when remaining embryonic, such open-endedness does not devalue these half-drawings. Rather, precisely because the upshot is not necessarily a completed work but only a gesture at art, this unique exchange: displaying the brute energy of a human body by a model reciprocated by corporeal attending and generous rendering on the part of the artist, engenders one of art's most fascinating antechambers.<sup>41</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

1. Maughan 2004.
2. Phillips 2006, 4.
3. Bell 1806, 9–10.
4. Postle and Vaughan 1999.
5. Clark (1956) 2010, 3.
6. Postle and Vaughan 1999, 27.
7. Postle and Vaughan 1999, 20.
8. Borzello 2010.
9. Phillips 2006, 115–116.
10. IAMU 2022.
11. Nead 1992, 55.
12. Berger 1972, 45–64.
13. Phillips 2006, 12–4.
14. Debaene 2021a; Phillips 2006, 107.
15. Phillips 2006, 15–7.
16. Taylor 2001, 3–4.
17. ‘Rachel’ in Phillips 2006, 84.
18. Mears 2011, ch. 4; Irvin 2014.
19. Waller 2006, 4–16.
20. Clark (1956) 2010, 9.
21. Phillips 2006, 83.
22. Hollander 2001; Borzello 2010, ch. 9.
23. Magee 2022, 169.
24. Robinson 2020, 153.
25. See also Freeland 2010; Debaene 2021b.
26. Magee 2022, 257.
27. Magee 2022, 258.
28. Debaene 2021a, 20.
29. Freeland 2010, 200.
30. Freeland 2010, 261.
31. Robinson 2020.
32. Walden 2020, 278.
33. Clark (1956) 2010, 7.
34. Phillips 2006, 39–42.
35. Waller 2006, 37–78.
36. Heyward 2016.
37. Freeland 2010, 202.
38. Guyer 2020, 51.
39. Bell 1806, 28.
40. Guyer 2020, 55–6.
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