“Ali Smith and the *Seasonal Quartet*; *Encounters with Art*”

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Lisa Sanderson
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Abstract

Scottish writer Ali Smith's tetralogy, *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), *Summer* (2019) and *Spring* (2020), known collectively as the *Seasonal Quartet*, is replete with descriptions of encounters with visual artworks and artists. The novels portray emotive responses to art that flow across a spectrum of bodily, affective, emotive and, finally, cerebral responses. The encounters generate feelings of awe, shock, transformation and enlightenment, which subsequently effect change in the characters experiencing them and create space for seeing and thinking anew. I argue that in the novels Smith emphasises affective-led understanding that fosters movement between bodily response, emotive engagement and intellectual analysis.

In this thesis I claim that Smith encourages readers to see the *effect* that encounters with art have on her characters and encourages a similar response in readers to their engaged interpretation of her literary art. In this way, readers are invited to share with characters the experience of flexible, imaginative thinking that prioritises emotive connection before the interpretation of meaning. Furthermore, I argue that the encounters with art experienced by readers, via ekphrasis and description of character response, stimulate thinking about contemporary social, political and ethical issues.

The novels further function to investigate the form and materiality of both Smith's own work and that of other art forms and artworks. I suggest that the creative encounters within the *Quartet* spill out of the narrative due to Smith's abundant bridging of image and text and the paratextual and metatextual mingling of the (character's) intradiegetic and (reader's) interpretative worlds.

The critical approaches that I adopt in this thesis place an emphasis upon engagement and connection with 'art' (in many forms) rather than focusing primarily on interpretive 'meaning.' I examine the tenets of postcritique, such as acknowledging the breadth of our attachments and affinities, while being present, open and charitable to our experiences with artworks. In addition, I discuss theories around ekphrasis as a simple act of translation, from visual into verbal representation, but also as a rich band of divergent ideas that expand dialogue about hermeneutics, art historical discourse,

and political, social and cultural ideologies. I also engage with reader-response theory based on my understanding that any discussion about aesthetic encounter and experience must acknowledge the co-creative participation of the responder.

Combining these critical filters has allowed me to consider the encounters portrayed in the novels from both emotive and analytical standpoints, encompassing both 'feeling' and interpretive 'critique.' It is my belief that this approach of entanglement between positions of affinity, shock, wonderment, philosophy, ideology, ethics and politics, reflects the complex way of encountering art itself.

This thesis combines a critical and creative approach, to honour postcritical ideas around imaginative, flexible thinking and to reflect the *Quartet's* own sense of border crossing. Due to the wealth of visual art references within the *Seasonal Quartet* l centre my narrative around the idea of a visual art exhibition compiled from the artworks and associated ephemera described within the tetralogy. I explore the fields of postcritique, ekphrasis and reader-response, via the employment of an earnest curator, assembling an exhibition on the 'encounters with art' portrayed within the *Quartet*. The curator, in conversation with her peers, models both a sensitive response to artworks and an expert, academic overview, and provides a flexible vehicle to explore both critical analysis as well as the act of being 'hooked.'

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Thank you to my friends and family, who patiently nodded, smiled and frowned, who shared in all my excitement and my frustration. They generously accompanied me on a journey that was occasionally bumpy, sometimes circuitous, now and then improvised, but constantly, consistently expansive and absorbing.

To the memory of Eva Rawnsley, my first art history teacher. Eva cracked open Frederick Hartt's *History of Italian Renaissance Art* in the sixth form art room and lit up my heart. Her impact far outweighs the brief time we spent together.

Introduction

Picture this. I am in an art gallery. Imagine an exalted and prestigious place. The kind of institution that sits comfortably in a big electric city on a small, crowded island. I take the stairs all the way up to the fourth floor. The angle is leisurely; the carriage is wide. I negotiate the tourists, wandering aimlessly, I bypass the selfie-takers, their backs to a wall of red soup cans, I avoid the school group, sitting cross-legged on the floor.

I am looking for Room 403. And here I am. Now, imagine I stop in front of a pulsing rectangle with three, horizontal fields of painted colour, approximately the size of a generous door. Though truthfully, there are more than three colours, if you register the nuance: the variations of hue, the saturation, the tints, the fluctuating depth of troughs and peaks. What appears as a composition of three simple blocks is, in fact, a trio of endless gossamer layers. There is no tangible surface for your eye to settle on. Rather, it drops away, merges and confounds. The clouds of colour quiver against each other and the edges shimmer and blur. The canvas rhythmically expands and contracts, as if sustained by a pair of golden lungs.

I step closer, placing a mere eighteen inches (the artist's preferred viewing distance) between myself and its vibrating surface. The colours flood my peripheral vision. I'm almost in the painting now. Its energy travels around and through me. I am overwhelmed by an intense wave of exultation. My bodily vessel is not large enough to contain the emotion. It has to exit me somehow. I know I am about to cry.

Do you recognise Mark Rothko's No.5/No.22, from New York's MoMA? Perhaps you have been to the Rothko chapel in Houston, maybe to the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, or to the Tate Modern in London, and seen another Rothko. If you haven't stood in front of a Rothko, I apologise for the above hyperlink. It is a sad and flat reproduction.

Mark Rothko, a Latvian of Jewish descent, emigrated with his family to the United States as a young boy in 1913. Affected by the contemporary world, bearing witness to the atrocities of the Second World War, the Holocaust and the atomic bomb, Rothko declared that artmaking was a moral act, and its product a profound form of

communication. His colour field paintings were motivated by a desire to express basic human emotions, such as “tragedy, ecstasy, doom” (MoMA). His colour masses range from warm yellows, oranges and pinks, through to oppressive blacks, maroons and stormy blues.

Is it possible that a thousand hues of yellow could communicate ecstasy? Or a palette of dark red and black could evoke doom? Yes, I believe they can. That day in the Museum of Modern Art, I had personally felt cradled as a swell of euphoria and a profound sense of hopeful, cosmic immensity had welled up inside me. And I have since wondered whether this is art’s strategy, to capture a person carnally and then slip sensorily into their cerebral cortex. Because I hadn’t stood before the Rothko and asked, ‘what does this painting mean?’ And yet, I had got there, to a place of understanding. Rothko had reached through the canvas, across half a century, and gifted me a pure moment of joy and connectedness.

(I found out, much later, that I was not a unicorn, and my experience was not unique. Many people cry in front of Rothko’s work.[1] But in that moment, my moment, the encounter had felt deeply personal and singular.)

So, perhaps it was the vivid memory of this encounter that resonated through me when I read Ali Smith’s *Seasonal Quartet*. Across her novels, *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), *Spring* (2019) and *Summer* (2020), known collectively as the *Seasonal Quartet*, Smith portrays encounters with art that flow across a spectrum of bodily, affective, emotive and, finally, cerebral responses. Their effect, I suggest, is in the experience of reading these often ekphrastic vignettes, before interpreting their meaning. Their power lies in the ability to create a change in the reader, achieved through affective connection; a change that challenges their perception, their sense of equilibrium, that disrupts a belief or ignites a call to action. And I believe Smith models this responsivity through her characters’ encounters with art in the novels. Many of the characters of the *Quartet* are, in turn, in love with an artist’s creative vision (Boty), consumed by the sensuous curve of a sculptural stone (Hepworth), shocked into a perspectival realignment (Dean), and comforted by the silent optimism of two innocent companions

[1] On crying before Rothko see Elkins 1-14.

(Mazzetti). Smith's approach to describing artworks as powerful catalysts seemed to align with my own sense of affective-led understanding, a movement between bodily, emotive engagement and intellectual enrichment. It seems to me that Smith purposely harnesses the affective response in her characters to throw their subsequent interpretative process into relief. The characters *feel* first and reflect later.

However, in my opinion, Smith's description and exploration of artwork in the *Seasonal Quartet* is not driven by a purist or aesthetically charged idea about 'art for art's sake.' It seems that the aim is not to cloister the artwork beyond the reach of the reader, or to champion feeling over thinking, but to suggest that feeling is a brilliant catalyst to ignite thinking in both the protagonists and the reader.

In *The Emotions of Protest*, James Jasper states it is impossible to think without feeling. He dubs this process, *thinking-feeling*, and describes it as a cycle of affect and argument, a co-mingling of emotion and rationale, an expression of cooperation rather than struggle, between the head and heart.[2] I believe I can see this process at work in the *Quartet*. The characters' encounters with art give credence to some of art's most contentious attributes: beauty, sublimity, awe, and the power to transform and enlighten. And this indicates that an encounter with an artwork, whether visual or verbal, can inspire a change in the receiver.

In this thesis I will argue that Smith encourages readers to see the *effect* that encounters with art have on her characters. Their responses to art suggest that art can offer an alternative way of understanding the world, and can promote flexible, imaginative thinking by prioritising emotive connection. Furthermore, Smith's descriptions of art invite readers to share this affective response in their engaged interpretation of the novels. The novels function as an investigation into the creative medium itself, the form and materiality of both Smith's own work and that of other art forms and artworks. I believe that the creative encounters within the *Quartet* spill out of the narrative due to Smith's abundant use of ekphrasis and the paratextual and metatextual mingling of the (character's) intradiegetic and (reader's) interpretative worlds.

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[2] On *thinking-feel*ing see Jasper 7-9.

This is certainly not to claim that in its emphasis on aesthetic affect/effects the *Seasonal Quartet* is apolitical or disengaged with real world concerns. I argue that the encounters with art experienced by readers, via the characters, in fact stimulate thinking about contemporary social, political and ethical issues, regardless of whether the artworks portrayed are concurrent or historical, highlighting their ability to traverse time.

Critical Framework

When I began this project, I read widely, looking for a critical framework that would help me to explore and discuss the creative encounters in (and with) the *Seasonal Quartet*. I hoped to balance discussion of the affective response to artworks with critical analysis of our aesthetic attachments while recognising the potential impact of artworks upon the reader/ viewer to activate change, power new thinking, and foster participation and co-creation. I found the work of contemporary postcritical scholars, along with their forebearers such as the critic Susan Sontag and philosopher John Dewey, helped me to bridge the gap between art's presence and its effect. The critical approaches that I adopt in this thesis place an emphasis upon engagement and connection with the artwork over an attempt to interpret its 'meaning.' Accordingly, I examine the tenets of postcritique, such as acknowledging the breadth of our attachments and affinities, while being present, open and charitable in our engagement with artworks. In addition, I discuss theories of ekphrasis: as a simple act of translation, from visual into verbal representation, but also as a rich band of divergent ideas encompassing dialogue around hermeneutics, art historical discourse, political, social and cultural ideologies, as well as the politics of looking. I also engage with reader-response theory based on my understanding that any discussion about aesthetic encounter and experience must acknowledge the co-creative participation of the responder.

I have adopted a postcritical framework centred on Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) and her later work, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (2020). This is supplemented by ideas drawn from Elizabeth Anker and Rita Felski's *Critique and Postcritique* (2017) and Susan Sontag's much earlier, groundbreaking work *Against*

Interpretation and Other Essays (1966). In addition, parts of my thesis utilise ideas inspired by affect theorists like Wendy Truran and Stephen Ahern, surface reading theorists such as Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

My understanding of ekphrasis has been greatly advanced by reading discussions of the rhetorical device by James Heffernan, Liliane Louvel, Kennedy and Meek, W. J. T Mitchell, Val Cunningham and Renate Borsch. Further reading placed ekphrasis in conversation with ideas around art's "aura," as theorised by Walter Benjamin. Some of these thinkers and theorists argue that ekphrasis reflects the writer's attempt to align their work with western cultural inheritance and canonical works of art, in order to perpetuate and reaffirm idealised concepts around genius, sublimity, and transformation. Others suggest that ekphrasis might be an attempt to capture the 'real' or material world, to overcome the tension between physical and fictional spheres. Yet others describe ekphrasis as a vehicle for struggle and opposition, or alternatively, identify modern ekphrasis as a vehicle for cooperation and creativity. While I've found little evidence in the *Quartet* of ekphrasis promoting contest between the written and verbal arts, I have noted many passages where ekphrasis explores and describes the critical discourse put forward by the above-mentioned writers and thinkers around a range of ideological and cultural precepts.

My investigation of reader-response theories focused on Hans Robert Jauss's ideas about "horizons of expectation" (developed in works such as *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982)) and Stanely Fish's notion of "interpretive communities" (first elaborated in *Is There A Text in This Class*? (1980)). This was supplemented by my reading of Louise Rosenblatt, on reading as a process of transaction (as discussed in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1994)), as well as informative introductions to reader-response theory such as *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982), Elizabeth Freund's *Return of the Reader* (2002) and Ika Willis's *Reception* (2017).

I found it invaluable, when examining and discussing the encounters with art in the *Seasonal Quartet,* to combine my understanding of postcritique, with its emphasis on affective response and attunement, with the exploration of the use of ekphrasis as a field of critical discourse. This background allowed me to consider the encounters from

both an emotive and analytical standpoint, combining both 'feeling' and interpretation. It seems to me that this approach of entanglement – between positions of affinity, shock, wonderment, philosophy, ideology, ethics and politics – reflects the complex way we encounter art itself.

The novelist and the *Quartet*

Born in Inverness, Scotland in 1962, Ali Smith is the author of 14 novels, 5 collections of short stories, 8 plays and a collection of autobiographical writings. She has been shortlisted four times for the Booker Prize, and has won the Costa Book Award, the Goldsmith Prize, The Women's Prize of Fiction, as well as the Orwell Prize for political writing (*Summer)*.

The four novels in the *Seasonal Quartet* were written quickly and published at speed. In conversation with Andrew Marr, Smith said the novels were not 'theme' based but were rather an attempt to capture the general feel and significant events of the mid- to late 2010s, such as fake news, the Australian wildfires, Brexit, #MeToo, the digital era, (mis)information overload, the refugee crisis, and Covid-19. And although several narrative threads run through the novels, and characters in each are interconnected, Smith claims that her hope was to reflect and reveal the state of her world, not force an agenda (Marr). The *Quartet's* priority, she insists, was to communicate contemporaneity, in the true spirit of how the 'novel' was originally intended (ABC).

In a discussion of the *Quartet's* attempt to capture immediacy, Samatha Purvis questions the novelist's desire to keep time with speedier, digital forms of storytelling and news-panhandling, suggesting it is simultaneously a losing and complicit battle. However, Smith appears to both acknowledge and celebrate that the boundaries between 'past' and 'present' are unstable and uncooperative (Purvis 453-54). She argues against the idea of a structured and forward-progressing understanding of time, instead suggesting that "[t]he way we live in time, is made to appear linear by the chronologies that get applied to our lives by ourselves and others," whereas, "we're time containers, we hold all our diachrony, our pasts and our futures " (Anderson). This indicates to me that for Smith, time, like other forms of border-crossing she portrays, is not a fixed entity but something open, malleable, and adaptable. And perhaps this is

why she holds the attributes of art – visual and literary – as so important. Smith believes that fashioning works from one form into another, such as a contemporary event into a painting or poem, can inspire insight or clarity, or re-invention, through a process of on-going translation across time. The movement creates a timelessness, an aura, that allows past events to become visible and knowable again and again (Hessel). If the *Quartet* is Smith's 'response' to the current geo-social moment, it equally reinforces the multi-layered, non-linear response of artists and of characters towards art, across time, within its pages. Each responds to their own moment in time, and responds to the response of others, out of time. Importantly, I argue, this encourages readers to see and think anew, along with the *Quartet*'s characters.

Role of art

The artists and artworks that appear in the *Seasonal Quartet* occupy a space both in time and across time, marking their moment yet encouraging their artwork to flow synchronically and diachronically. While many artists and admirers of art populate the novels, four drawn from real life are key. Their work confronts the characters in the tetralogy, sparking physical reaction, insight and contemplation, and the portrayal of these encounters invites a shared (if different) reader response. The first is Pauline Boty, the recently rediscovered Pop art painter, who appears in *Autumn*. Boty documented the culture and mood of the sixties, though her work stands apart from that of her predominantly male contemporaries. Her canvases portray an alternative, female counterstrike; her gaze is subaltern, and the politics of looking are laid bare, for both the viewers of Boty's art and for Smith's readers. Another is Tacita Dean, whose drawings, photographs and films surface in *Spring*. Dean once told an interviewer that in her work she seeks to create the effect of poetry, embodying mystery and blindness, nurturing forgetting, re-seeing and re-encountering (Kodak). Work by Barbara Hepworth, a British modernist artist and sculptor, materialises in the pages of *Winter*. Hepworth, who created work throughout the Second World War, and was the mother of a soldier, once declared "[s]culpture to me, is primitive, religious, passionate, and magical – always, always affirmative" (Hammacher 97). For Hepworth affective engagement was uppermost in informing basic and shared human responses – primitive, passionate,

magical, life-affirming. And finally, there's the Italian film maker and writer, Lorenza Mazzetti, whose film segments are ekphrastically detailed in *Summer*. She wrote, as part of a manifesto for the avant-garde "Free Cinema" movement, that art should capture "the importance of people and the significance of the everyday" (Scholes).

Those are the makers of art in the novels; they speak about what art can do and should attempt to do. But what of the observers and what they have to say? There are many within the novels – and without, too: Smith's readers, of course, and aesthetic theorists of different kinds. In *The Uses of Literature*, Felski ventures "that aesthetic value is inseparable from use." Though she clarifies, 'use' can encompass practices and expectations as well as emotions, dreams and interpretations; it is a "many-sided play of passions and purposes" (Felski *Uses of Literature* 8). Likewise, Francis Halsall, in conversation with Bruno Latour, suggests, in line with Latour's thinking, that art is a mode of inquiry and exchange that needs to accommodate politics, science, sociology and philosophy, in a 'Laboratory of Everywhere' (Halsall). It's not hard to imagine Susan Sontag in recoil. Sontag believes that a "work of art encountered as a work of art is an experience, not a statement or an answer to a question." And while she acknowledges that artworks refer to the real world and are informed by personal knowledge, experience and values, she insists that "[a]rt is not only about something; it is something. A work of art is a thing *in* the world, not just a text or commentary on the world" (Sontag 31). John Dewey's ideas are perhaps more aligned with Sontag's, focused more on the experience of encountering an artwork than any absolute meaning that may be attributed to it. He proposes that "a work of art is re-created every time it is looked at and experienced," emphasising the role of the receiver. The art experience is not a static moment, he avers, rather it is a flexible, adaptable dialogue that requires movement in and across time. Dewey states that "art is created in a contemporary sphere but has to travel over the ages to remain relevant" (Dewey 113). The artist, he believes, is in service to the viewer, their role is to bring the magical into the ordinary life of the social. The artist thus acts as a translator and enabler of unique viewer/ reader responses.

Can art be all these things? In a conversation with Claire Nichols, Smith notes her admiration for Shakespeare's late plays (the romances) and the hope for transformation they express. She describes them as an amalgam of tragedy, comedy,

and history that raise problems and questions about form and category. It is as if, Smith continues, a giant cocktail shaker has blended and reformed them into something new, delivering a re-birth and actualising the seemingly impossible (ABC). This evaluation aligns with my own experience of Smith's *Seasonal Quartet* and provides insight into what my thesis seeks to explore: how encounters with art may be able to activate, in the reader/ viewer, new perspectives and understandings.

Approach

In *Hooked*, Rita Felski advocates for a critical language that is attuned to the object it explicates, rather than what that object might hide or conceal (Felski *Hooked: Art and Attachment* 134). She is in agreement with Ben Highmore, who asserts that examples of vivid and accessible critical writing appear to strike a balance between "blending intellectual seriousness with lightness of presentation and mixing genres … as well as moods." This prompts Highmore to question whether critical writing should shift its attention from evaluative 'method' to "size, shape, angle, breadth, connection, attitude, tone" (qtd. in Felski *Hooked* 148). When I read this, I was reminded of Smith's novel *Artful* (2012) with its genre-bending mix of fiction, criticism, memoir, essay and personal observation. Smith's preoccupation with genre, or form, is explored and articulated in much of her work. In *Artful* she writes "[f]orm is a matter of clear rules *and* unspoken understandings … . [It encompasses] need and expectation … [and involves] breaking rules, of dialogue and argument, form, the shaper and moulder … . [It] endlessly breed[s] forms from forms" (67). Having observed a similar kind of argument advanced by postcritical theorists, I felt encouraged to explore this idea further. In this thesis I attempt to combine critical evaluation with postcritical respect for the 'presence' of art and writing, commenting on and letting myself be seduced by Smith's unconventional formal approaches.

Although it was not an easy resolution, I decided that a conventional critical analysis of the *Seasonal Quartet* would run counter to what interested me most in the novels: Smith's evocative portrayal of characters' affective, emotive engagements with art. In addition, my own affective response to both the novels and the ekphrastic elements within them led me to wonder what an alternative, imaginative rendering of a

critical thesis might look like. As someone who has always been engaged with the arts – from ballet class to Arts and Fine Art degrees, from making art to teaching art – I've personally found the most satisfying engagement with art has resulted from a combination of bodily response and interpretive excitation. So, the wealth of visual art references within the *Seasonal Quartet* led me to wonder what an exhibition of the artworks and associated ephemera in the novels might *look* like. I thought about how I could play with the idea of ekphrasis, employed in the *Quartet*, and use this to inform my own writing about the novels. I settled on the idea of focussing on Smith's verbal representation of artworks and her characters' responses to these. I imagined transposing these objects into an imaginative art gallery and re-writing their existence in a playful acknowledgement of a two dimensional/ three-dimensional translation. I determined that a critical/ creative approach could explore the roles of postcritique, ekphrasis and reader-response, via the employment of an earnest curator, assembling an exhibition on 'encounters with art' portrayed within the *Quartet*. The curator, in conversation with her peers (I reasoned, in answer to my supervisors' querying eyebrows), would have the potential to model both a sensitive response to artworks and an expert, academic overview, providing a vehicle to explore both critical analysis and the act of being 'hooked.'

Importantly (I argued), writing a critical/ creative piece in response to the *Seasonal Quartet* would enable me to acknowledge the boundary crossing (here between artist/writer/reader) that Smith celebrates in works such as *Artful* (2012) and *How to be Both* (2014), in which boundaries between genders, the living and the dead, and the past and present, are playfully traversed to invoke serious questions about how we interpret the world across time and in time. Smith has claimed that "[f]luidity is everything. Fixed things fracture and break" (qtd. in Hessel). In her work, agility, fluidity and adaptability are key, in both creative form and meaning-making. I could then point (I insisted) to a larger preoccupation with border crossing that spans much of Smith's work, including the *Quartet*, between literary forms to the breaching of physical borders (countries, detention, internment, digital life), to more socially transgressive crossings (between gender, sexuality, time).

For this thesis to read as smoothly as possible I have adapted the more usual MLA referencing style to create an uninterrupted reading experience. I have used

footnotes to cite secondary sources and associated ideas, providing the minimum amount of information needed for readers to trace the source via my Works Cited list. However, given the extent of my quotation from Smith's novels, I have used in-line referencing to indicate the source of quotations from the *Quartet*. The titles of novels are indicated by their first letter(s), italicised: Autumn = *A*, Winter = *W*, Spring = *Sp*, and Summer = *Su*).

Chapter One: The Catalogue/ Critical Material

Chapter One introduces the three critical filters I will be using to explore the portrayal of creative encounters in the *Seasonal Quartet*, and the reader's encounter with the novels*:* postcritique, ekphrasis and reader-response theory. This chapter will lay the foundation for the following two chapters by exploring secondary critical material. This material helps elucidate the importance of affective and emotive response as a pathway to alternative understandings and imaginative thinking. In addition, it emphasises viewer/reader co-production of, and connection with, visual and literary art. While this chapter establishes the groundwork for exploring Smith's portrayal of encounters with art, it also refers self-consciously to my own thesis and writing approach, by establishing a metatextual/paratextual element, where I am commenting on and playing with the idea of writing a critical/ creative thesis, and attempting to reflect Smith's own creative, trans-border approach.

In this chapter the curator is introduced. She is in the process of designing and compiling a catalogue for the exhibition she is curating, *Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet and Encounters with Art*. The curator envisages the catalogue as a document that can portray and promote both emotive and cognitive responses, in homage to the encounters she has identified within the *Seasonal Quartet*. She stresses to her colleague, responsible for marketing and communication, that the document must embody a mood of creativity and imagination, while conceding it must also meet the conventional standards of detailing, recording, and marketing the exhibition. The curator and her colleague spend time reflecting on the different modes of attachment to artworks represented within the *Seasonal Quartet,* as well as their own personal experiences when responding to various artworks and the novels. Finally, they settle on

a format for the catalogue that will satisfy official requirements – including introductions, academic essays and the exploration of themes (and cost!) – yet still be a creative work in itself, fulfilling the curator's imaginative vision.

Next, the production of the catalogue is detailed, from cover to content. This creates a conduit to introduce my critical filters and enables the discussion of ekphrasis, postcritique and reader-response theory. As the curator attempts to describe the images on the cover of the catalogue to her contrary inner-voice, a brief history of ekphrasis is offered. The curator argues with herself about definitions, combative perspectives, critical discourse and the re-invention of classical ekphrasis, in the late twentieth century, as an act of co-creation and translation between the visual arts, writers, and readers. After this, some of the catalogue content is presented. First is a transcribed conversation between the curator and a guest speaker about Rita Felski's ideas on attachment, and the critique/postcritique debate about 'deep' and 'surface' reading. I then provide an excerpt from an essay written by the curator's academic colleagues for inclusion in the catalogue, which explains aspects of reader-response theory for the lay reader.

Chapter Two: The Installation/ Intradiegetic Encounters

Chapter Two focuses on characters' intradiegetic encounters with art in the *Seasonal Quartet*. Paying close attention to the novels, it explores how Smith's ekphrastic descriptions are used to portray characters' responses to artworks. I discuss the different ways in which attachments have been theorised, spanning attunement to identification to interpretation.

In this chapter, the curator and her intern are in the gallery space as the exhibition is being installed. It spans across four spaces, each dedicated to one of the novels in the *Quartet*, and named accordingly: Autumn, Winter, Spring and Summer. As they manoeuvre around paint cans, technicians, ladders and a film crew, they discuss artworks described in the *Quartet* and they reflect on Smith's use of ekphrasis, along with the differing responses of the characters to the artworks detailed within.

Both the curator and the intern are familiar with Felski's *Hooked* and they draw on her work to discuss the divergent ways that we encounter art. They consider the

variable and personal factors that draw us, that 'hook' us, to one piece of artwork over another. They contemplate what societal, moral, or ideological forces might mediate our aesthetic attachments. This leads them to weigh the imaginary divide between emotion and cognition and pose ideas about the complicated mingling of both. They recognise that some characters are affected sensorily, physically, and some emotionally, while others grapple with theory and meaning, and some believe in the power of art to provide comfort or, conversely, spark discomfort, which potentially drives change.

Following Benjamin, they discuss the use of ekphrasis to reinforce art's aura. They debate whether ekphrasis attempts to promote the moral and educational benefits often assigned to art. They consider the way ekphrasis aligns the literary arts with the concrete things of the real world, and they reflect on its ability to examine the politics of seeing and the performativity of the 'gaze.'

Chapter Three: The Exhibit/ Extradiegetic Encounters

The intradiegetic focus of Chapter Two is followed by a focus on extradiegetic response in Chapter Three. Encounters with art beyond the fictional world of the narrative are explored. In this chapter reader-response is considered, both in relation to their experience of artworks through textual descriptions, and to the novels themselves as creative works in the physical world.

The exhibition, *Encounters with Art*, is now open to the public and the curator walks through the gallery space observing audience reception. The curator reflects on the entrance hall through which viewers pass before reaching the art works and observes that it functions as a kind of paratext to the show itself, noting the similarity and slide between inside and outside spheres, the work itself and the supporting material.

As the curator moves through the exhibition, she eavesdrops on a group of art students discussing Smith's use of synaesthetic language to emphasise her characters' sensory responses to art. While she thinks about the historical evolution of ekphrasis and Smith's use of it, she observes a young couple trying to capture the essence of Hepworth's sculpture in a selfie. She muses on the 'cult' of the artist and the power of

artworks to elicit strong feelings in the reader/ viewer and accidentally gatecrashes a book group's earnest discussion about whether ekphrasis can direct a readers' emotions, and so align them with a character's sense of hope, transformation, enlightenment or epiphany as the result of an encounter with art. The curator then pauses behind a group of visitors in conversation with a volunteer art guide. She watches as they tease out ideas of ekphrastic hunting, puzzling and questing, all portrayed in the novels and seemingly encouraged in Smith's readers. Finally, as the curator finishes her rounds, she meets a literary critic who is writing a piece on Smith's use of metafiction in the *Quartet*. They converse about how the metafictional elements in the novels self-consciously signpost the world beyond their covers and involve the reader in the construction of the story, as well as its meaning, production, and distribution.

Conclusion: The Project Closure Report

The conclusion takes the form of a Project Closure Report written by the curator after the exhibition is over. This style of report allows an event organiser to summarise a project's objectives and goals and assess whether these have been met. It celebrates the project's accomplishments and acknowledges lessons learned, limitations and possible future directions for subsequent projects.

At the end of a long summer the curator is in her office compiling the Project Closure Report. She contemplates her aims in producing the exhibition and reflects on how Smith portrays encounters with art in the *Seasonal Quartet*. She considers whether her use of postcritique and reader-response theories as a critical lens has enabled her to illustrate and explore those encounters, and with what degree of success. She mulls over the exhibition's achievements and pens advice for a future curator, regarding limitations, extensions and revisions, if the show were to travel.

Chapter One: The Catalogue/ Critical Material

You know that feeling?

When the slow, unresolved melody of the orchestra pit and the audience merge and wane with the dimming lights, and you are held in the smallest moment of blackout. Of silence. And even though the moment is a fraction, it is infinite with possibility, the absence before the presence, a breath held heavy with promise.

And you love that sense of crossing over. You feel small and wondrous again, primed to the quirks and rituals of performance because your mother always took you to The Regent, so you could share in whatever was playing in your small, flat town: *Coppelia*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Mikado*. And even though you know this affinity is nurture, it has to be nature too because your brother would rather swim 50 laps of the grey Olympic pool every morning at six, than sit through one hour of *Swan Lake*.

You know that feeling?

When the invisible hand pulls away the heavy, velvet curtain, and the embroidered fleur-de-lys breaks in two (imagine the size of the sewing machine!), and you sense the energy between the dark, watchful crowd and the light-filled stage. One thousand eyes and every connection different.

But this time something surprising happens. And it is not familiar, or warm, or comforting. And you lean forward in your seat, hoping that those three inches will bring a little clarity. And you should have read the programme, but you never read the programme. And you are caught, as if your spirit has leapt from your body and condensed itself upon that stage, leaving your brain popping and fizzing on the theatre chair. It is almost painful, the energy that focus takes.

You know that feeling?

When you madly search the recesses of your mind, compiling, translating, discarding. There is urgency, confusion. You have the repertoire somewhere, but you are adrift, the steadying line of the horizon lost. Yes, the movement is confronting and disorientating, but you are also caught in its flow, compelled to keep pace.

So, instead, you still the madness, the drive for understanding, because you know there will be time tomorrow to talk and reflect and if you scramble for meaning

now, you may miss the force, the glance, the shudder, the arc of an arm, the affective response to the whole.

You glance at your neighbour (it is your mother; it will always be your mother) and there is a fraction of a moment, when your eyes lock and a world passes between you. And as you surrender, you realise you love the fracture, that there's both pleasure and expanse in discovering a new horizon.

… And finally, you recover enough to realise that your mouth is open. A caricature of shock and awe. Funny.

You know that feeling?

Yeah. That.

That was the feeling the curator wanted to share.

Her colleague from Marketing and Comms looked sceptical. They raised an eyebrow.

Yeah, that's going be hard to achieve, they said. I mean, most people like an exhibition catalogue to follow a recognisable, standardised format. Feelings are messy, no doubt.

You're in marketing! the curator said. Isn't your entire MO to inveigle and manipulate feelings? You, my friend, should be comfortable with feelings.

We prefer '*communicate'* to manipulate, her colleague said.

The curator felt a pang of guilt, though her colleague's face remained open and unfazed. Their diary (*365 Days of Masterpieces*) was swollen with auxiliary papers; turned corners, colours, and appendages creating a fluttering tide. The curator glimpsed jottings, doodles, torn scraps, clippings, colour swatches, and sticky notes hectoring the soft covers for liberation. (Was it Monet's *Waterlilies* hiding there?) A postcard muscled its way free on to the desk. It was a colour photograph of the wall above Pauline Boty's desk, a riot of found images collaged one upon the other.

Ok. I'm not looking to manipulate, the curator said. But the exhibition title is *Encounters with Art*. And some encounters generate a tide of feelings. They can throw you from your seat, shake you inside out, stop you, arrest you, *change* you. And I want to

illustrate that 'feeling' in the catalogue. Of having a visceral reaction, an affinity, an attachment to an artwork, with all its un-delineated, unquantifiable energy.[3] I want the catalogue to recognise that a focus on 'attachment' deserves equal measure to a Freudian or Marxist reading.

The curator studied her colleague.

The Kandinsky? 8am every Wednesday? she said. There's definitely something going on between you. You're in a quiet tryst. Honestly, I don't think there's a single person working here who isn't in some kind of surreptitious love affair.

Ahhhh, the Kandinsky. That's a slow burn, her colleague said, tucking Boty's wall back into the paper chaos.

In fact, it's a kind of penance, her colleague said. I'm trying to make some peace with it. Twenty years ago, straight out of university, I worked for an agency that was rebranding an oil company. We put together a whole campaign based around a Kandinsky. I worked on that project for six months straight, but I never really understood the Kandinsky. I was passionate about my work; I just couldn't get passionate about that painting.

Death by design? The curator said.

Big donors of the acquiring gallery, her colleague said. Death by petroleum. Anyway, I'm communing with our Kandinsky now. I'm trying to cultivate rapport but it's a long, drawn-out affair. It's difficult to find an access point. I can't rouse emotion or intellectual curiosity for colour and shape. I usually go for narrative. Something I can read and relate to. So, I'm aiming for a "steady acclimatization"[4] over epiphany. I've done my due diligence; read some art criticism, visited the Miro on the second floor, talked to my sister; she LOVES Kandinsky. And I'm trying to absorb the red and the blue on a Wednesday morning. I'm networking, my friend.[5]

The curator thought about the different encounters with art in Smith's *Seasonal Quartet*. Sometimes they are described as shocking, transformative, bodily reactions that stopped the character short, transfixed them, while at other times the encounters build gradually, seeping slowly and settling quietly in a character's heart. Sometimes

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[3] On "attachment" see Felski *Hooked: Art and Attachment* 7-14.
[4] Felski *Hooked* 67.
[5] 'Networks,' defined by Bruno Latour writing on Actor Network Theory (ANT), are discussed below.

Smith's focus was not the physical artwork itself, but on the encounter with the philosophical or ideological weight that it carried. Some characters' encounters are scaffolded by years of attachment to artworks, institutions, familial ties and memories. While others seemed to experience them in isolation, severed from their patterns of everyday life.[6] When describing the encounters, Smith's narration could be emotive, but it could also be cool and observational, her portrayals as multifarious as the confrontations themselves.

Perfect. I think your encounter with Wassily could be a fitting addition to the catalogue, the curator said. Encountering art doesn't have to involve being struck through the heart. Attachments are forged. Sometimes over time. It doesn't make them any less salient because they weren't formed under pressure or via epiphanous clarity. You're slowly forging ties with Kandinsky. You're creating a relationship in the 'now'. Whereas my connection to the theatre stretches back to childhood; pliés and dusty recital halls, ballet mothers with knitting needles, over-zealous pianists banging out a 3/4 tempo on an old upright. I could identify with the stage I observed; the training, the make-up, the view from the wings, the feeling of your body moving through space. I was primed for the dance of darkness.[7] You might say I was pre-loaded.

What's important is that we put some emphasis on the idea of 'encounter' in the catalogue, the curator said. I want the audience to consider how they get hooked, whether it's a sudden engagement, or a slow burn, whether it springs from the heart, or the mind, or a combination of both.

When *Encounters with Art* was in its infancy, all mind-maps and half-thought ideas, all spit-balling and brainstorming, all wild tangents and converse foci, the curator and her team had teased out ideas about Smith's portrayal of encounters with art in the *Seasonal Quartet*. It encompassed affect and aesthetics (they decided), and yet theory (they countered), but also ekphrasis (they agreed), and certainly reader response (they acknowledged). The curator had tried to filter her reading via some of these frameworks, delving into Mitchell, Iser and Fish, Felski and Ankers, Best and Marcus, Sedgwick and

[6] For discussion on creative encounters within the *Seasonal Quartet* see Chapters Two and Three.
[7] Butoh is a Japanese style of dance invented in the 1950s, known as "the dance of darkness."

Sontag, amongst others.[8] And finally, as Felski championed his approach so consistently in *Hooked*, the work of French sociologist Bruno Latour on Actor-Network Theory (ANT).[9] Latour was slippery, Actor-Network theory defiantly hard to pin down. When is an actor not an actor? When it wears no make-up and learns no lines. When it is not defined by autonomy or free will, nor by human or non-humanness, but rather by its agency to create change.[10] And the network? No, not defined by shape or scale, nor discovered, or drawn out, but created by actors connecting and interacting, in whatever form or combination, by chance or necessity.[11] So, theory then? Yeah, nah, not really. More a concept, a movement, a changing, evolving energy, unconstrained by party lines or manifestos. Despite how elusive ANT felt, the curator was most compelled by Latour's idea of connections and co-production. That meaning was made through entanglement.

Just last week the curator had met Smith for a dark roast at Birds Hill Coffee. The author had talked about colliding forms,[12] the ability to conjure up multiple elements at once, and how transformation could be sparked by the merging of media.[13]

Imagine if the catalogue took the mood of your diary, the curator said to her colleague; an assemblage of criss-crossing ideas, messy and entwined, with links to artworks and ideas, but also to Pantone swatches and taxi stubs.

The curator teased out a crumpled Maison Bertaux pastry bag, from around the depth of April.

Even what you had for lunch, she said. I imagine Latour would declare it all useful in creating networks. What if we viewed the catalogue as a mediator for co-creation and meaning-making, rather than purely a transmitter of knowledge and education?

It could even function as a type of visual diary, with some pages left blank for viewers to record observations, reflect, sketch, stain with an oily finger, add their egg salad wrapper. It could become a living document with which viewers engage and

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[8] Refer to bibliography for works by these writers. This is not a comprehensive list, only a 'snapshot' of what the curator has read on postcritique, ekphrasis and reader-response theory.
[9] Actor-Network Theory is discussed further in Chapter Two.
[10] On 'actors' see Latour *Reassembling the Social : An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* 43-62.
[11] On 'networks' see Latour *Reassembling the Social* 27-42.
[12] Marr.
[13] Hessel.

relate, creating and describing, requiring participation … . We could model the act of encounter as well as elaborate on its theorisation.

Despite my diary looking like it's survived the Running of the Bulls, this kind of studied indifference wouldn't come cheap, her colleague said. We have a price point for the catalogue. It has to fall within the accepted price range. £30 – 35. And of course, there's customer expectation to consider. A lot of visitors will buy the catalogue as a kind of memento, a souvenir really. Some will probably never read it, just flick through it and shelve it like a trophy. But others will want a return for their pound, something learnt, some vision expanded. So, what do I suggest? Lots of glossy pictures, a smart font along the spine, a little bit of light learning. Nothing too challenging or alienating, yet enough to keep our expert readers happy too.

You know, her colleague said, it would be way too expensive to produce with tip-ins. However, a similar effect could be achieved through design, and layout, a bit of clever photography. It could *appear* to be an organic, unstructured document. What content are you hoping to include? How will we manage expectation *and* experimentation?

The curator thought about the retired catalogues floating somewhere overhead on level 4. The cool, dim archive (appointment only!) had gravitas. It was both a shrine and a resource, a place of death and rebirth. She felt the weight of the future passing over *Encounters with Art;* the scholars and historians, the curators and curious citizens, the university lecturers and PhD students, all assessing the arguments, gauging the delivery, noting the reach. She knew the catalogue was part of her legacy.

This is what the curator and her colleague from Marketing and Comms agreed upon.

1. The curator would write a concise intro that would herald in the ideas behind the exhibition, setting the scene and fulfilling the official requirements associated with thanking sponsors, contributors, institutions, and peers.

   (Have you thought about including a definition of 'encounter'?

encounter (noun)

/ɪnˈkaʊn.təʳ/

a meeting, especially one that happens by chance:

- **Encounter with** *I had an alarming encounter with a pig*)[14]

2. The curator would participate in a conversation with a knowledgeable peer, transcribed for the catalogue. (Both felt this would lend an informal, eclectic energy.)

3. The curator would solicit (bargain, bribe, beg) an associate to write a theoretical essay on a theme presented in the introduction. (Ekphrasis? Reader-response theory? TBC.) The curator was to put out feelers.

4. The catalogue would be a kickass combination of creative ingenuity that promoted the themes of the exhibition while retaining elements of stabilising conventions (budgeted for 2 tip-ins, RRP £35.50).

That was September.

Now imagine a time in late winter. Here is the catalogue; mocked up and ready for the printers.

The curator is having an imaginary conversation with her somewhat petulant frontal lobe (always a devil on matters of design and theory). As her colleagues toil and spin around her, the curator is caught in a daze, a kind of mid-focus dream state. The computer screen is reduced to a blur of double vision to her left, while a neglected nub of sushi dozes to her right.

Wait. Hold on, the curator says, fingering the loose pages of the sample. Before we venture inside, shouldn't we consider the catalogue's cover? As readers we negotiate the outside world of the cover before entering the inside world of the text. First things first, after all.

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[14] Cambridge Dictionary.

So let me show you a picture. No, not an actual picture (though how easy to insert a PDF here!?). Rather, let me translate the cover into a textual representation. I'm going to describe it to you.

In a world of digitised communication, fast clicks and instant gratification, why torture me with words (her frontal lobe might say)? This isn't an art history lesson, is it? You're not going all *Salon of 1846* on me?[15] We don't need words to stand in for images when visual dissemination is now so immediate, so complete. Describing a picture cannot possibly compete with *showing* me a picture. (Please. Just let me look.)

Ekphrasis isn't about standing in, it's not a proxy or a poor cousin. It's a bona fide practice with a long history. And besides (the curator would say), I'm modelling ekphrasis because it's an important part of how both characters and readers encounter art in the *Seasonal Quartet*.

Anyway, don't you know, *describing* a picture is very 'NOW'? In fact, we're witnessing a significant up-tick in the use of ekphrasis in twenty-first century novels.[16] Maybe writers are pushing back against our digitised world, hunting for the original, the concrete, searching for the mark of a human hand?[17] Though, in truth, the interest in ekphrasis had been growing in literary circles since Murray rescued it from oblivion back in the sixties.[18] So, I think we can refute that ekphrasis is a *still* moment.[19] It's very much a morphing, evolving (un)moment … how we perceive and utilise ekphrasis now is very different from in antiquity.

From openness and generosity to a narrowing. To competition, to discord, and hopefully, in a full-circle-moment, back to openness – affect and inclusion.

In the beginning (the curator would say) … ekphrasis was broad and encompassing. Pretty democratic really, covering all descriptive language, simply

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[15] In *Salon of 1846*, Charles Baudelaire describes the paintings hung in the salons of Paris. As photographic images were not widely produced in magazines and newspapers until the early 1900s, the reader's only knowledge of an artwork, beyond visiting the gallery that housed it, was via textual description.

[16] Brosch "Ekphrasis in Recent Popular Novels: Reaffirming the Power of Art Images" 403-4.

[17] On the mark of the hand and the search for empirical presence see Brosch "Ekphrasis in Recent Popular Novels"; on the physical object see Cunningham 61.

[18] On Murray Krieger's 1967 essay, entitled "Ekphrasis and the Still Movement of Poetry; or Laokoön Revisited," see Heffernan "Ekphrasis Theory" 35.

[19] On ekphrasis as a 'still' moment see G.E. Lessing in "Laocoön; An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry", W.J .T. Mitchell "Ekphrasis and the Other", Valentine Cunningham "Why Ekphrasis?" and Leonid Bilmes "Ekphrasis, Memory and Narrative after Proust."

"bringing what is shown clearly before the eyes."[20] No limits. No designs upon itself. Then, in the fifth century CE a fissure started to appear, and definitions tightened. The meaning constricted. Ekphrasis began to refer only to the description of *visual art*.[21] No wiry goats or rollicking seas allowed, unless rendered in mineral and egg. If we fast forward to the Renaissance, we capture its citizens standing in the crosshairs, enacting a kind of sibling rivalry between the visual and verbal arts, the oft quoted *Paragone,* or struggle for supremacy.[22] But I think it was probably Lessing, in 1766, who really drew a line in the sand.[23] He ruled the attributes of painting and poetry to be unequivocally different, insisting on the protection of separate mediums, lest the textual be emasculated by the pictorial.[24] A state of binary opposition was bedded down.

Well (her frontal lobe might say), division exists. It's irrefutable how different the visual and verbal are. Their unique qualities – oil, or marble, or words –make them distinct. Each has inherent properties the other can't replicate. And philosophically, surely words describe better than paint?

Don't you think (the curator would say), it's communication that's key? "Language can stand in for depiction and depiction can stand in for language because communicative, expressive acts, narration, argument, description, exposition, and other so-called 'speech acts' are not medium specific …"?[25] Creating division only gives the *Paragone* oxygen.

The twentieth-century understanding of ekphrasis was predicated on antagonism between forms of representation. It seemed the *Paragone* observed centre stage – yet it's debateable whether the poor old Italians, whose Renaissance folk were given credit for birthing the *Paragone*, even bought into the idea of this struggle, or whether it's simply our twentieth century selves, projecting our own love for evaluation and comparison onto them.[26] Writers of the late twentieth century were seeing it everywhere. James Heffernan suggested ekphrasis embodied a gendered competition

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[20] Kennedy and Meek 6.
[21] Heffernan "Ekphrasis Theory" 36.
[22] On Paragone see Kennedy and Meek 4-11.
[23] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing wrote *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* in 1766, an influential text that promoted a combative division between visual and verbal expression.
[24] Mitchell "Ekphrasis and the Other" 698.
[25] Mitchell "Ekphrasis and the Other" 701.
[26] On ekphrasis as combative see Kennedy and Meek 10.

between the male gaze and the female image,[27] and W. T. J Mitchell theorised an ekphrastic fear of Otherness,[28] where the speaker is plagued by an irreconcilable difference between themselves and the object of description, a "struggle between body and soul, world and mind, nature and culture."[29]

But over the last two decades we've started to observe a change. And you can see it, read it, feel it, think it, in Smith's *Quartet* (the curator would say). She plays a big part in muddying the old ekphrastic waters, I believe.

Charlotte Terrell argues, in "Seeing and Seeing Again," that the ekphrasis of the twenty-first century may be an attempt to overthrow discordant binaries in favour of entanglements, co-operation, and intermediality.[30] And Nicole Schrag suggests that Smith's experimental, genre-bending novels employ ekphrasis "to test the relationship between art and politics."[31] It appears modern ekphrasis is less interested in being combative and more interested in being explorative, probing encounters "between art and life, between the reader and the text, between the present and the past, and even between scholarly disciplines."[32]

Is this what Smith is doing in the *Seasonal Quartet* (her frontal lobe might say)? Feeling out the spaces in between, exploring "the forms that go between the forms"?[33] Hey! Remember when Smith said "that extraordinary things happen on the edges – the changes happen … [and that] everything is possible at the edge. It's where the opposites meet, the different states and elements come together"?[34] Perhaps this cross-fertilisation is what she has in mind? Blending and manoeuvring, remaining agile while circumnavigating the centre. Maybe Smith hopes this is the key to building bridges between experiences – the reader's, the characters', and the arts – to create connections, forge new relationships, and celebrate the ways in which life and art are infinitely encountered.

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[27] On gendered competition see Heffernan *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* 6-7.
[28] Mitchell "Ekphrasis and the Other" 697-99.
[29] Mitchell *Iconology : Image, Text, Ideology* 49.
[30] On modern ekphrasis as cooperative see Kennedy and Meek 14.
[31] Schrag 2020.
[32] Kennedy and Meek 15.
[33] Hessel.
[34] Begley.

Ohhh, nicely done. Good point (the curator would say). Maybe ekphrasis can reach across borders. That certainly resonates with the mood of the novels. Whether Smith is approaching form, art, ideology or politics, she raises the danger of drawing boundaries, the risks of crossing them, and the urgent need to do so.

Right. Here is (a description of) the catalogue.

Immediately you have some kind of picture in your mind's eye, don't you? Most people can access a catalogue-likeness from their storehouse of images. Mine is slightly larger than A4 and designed to be held in 'portrait' orientation. The top two-thirds is a reproduction of a painting. The painting is Pauline Boty's *My Colouring Book,* and unless you're an art enthusiast, I'm pretty sure you won't have this little-celebrated work stored away in your memory bank. There's some text included in the painting but I'm not going to tell you what the words say, because we're not talking about words. I mean, even though I'm using words, this is not about words ...(!) That being said, even the title, *My Colouring Book*, is slippery because it's a phrase taken from song lyrics, ones about jilted love.[35] Colour and paint and text, melody and music and heartbreak, the tangible and intangible: crossing, merging, remaking. Slippery borders indeed.

So, this is a real painting (her frontal lobe might say), not something imagined, like Keats' urn?[36] (Such a bizarre concept, to imagine an object and ask your reader to 'see' it.)

Art is artifice (the curator would say). "All the objects of the ekphrastic gaze are made ones. Doubly so ... for these made objects are also re-made out of words."[37] Whether they're real or imagined is superfluous. It's hard to say whether Keats' motives were different from Smith's. They probably share a lot, in that ekphrasis always explores the tension between the verbal and visual, either a fissure or a reconciling.

Maybe ekphrasis is an attempt to grasp "thereness," to align the abstract quality of words with the physical presence of the concrete object.[38] Maybe ekphrasis is a desire to share in or re-create the aura, the immeasurable allure, of the visual arts.[39]

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[35] "My Coloring Book" is a song written by Fred Ebb and John Kander. Ebb and Kander were nominated for a Grammy Award for Song of the Year in 1963, the year Boty painted *My Colouring Book*.
[36] Keats "Ode on a Grecian Urn", 1819, is a well-cited early example of ekphrastic poetry.
[37] Cunningham 68.
[38] On "thereness" see Cunningham 61.
[39] On "reauratising" art through ekphrasis in the contemporary novel see Brosch "Ekphrasis in Recent Popular Novels" 404.

Perhaps it is the neutralising pixel of the digital age that makes us yearn for the trace of a human hand, or the desire to reinstate a romantic vision of artist as truth-teller, as transformer. Or perhaps we believe that by standing close enough to genius and beauty, its golden light will illuminate us also.

Smith has a record for standing next to the golden light (her frontal lobe might say).[40] Perhaps she seeks authenticity by proxy? Or does she hope to share the divergent ways that we experience the world? Hell, perhaps she just loves art.

Ah! But consider her attachments (the curator would say), her affiliations. Can it ever be as simple as 'love'?[41]

Alright now. The painting on our catalogue cover is not Boty's most prominent work. It is loosely divided into a 3 x 2 grid, and each section has a different image painted within it. They aren't held tightly within the spaces; they overlap and jostle with each other's borders. In the bottom left of the grid sits a series of different-sized green balls, all looping together in a kind of necklace, against a bright orange background. To their right, moving counterclockwise, is a blue and pink bedroom vignette. It looks like something out of a *House & Garden* magazine. Very *nice,* very chintzy, very 1963. And to the right of that is an image of a man's head and shoulders, painted in black and white. It looks like a still from a B-grade movie. He's smoking, he's wearing a leather jacket, his head is thrown back so that he surveys the world along his nose (though maybe he's just trying to keep the smoke out of his eyes. I had a boyfriend once who used to do that). And now it starts to get really interesting, because in the grid above the James Dean-like character is a kind of mirror image of him. But it's a negative, empty, white space, in the shape of a man, a shape that is decidedly phallic, and a woman, whose face is smudged and faint and barely filled in at all, is clasping the man-space, her face pressed into its neck. The background is fire-engine red and painted across it (okay, okay, I have to tell you this), are the words, "THESE are the arms that Held Him and Touched Him & lost HIM Somehow COLOUR Them empty noW."

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[40] Ali Smith's novels often contain references to textual and visual artists. In addition to the *Seasonal Quartet*, further examples can be found in *Artful* (2012*)* and *How to be Both* (2014).

[41] Attachments and affiliations (terms coined by Felski) are discussed in the conversation between the curator and guest below.

Speaking of attachments and affiliations (her frontal lobe might say). Your feminist scholar is showing. This isn't a neutral description.

They're not my words, those words (the curator would say). They're lyrics from the song, the song of the title, "My Colouring Book."

Besides, no description is neutral (the curator would say). Ekphrasis is an expression, not a faithful representation. It's perspectival. I'm staging the act of seeing, I'm kind of 'framing up' the process, and translating what I see.[42] I concede my translation has biases, for it's a truism that vision is culturally constructed,[43] as are descriptions and, of course, you are right to be wary of my allies. Maybe I am leaning into a feminist reading, or a Freudian one. I could even make an argument for Marxist, if I worked hard enough.

But forget my ideological attachments; I'll talk about them later, when I'm in conversation with my 'guest.' They're of no concern to you. Think instead about the role of ekphrasis in portraying encounters with art in the *Seasonal Quartet*. Yes, ideology is there, the feminist lean is pretty evident in descriptions of Boty's work and life, for example. Yet at other times Smith's descriptions seem neutral and observational, just a list of formal qualities noting colour and size and shape. Others, in contrast, have a reverential, transformative tone. While elsewhere the artworks are presented in decidedly political or psychological terms.[44] We might suggest that the varying shades of ekphrasis reflect a braiding together of divergent approaches and ideas across the *Seasonal Quartet*: Freudian dreams, the anti-art of the Dadaists, feminist re-tellings of Dickens, spacecraft named after Renaissance painters, and the study of snowflakes. Cognitive responses are all entangled with meditations on beauty and transformation and the power of art. Which brings me back to the catalogue … .

Really, we're still here (her frontal lobe might say)?

Yes, but not for long (the curator would say) because I want to create an entanglement of my own. Turn the catalogue over. Now we're on the back. Again, there is an image occupying the top two thirds. It's a mountain. Have you imagined a sunny

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[42] On seeing as framing see Bilmes 21.
[43] On vision as a cultural construction see Mitchell *What Do Pictures Want? : The Lives and Loves of Images* 337.
[44] Examples of ekphrastic encounters are discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

day, somewhere picturesque in the Swiss Alps, with a green meadow, a blue sky and a small cottage in the foreground? Throw it away. That's probably not even a memory. It's a postcard you've seen somewhere or a musical – or a film of a musical. Start again. This mountain is close, ominous, towering. And it's not in Switzerland. Its jagged peaks are outlined against the blackest of skies and an avalanche of snow cascades towards you. The image is all movement and form. It looks both amorphous and impenetrable, frightening and seductive, frozen yet tumbling, all at once. It is Tacita Dean's *Montafon Letter*.

When you open the catalogue, like this, you can see both images at once. Don't worry about the spine. It's fine. It won't crack. I could tell you about the binding method which ensures this beautiful, seamless opening, but that would be another 500 words. (Just trust me. It looks great.) Now you can see both images at once. Very different but complementary. And along the bottom third, spanning the back and the front, the text runs … "*Encounters with Art.*" You can only read it when you change your perspective, by either opening the catalogue or turning it in your hands.

Okay. Now open the catalogue.

Contents

Page 7. The 'Conversation' is printed against a background of lined paper, slightly yellowed, to resemble an old notebook, complete with vertical red margins. The 'paper' is marked in places with the half-moon tan of a disrupted, afternoon coffee. And the strangest little three dimensional 'crumbs' trail across its surface, refusing to be swept away. The curator is amused the narrative is one of coffee and cake, whereas, in reality, the night involved a light Beaujolais and some oily, Otzi anchovies. The font is Segoe Print and is intended to convey a casual, friendly tone. Which it was – minus the arguing over ANT's flat ontology[45] and whether it was wilfully blind to power struggles, injustices and inequities (and therefore complicit with them),[46] or conversely, whether the ANTian ontology was an attempt to break down human-centred hierarchies and egos.

Expletives were certainly edited out.

Guest: Let's begin today by talking about the ideas behind the exhibition, ***Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet and Encounters with Art,*** *and what drew you to postcritique as a lens for exploring Smith's portrayals of art in the novels.*

Curator: Sure. Well, I wanted ***Encounters with Art*** *to capture and hopefully reflect some of the ways that art is portrayed in* **The Seasonal Quartet**. *And by 'portrayal' I'm suggesting a twofold process here – one, how Smith portrays encounters using both subject matter and literary devices, such as ekphrasis and synaesthetic language, and two, how she portrays encounters on an emotional, psychological and philosophical level via description of character engagement and response.*

[45] On "flat ontology" see Latour *Reassembling the Social* 63.
[46] On erasing power differentials see Robbins 375.

Initially, I was interested in the sheer abundance of art and artists referenced in the **Quartet**, and the richness and connections that these elements created. Many of the encounters within the **Seasonal Quartet** are described as aesthetic, bodily encounters. There are definitely times that art is presented philosophically too, though rarely when the artwork is being viewed by a character. Theoretical, philosophical musings usually come separately. Emotional and cognitive responses are both represented, but I see a distinct juxtaposition in the **Seasonal Quartet**, of presence and affect in encounters with the artwork, and reflection or interpretation afterwards.

I started to think about that inexplicable connection you can feel to an artwork, or that first, ineffable response that might strike or overwhelm you when you encounter it. Do we have a language for that?, I wondered. Is there a body of work that attempts to contain and explain the seemingly uncontainable? And in trying to assemble a framework that prioritised experience over interpretation, I discovered that postcritique and other, affiliated approaches, were indeed trying to build a language that would aid in describing and validating precisely this.

I became increasingly curious about the effect and affect these encounters produced, both in the fictional characters and potentially in Smith's readers, too. I wondered if the portrayal of these encounters and the experiences of the characters could, in fact, escape the containment of the novel's world and invoke reciprocal reactions and interactions for the reader, in the physical world. This got me thinking about reader response (and in the case of the exhibition, audience response) and again, I found postcritique (and by extension Actor-Network

Theory), along with the work of critical theorists like Stanely Fish, Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, very helpful in approaching these ideas.

Guest: You've mentioned your interest in postcritical writers such as Elisabeth Anker and Rita Felski in the past, and I just finished reading Rita Felski's ***Hooked: Art and Attachment*** last weekend. I was curious to see how it differed from her earlier work, and I'm interested in exploring it as a pathway into this exhibition because ***Hooked*** argues for building connections, acknowledging attachments, and reclaiming a sense of wonder before the artwork.[47] In fact, it advocates attempting to withhold judgement, at least for a moment. I think ***Hooked*** provides more affirmative alternatives for describing and delineating creative encounters than her earlier work, like ***The Limits of Critique***, and it devotes a lot less energy to throwing previous approaches under the bus. I felt like I was being relentlessly pummelled in ***Limits***.

Curator: I hear you! But I also understand the drive of Felski's argument in ***Limits***; she's trying to overthrow the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'.[48] However, I ultimately had to agree with Stephen Best, that ***Limits*** felt "more like literary sociology than literary theory, more like a statement of ethics than a working out method; and to the extent that the book calls for return without providing a clear map for how to get there, it remains weakly committed to that goal."[49] In contrast, I think ***Hooked*** is a far more successful attempt to address and correct the critical

[47] For example, *The Uses of Literature* (2008) and *The Limits of Critique* (2015).
[48] On the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' see discussion between curator and guest below.
[49] Best 338.

*and ideological imbalances described in **Limits** and provides the reader with more ammunition to defend their, shall we say, 'less-than-scholarly', emotive responses.*

*Guest: I agree, **Hooked** offers a more precise language to discuss experiential encounters, and Felski's discussion of 'attachment devices'[50] helps to reframe the idea that affective responses are simply unscholarly or naive. Her work in **Hooked** really tries to analyse and accreditise the complexity and diversity of our responses to artwork. But I'm glad you brought up the hermeneutics of suspicion just now. I think we should talk about the tenets of **The Limits of Critique** because this work creates a dynamic with, and leads directly to, the intentions behind postcritique, doesn't it?*

So, can you define the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that Felski and other postcritical writers are pushing back against?

Curator: Well, the hermeneutics of suspicion is a phrase borrowed from the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. He uses it to describe a spirit of modern thought, influenced by the work of nineteenth-century theorists such as Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, whom he calls the "masters of suspicion." He refers to their thinking as 'critique'. Critique, he argues, is characterised by a tone of wariness, scepticism and intellectual detachment, and this became the dominant style of thought and method of interpretation throughout the last half of the twentieth century.[51] Critique looks for deeper or hidden meanings that lie below the surface of texts

[50] In *Hooked* Felski identifies three attachment devices – attunement, identification and interpretation – these devices are discussed in the dialogue between curator and guest below.
[51] Felski *The Limits of Critique* 37.

(or narratives, more broadly) and attempts to decode these. In ***Limits***, Felski argues against this approach, maintaining that it is fundamentally hostile – that unmasking, reading against the grain, and wresting hidden meanings from 'mute', 'unintentional' objects, ultimately renders them passive and inferior to the interpreting subject. Critique positions the artwork as naïve, or worse, complicit with dominant power structures, characterising it as self-deceptive or untrustworthy. Postcritique suggests that the practitioners of critique are so busy plumbing hidden depths that they forget to look at the surface.

Guest: Ah, but can we ever 'just look' or 'just read' the surface, as postcritique implies we should? The kind of reading and viewing considered 'natural' (and right) by postcritique is still cloaked in ideology. Railing against the tendency to seek hidden power structures and sociological determinants in all artistic expressions is a kind of ideological position in itself, isn't it? I mean, Bruce Robbins is alarmed that postcritique "wants to extricate literature from its entanglement in the cultural concept,"[52] potentially chipping away at the rigor of critical distance, blunting its 'edge,' to elevate pedestrian attitudes, to feed the flames of commercialism and fandom. Can it be, that by appealing to the ordinary, the surface, and the evident, postcritique supports a kind of neoliberal focus on surfaces and things, moulded by consumerism and markets?

Curator: There's certainly validity in that concern. Look, I read a review of Robert Talley's "For a Ruthless Critique of all that Exists" in the **Los Angeles Review of**

[52] Robbins 372.

Books *recently. The reviewer sums up Tally's arguments by saying he argues that "postcritique is symptomatic of capitalist realism" and "the principles and methods of postcritique resign themselves to the institutional demands of the neoliberal university."*[53] *Postcritique certainly has its share of detractors. Take Carolyn Lesjak, lamenting "the death of theory." She believes that "a hermeneutics of suspicion is replaced by a suspicion of hermeneutics, a disavowing of interpretation itself."*[54] *While musing on the suggested return to 'surface reading', she quips "[a]ll of this is done in the name of getting back to basics, while seemingly forgetting that we have been there before and it is no longer the same place it used to be, if it ever was that place."*[55] *Susan Stanford Friedman is more measured, suggesting that critique is not purely negative, that there are merits in interpretive critique, that it can offer positive, alternative meanings and valuations, that it "is often what clears the way for new frameworks of thought, new discoveries, new ideas."*[56] *Which I totally support. But at heart, what Felski and others claim is that "a persistent concern with drawing out shadowy, concealed, or counterintuitive meanings can lead to a neglect of the formal qualities of art and the sensual dimensions of aesthetic experience."*[57] *For postcritique, feeling (affect, attunement, being 'hooked') matters when we engage with things, just as much, perhaps more, than thinking about them.*

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[53] Scott.
[54] Lesjak 244.
[55] Lesjak 237.
[56] Friedman 349.
[57] Anker and Felski 15-16.

Guest: So Felski claims that suspicious thinking ignores or diminishes such feelings? Even derides ideas of attachment, affect, or attention to the surface?

Curator: Yes. According to her, for the 'masters of suspicion,' artworks should certainly not be taken at face value, nor be allowed to seduce or co-opt the receiver emotionally. Indeed, an artwork can only be truly dismantled, interrogated, and illuminated by the critic's knowing and objective eye.

Guest: So, only the expert critic can know what texts and art mean? And an audience engaged with 'feeling' is considered a duped consumer; unserious, unwitting, indulgent … and uneducated?

Curator: Yes. The attitudes of the lay audience hold little value. Of course, critique wasn't the only approach to art in the later twentieth century, but it was certainly a very powerful one. In fact, in ***Limits*** *Felski claims that 'critique' became a byword for intellectual and radical thought. It had a largely undisputed authority in academic circles, and was generally celebrated as progressive and revolutionary, pushing boundaries and toppling normative conventions.*[58] *All quite heady stuff. And for sure, some great literary thinkers and philosophers inspired critique and flourished under it (creating some notoriously inaccessible texts along the way.).*[59] *However, Felski also argues that critique, despite its association with*

[58] On critique as intellectual and avant-garde, see Felski *The Limits of Critique*.
[59] These thinkers and philosophers could include Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty, Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak and Slavoj Žižek.

radicalism and innovation, had constraints, patterns and rhetoric equal to the conventions of the very status quo it sought to disrupt.[60]

Guest: Okay, if critique is not the only method, nor the most accessible one (perhaps deliberately excluding the uninitiated), for gaining insight into literature and art, what does Felski propose? Because simply being opposed to critique is not a viable alternative in itself. Flipping binaries is never an answer.

Curator: Exactly. I think Felski argues for the need to find a different mood and language to supplement those used in critique. As Felski remarks in ***Limits*** *– we have a lot of words for suspicion and not many for love. I think she wants to challenge critique's status as the dominant method for responding to art (which includes literature), and embrace alternative, ways of understanding* **things** *in the world. Near the start of* **Limits,** *Felski asks "[w]hat intellectual and imaginative alternatives does [critique] overshadow, obscure, or overrule?"*[61] *And this is where postcritique comes in. As a counter to suspicious thinking.*

Guest: Okay, 'postcritique' – what do you make of the moniker? Does the prefix imply alternative, beyond, or after? Are we really 'after' criticism? Do we even want to be beyond it? And, more importantly, what might that look like? I mean, the 'post' prefix is rife with controversy in the humanities. And let's not get started on the 'post-posts.' It could be seen as quite an inflammatory choice

[60] Felski *The Limits of Critique* 90-120.
[61] Felski *The Limits of Critique* 12.

of term. However, I read Anker and Felski on this point, and they write that "the 'post-' of postcritique denotes a complex temporality: an attempt to explore fresh ways of interpreting literary and cultural texts that acknowledges … its inevitable dependency on the very practices it is questioning."[62] So the term doesn't deny the place of critique. I'd say Felski suggests a realignment over an extinction.[63]

Curator: Absolutely. Who wants to destroy critique? Does anyone want to simply embrace the uncritical?[64] I mean, the implication is not favourable – unthinking, unsophisticated, uneducated? And besides, critique can be *fun*. We are meaning-making animals. And Felski's been quite explicit about needing to give "equal weight to cognitive and affective aspects of aesthetic response."[65] It is crucial that we acknowledge the significance of social, cultural and political attachments alongside those of feeling, intuition, and gut reaction. "[A]ttachments," she says, "encompass far more than immediate gratifications or visceral pleasures: blending, in varying degrees, feeling and thought, the affective and the normative"[66]. But still, her loudest detractors remain bullish, insisting that postcritique is 'anti-critique', and that Felski is promoting a quietest, apolitical, belletrist takeover of serious thought.

[62] Anker and Felski 1.
[63] Felski *The Limits of Critique* 18.
[64] Felski suggests a binary exists between the haloed effect of critique and the "bad smell of the uncritical." Felski *The Limits of Critique* 15.
[65] Felski *Uses of Literature* 16.
[66] Felski *Hooked* 140.

Guest: Without doubt. In the age of 'truthiness,'[67] you can see why people are nervous about abandoning critique. I understand Diana Fuss's concern: "[S]hould we be actively working to demote critique, an interpretive method with a proven track record of calling out and calling to account purveyors of false and pernicious narratives?"[68] Now, in a global climate where truth and fact are dismissed as "fake news," and untruth is promoted as authentic, seems precisely the time to be more vigilant and suspicious than ever.

Curator: One hundred percent. We can't give up on critique. But perhaps we need to broaden our interpretive focus? Latour argues that critique, championed by the humanities, has ironically played its own role in the evolution of 'truthiness'. And I quote, "entire Ph.D. programs are still running to make sure that good [American] kids are learning the hard way that facts are made up, that there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth, that we are always prisoners of language, that we always speak from a particular standpoint, and so on, while dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives."[69] It's a crazy, mixed-up world. So, maybe Felski's onto something, especially now. We need an alternative to - or something to balance against –suspicious and cynical thinking.

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[67] Friedman 348. Friedman discusses the idea of 'truthiness', a term coined by US humourist Stephen Colbert in 2005, defined by *Dictionary.com* and quoted by Friedman, as being "the quality of seeming to be true, according to one's intuition, opinion, or perception without regard to logic, factual evidence or the like."

[68] Fuss 353.

[69] Latour "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern" 227.

Look, in the never-ending drama of 'the humanities in crisis,' we might have reached a tipping point.[70] You might question if the old, pessimistic ways still have traction or whether, as Ricouer offers, we need a hermeneutics of trust, restoration and "faith"?[71] Anyway, I think that's what postcritique is gunning for. That we bring back enjoyment, engagement and immersion, but we don't give up on thinking or theory, let alone politics. They're not the enemy after all, simply "the process of reflecting on the underlying frameworks, principles, and assumptions that shape our individual acts of interpretation."[72]

Guest: Is that what ***Encounters with Art*** is gunning for then? Because a lot of the ideas around postcritique seem relevant to the exhibition's exploration of the **Seasonal Quartet**. For example, Felski takes a lot of inspiration from Actor-Network Theory in ***Hooked***. Can you see similarities with ANT and the thrust of Smith's novels? I'm thinking particularly about entanglements and connections – I love the way characters and motifs link up through time and across the novels – and also the sense of co-creation they foster in readers by inviting active engagement and encouraging them to undertake 'detective work.' I spent a lot of time on Google with those novels in hand trying to track down 'real' sources and information about artworks, artists, historical and contemporary events - and was constantly delighted by the crossover between fiction and 'reality'. Across the **Quartet** I really got the sense that Smith is trying to acknowledge the breadth,

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[70] Ahlburg, *The Humanities in Crisis*. This collection of essays explores the debate coming out of the US and UK since the start of the twenty-first century, around whether the humanities are in crisis, what form that crisis takes and what responses could be taken to address it.

[71] Paul Ricoeur distinguished between two forms of hermeneutics: a hermeneutics of faith, which aims to restore meaning to a text, and a hermeneutics of suspicion, which aims to break down a text to expose repressed and hidden meanings. See Terrell 288-9.

[72] Felski *Uses of Literature* 2.

width, and diversity of our attachments but also make a series of political statements worthy of critique. I think that can be witnessed in the variety of ways that Smith portrays encounters with different artists, and artworks, as well as scientists, technologies and philosophers, and her unflinching engagement with both history and contemporary events and politics.

Curator: I definitely felt a postcritical sensibility in Smith's portrayals and I was also curious about how this delivery might direct and effect the reader. I wondered what was at stake when the encounters with art in the ***Quartet*** were defined as aesthetic, affective, or transformative meetings, encouraging emotive attachment in the fictional characters and the reader outside the storyworld. It seems to me that postcritique allows for personal, individualised experience. It aims to nurture attunement and attachment over detachment, and it invites suspicion of suspicion. Perhaps by fostering affective encounters, Smith hopes to encourage engagement. Because engagement triggers connection, it counters apathy and fights indifference. If I am engaged, I might think more dynamically. I may care more. Will I, therefore, make room for optimism, sensitivity and patience? Will I be open to moving beyond binaries and boundaries? Yes! I believe so.

Guest: Agreed! And perhaps through engagement we can extend our ethical, moral and ideological reasoning? Didn't Nicole Schrag write that Smith's style "affirms a powerful experience of connection alongside opacity, often mediated through the joy of experiencing art, that allows for new ways of imagining the

politics of belonging and survival.''?[73] Because at the heart of the ***Quartet*** lies an appraisal of the challenges of the contemporary world: information saturation, the rise of the far-right, climate change, national borders and Nationalism, an epidemic of scepticism alongside an excess of 'truth." I felt the novels used emotive attachment to stealthily lead me into ethical and political exploration. What does Susan Sontag say in ***Against Interpretation***, that art should make us see or comprehend but not judge or generalise, that the act of comprehension accompanied by "voluptuousness" is sufficient justification for an artwork?[74] Critique is certainly there in Smith's writing but perhaps as a vibration flowing off the affective – or the voluptuous, I suppose.

Curator: The politics sneak up on us, you think? Camouflaged under the bodily or emotive influence of Hepworth and Mazzetti? Yes, why not? Tactile qualities can transform into an affirmation of life, or a balancing act can be a protest against passivity.[75]

Guest: Exactly. The description of Fred Uhlman's drawings in ***Summer*** worked like that on me. I could sense the struggle between his delicately rendered lines and the weight of his subject matter. In fact, I was so taken I bought a copy of *Captivity*, the published book of his drawings completed in the Internment camp (Su 179). (Hideously expensive fyi.) And now I feel a little worried that I'm Talley's neoliberal consumer, complicit in the capitalist marketing of art.

[73] Schrag 2024.
[74] Sontag 40.
[75] Hepworth as anti-war and Mazzetti's short film *K*, are discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

*Curator: Okay. A confession then. I bought the Butlin's Clacton badge described in **Summer** (Su 57). (A steal, at £16.50 on eBay.) So, we're in this capitalist boat together. But I guess what I found astounding (and delightful) was that this cheap piece of ephemera actually existed. When you Google the artworks, you kind of expect a work of 'high' art to exist, and it does – the Botys, the Uhlmans, Tacita Dean's mountain. But a souvenir, summer camp badge, made for the masses? An easy-to-loose item? Yes! And while not overtly political, there is something ideological going on here. Smith is confounding boundaries. High and low. Art and craft. Aura and reproduction. Yeah, absolutely, I wanted to own it, like it really belonged to Daniel, and I was somehow sharing in its magic. It definitely created a tie for me.*

And maybe that's cause to celebrate. From an ANT perspective, our sequestered artifacts have "the effect of making the novel more real, not less real. Art's power and presence [is] not attenuated by its relations, but made possible by its relations."[76] The book as an object has a presence. We handle it, we admire its spine on our bookshelf and we even feel compelled to seek out artifacts mentioned in it – like the Butlin's badge, an Uhlman print, or a Shakespeare commemorative coin. All these things, in unison with the reader, generate the network of responses that, layer upon intersecting layer, create meaning(s). Hence therefore, embrace the badge, the Uhlman First Edition, and the Shakespeare coin!

[76] Felski "Comparison and Translation: A Perspective from Actor-Network Theory" 750.

Guest: Oh, I did. I really pored over those Uhlman drawings. All those children with balloons. They're ghastly. Macabre really. And yet, they are playful, innocent almost. The lightness of the artist's mark-making and the innocence of the balloon-holding child against the darkness of the work's content – the internment camp, the horror of captivity, suffering, execution, cruelty, death. It's powerful. I would hesitate to say they're beautiful, as their content is so gruesome, but they're certainly aesthetically and emotionally engaging. However, if I describe them as captivating, true, gut-wrenching, do I then become the unwitting, naive non-thinker that critique condemns?

Curator: Well, for many people (you and I most certainly) an emotive response is a primary reaction. Before we engage cognitively, we engage sensorily, affectively. I suppose the challenge then is to find a way of describing that initial, charged response without resorting to feverish hyperbole. In ***Hooked****,* *Felski aims to develop a language which helps us explain our attachments in a rigorous manner. She argues that this language is a crucial step in formalising and validating our attachments because aesthetics and affect have, for decades now, with the rise of critique, been treated with distrust.*[77] *A belief in the value of 'beauty,' as expressed by the ancient Greeks, or during the Renaissance, or by the Romantics with their emphasis on subjective emotion, seems at odds with the more contemporary, discriminating eye of identity politics, ideological determinism, and social construction. However, postcritique is about more than binary inversion, as we've discussed. Grace Cowtan believes that "Smith uses the affective experience of art's*

[77] On the language of affect as taboo see Felski *Hooked* 13, 76, 68.

viewership to promote an ethics of meaning-making,"[78] *which backs-up Felski's stance on what we might call affective interpretation which involves a re-orientation in the value accorded to modes of perception. Honestly, I don't believe postcritique wants to hark back to a pure, 'art for art's sake' stance. Postcritique doesn't position artworks as autonomous, detached entities, beautiful, solitary objects immune to the sway of culture and society. Rather, borrowing from Actor-Network Theory, Felski situates art, artists and viewers/readers as co-actors and co-authors, intricately embedded and wedded to their surrounds.*

Guest: Alright. It's late and the coffee's cold. (#beaujolaisdestroyed.) Let's quickly talk about those relationships, those connections between art and audience. Felski lays out three 'attachment devices' in ***Hooked****, as a pathway to explaining our differing relationships with artworks. I want to talk about* **attunement** *first, because it encompasses the primary, affective response you mentioned earlier. This really is the stickiest device, isn't it? Because attunement encapsulates "those affinities, inclinations, stirrings that often fall below the threshold of consciousness."*[79] *It is the most difficult to quantify and, therefore, the most open to criticism. For example, I love the work of Barbara Hepworth, you hate it. Why? I can't explain. I respond physically to it; I want to encircle it, touch it. There is something in her forms that pulls at me, that thrums in my chest. That's my primary reaction, right? However, Felski argues, it's not simply the sticky attunement drawing me to, say, Figure for Landscape. Beyond my primary*

[78] Cowtan 178.
[79] Felski *Hooked* 12.

response is a host of underground social forces influencing my attachment. Like, my grandmother lived in St Ives, not far from Hepworth's studio; we both studied at the Royal College of Art – though 60 years apart – and, I confess, I share her love for cats and chain smoking. So, you could argue my aesthetic experience is equally grounded in shared materiality, connected networks. Felski outlines several scenarios in ***Hooked*** *which illustrate how attunement is fully realised both via affinity and connection. And of course, she explores the elements that influence our attunements – such as education, experience, historical moment, culture and upbringing.*

Curator: So, your attachment to the Hepworth is both a combination of sticky feelings, subconscious currents ***and*** *a felt connection from random outside forces – you identified with a town, a landscape, a training, a packet of Benson & Hedges.*

Guest: Undoubtedly, I identify with many aspects of Hepworth's life and work. And there you have it; Felski's second device, linked to the first, is ***identification****. However, Felski teases out the definition of identification to include alignment, allegiance and recognition, in addition to empathy, which many lay audiences will recognise as the most common form of 'identifying' with a character or situation or artwork. And Felski reiterates that her expanded definition of identification can alternatively "trigger ethical, political, or intellectual affinities that have little to do with co-feeling"*[80] *or compassion.*

[80] Felski *Hooked* 13.

Curator: So, within the scope of identification, an acolyte of critique (an academic, say?) may have political or intellectual attachments to certain modes of suspicious thinking because of their affinity for a kind of discourse, or at least for those aspects of it that they recognise and admire – interpretive methods and ethical stance, or peers, institutions, careers. Identification may be with a particular way of thinking and theorising, not only with shared, lived connections.

Guest: I think that's right. Some artworks may resonate more because of our allegiances, education and upbringing, or because we recognise elements that matter to us whether politically, ethically or aesthetically. And some affinities may not be to the objects themselves but to the modes of production, dissemination or organisations that surround them. Futhermore, identification may be an ethical allegiance around gender equality, say, or a political bond over asylum seeker rights, or fealty to an academic or interpretive community.[81]

Curator: That makes perfect sense to me. I certainly feel a bond with my colleagues and peers, the institutions we work within, and our shared, common goals. But Felski talks about interpretation as a form of relating too, whether it's my staff and I discussing Dubuffet's formal break with the conventional nude, a book-group contesting the merits of Spring over Summer, or an expert panel at the writer's festival discussing Derrida.[82] *Interpretation is created and maintained through*

[81] On the idea of "interpretive communities" see Fish 13-14 & 318-32.
[82] On aesthetic experiences through membership and shared affinities see Felski *Hooked* 135-75.

individual engagements, and situations within the interpretive communities to which they belong.

Guest: Exactly. Interestingly, ***interpretation*** *is Felski's third attachment device. So she doesn't simply dismiss thinking and conveying ideas about meaning and value. She states: "Commentary … is connection."*[83] *The act of interpreting and the associations formed with like-minded thinkers are forms of attachment as powerful as attunement or identification.*

Curator: Okay, and here is another place where boundaries overlap and binaries are dispelled. Felski suggests that expert or critical readers may have more in common with general lay readers than previously acknowledged. As I understand it, she goes further and suggests that the attributes of lay readers – such as attending to the surface, being present before the text or work of art, becoming involved and attached – are worthwhile pursuits that need to be reclaimed, re-evaluated and reabsorbed into scholarly reading and assessment. There's a consensus amongst postcritical thinkers that the acts of surface reading, affective reading, or reparative reading[84] *can not only challenge but supplement the suspicious, symptomatic reading associated with critique. Felski writes that if we want to understand how and why we forge ties with artworks, we need to venture beyond just scholarly analysis and include the responses and methodology of lay readers. So, the way I see it, while terms such as 'reception theory' or*

[83] Felski *Hooked* 135.
[84] On surface reading, see Best and Marcus 9; on affective responding see Truran 28; on reparative reading see Sedgwick 149-51.

'reader-response theory' are rarely cited in postcritical thinking, reader (or viewer)-oriented criticism should, in fact, be considered an important tool in a postcritical approach to all forms of art.[85]

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Come on, the curator said. It's good for your Google Scholar profile to be included in the catalogue. You've seen the drafts. It's an exciting project. It's exploratory, progressive. We're charting new ground here. You're going to want your name associated with this, I promise. (Bribing.) And think of the readership. This is an extension beyond your usual fraternity, an opportunity to gain wider exposure. Besides, you know how much it would mean to me. (Begging.) I respect your work immensely and I believe your contribution will play an integral role in establishing the complexity and variety the catalogue seeks to explore, between the creative, the cognitive, the playful and the rigorous. It would make such a difference to the text if your writing was included. Seriously, I'd owe you one. (Bargaining.)

In all honesty, the academic said, your timing couldn't be worse. It's bedlam in my department at the moment. Restructuring, lay-offs, auditing *and* I'm snowed under with the extra marking and the constant re-jigging of the curriculum.

… But just say I found some time. What aspects of reader-response theory would you like me to discuss? It's an extensive subject, let's not get carried away. How do you see reader response relating to Ali Smith's *Seasonal Quartet* and *Encounters with Art*?

Well, it's exactly that, the curator said. It's the encounters. You can't have an encounter without a recipient who responds. It's a dialogue. There's transaction and transferal and translation at play, between the artworks and the characters, between the artworks and the readers, between fiction and life. So, as I see it, the dialogue across the *Seasonal Quartet* is both intradiegetic and extradiegetic. The reader shares in Smith's portrayal of creative encounters via the narrative and stylistic devices, but also

[85] On reader response theory and postcritique see Willis 3.

through personal attachments, co-production of meaning and even paratextual elements, like the Hockney covers.[86]

The curator watched the academic thinking.

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Page 10. An essay on reader-response theory.

I imagine you are sitting rather comfortably in a soft armchair at home, next to the radiator, or perhaps you are standing under the warm lights of the museum gift shop, balancing this catalogue in one hand whilst juggling your bag and umbrella in the other, wondering whether this essay and the associated contents justifies the £30+ price tag. At any rate, the catalogue is open, and we can both agree you are in the act of reading – decoding symbols, evaluating language, synthesising and interpreting what is before you.

It's odd to think that for a very long time the readers' thoughts or presence were barely acknowledged in discussions of literature. Historically the reader has been rather absent from the conversation around the meaning and interpretation of writing, much like the viewer, largely ignored in the discussion of art. One might wonder why this has been the case, when one considers the effort – metal and emotional – of communing with a text or encountering a painting or sculpture. It is in response to this effacement of the (interpreting) receiver that reader-response theory has carved out a space. It challenges the auxiliary role of the reader, it seeks to define what constitutes a 'reader,' and it attempts to theorise the process by which meaning is constructed and consolidated through reading.

We might ask, where has the reader been for the last 2000 years? For it is duplicitous to suggest that the reader has been entirely truant or silenced. During ancient times an audience was more common than a reader as the recipient of art, theirs being an aural culture, predominantly performative. The Ancients certainly acknowledged the audience, recognising the impact of art upon them. Plato deemed audiences morally corruptible by the effects of poetry, whilst Aristotle argued the cathartic effects of tragedy upon the audience were both desirable and restorative, and Horace's insistence that poetry should 'teach and delight' has travelled down through the ages.[87] And what of the fervid epistles 'To

[86] Reproductions of four paintings by the British artist David Hockney, from his 2006 *Tunnel* series, adorn each cover of the *Seasonal Quartet*. The paintings depict the same country road across changing seasons and correspond to the titles of *Autumn, Winter, Spring* and *Summer*.
[87] Rosenblatt 3.

the reader' popular amongst 16th and 17th century writers, suddenly aware of a growing readership beyond their control? These epistles, or paratexts, were conceived as a transactional space to communicate with the reader, and became ever more centred on the reader as consumer, as the centuries passed. While one might question whether the primary goal was to accommodate the reader, to smooth the text's reception, or to shore up reputation and (ultimately) sales, it must be said that the audience, the reader, and the receiver has indeed been present throughout history. However, one may also say that, from ancient Greece to the Victorian era, the audience has generally existed as a figure without authority or agency. The reader was a subject acted upon, an inert receptacle, hollow and impressionable. Emphasis lay upon the *creation* of effects rather than on the *recipients* of them.[88] And the reader fared little better during the first half of the twentieth century. The New Criticism of the mid-1900s completely sealed off the artwork from extraneous forces. It posited the autonomy of the text, free of social and political determinants. Meaning was held within the artwork, independent of the surrounding world. Context, authorial beliefs, politics – none of these mattered; everything was *in* the work, alone. A counter-response in critical opinion soon followed, not least due to the politics of the Second World and Cold Wars, second-wave feminism, the civil rights movement and the 'independence' of former colonies. And, as the sixties and seventies rushed in, so too did critique arise and burgeon.[89] But, despite appearances, the two apparently dichotomous responses to literature (and art) are oddly related: both endeavoured to keep the ordinary reader, or spectator, at bay. If meaning had to been found, that office could not be entrusted to the *vox populi*. Excavating the surface, digging down, unveiling hidden truths, became the sole preserve of the ideologically astute critic. The expert reader with years of training. Albeit sensed, the reader remained, as they had across thousands of years, lurking furtively in the shadows. However, in the latter half of the 20th century, reader-response theory finally sought to draw the reader out, centre them under the spotlight, and allow the other actors to fade into the wings.

One may wonder who the supposed 'reader' is, in 'reader-response' theory. An expert reader will certainly approach the text differently to a lay reader – perhaps with a critical, detached eye – while conversely, a lay reader may become immersed and otherwise affected. The reading may be efferent, that is, solely end-driven with the goal of garnering information, or aesthetic,[90] passive, active or resistant.[91] How does one corral 'the reader'? For this disparate body has to be coaxed into a

[88] Rosenblatt 3.
[89] Freund 3-4.
[90] On efferent and aesthetic reading see Rosenblatt 23-25.
[91] On passive and resistant/ active readers see Willis 75-80.

manageable, definable form, made to conform with certain categories and generalisations, for the good of theory and analysis. Reader-response theory has proffered a slew of definitions in an attempt to approach the reader as a meaning-making agent: "[T]he implied reader (Booth, Iser), the model reader (Eco), the super-reader (Riffaterre), the ideal reader (Culler), the actual reader (Jauss), or the reader as member of an interpretive community (Fish)."[92] Ultimately, whatever the reader, whether they be implied, ideal or actual, they lie at the centre of reader-response enquiry.

From the list of definitions above we might conclude that reader-response theory is divergent rather than cohesive in its approach. Indeed, it is not spearheaded by one scholar, nor constrained by one manifesto, but is rather something of an umbrella term that covers a variety of debated approaches. What they have in common is a desire to examine the relationship between reading and "the life of the psyche, or the imagination, or our linguistic habits"[93] and how the reader might decipher meaning, not just cognitively, but also psychologically, consciously or unconsciously.[94]

Let me provide an extremely condensed, and decidedly simplistic, snapshot of four prominent theorists to help elucidate some of the diverse approaches within reader-response theory to meaning-making. Hans Robert Jauss believed the text was not a static object but an evolving entity in continuous dialogue, evolving between multiple readers and past texts, across time. He suggested meaning was generated in the translation between a reader's past and present knowledge, hence continuously changing through time. How one reads and interprets a text depends on one's (changing) 'Horizon of Expectation.'[95] This 'horizon' is made up of one's prior knowledge and formative generation or cultural context; these establish the 'expectations' or assumptions one brings to a text and shape the way one interprets its meaning. So different people, living in different places and times, or with different backgrounds, attribute different meanings to the same text. And because individuals change as they learn and experience new things, or move to new places, an individual might interpret the same text differently at different stages in their lifetime. Jauss's contemporary, Wolfgang Iser, agreed with many of Jauss's tenets, but placed even more emphasis upon the reader's creativity. He argued that texts were incomplete without the active agency of readers in the production of meaning. Readers, he claimed, filled in the (inevitable) gaps, indeterminacies and ambiguities in texts, whether consciously or not. They do not supplant the author (Iser differs from Roland Barthes here, who famously asserted "the

[92] Freund 7.
[93] Freund 5.
[94] Freund 5.
[95] On the "Horizon of Expectations" see Jauss and Benzinger 12-14.

death of the author" in an essay with that title) but co-create the text's meaning in their individual interpretation of what the author has provided (and what they have not).[96] Louise Rosenblatt agreed with Iser in many respects, suggesting that meaning was not to be found in either the text or the reader, but in the moment of interaction between the two: in a transactional dialogue.[97] According to Rosenblatt, the reader reflects, synthesises and evaluates the text, drawing on past experience and knowledge, including cultural assumptions, personal affective and cognitive responses, as well as information gleaned from textual signposts and technical literacy. Stanley Fish took this a step further, insisting that the reader does not make meaning in isolation, but rather as a member of a community of like-minded interpreters.[98] A community such as this constructs meaning less from individual histories and learning and more from systems of allied thinking. Specific communities share attitudes, knowledge, and practices that tie them to their cohort. What is normative to one cohort, may be completely alien to another.

Now, where does that leave the reader – that is to say, *you* – when approaching *Encounters with Art*, or reflecting upon Ali Smith's *Seasonal Quartet*? The truth of the matter lies in…

The curator holds a catalogue, newly arrived from the printer. She tests the weight of it in her hands. She slides her palm across the cover. So pleasing to the touch. It is just an object, not a very big thing, but a whole world exists within it. She takes two from the freshly minted pile on her desk and slips them into a manila envelope, addressed for internal mail:

The Archive
Rm 402.1
Level 4

[96] On gaps and indeterminacy see Iser, Chapter One: "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response."
[97] On the 'transactional' relationship see Rosenblatt, Chapter Two: "The Poem as Event."
[98] On Fish's idea of the interpretive community, see fn. 81, above.

Chapter Two: The Installation/ Intradiegetic Encounters

It is a Thursday close to the end of winter. Pauline Boty is across the room mingling with the crowd, laughing and swaying. She's making a joke of shimming a soft stole around her shoulders. It's a parody. It has something of the showgirl-with-feather-boa about it. But it's Pauline, so it's crazy sexy and captivating too. With her blonde, shaggy hair and kohl-rimmed eyes, it's hard to look away. Her presence is electric. She is undeniably larger than life. No really. She *is* larger than life. Four metres high, five metres wide. The flickering black and white phantom is being thrown onto the rear gallery wall of the Autumn space. The laughing and clowning stops. Now she is at a fairground in a dark coat, smoking a cigarette. And now she's in her studio, kneeling on the floor, dragging her brush across a canvas, performing painting. And now she is in colour, snogging Michael Caine in a sky-blue top. Next a ragged yellow line, a green line, a red line cuts through their embrace. The moving image stutters and stops. The wall returns to white. Colour Her Gone.

The curator bites her cheek. She makes eye contact with the designer who is busy watching a worker apply the last slick of paint on to a high corner with an impossibly long roller on a stick. Last week the walls were blank canvas, Hang Anything On Me White. Now they are (Bronze Icon. Burnt Butter. Tree Hollow. Cinnamon Sand. Tuscan Sunrise) Tobacco. At least there was some play on burning leaves, the curator thought.

Can you … the curator says … find a technician for this?

She tosses her head in the direction of the stilled wall. Video Production was due in thirty minutes. The aim: to record a score of social media teasers for *Encounters with Art*. 'Go Behind the Scenes with …'. She had a running sheet. Somewhere.

- Curator flicks through the catalogue, introducing the show.
- Curator speaks to artworks and ideas around the exhibition.
- Gallery staff respond to artworks. Mixed group required. Expert and lay. Archivist, historian, cleaner, security guard?

- Ali wanders the gallery floor (had someone got her a coffee, was she even here yet?).
- Models sport tote bags emblazoned with *BUM* (for the adventurous) and *Early July Tunnel* (for the not).

The gallery floor is awash with art handlers, display technicians, lighting and audio engineers. Flagstones are marked with guidelines; infrared plumb lines dissect the walls. Ladders, power tools, blankets and ratchet straps merge and divide across the light wooden floor. It feels like a performance piece (scissor-lift stage right), or an interpretive dance slowly gaining momentum, a discordant orchestra pit gradually finding its equilibrium.

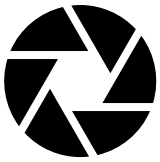
Close to the title panel, near the entrance, the curator spots a young figure with short, choppy hair. It's the intern, barely with her a month, crash landing in the middle of a blockbuster hanging. The academic's revenge, no doubt. In the end 'bargain' had prevailed and in exchange for their essay, the curator had agreed to mentor the intern, a member of the academic's Bright Young Things. Postgrad. Museum and Heritage Studies. Writing a dissertation on polymodality in the gallery space, or some such.

The intern, meanwhile, has pulled up the installation plan for *Encounters with Art* on their tablet. They can see the exhibition traverses across four spaces, each named after the title of one of Smith's four novels. However, on pinching and expanding their thumb and forefinger over the surface, they have discovered an array of small doorways, passages, and junctions that connect unexpectedly on to other *Seasonal* spaces. The intern feels like they are lost in an Escher. Or rather, in IKEA, where a sliding door or a sharp right turn delivers you suddenly into Kitchens and Wardrobes when you are anticipating Bedrooms and Soft Furnishings. They try to spin the screen like you might an old, hardcopy map. They know this is an obsolete gesture. The helpful little device obliges by reorientating itself to the original position.

Good morning! How are you getting on, the curator says. Ready to take a run through the seasons?

Oh. I'm having a little trouble seeing how the installation works, the intern says. Is there another way I can look at it?

Yes, the curator says. Ignore the centre and try looking around the edges, then transgress the borders between the spaces. I have it on good authority, from the author herself, that it's on the borders we create a "threshold to new places, possibilities, multiplicities."[99] We're hoping our installation will reflect malleability and entanglement. Because when you're entangled, you're participating, producing, responding and re-creating. "Works of art … are enlisted, entangled, engaged, embattled, embroiled, and embedded."[100] And so are we.



[ID: Long shot. A woman dressed in black and wearing heavy, angular glasses perches on a high stool, leafing slowly through a catalogue. Behind her is a wall painted medium brown. (Tobacco.) As the camera pans out the woman raises her head and begins to address the viewer. A gallery scene is revealed. Two figures wearing white gloves manoeuvre a painting into position.]

"Hello. Welcome to The Gallery. I'm the curator of *Encounters with Art*, an exhibition that aims to reflect and explore the creative encounters portrayed within the four novels of Ali Smith's *Seasonal Quartet*.

"You may wonder what an encounter actually is. And to be fair, there are many kinds. They're not always predictable, uniform or easily mapped. What we can say, however, is that an encounter demands a response. It is an unexpected exchange that creates a change in both the object and the viewer. It may sneak up on you, percolating over time, or it may barrel down upon you with titanic force. An encounter may be difficult to articulate, felt more than thought, mysterious more than metered. And although an encounter may seem ineffable, its otherworldliness is not beyond examination and discussion. Because responding to an artwork always happens in the company of human or nonhuman actors, whose relations can be traced, articulated, and made tangible. Ask yourself, if you

[99] Begley.
[100] Felski *The Limits of Critique* 19.

> feel drawn to an artwork in this exhibition or within the pages of the *Seasonal Quartet* (and I hope you do), why am I responding this way? Do I recognise, aspire to, bristle against or embrace, a subject, a situation, a colour, a destination, in the artwork? Am I aligned with or committed to an idea or action being represented? What is in me, around me and before me that makes this exchange important to me?"

While waiting for the curator, the intern had stood patiently, studying two paintings of quite different women. Resting side by side, waiting to be hoisted from their thick foam blocks and on to the wall, lent Boty's *Only Blonde in the World*, all laughing, long-legged Marilyn, and Duchamp's disgruntled, four-square, totemic nude.

I love the two of them together, the curator says. You *could* see these two as warring figures in a Laocoön-like struggle, *or* you could see them as collaborators; inspiring, extending, enriching a dialogue. Because, despite them being very different representations of the female form, I'd argue they have a lot in common for Smith's Daniel.

Here is something from last year. The curator is beginning her search for the Dubuffet, an unnamed painting in *Autumn*, an artwork that had rendered Daniel "so moved by the wildness" that he had "taken his shoes off and knelt down in front of it to show respect" (10). It is well past lunch when the curator pulls up the thumb nail of *Le Métafizyx* from the Pompidou website. She feels a ripple of pleasure. The dates align. Painted circa 1950, acquired in '76. Oil on canvas. Daniel and Sophia are in the Pompidou sometime in the eighties. Tick, tick, tick. The curator adjusts her chair, tilts the computer screen and settles in for a longer, closer look. It's true, *Le Métafizyx* is no *Grande Odalisque*, no Wimbledon Bardot (*A* 75, 244). Rather, this primitive nude has slipped free of her perfect skin, the visceral has bubbled to the surface, the form of her body, etched into thick layers of paint and sand, appears as if de-gloved. The curator wonders if *this* is the kind of untamed woman that Daniel would supplicate himself before?

Now, the curator and the intern are entering into the soft light of Autumn. The grimacing skull of *Le Métafizyx* side-eyes Boty's starlet, appraising her painted lips and sky-high stilettos, acknowledging their shared existence as symbols of problematic female commodification.

Of course, I'm only making an educated guess about the Dubuffet, the curator says. Smith doesn't identify the piece, and despite Daniel's profound encounter with it, she provides no ekphrastic description. Rather she offers "a performance of a gaze,"[101] the visual object is almost irrelevant. She's withholding it from us, the tease. Keeping the Dubuffet a secret. Because "its true subject is not the verbal depiction of a visual object but, rather, the verbal enactment of the gaze."[102] You really feel that pull between presence and absence.[103] We know that Daniel is before something he finds personally profound, but we are denied access to it. It's like a magnification of the ekphrastic principle. Or the inverse. The verbal description of the visual object is voided; the object is alluded to but ultimately remains invisible. But, of course, I couldn't help myself and had to sabotage the whole process by tracking it down. That's my interpretive drive. I'm a curator, a collector, a hunter, a translator. Honestly, I could have left the Dubuffet a blank. Fought off my academic curiosity and embraced the mystery. Smith is placing the emphasis on Daniel's affective response after all. The reverence is what she wants us to 'see.' And share.[104] Smith describes Daniel kneeling barefoot before the painting. The gesture is sacred, ritualistic. And replicated again when he crawls towards Boty on hands and knees in *Autumn,* kissing the ground between them (244). Daniel has a devotional respect for the creative. Quasi-religious vibes, right?

The divine power of Art, most def, the intern says.

The curator couldn't deny that intensity. She had stood in front of Rothko's *No.3/No.13* while a lone tear escaped. Others had pushed past in the gallery, oblivious to the power that gripped her. Ok, she hadn't knelt, but that painting had held her fast; the colours swam, floated free of the surface and enveloped her. She had been within the painting, hypnotised. It was painful. It was beautiful. It was painfully beautiful.

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[101] Brosch "Ekphrasis in the Digital Age" 238.
[102] Brosch "Ekphrasis in the Digital Age" 238.
[103] Brosch "Ekphrasis in Recent Popular Novels" 415.
[104] On ekphrasis as sharing affective response see Brosch "Ekphrasis in the Digital Age" 238.

Whenever she thought of Elkins' *Pictures and Tears*[105] she felt equally amused and uncomfortable. Sure, she was the crying type. Was it a religious experience?[106] No doubt that would have made Rothko smile. But while others see absence, a grave, the dying gasp of Romantic landscape painting, geometricized human figures and loss, the curator saw … no, *felt*, experienced an intense, an intense, an intense … yeah.[107] It was hard to articulate. And maybe that *was* The Rapture.

But what if that experience, that attunement, was actually the indivisible marriage of emotion and cognition? Because the weird thing was, she had intuitively sensed those same things in the Rothko, the human scale, the endless depth of colour, the elation. And the ache. Was this a cerebral equivalent of Louvel's 'iconotexts' where the saturation of text and image was so complete they consumed one another?[108] Felski believes affect and argument are connected, not severed.[109] And the curator's own experience proved it so.

The curator stepped aside as two art handlers manoeuvred a platform ladder between her and the shimmering Marilyn. They carefully raised her up. And nailed her to the wall.

I like what you've got going on here, the young handler said. And nodded down at the Dubuffet, waiting patiently on her Styrofoam alter. It's a kind of feminist/ stylistic/ contextual face-off, aye?

Sure, the curator thinks (everyone's a critic). Why not. She hadn't felt like Daniel kneeling before the Dubuffet. His reaction is immediate. Whereas hers was regulated, a hermeneutic quest, the cookie crumb trail left by Smith's linguistic markers had led her to the Pompidou website.[110] But her affinity had grown as she looked, and thought, and devised an installation plan. Her attunement had been "aslant of clock time,"[111] a gradual incubation connected to her work, her career, and her regard for *Le Métafizyx's* tactile ridges and sand-laden surface.

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[105] Elkins.
[106] Benjamin 252.
[107] On interpretation of Rothko paintings see Elkins 10-11.
[108] See Cluver 251.
[109] On the relation between affect and argument see Felski *Hooked* 122.
[110] On Hermeneutic Ekphrasis see Louvel 250.
[111] Felski *Hooked* 72.

But she had wondered about the bones of Daniel's encounter. The curator understood Daniel as a thinking man. As a man who believes college should emulate 'collage,' be remade as "an institution of education where all the rules can be thrown into the air, and size and shape and time and foreground and background all become relative … everything you think you know … made into something new and strange" (*A* 71). He is a man aware of the politics of seeing. He understands that Boty's work explores "the replication of the image, and our relationship with the image."[112] He is a man who understands that narratives are controlled, that "whoever makes up the story makes up the world" (*A* 119).

And yet, he is also a man who understands that the paintings of Kandinsky and Klee with their "bright yellow … pink and black triangles pulsating along the curves" were like a "whole new landscape painting" (*A* 183). Narratives, and worlds, can change when interpreted anew. He adjusts to, interprets, and moves across time, to find joy in avant-garde ways of creative seeing, equating the mind's eye of the painter to the migraine sufferer, feeling the dizzying effects of pain and colour flowing onto the canvas.

So, did Daniel recognise Dubuffet's desire to challenge art's conventional standards of beauty in this brutal nude? Did he feel the dirt and grime of the Second World War in the mark-making, recognise the ideology inscribed on her ancient body, accept the creative gauntlet thrown down? Or is it possible his reaction is purely aesthetic, a corporeal response to the wildness of line and form. Is he simply gripped by the painting's presence, swept under by its current?

Well, the curator chastised herself, there was nothing 'simple' about being hooked. Even the strongest of emotions were "shaped, synchronized, articulated."[113] Your response to an artwork didn't exist autonomously, floating free in the world, with a universal fit. It was entangled with life, with where you lived, what you did on Sundays, AND who you did it with. Aesthetics, a combination of effects, a flash of transcendence, a heady delight, a bodily vibration, was still a "value framework [that] b[ore] the imprint of education, class, gender, race, and other variables."[114] Daniel's encounter with the Dubuffet is not 'simply' about being gripped, she was sure. The curator ran a mental

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[112] Anderson.
[113] Felski *Hooked* 25.
[114] Felski *Hooked* 49.

Felskian checklist: educated, European, well-travelled, politically progressive, a man who collected art, knew artists, was interned with artists, "a man who knew about Dante, Blake and Keats … and who … described art, poems, theatre" (*W* 266).

[ID: Extreme close shot. The frame is filled with an intense dark blue. The camera pans out to reveal an assemblage of coloured paper, clippings and materials. The camera continues to pan out. An art technician carefully inspects the surface of the collage with a head torch, making notations on an iPad. The camera pans out further and a woman dressed in black and wearing heavy, angular glasses walks into frame and turns to address the camera.]

"Here is Pauline Boty's *Untitled (with Lace and Hair Colour Advert)*. Daniel describes this collage from memory, to a young Elisabeth in *Autumn*, as part of a game that riddles and riffs off two principles: 'One. Every picture tells a story. 'And 'Two. Every story tells a picture' *(A* 72). And it's among the first of many encounters with art in the *Seasonal Quartet*. This is an important passage because it signals the start of an ekphrastic love affair within the *Quartet* and introduces us to one, among many, forms of ekphrastic description.

"Let's consider Daniel's description of the Boty collage. Both characters close their eyes, so that Daniel can recall the image, and Elisabeth can imagine it. Daniel's recollection of the collage involves colour, shape, scale, rhythm and texture. The emphasis is very much on composition and formal visual elements. He describes a 'rich dark blue … [a] blue much darker than sky' while 'in the middle of the picture, there's a shape made of pale paper." There's a "giant hand … holding inside it a tiny hand' and there's a drawing of a ship with its sails up, 'the smallest thing in the whole collage,' while at the bottom of the image is 'the same face repeated several times.' And '[f]inally, there's some pink lacy stuff … actual material, real lace' (*A* 73).

> "Daniel's description of the collage to Elisabeth is reliant on his memory. Though he 'was there the day [Boty] made it' he admits that he is 'making it up from memory' and 'doesn't know where those pictures are now in the world' (*A* 75). Daniel acknowledges his memory may be unreliable. Though perhaps pictorial fidelity to the collage is not central to the exchange? On the one hand, this ekphrastic passage suggests 'the performance of seeing,'[115] by staging an imagined mind's-eye recollection, making the reader aware of the process of looking. On the other hand, it highlights Daniel's act of narration, his 'telling' of the picture, exposing the 'subjectivity and narrative dimension of description.'[116] We are reminded of the constructed nature of both memory and storytelling.
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> "However, I also want to suggest Daniel's portrayal is an 'accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of a work of art.'[117] There is no sense that his descriptive account is concerned with explicating meaning, divulging symbolism, or unearthing hidden truths. Rather, his description of *Untitled (With Lace*) quietly attends to the surface of the artwork, noticing what is felt and apparent.[118] We could conceive of Daniel's description of the artwork as a reflection of a postcritical sensibility."[119]

Imagine a brightly lit stockroom in a small, upscale art gallery around the corner from the Queen's grocer. It is six months before the curator is due to send out loan requests for the exhibition *Encounters with Art* and she is doing the rounds of the most accessible Botys first.

And here's *Sunflower Woman*, the gallery director said, taking her from the large sliding rack and placing her on the display shelf next to *Colour Her Gone* and *With Love to Jean-Paul Belmondo*.

The curator flips to a colour-coded sticky note in her heavily annotated, decidedly grubby, broken-arse-spined copy of *Autumn*, page 82, and reads aloud. "[S]he's sort of throwing her arms up in a blue sky, and behind her at the foot of the picture there are alps, but very small, and a lot of zigzags in colours. And instead of

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[115] Brosch "Ekphrasis in Recent Popular Novels" 406.
[116] Schmitz-Justen 321.
[117] Sontag 21.
[118] On defining surface reading see Best and Marcus 9.
[119] On the use of description as an alternative to the hermeneutics of suspicion see Love 382-3.

having a body or clothes, the woman's insides are made up of pictures, pictures of other things."

Oh yes, the gallery director said, that's her exactly. That's *Sunflower Woman*.

The thing is, the curator said, despite the accuracy, Elisabeth has never seen the image she is describing here.

The curator thought about the different ways that *Sunflower Woman* generated encounters for the three characters in *Autumn*. Elisabeth drew the description from her memory, which was informed by Daniel's own recollection and re-telling. By the time the description of the image reaches Wendy, Elisabeth's mother, it is a third hand translation of others' remembering. And how Wendy interprets the description is starkly different to the mind's-eye-imaginings of Elisabeth and Daniel. He shows you "[p]rivate pictures?" (*A* 80), Wendy questions. Her imagination alive with salacious images and overtones, mistaking the act of sharing a description with the experience of seeing a 'picture.' "He told you about a woman's body, a woman's insides" (*A* 82), she continues, as the 'pictures' take on ever more sinister overtones. Elisabeth's innocent detailing of sunflowers, machine guns and owls, seem to morph into the entire female urogenital system, for Wendy. Well, the curator thought, she's half right; machine guns, a cylindrical, phallic airship, the dark cavern of a woman's open mouth, but then, this is female desire, not Daniel's.

It's certainly true, the curator thought, "[o]ur mental images are never 'innocent' or acultural."[120] As much as Wendy's interpretations are wound up in the hyper-vigilance of a young girl's mother, Daniel's recollections are also tied up with his cultural experiences and background, his admiration for the artist, and his engagement with 1960s London. Daniel admits, "memory and responsibility are strangers. They're foreign to each other" (*A* 160). He recognises the idiomatic nature of memory and its entanglement with nostalgia and revision.

Daniel's attachments are shaped over time, she thought. Attachments are fostered, nurtured, not arrived at in the moment. After all, "encounters with art are not cut off from the world but are infused with thoughts and feelings that shape other

[120] Brosch "Ekphrasis in Recent Popular Novels" 410.

aspects of our lives."[121] For Daniel, they are primed in the internment camp, where he meets painters and sculptors, the piano duo Rawicz and Landauer, as well as "talented and scholarly people" who gave "lectures … on Goethe … Plato … Rilke" (*S* 189). After the war, he acquires a Barbara Hepworth, mingles with artists, creates a house whose "shelves are all books and art, beauty everywhere" (*W* 271).

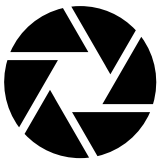
And Elisabeth?, the curator wondered. Her attachment to Boty is also cultivated over time. From her childhood games with Daniel, her companion and educator, to her finding the "old red hardback catalogue in an art shop on Charing Cross Road" (*A* 149), that alerts her to the paintings' physical reality. Elisabeth's encounters transform from the imaginative play of adolescence to the adult, academic engagement of formal thesis writing. She now finds the paintings "thematically and technically interesting," while also "witty and joyous and full of unexpected colour and juxtapositions" (*A* 158; 151). In *Sunflower Woman* she notes an "exploding airship made her crotch," and questions whether there was "anything else like this being painted by a woman at the time?" (*A* 154; 156). Elisabeth's period studying art history at university, means her engagement with the artwork is altered from play to assessment. Still, the curator thought, "[c]ritique and interpretation are not opposed to attachment; they are built upon it,"[122] which produces the perfect scenario for Elisabeth's attachment to grow.

They're quite brilliant, the curator said. I'd like to show all three.

Of course, the gallery director said. I'll email you through the Loan Request form.

It is 08.42: Winter feels very different to Autumn. All the surfaces are white. Even the floor. A kind of velvety-grey-white. The curator makes a note to lower the top-level lighting and boost the accents over the artworks, so that hazy circles of light can create discs amongst the snowy shadows. It was supposed to feel cool and wintery in the gallery, not germicidal.

[121] Felski *Hooked* 73.
[122] Felski *Hooked* 140.



[ID: Mid shot. A scissor lift is lowering a large sculpture into the middle of a gallery space. A group of technicians wearing orange hard hats help to guide the piece into place with the assistance of ratchet straps. A figure wearing dark pants and a neon yellow safety vest turns and addresses the camera as the sculpture is secured in place.]

"Hello. I'm the Senior Art Technician at the Gallery, and this is one of my favourite pieces in the exhibition. The work of Barbara Hepworth is a key player in Ali Smith's *Winter*. Daniel owns a piece of hers, referred to as the *Mother and Child*. This artwork is encountered by several characters in the *Quartet* and elicits a number of different responses. For Sophia, in *Winter*, the response is physical, for Elisabeth's mother Wendy, in *Autumn*, it is alienating, and for Grace, in *Summer,* it embodies 'what art is maybe … [s]omething that impresses mysteriously upon you' (*Su* 275).

"Let's talk about the different ways that *Mother and Child* is received by characters across the *Quartet*.

"The piece first appears in *Autumn*, very briefly. It is displayed in the front room of Daniel's house and Wendy glimpses it as she passes by his window. It appears that Wendy is simultaneously dismissive of, and a little intimidated by, their art-collecting neighbour.

"What follows is a playful discourse about high and low cultural values between mother (Wendy) and child (Elisabeth). Wendy satirically dubs the abstract piece 'very arty art' (*A* 44). Which leads Elisabeth, in her innocence, to query whether the pictures in *their* house – a Matisse poster, a family portrait, a pinecone squirrel – are also arty art. We learn from this exchange that Daniel is considered cultivated, or 'European' as Elisabeth suggests, and a person of 'taste,' one who collects originals with a trained and expert eye. In comparison, the Demand family are portrayed as consumers of reproductions, lovers of populist, easily digestible images, and bearers of pedestrian or layman's taste.

> "In contrast to Elisabeth's mother, who feels excluded from the realm of arty art, and therefore orbits outside the field of the Hepworth stone, the character Sophia, in *Winter*, is directly and physically engaged with it. Her connection with the stone, the sculptural 'child,' is indelibly tied to her sexual encounter with Daniel. However, Sophia's initial encounter with the *Mother and Child* transforms over time. While her intimate experience with Daniel is intense, it is fleeting. Whereas her engagement with the artwork continues and transforms through time. Rather than a preserved, static response, her relationship with the stone traverses multiple emotive states. After her sexual encounter with Daniel, Sophia spirits the rounded, marble form of the stone child away, orphaning it from the hollowed nesting place within its mother's larger form. It accompanies Sophia for years and appears to her as a floating head (metaphor, hallucination, retinal detachment?), transforming from symbol of sexual desire to humanised child. The stone buried deep within her closet is still present in her old age, fluctuating between figurative object and abstracted, uncomplicated mystery. Whatever the stone's manifestation, small bobbing head or smooth, ancient marble, materiality and immortality are at its core. Sophia acknowledges the 'whole house could fall away to nothing, and when it did, at the centre of its wreckage? The stone, beautiful, unchanged' (*W* 269)."

Four technicians and a triangulation of webbing belts lower a large limestone form into the centre of the gallery. The curator has acquired three monumental Hepworth sculptures, along with a series of smaller, more intimate works. Together these pieces take up the centre of the space, like a dwindling mass from Stonehenge, while around the periphery, large black and white photographs portray Hepworth's life and times. Here's Barbara in a spotted headscarf, another Barbara peers through a sculptural hole, she leans, she smokes. Here she holds a chisel, now she holds a child. Then a mushroom cloud blooms, then people hold hands around a chain link fence, and then two bobbies drag a limp woman in a parka down a concrete path.

What?! The intern says. Hang on. That's Greenham Common. Iris's buddies are right then (*W* 264), Hepworth is anti-nuclear? But I don't get any of that from Sophia's encounter with the Hepworth stone. Her experience at Daniel's house is "something that she hasn't a name for" because "words will make it less than it is, or something it isn't it" (*W* 271). The Hepworth piece "looks primitive" (*W* 272) to Sophia, ancient and

tactile. Rather, she seems obsessed with its material qualities, describing it as "nothing but a circle carved through stone … [though] sort of amazing" (*W* 273). Her encounter is physical, all touch, and holes and wordless acts. It feels more carnal than cerebral. In *Winter* Sophia declares *"Politics and Art are polar opposites."* (Capital P, and capital A). She scorns anything "symbolic and heavy," is relieved, in fact, when the stone head finally abandons its figurative qualities and becomes "free of obviousness" (317*;* 123; 141).

And yet, the curator says, Sophia is quite philosophical when she notes "it would be good to be full of holes," like the Hepworth stone, as then "all the things you can't express would maybe just flow out" (*W* 273). Maybe in Sophia's encounter, we are witnessing a version of Silvan Tomkins' affect system? Basic drives and physiological response activating "cognition and behaviour in a perpetual process of feedback."[123] Sophia processes her bodily encounter with the Hepworth into thought and meaning, which potentially informs future life experiences.[124] Maybe her movement from feeling to thinking reflects an eternal cycle of experience and interpretation and experience …

Sophia's response is perhaps more philosophical than political, in this instance, the curator says. But Smith is definitely aware of the connection between Hepworth's work and her politics (socialist, humanist, anti-nuclear).[125] I mean, Hepworth's pieces don't scream 'ban the bomb,' do they? They're more subtle than that. Hepworth believed her politics were embodied within the work, they were fused into the marble and the bronze, enmeshed in the material.[126] I think Sontag would have been her ally. She writes: "[Q]ualities intrinsic to aesthetic experience and to the aesthetic object are fundamental constituents of a moral response to life."[127] They're bound. Entwined. It's possible that their approaches are similar. Both Smith and Hepworth entwine their work with feeling, showing and meaning – not telling or scolding. As Iris argues, all art, even that which appears solely aesthetic, is still political. Because the human will always surface in art (*W* 317).

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[123] Ahern 97.
[124] On the feedback loop between drive system and cognition system, see Ahern 97.
[125] On Hepworth's politics see Smith "Looking at the World through the Eyes of Barbara Hepworth."
[126] Wakefield.
[127] Sontag 25.

So, I don't think Sophia's encounter obviates the political dimension of Hepworth's art or stands counter to it. Her emotive response perhaps intuits some of the life force that Hepworth cast into her sculptures. Sophia is able to see both the figurative head, and its abstract form, to recapture "seeing inside and outside something at once" (*W* 273). Art and politics and life, entangled. The artworks function as "an alternative to news in understanding the present."[128] I mean, surely it's possible to traverse beauty and wonderment and ethics, as Cheney claims: "A commitment to aesthetics and a belief in the art object having an inherent value do not require a disengagement from politics or history."[129] Like Richard and Paddy's experimental docudrama on Northern Ireland, "Sea of Troubles: from Beatrix Potter to petrol bombs," where they "made the camera move as the human eye moves … via fragments," staying on the edges to talk about the centre, or Boty and the lost painting of Christine Keeler, or Chaplin's tramps hired for *Gold Rush*, "real loners, real lost and homeless men" (*Sp* 58; *A* 225; *A* 30). I think Smith does something similar with politics in the *Quartet*. Like Richard and Paddy using the edges to bring focus into the middle, Smith integrates the refugee crisis, climate change and Brexit. The *Quartet* is as saturated with politics, as it is with colour, affect and philosophy.

Sure, the intern says. But are you proposing there's a connection between carnality and the atomic bomb?

Sex and death. The life cycle. The flow of the seasons. Yes, the curator thinks. The stone head presses against Sophia's belly like a foetus balled inside the womb,[130] "streaked with green" (*W* 19), as a newborn babe with its caseosa glow. Hepworth says, "sculpture is a three-dimensional projection of primitive feelings: touch, texture, size and scale, hardness and warmth, evocation and compulsion to move, live and love."[131] So, yeah, the curator checks her watch, Sophia's encounter with the *Mother and Child* embraces all the life-affirming emotions, and the mortal too. Love, grief, connection, belonging. Family. That's ethics, that's politics.

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[128] Schmitz-Justen 320.
[129] Cheney 7.
[130] Schmitz-Justen 329.
[131] Hammacher 97.

The curator watches an art handler gentling rubbing finger prints from *Mother and Child* with a soft cloth. She thought it would be nice to lay her hands upon it, as Sophia did. She wondered if bodily touch intensified the experience and thought of Sophia in Daniel's apartment (*W* 271-6).

Sophia is in the blissful embrace of post-coital reverie when she discovers the Hepworth. Perhaps to Sophia the two things are tied, the force of meeting Daniel, the glimpse into his creative world, and the tactility of *Mother and Child*. Sophia's engagement is both immediate *and* filtered through her surroundings. Maybe we need to acknowledge "the surprising as well as the scripted, the sensuous as well as the sense-full ... without pitching the aesthetic experience outside the social world."[132] It's all quite Felskian really, the curator thinks. Sophia's aesthetic experience is both felt and mediated.[133]

It's hard to deny the sexual overtones in Sophia's interaction, the curator says. It's not uncommon in the ekphrastic novel to witness a link between the appreciation of beauty, and feelings of desire and obsession.[134] We witness Sophia cup the "smaller rounder stone, curved like a breast" and "finger the hole through the larger stone." Sophia exclaims it is "unexpectedly satisfying to touch" (*W* 273). The intensity of her physical encounter with Daniel becomes merged with the Hepworth stones. As if Sophia shares a "desire for erotic absorption and fusion"[135] with the artwork. Sophia covets the Hepworth stone and steals the child piece away. There is even a sense that the erotic encounter and its strange kind of three-way blurring between Daniel, Sophia and the Hepworth, culminates in a pregnancy. And not without irony, Sophia calls the fleshy child, Art(hur) ... .

Oh, now we're talking erotics over hermeneutics, the intern says.[136] Sontag has been calling for a connection back to sensory and sensual experience since the sixties and here is Sophia embracing desire over interpretation, intuition over formulation, empiricism over Marxism. And frankly, it's nice to be privy to Sophia's touch and gaze in this passage, over Daniel's. Smith up-ends the traditional, gendered division of male

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[132] Felski *Hooked* xiii.
[133] On attachment through affinity and mediation see Felski *Hooked* 15.
[134] On the link between artworks and desire see Brosch "Ekphrasis in Recent Popular Novels" 412-6.
[135] Louvel 253.
[136] On erotics of art see Sontag 14.

subject/ female object, the old "voyeuristic, masturbatory fondling of the ekphrastic image"[137] because Sophia is doing the looking and the fondling, her voice represents the subject. I'm not suggesting that Sophia is a transgressive character, because she's really quite conservative. But as readers, we stand with her, we experience the same touching and looking. It's kind of cool that contemporary ekphrasis can stretch its ideological wings, and potentially "stage ways of seeing through subaltern perceivers … creat[ing] a distinctive female aesthetic,"[138] rejecting the patriarchal gaze.

The videographer is attempting to throw extra light on to a large monolith at the centre of the Hepworth group. The curator and the intern watch as the curves and hollows surge and recede against the room's ambient gloam.

But there's another connection too, right? The intern says. To the physicality of the sculptural object. You can feel something concrete in the writing, as the words play across the curve of the marble, registering touch and weight and form. Sophia imagines the Hepworth stone is "an ancient stone Roman," "near-bald … glow[ing] in the dark … as if lit by Rembrandt" (*W* 108). In the novel she "[lies] in bed feeling the weight of the sleeping head" and as it reverts from child-like head to abstract form, it recovers "a surface like polished stone, worked, like marble," it is now "too heavy, too solid, to hover" (*W* 108; 141). When she takes it from her wardrobe in the final pages of *Winter,* Sophia admires the stone as "fluently veined … very like the material they used to line the upper walls of the Pantheon" (267). The ekphrastic descriptions of her encounters point to an "allegedly touchable, fingerable, *thisness,*"[139] to something concrete outside the text. The Hepworth adds real presence, a claim to truthfulness, and a sense that the materiality of the marble, reflected in Smith's use of tactile, weighted language, might transfer on to the page.[140]

Go back in time, to when the pollen swirled on the Embankment, and people's throats were coated by the silky filaments torn from its plane trees.

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[137] Mitchell "Ekphrasis and the Other" 706.
[138] Brosch "Ekphrasis in the Digital Age" 240.
[139] Cunningham 61.
[140] On ekphrasis laying claim to reality see Cunningham 62-3.

The curator and the designer are leaning over a desk, studying a cache of images drawn from the exhibition pieces. They are choosing which will be printed as postcards for the ~~gift shop~~ (no. Too commodified. Too nineties. Too close to the mediocrity of souvenir consumer-ship) Design Centre.

I think we need to choose a range of images to reflect the different encounters within the *Quartet*, the curator says. Several of the Hepworth's, to illustrate Sophia's emotive, physical response to *Mother and Child*. And I'm thinking Boty's *Sunflower Woman* as a lynchpin to capture some of the angst Elisabeth suffers over writing her creative/ critical dissertation. And Dean's clouds … .

Wouldn't it be great to reproduce the actual postcards mentioned in the *Quartet*, the designer says. Maybe we can get a display box made up just for that ephemera? The Kinguisse, the Orpheus, the Boubat … .

Definitely the Boubat, the curator said.

Daniel's encounter with the Boubat had acted as a kind of talisman for the curator during her research process. It came right at the beginning of the *Quartet* and seemed to set a tone for the different types of encounters found throughout the four novels. Daniel's ekphrastic description of it entwined both emotive and intellectual response. One that he sensed but also made sense of.

His memory moves across the surface of the postcard like fingertips over Braille, touching and de-coding the image, moving in time, changing direction, his reflections touching on beauty, context, philosophy and translation. The photograph of the small girl dressed in leaves, is a "tragic as well as fetching picture," a "terrible anomaly" (*A* 9), suggesting both war and the potential for magic and transformation. Daniel imagines her as both an innocent child at play, and a "nuclear after-child" (A 9), her leafy costume hanging like blistered skin. The image is "sad, terrible, beautiful, funny, terrifying, dark, light, charming, fairystory, folkstory, truth" (A 10). The curator thinks many of these same elements existed within the *Quartet* itself, a dedicated playbook ready to explore a variety of scenarios and responses. The novels make visible allegorical, magical figures, like Florence, they re-tell folk stories, such as that of the child in the snowy underworld, and they etch terrible accounts of war, murder and discrimination into your mind. There are passages dedicated to dreams, to philosophical discussion, to wonder and beauty, and many moments of humour and

hope. Like Daniel's own inquisitive encounter with Boubat's *Petite fille*, the *Quartet* also traces its way across mood and content.

And *The Montafon Letter*. I feel that's non-negotiable, the designer says. There's such a nice sympatico with Richard being in the gallery in *Spring* and our own audience in Spring. I'd like to think someone would buy the postcard and actually send it, just to defy Richard. But I'm not sure that's a thing anymore. Why does Richard buy a postcard of *The Montafon Letter*? Why does anyone buy a postcard these days? I mean, we used to send them all the time, they were "*rather like the text or email or even instantgram of today*" (*Sp* 97). They were a moment. Caught. But now … .

You buy a postcard because it's a memento, the curator said, thinking of the miniature Rothko imprisoned on her fridge door.

Both the literary critic Walter Benjamin and the art critic John Berger claim reproduction destroys (or alters) the presence of the original artwork, that it strips it of its unique time and setting, nullifying its aura, the curator says. [141] But who knows, perhaps it can highlight the power of the original through reproduction? Maybe technology helps us create ties and mediates our relationship with the original?[142] Obviously It can't invoke the actual encounter, with its reduced scale and flat palette, but it can invoke the memory of that encounter. When Richard buys a postcard of *The Montafon Letter*, it's because the image "stopped him in his tracks" and inspired a "[f]uck me" (*Sp* 78) moment. He acknowledges the limits of the postcard's effect, its diminutive size. "He held it in his hand – like you *could* ever hold the size of that image in your hand!" (*Sp* 79). But the intensity of the physical encounter with the drawn mountain ensures he keeps the postcard and sends an alternative image to Paddy instead.

But, you know, the curator says. I think the postcards carry a significance beyond memento for Richard. They're also an attachment, a connection to his absent daughter, a way to "meet each other imaginatively" (*Sp* 75) and forge an ethereal bond through art. And to Paddy too. He's at this exhibition "because it was by an artist Paddy liked" and he wants to impress and "surprise Paddy by knowing to do it without being told" (*Sp* 76; 77). His attachment to Dean's artwork is mediated by an admiration for his friend.

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[141] Benjamin and Arendt 247 and Berger 19.
[142] Felski *Hooked* 50, 82.

"Attachments are a matter not only of individual receptiveness but also of catalysts, sparks, triggers … influences that steer us towards an affinity for certain works."[143] "Our seeing often depends on the seeing of others."[144]

Or maybe, as for Rilke and his *Sonnets to Orpheus*, that nominal chance encounter with Cima Da Conegliano's drawing sparked a creative outpouring. "*A postcard meant that all those great poems somehow got written. The slightest of gestures against the odds … like a magic spell*" (*Sp* 99). Serendipity. Happenstance. A small moment with or without consequence.

The curator had googled Cima Da Conegliano's *Orpheus*, of course. And she had to concur with Richard: it didn't seem very inspiring (*Sp* 96). But who can say where Rilke's attachments lay? Possibly in the story of Orpheus himself, rather than in the artist's scratchy rendering of the mythical musician. It was amusing to think of Rilke fixing the postcard to the wall above his writing desk and taking stimulus from Orpheus' creative prowess. Inspiration, identification, aspiration.

What about the Mazzetti, the designer says. Will we grab a still from one of the films? Though I *do* feel conflicted about that. Like the narrator says in *Summer*, maybe there's "no point in showing … a still or a photo of this." Don't you think there's a weird kind of irony in seizing a frame when "[i]t's very much a moving image" (*Su* 6)?

Well, I think that's exactly *our point*, the curator said. I mean, come on, there's an ekphrastic joke in here somewhere, using text to transcribe a visual image, using narrative to address a silent movie.

The curator thinks about Smith's inclusion of Mazzetti's *K* in *Summer.* [H]ere's something I once saw. It's an image from a film"(5), the narrator says. The implication: *text* is a superior mode of description to render the scene, rather than including a visual image, Sebald-style.[145] The curator wonders if the textual description of the "freeze-frame image[s] … ma[d]e a more lasting and memorable impression on the reading mind,"[146] than the reduction of the film's affect to a single printed photograph.

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[143] Felski *Hooked* 21.
[144] Felski *Hooked* 29.
[145] On including images in the mode of W.G Sebald, see novels *Austerlitz* (2001) and *The Rings of Saturn* (1995).
[146] Brosch "Ekphrasis in the Digital Age" 237.

And yet, the curator puzzles, when the narrator presents *Together,* she states, "here's another fragment of moving image" (*Su* 125). This time her brief cinematic ekphrasis reflects a sense of filmic movement over a static image. Perhaps, the curator thought, "ekphrasis works … by harnessing both the power of the still image and that of dynamic imaginative visualisation."[147]

The Mazzetti encounters within the text had a curious effect, the curator thinks. The lone vignette from *K*, "stall[ed] the smooth unrolling of the narrative."[148] The figure of the balancing man, "light on his feet but … burdened," high on the "narrow brick ledge," comes in the wake of the opening pages of *Summer*, themselves a rapid-fire litany detailing the power, the complacency, the disavowal of a fragmented society's "*so?*" (5; 3-5). The ensuing description of the image then, both disrupts the narrative pace, creating a sense of stillness, and throws a rueful glance back to the contemporary moment of indifference. While the description of the deaf mutes in *Together*, wandering the bombed-out streets of London, insulted and mocked, unmistakeably bleed into Daniel's internment at Ascot on the following page. Daniel stands in the hot summer sun, "behind the wooden huts in a ruined field" (*Su* 129). He is now an outcast like the deaf mutes, existing on the fringe. Both Mazzetti encounters, relayed by the narrator, are sandwiched between Smith's own portrayals of alienation, distrust, and division.

At any rate, the curator says, however you look at it, Smith is describing something we're unable to physically see. Perhaps our postcards can initiate a conversation around that.

It is just before supper on the longest day of winter. The curator is out walking her dog, and the streetlights have just come on. She stops to watch as shadowy figures pass through the beams of light, moving in and out of obscurity, dim forms defined for a moment, as if caught by a camera's flash, before receding into darkness again. There is no noise. The heavy winter air has dampened the sound. It is like watching a silent movie. Unknown people moving through space for unknown reasons. A courier on a

[147] Brosch "Ekphrasis in the Digital Age" 237.
[148] Louvel 249.

bike. Someone pushing a pram. Two children with heavy backpacks. Seen. Unseen. Seen. Unseen.

She thinks about the two Mazzetti films she has requested for the exhibition. The ekphrastic descriptions of them in the *Quarte*t are delivered by the narrator, not filtered through a character. Any immediate encounter is transposed. Any affective or philosophical quality experienced second-hand. Their form is at odds with the other artworks in the *Quartet*. You couldn't mount a Mazzetti film in a frame, display it on a coffee table, or steal it away. The Mazzetti only really exists when you imagine yourself inside it. Inside that world. Like a good novel. Except there wasn't even a limited-edition hardback to display on your bookshelf.

The films are like the opposite of a Hepworth stone. They are ephemeral, like clouds or a bag of air. Where the Hepworth pieces are solid, permanent, and definitively touchable in their *thisness*, the Mazzetti works are transient and incredibly hard to track down. Incredibly. That's what the curator had found. They're an artform you can't easily consume at your dining room table. Much of Dean's work is the same. She refuses to have her films transferred to digital. No pixelated presence, no trace on the net. No conversion to 24-inches of Dell blue light. You have to visit them in person. You have to be consumed by them.

The narrator in *Summer* describes Mazzetti's *K* and *Together* as "small, slight, immensely powerful … both everyday and near-apocalyptic" (261). The films are "about the rupture that happens when innocence and knowledge meet, and about how to retain that innocence" (*Su* 262). And they are very much about *not talking*. Charlotte suggests they may provide solace for Ashley's silence, a silence borne from "feeling getting in the way of language," because Mazzetti's films could say "all these complicated things … without saying a word" (*Su* 83; 109).

The curator thinks there is an irony in Smith using narrative description to expose the shortcomings of language. The mistrust of language is reflected in Ashley's lexicon entry, where she jots down "language distorted, used as a tool of taking control of a populace" (*Su* 71). And again when Arthur quotes "the limits of my language are the limits of my world … Wittgenstein" (*Su* 94). The curator wonders about the titanic struggle between language and feeling for so many characters in the *Quartet*, as if the two were often in separate orbits. She sides with Felski, in feeling that "[l]anguage … is

more like an interface than a firewall, an array of devices that connect us to other things." [149] But the narrator describes the two main characters in *Together* as conversing "with their hands and by watching the shapes each other's mouths or faces make" (*Su* 125) and she emphasises that while the antagonists shout things, trade insults, and exchange words, Mazetti's audience can't hear them. Language is present, intimated but silenced. An interesting power shift, the curator thinks, turning Lessing's dictate on its head. Now the images have action and agency, while the verbal is rendered passive and mute. Though really, it doesn't take much for the reader to guess or imagine what the characters are saying, because of the narrator's description of the scene. The curator detects "the oxymoronic noisiness" of ekphrasis, celebrating the silent past.[150]

Sontag, she thinks, directs us to "see more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more,"[151] but certainly not to *talk* more. Though of course, she's rallying against a particular kind of language, the "thick encrustations of interpretation."[152] Still, her hope is to prioritise sensory experience over overt, expository language – to expel it, even, because Sontag believes "the most potent elements in a work of art are, often, its silences."[153]

Here comes the intern now. Tripping out of Winter and into the green light of Spring. They have a (much needed) tray of takeaway coffee and a clutch of brown paper bags, butter pooling on the surface in an oily sheen. And here is the author, nodding calmly and twisting her rings while Dean's chalkboard avalanche rumbles behind. And there is her colleague from Marketing and Comms talking with her hands, indicating a proposed trajectory on the floor for the author to follow, like a flight attendant pointing out the emergency exits. Walk here. Pause here. Turn here. The curator can't see the videographer, but she suspects the smell of coffee will resolve that.

She proffers a cup in the author's direction, and the author smiles her wide, warm smile.

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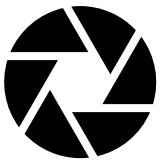
[149] Felski *Hooked* 84.
[150] Cunningham 64.
[151] Sontag 22.
[152] Sontag 17.
[153] Sontag 36.



[ID: Shot from low angle. Slow motion. A woman with shoulder length, brown hair, in a white shirt and dark pants, walks away from the camera. To her right is a large-scale hand-drawn image of a mountain. White chalk on black slate. It covers most of the wall. To her left, in the same material, is a series of smaller drawings of clouds, hung in a line. The camera follows the woman then pans 180 degrees. The woman now walks toward the camera. She puts a hand to her face in quiet observation. She has many large, silver rings on her fingers. A voice-over plays.]

"Ohh, I love the way that Dean can make a wall and a mountain one, don't you? You have this enormous mountain, this terrible wall of snow just rushing towards you. Such a feeling of awful fear … but beauty too. Both combined. The mountain surges toward you, and yet it's somehow tamed. Dean takes the enormity of the avalanche, the impending disaster and just fixes it for you – in time and space. And suddenly, you're able to see and think and breathe again. And I really think that's art, don't you? That's what art can do. You're given this amazing moment, when your mind stops thinking about snow, or doom, or the freezing cold, or whatever a picture might be 'about.' And you have this change, it brings in a change, of perspective, of understanding, of relating maybe. The experience is about more than chalk and slate; it stops being a picture of a mountain. It becomes 'something terrible, seen' (*Sp* 78). And then, yes!, [she turns] there's that other wall, the lightness of the clouds, the ability to breathe again. And breathing takes flight. 'Alchemy and transformation become matters of good spirit' (*Sp* 220). Ohh, I really think 'Dean asks something so simple and something so profound about how we make meaning.'[154] It's extraordinary."

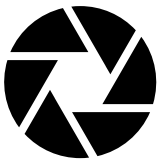
"Everything that a mountain can mean" (*Sp* 79), the curator says. All the possibilities of what you can and can't see. The visible, the knowable, and the sensed. The current running underneath and the still surface. A mountain is "bleak and true" (*Sp* 13) for a melancholy Richard, an escape route for Hannah smuggling families, a place of respite for Mansfield, and a matter to investigate seeing for Dean. Because what

[154] Hessel.

happens when a mountain stops being a mountain? The actual subsides, the physical subsides, and you're left with looking.

Or is it 'everything a cloud can mean'?, the intern says. You can't see it at all: art exhales subtle transformations, like breath or vapour. For Richard, experiencing Dean's cloud piece "made space to breathe up against something breathtaking" (*Sp* 79). The two things together produce a shift, something barometric, something personal. It reminds me of the LEISE performance in *Summer*, Kurt shouting at the top of his voice – "LEISE!" – when the climax of shouting and laughing and smashing crockery leaves Daniel "breathing fully for the first time in … years" (*Su* 176). The encounter causes a fundamental change in the atmosphere. Out on the street Richard notices "the real clouds above London looked different," something has changed, "the ways in which the roads intersected, the ways in which people were passing each other in the street." The relationship between traffic, buildings, and people have altered, like it was "part of a structure that didn't know it was a structure" (*Sp* 79).

Now the long light of the day is slowly fading. The curator is hovering over a glass display case in the warm air of Summer. Inside is a small collection of objects from the fourth novel, chosen for the supplementary encounters they inspired. The case holds historic photographs from the Hutchenson Internment camp, men in dark winter coats strolling along a row of Victorian terraces. All quite harmless, if not for the double line of barbed wire fence. There, on a small acrylic stand, is the Butlin's Clacton pin. Next, several of Fred Uhlman's drawings, the small girl with the bobbing balloon, navigating an apocalyptic landscape, "curious, detached, untouched, and just as powerful … as the hellish things happening around her" (*Su* 173). And finally, the Schwitters, brought up from the gallery's own collection, a rhythmic assemblage of brown paper cuttings, ticket stubs, litter, and lace. The curator had hoped a grainy, distorted version of the LEISE performance may have existed somewhere out there on the digital currents (*Su* 175). But how do you harness the transient? The performance had lived and died in the company of Kurt's fish skin collages. Unfixed, fleeting.



[ID: Long shot. A young person with short, choppy hair stands in the middle of the camera frame. Behind them is a wall with a large close-cropped photographic portrait in black and white of a young woman wearing a dark duffel coat standing at the viewfinder of an old film camera. At the bottom right of the portrait an art technician applies the last line of a bright yellow decal to the wall. The decal reads *"Creativity is cultural not because it is derivative of it, but because it aims to heal culture. Art saturated with the unconscious acts like a compensatory dream in the individual: it tries to rebalance and address deep-rooted problems"* (*Su* 263). The young person addresses the camera.]

"This quote is from *Summer*. The narrator tells us that while she has lost the original source, it is both 'nothing to do with Mazzetti … [and] it's everything to do with her, and us all' (263). The quote perfectly captures the spirit of Mazzetti's work. It's about art's ability to heal and restore balance.

"And in the last pages of *Summer* Arthur and Charlotte continue this discussion around art's function. Arthur believes art helps us to understand and communicate in times of 'impossible pressure.' Art helps us 'feel and think then articulate' across the chaos of the world. However, Charlotte argues that art creates an encounter that 'takes you both into and beyond yourself, it gives you back your senses.' 'What art *does* is, it exists,' Charlotte says. 'And then because we encounter it, we remember we exist too' (329-30). The permanence of art reminds us of our own mortality, 'it confronts us with the fact of transcendence; that is, it will last beyond the "now," beyond us.'[155]

"Smith is 'fascinated by the stubbornness of art, its capacity to outlive its creator, to 'float.'[156] And we see that in the *Quartet's* ekphrastic descriptions. *Colour Her Gone* has outlived Boty's short, electric life, Hepworth's monumental sculptures remain peppered by rain at St Ives, and the Mazzetti films are playing here now, alive in the screening room. The artworks continue to reach out across time to

[155] Kennedy 5.
[156] Laing.

> arouse feeling and provoke thought. 'Smith captures not art's static immortality, but its repeated and vigorous rehappening, as representation opens to the active interpretation of its viewers.'"[157]

Rewind all the way to the beginning. To a weekend in autumn, when the curator is lying on her sofa, thumbing through the last pages of *Summer*. Mazzetti walks toward her on the back inside cover. A self-portrait with high black boots and a drifting green coat. But this is a mercurial self-portrait (she learns later). Drawn over with ink and wash, photocopied and photocopied again, so that the recurring image is liberated from the original, continuously shedding its skin, in perpetual reinvention. And the curator gets to thinking about the artists in the *Seasonal Quartet*, as she reaches around to plump the cushion behind her head, and in particular about the four female artists who are at "the spine … at the structural core of the books."[158] The curator thinks about how these artists help create a framework for the novels to build upon.

Boty asks questions about the image, the representation of representation. Daniel is in love with how she sees the world, "how eyes that aren't yours let you see where you are, who you are" (*A* 160). When the child Elisabeth describes the Boty paintings to her mother, she states "I have to close my eyes or I can't see them" (*A* 81). Hepworth creates sculptural masses that are both solid and pierced with holes, abstract yet figurative. Sophia finds the Hepworth "makes you walk around it … makes you look through it from different sides, see different things from different positions" (*W* 273). While in *Summer*, the artist Fred Uhlman asks Daniel, "Do you like to see things as they are and as they aren't?" Because being able to see both, is "one step away from artist" (174). When Richard reflects on Dean's lost photograph book, he notes that by recapturing and recontextualising the images Dean allows "someone looking at them [to] see how the world really appears" (*Sp* 77). Even the young man in *K,* "so wild and still so graceful, so urgent and blithe both at once" (*Su* 6), is navigating an unknown point of in-between.

Maybe that's the trick with art, the curator thinks, as she pushes her feet into her (rather nice, tooled, Moroccan) slippers and makes her way to the kitchen. The "art act

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[157] Cowtan 179-80.
[158] Hessel.

make[s] us reassess the perspectives of our perception, and vice versa … ."[159] Did the *Quartet*, much like the visual encounters described within, enable or encourage a reorientation in its readers? Did transcribing one form into another, perhaps visual into verbal, tragedy into comedy, ancient into modern, or linear into cyclic, allow us to really *see* what the form holds? Did it encourage us to turn it in our hands, to look again and look anew?[160]

The characters encounter the artwork; the reader encounters the characters' encounter. And the experience is both magnified and problematised using ekphrasis, itself a rhetorical device that "typically interrogates culturally determined habits of seeing,"[161] and questions the politics and accepted aesthetics of looking and the subsequent process of interpreting. But … (Earl Grey tea, turn the pot, no milk – sacrilegious) … maybe ekphrasis could do more than just expose struggles and disrupt norms, maybe it could also encourage "fruitful collaboration and a productive encounter,"[162] an intertwining of sorts, between the artwork described and the reader. Maybe the varied ekphrastic encounters in the *Quartet* have the potential to "stimulate the reader's imagination and creative participation in the construction of new meanings."[163]

And then, as the curator brews her tea and stares out the window at the half-dressed autumn trees, she gets to thinking about how Smith portrays the encounters with art in the *Seasonal Quartet* as a transformative collision of sense and faculty. Did the reader experience something similar when reading Smith's descriptions? She wonders if the 'luminosity' of the thing is in its ability to hold all those parts at once, balancing affect and analysis. And then she thinks about Elisabeth and her dissertation on Boty, mentally collaging what she saw and felt – trying to explain and interpret the naturalness of nature's colours, the vibrant hues in *With Love to Jean-Paul Belmondo,* the yonic symbolism of the deep red rose. "The cow parsley. The painted flowers. Boty's sheer unadulterated reds in the re-image-ing of the image. Put it all together and what have you got? Anything useful?" (*A* 139).

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[159] Greengrass.
[160] On turning contemporary events into form see Hessel 329.
[161] Brosch "Ekphrasis in the Digital Age" 238.
[162] Louvel 260.
[163] Brosch "Ekphrasis in Recent Popular Novels" 421.

The curator wonders if encountering artwork in the *Quartet* is a balance between thought and emotion for the reader, too, a balancing act like Mazzetti's lithe man on the narrow brick ledge. Or the coastline teetering over Arthur in *Winter,* hanging, swinging slightly, "suspended by nothing" (217). Is encountering art about fluidity? After all, "[f]ixed things fracture and break."[164]

Art, encountering, feeling, seeing, participating. Anything useful?

She thinks maybe, just maybe, there is an exhibition here.

[164] BBC.

Chapter Three: The Exhibit/ Extradiegetic Encounters

It is a mild morning in early summer. The curator is taking the escalator that winds down several floors through the centre of the gallery and will deliver her into the entrance foyer. She could have taken the staff service lift from her third-floor office, like a piece of boxy human freight (faster, covert, distanced), but she likes to see the small figures that are oscillating over the heavy concreted floor grow and take shape as she travels downward: someone with a pram, another with a walking frame, a small group bent over a fold-out map, several people lining for tickets, figures criss-crossing over the foyer heading for toilets, coat check, meeting points and information counters.

The curator has worked with her team for eighteen months in an internal, creative vacuum, slowly constructing her vision, realising ideas, building arguments and developing a dialogue to help illustrate the encounters with art at the centre of Ali Smith's *Seasonal Quartet*. She hopes they have captured how the *Quartet* uses different types of ekphrasis, whether educational, emotive, ethical or quest-like, to compel the characters and affect the reader. And she hopes they have done enough to reflect the synaesthetic nature of the novels, as well as highlight the paratextual properties and the metafictional references. She hopes that the exhibition will evoke Smith's multi-layered approach to the arts and that it will match the spirit of optimism and engagement evident in the novels' creative encounters. She hopes their audience will experience something of the diverse responses to art portrayed in the *Quartet*, and that they will measure their critical thinking with equal parts of affective and emotive embrace.

A beam of light intersects the curator's path as she crosses the second-floor mezzanine. She re-times her footwork to regain the collapsing, downward motion of the last revolving staircase.

If they have managed to harness something of a postcritical perspective in the presentation of the show, she thought, then they had a chance of emulating the mood of the *Quartet*. Smith models, through her characters' divergent encounters with art, generous thinking that is open and dexterous, enlisting the possibility for change in both the protagonist and the reader.

The curator understands her contribution to the project is now at an end. She thinks about Felski's claim that "[a]rtworks can only survive and thrive by making friends, creating allies, attracting disciples, inciting attachments [and] latching on to receptive hosts."[165] The collection is now free of her nurturing hand, making its way in the wild world of the public domain. It is time for each viewer to enter into a dialogue with the artworks she has collected. She has provided the ordered symbols, but the audience will now call upon their own resources, values, memories, thoughts and feelings, to forge a personalised experience.[166] Like the *Seasonal Quartet*, the exhibition is an event in time, a living, organic, moveable feast, its many meanings dependant on its viewers' interpretations. The curator agrees with Rosenblatt's assertion that experience, whether the movement between object and viewer, text and reader, or actor and audience, can never be contained as one definitive thing. It is "not an object or an ideal entity. It happen[s] during a coming-together, a compenetration"[167] of audience and artwork, in which the individual merges past experience, background and degrees of attunement with the ordered symbols of the artwork and creates the experience anew.

The escalator completes its final rotation and delivers the curator into the shifting crowd. The event banner rises fifteen metres before her into the double story space, dwarfing the information desk: *Encounters with Art: Ali Smith and The Seasonal Quartet*. The text, a vivid yellow, pops against a slice of Hockney's country laneway, brushed green, blue and purple. The curator wonders how many upcycled, cross-body messenger bags the banner will surrender, say in another six months, appearing quietly on the shelves of the Design Centre, when the smaller, winter show replaces it.

It is last week. It is still a mild day in early summer but now it is dusk. The entrance foyer is full of the well-dressed and the well connected. Flashes are firing, canapes are circulating, champagne is being sunk. There is gesticulating and smiles and small talk. The curator can see the gallery director cutting through the crowd towards a temporary dais, over-shadowed by the towering exhibition banner behind.

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[165] Felski ""Context Stinks!"" 584.
[166] On aesthetic response as personalised experience, I have paraphrased Rosenblatt 12.
[167] Rosenblatt 12.

I always find Opening Night terribly exciting, an important benefactor at the curator's elbow says. I really feel I'm on the threshold of something, don't you? I'm poised between the outside world – Cheers! (a tilt of the Telmont Réserve brut) – and a magical interiority. I literally feel like I'm about to step into *The Quartet* with Hockney's *Tunnel* series all around (the curator's eye obligingly follows the sweep of the benefactor's arm as it takes in the four artworks flanking the darkened entrance), announcing my journey from cover to narrative.

It's true, the curator thinks. The foyer does act like Genette's airlock.[168] It functions as the paratext does for the reader, forming a place of intermediacy that bridges the space between the audience and the work's production. Certainly, how a book is received, if tactile rather than digital, starts with the object in one's hands. In fact, the curator feels the reader's creative engagement with the *Quartet* is doubly so. First, they experience a creative encounter with the novels as artworks, and then they experience the *Quartet*'s ekphrastic description of artworks within the narrative, participating in the characters' resulting cognitive and emotive responses.

The curator thinks about her four old paperback friends convalescing on the rear shelf of her crowded office. A little grubby, a little worn, corners turned, their interiors riddled with graphite. Spines wrapped in burnt sienna, dove grey, sunflower yellow and glacial green. Four Hockneys sitting on your office shelf? Their painted expanse confined to just 22 x 14 cms. Little more than postcard-size. Just like Richard, declaring the incongruity of Dean's *Montafon Letter*, shrunk to fit his back pocket, on an unsent postcard to Paddy: "Like you *could* ever hold the size of that image in your hand!" (*Sp* 79).

The benefactor nods towards *Early July Tunnel*.

Do you recall the passage from *Summer*, the benefactor says, when Grace takes a single-track road, in search of an old graveyard? She admires "[t]he light gold, dark gold of the fields spreading back away … the green of everything … the trees ahead down the road throwing long English shadows … the patches of sunlight that come through them in the distance down the road, shining on its surface …" (288). I think what Grace is describing is on the cover of *Summer*; it's a gesture from *inside* the book,

[168] On the paratext as airlock see Gerard 408.

forming an interface with the reader, outside of the fictional world. It's the Hockney. This border-crossing happens again in *Winter*, as Arthur longs for "winter where woods are sheathed in snow … the ground underfoot snow-covered … streaked with gold through the trees from low winter sun … the barely discernible track … a muffled path between the trees … woods opening to a light that's itself untrodden …". It's surely the Hockney on the cover he's describing (*W* 214-5). I have to admit, I was pulled back and forth between the textual content and the novels' covers, the benefactor says. I sensed "the presence of a painting behind [the] description … [t]he trace of a possible picture concealed behind the verbal text."[169] I felt rather like a detective. The clues were right there, in my hand.

Well spotted, the curator says. I noticed something similar, another connection between text and paratext, a wonderful fusing. Hannah writes in *Summer,* "[h]ere's something of a self-portrait. It's of me walking towards you" (236). And there, on the back cover, is Mazzetti striding out of the book, her smile faint, her gaze direct. I felt the two 'self-portraits' merging and duplicating.

The benefactor mumbles a vague agreement but is half distracted now, motioning to a friend in black-tie across the foyer. They slip quietly back into the crowd; an empty champagne flute raised on departure.

The curator thinks Smith was as aware of the book's construction as she is of the role her gallery hanging plays. In fact, she concedes, recalling an article by Adel Cheong, "[f]or many, Smith's novels are seen to carry out an assault on the traditional nineteenth-century novel, not simply in terms of how the story is told but also the ways in which the novel, as a physical object, is assembled and put together."[170] Like any production, the curator thinks, the framing of an artwork could manipulate, amplify, obfuscate or crystallise its reception, through arrangement, contextualisation, and the negotiation of conceptual and physical space. Personally, the curator rather likes the idea of Smith's "assault." She enjoys a good challenge to her "horizon of expectation." Though she acknowledges that not all audiences may be as receptive or equipped to steady themselves against such an unstable tide. She knows that despite one's best

[169] Louvel 250.
[170] Cheong 346.

efforts to engage and direct, it was a folly to assume one's audience would unequivocally 'get' you.

The curator thinks about Ika Willis's work on reception theory. She suggests the "technological and material aspects of reading cannot be readily separated from the interpretive aspects, as the book is indissociably both 'physical object' and 'expressive form.'"[171] The curator had to agree, Smith's construction of the *Quartet* had to be acknowledged. Its reception embraced both the cerebral and the visual, despite its fundamentally textual form. From the cover art through to the text on the page, Smith commanded the peritext. She employed capitals to suggest X (Twitter) posts in *Spring*, inscription and signage in *Summer*, and used italics to indicate written correspondence, like Arthur's blog in *Winter*, and Elisabeth's dissertation in *Autumn*, and then there was the typewriter font that mimicked a screenplay in *Spring* (3-5; 291; 309;183-6; 226; 83-7). The pages of the *Quartet* positively jumped with visuality.

The artists' bios, embedded in the text, along with the inclusion of information drawn from secondary sources, motioned toward Smith's purposeful engagement with Gennette's airlock. The Boty interview in *Autumn* clearly mirrors one that appeared in *Vogue* in September 1964, right down to *Vogue*'s own paratext: "FEATURES *9 Spotlight 92 Paola, paragon of princesses 110 Living doll: Pauline Boty interviewed by Nell Dunn 120 Girls in their married bliss, by Edna O'Brien*" (152). Smith's description even includes a precis of the surrounding advertisements found on the magazine's pages. And the acknowledgements at the back of *Autumn* register Smith's debt to an unpublished typescript of Steven Ward's trial, confessing that some elements had "slipped into th[e] novel" (263). Then, in *Spring*, a quote: "*If you rise at dawn in a clear sky … they say you can catch a bag of air so intoxicated with the essence of spring … it will produce an oil of gold …*" (218), followed by an explanation: "[t]hat's the voice of the artist Tacita Dean" (218). Though the quote's exact provenance is hazy, the reader could comfortably assume it's drawn from the artist's own short film on air. It captures something of Dean's own process of framing her artwork. The curator smiles. The passage in *Spring* about the novel by "Nella something" is especially cheeky. It's "a bestseller … on all the shortlists" (33). And then there's another inside joke shared with

[171] Willis 21. Willis quotes D.F. McKenzie (1984: 334-335).

the reader, as Paddy and Richard discuss "[t]he acknowledgments page at the back of the novel" as well as the "[p]aperback blurb" declaring it "an idyll of peace and quiet, a gift from the past … escape from an era of Brexit" (*Sp* 33). Smith is in teasing dialogue with the paratext, acknowledging the construction, production and dissemination of other texts, as well as her own. The curator thinks this awareness lends a spatial dimension to the text, aligning it ever closer to the presence of the plastic arts.[172] The verbal and visual, the inside and the outside, in amicable co-habitation.

Recover the mild summer morning. Here is the curator dodging the line around the ticket counter, avoiding a small child in a pram, nodding pleasantly to the entrance attendant and dissolving into the dim, warm tobacco of Autumn. She has thirty minutes to wander the exhibition space before her 11am in the Design Centre.

Three friends are grouped around Boty's *With Love to John-Paul Belmondo*. The curator recognises them as students from the art school a few blocks away. One is dressed in an old, holey, "Pussy Grabs Back" T-shirt, another has a tangle of green hair, while a third sports headphones of fluorescent green around their neck. The one with the headphones was often around, sketching the works in the forecourt, killing time with the barista in the canteen, endlessly thumbing the monographs in the gallery store. The curator slows her pace; pauses before an information panel she's (proof)read a hundred times and listens.

… but Smith's use of synaesthetic language really just acts as another form of ekphrasis, Holey T-shirt says. The kind of ekphrasis that evokes vividness and acts as a translation between the senses, "making the listener 'see' the subject in their mind's eye." That's Webb, Holey T-shirt says (tossing their head), in *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*.[173] Or my personal fave, Valentine Cunningham (making 'the voice'); it's an "intertextual or intermedial … synaesthetic miscegenating, overlapping, blurring … ."[174]

Whaaaaa? Headphones says. Miscenga-what-what?

Yeh, I know, Holey T-shirt says. I've been reading heaps of theory. I've got an essay due end of the week.

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[172] On paratext creating physical qualities see Cheong 347-48.
[173] Webb 2.
[174] Cunningham 57.

Wait, the third student says (the one with the green tangled hair). The synaesthetic language of the *Quartet* is used to describe more than just visual elements. Think about it, fam. It contributes to the ekphrastic *description* of the visual, but it's also used throughout the text to conjure more than the *sight* of an artwork. Smith is lowkey using synaesthetic language to encourage a feeling of sensual engagement in the reader.

Headphones raises an eyebrow.

I heard an interview! Green-tangle says. Smith believes that "[a]rt helps you make sense and engage the senses. You are physically there, engaged in the space."[175] I think that's about more than just visual sense. To be 'physically there' is to acknowledge sight and sound, feel, taste. Look, forget cognition for a moment, and just think touch, smell, sight, an engagement with the object, an opportunity to "experienc[e] the luminosity of the thing in itself."[176] You know, when you really vibe with something, you're all the way in. Total immersion. You're not standing *outside* looking in, like some sketchy wonk. Nah. You've got skin in the game. You're attuned. And when you're attuned you *care* about shit.

Facts, Headphones says … like the symphony of the sold and discarded in *Autumn*. Smith's writing is maxed with the sound of things. "The Clarice Cliff fakes would be flutey. The brown furniture would be bass, low. The photographs in the old damp-stained albums would be whispery … the wickerwork would be reedy" (220). You can hear the objects going full turbo.

Oh, oh, when old Sophia is contemplating the Hepworth stone in her wardrobe, Green-tangle says. You know, describing the stink of the marble-like stone from the north of England: "the smell of decay … of ancient shells of once-living creatures which decomposed when you broke the stone open and they met the air" (*W* 268).

The lemons! Headphones says. When Florence does a runner in the supermarket while Richard is trying "to get to the lemonness of lemons." He's all like, "picks a lemon up … holds it in his hand, feels the weight of it … digs the nail of his thumb a little into the skin … the far high smell of lemon, sweetness and bitterness at once" (*Sp* 264).

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[175] Hessel.
[176] Sontag 22.

The floating coastline in *Winter*, Green-tangle says. Arthur sees it but also smells it and feels it. His nose fills "with the smell of plantlife, the smell of greenness" (215), as it hangs above him, "[l]ittle bits of rock-dust from the edges crumble down … He scratches at his head. There's grit under his nails … grit at the roots of his hair" (216).

Texture, lots of texture, Headphones says. Kurt's lumpy, mouldy, porridge sculptures growing hair (*Su* 178). The fish skin collages, like iridescent lace (*Su* 177). The text lays out smell and sound and sight for the reader to experience.

Okay, I can take the L, Holey T-shirt says. I was thinking more about Smith's painterly language. But yeah. The synaesthetic stuff totally includes the other senses.

Green-tangle was right, the curator thinks, drifting away from the group. Focusing on the sense of touch, smell and sound, in addition to sight, could prompt the reader to engage with the text in a more bodily way. Appealing to the senses helped nurture and render affect; "the other-than-conscious forces that make subjects and worlds, and the entangled materiality of both."[177] Affect could help us connect to forces separate from interpretation and investigation. Maybe, the curator thinks, as postcritique suggests, affect could help generate alternative ways of thinking and understanding, ways not built on scepticism and unmasking. Perhaps getting back to our senses is exactly what we need in a world assailed by fake news. Like Fuss says, "[o]ur current moment demands drawing on insightful practices of responsible critique as well as exploring fresh forms of intellectual engagement."[178]

But Holey T-shirt was right too. The *Quartet* is saturated with colour. And that use of descriptive colour harks back to a traditional ekphrasis, one that denoted "a literary response to a visual image."[179] Some of the references clearly allude to the medium of painting. Elisabeth's dream in *Autumn* imagines a pure, clean, white space, transformed by Daniel (the curator recognises the minimalist, gallery aesthetic of her profession, 'The White Cube'[180]). He "pulls straight out of his chest … like a magician, a free-floating mass of the colour orange," followed by "the colours green and blue like a string of handkerchiefs out of the centre of himself. The orange in his hand turns Cézanne-

[177] Truran 27.
[178] Fuss 354.
[179] Brosch "Ekphrasis in the Digital Age" 227.
[180] On the gallery space as a white cube see Tate.

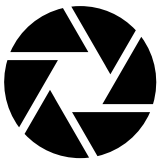
colours" (39). While dozing in the rest home, Daniel imagines himself encased in the trunk of a Scot's pine, its pollen "as yellow as bright paint pigment in an artist's jar" (*A* 90). In *Winter,* Sophia watches the rain on her car window create a blur of colour and shape, like "someone's thrown little paint-filled missiles at the windscreen" (8). But Smith appears to be most preoccupied by the colour green: "The earth is made of it. Green. Moss, algae, lichen, mould. It's the colour everything was before there were flowers" (*W* 102). In fact, she writes, green existed "before the world decided to invent all the other colours" (*W* 102). The curator thinks the novels are infused with green. Chaplin is evergreen, Daniel dreams a green suit of leaves, a girl grows shoots and buds, metamorphosises into a young tree, a stone head is covered in "[l]acey green growth, leafy looking," and a cold winter signals a green spring (*Su* 185; *A* 8; *A* 96; *W* 28; *Sp* 72). The curator couldn't help but feel green was more than just 'green' … ach, was it wrong of her to be suddenly interpreting, digging down into metaphor, finding allusions to Kafka and metamorphosis, unmasking the cycle of life and exposing renewal, in the face of all that beautiful, painterly, life-affirming green? Nah, stuff it, the curator thinks, when something has meaning to us "it grabs us, resonates in our bodies … stimulates our emotions. If it does not trigger feeling-thinking … it falls flat."[181] And Smith's use of synaesthetic language did exactly that; it enlisted her senses, made her *feel* and sparked in her curious, explorative *thought*.

Across the gallery space, close to the point where the warmth of Autumn seeped into the steely violet of Winter, the curator can see the security guard, swaying slightly on their feet, patient and observant, the large curve of Hepworth's *Monolith (Empyrean)* mirroring their quiet form in the distance.

Hiya, how're things this morning, the curator says.

Can't complain. Quiet morning, the guard replies, their eyes swivelling to follow a young couple weaving between the stands of sculptural shadow in the centre of the room.

[181] Jasper Introduction: Thinking Hearts.



[ID: A montage of long, mid and close shots; the camera follows a security guard dressed in black pants, white shirt and fluoro safety vest. 1. Walking across the gallery's entrance foyer. 2. Chatting with visitors. 3. Standing in front of a painting. 4. Sitting in the sculpture garden with Ali Smith's *Spring* in hand. A voice-over plays.]

"I've been a guard here at the gallery for almost a decade now. I didn't really know much about art when I came here to work. But I've learnt a lot, just looking and thinking, talking to people. I always read the information panels and the explanatory text on the art labels. I mean, you don't have to know what an artwork is about to appreciate it. But sometimes it helps. A bonus with the novels of the *Quartet*, though, is the inclusion of a brief biography on each artist. So, whilst reading, you can both imagine the artworks and something about the lives of those who created them. Mostly it's the narrator telling you, so it feels a bit like an art history lesson but that's ok because it helps enrich your understanding. And I like the way it brings the past back into the present. You know, as if it fulfils "the craving to have the past return livingly, to live again, to speak again."[182] I personally loved the way we hear from Boty. It's sad, you know? She and Lorenza Mazzetti had such tragic lives."

That last social media post? Filmed several weeks ago. The curator had seen the security guard reading the *Seasonal Quartet* in the break room. They had talked briefly about the novels and the four women artists that grounded each season. The security guard had called Daniel an art historian, because he felt like a lodestar, guiding the reader through the *Quartet*, a collector, an educator, an admirer. The curator thought that was quite on-point. The ekphrasis in the *Quartet* was full of descriptions that triggered emotive, ethical, cognitive and quest-like engagement. But in the instances where Smith laid out the defining forces behind the creatives' lives, the ekphrasis presented as educational.

[182] Cunningham 63.

The curator wonders about the way Smith often employs the narrator's omnipresent voice, and evidenced secondary sources, when illustrating the artists' work and life. In one of the many journal articles she had read about ekphrasis, while preparing for the exhibition, Louvel had described a kind of art criticism, a "[s]econd-order ekphrasis … an encounter between two disciplines, art history and 'literature/ writing on art.'[183] The curator thinks it presented as a mindful dance between the writer's obvious passion and the desire for measured professionalism. The historical ekphrasis creates movement away from the dialogue and the lives of the fictional characters but it also suggests an authenticity "endorsed from outside the time … of the novel."[184] The curator thinks there is something about the reverential, velvet cloak of 'history' that lends importance, immortality, and weight to a subject. Smith suggests, in the Hessel podcast she's listened to time and again, that turning contemporary events into form, like paintings or stories, immediately casts them as "ancient and you can see again."[185] Well, it was all about distance and perspective, wasn't it? How you can't always see or understand in the moment. That re-forming something made it visible again. And yet, like Smith, the curator also acknowledged, that history was so damn unreliable. Look at Boty; lost to history, rescued from a dusty shed, then resuscitated, so to speak.

The reader discovers Boty's backstory along with Elisabeth, as she reads the pages of an old exhibition catalogue rescued from a box on the Charing Cross Road (*A* 149-56). The catalogue prompts Elisabeth to research Boty further, to "read everything she could find online and everything in the library" (*A* 226). The effect, the curator thinks, is that the reader is pulled along, or even into the novel, if that was possible. They become part of the discovery process, the message and the receiver indispensable partners. What was it Dewey had said? Something like, "The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others … ."[186] And yes, there you are, in the British Library (it was the noughties after all, the internet not entirely domesticated), collating notes, hunting down references, scouring records and disturbing librarians. Even "staying in … watching Alfie" (*A* 223), pre-Netflix. The reader is not only a witness to Elisabeth, the

[183] On ekphrasis as art criticism see Louvel 255-56.
[184] Cunningham 63.
[185] Hessel.
[186] Dewey 110.

narrator, and the author's factual unearthing of crumbs, they are an actual participant in the novel's research project.

Lorenza Mazzetti's life in *Summer* is laid out in a similar way. The narrator is quite explicit in emphasising their external sources, time and again pointing out demonstrable information about Mazzetti to the reader, located outside the fictional text. Mazzetti, the narrator states, "writes a novel called *Il Cielo Cade*" and then "she writes another, *Con Rabbia*" from which the narrator provides a quote, "*I couldn't live in calmness and boredom anymore. My hand had touched blood and tragedy*" (261; 262; 262). The narrator goes on to mention her "last great project, *Album di Famiglia*, or *Family Album* – a set of paintings featuring portraits of her family up to the time of the murders" (*Su* 262). Yeah, the curator had looked that up too, curious as to how the paintings might "bring to mind artists like Henri Matisse and Charlotte Salomon" (*Su* 262). She had hoped to acquire a few copies for the Design Centre; £62.00 (!) on Amazon. And, as the narrator assures the reader, the information on Mazzetti appears to be true. Researched and compiled with an historical eye: "Much of what I've told you here can be found in Lorenza Mazzetti's novels, and in her memoir, *Dario Londinese*, published in English as *London Diaries*" (263). Go on, dear reader, go and look it up. Better still, read it.

You could accuse Smith of giving away too much of course, the curator thinks. Iser certainly championed keeping determinacy at bay in literature, for fear of "external, verifiable factors" creating "nothing more than a mirror reflection of th[o]se factors."[187] Iser prefers gaps, occlusions, that allowed "the possibility [for the reader] of connecting one's own experience with what the text wants to convey,"[188] because he believes "indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for reader participation."[189] The curator thinks Smith's factual inclusions are all part of a larger game. Sometimes she thew in a red herring, completely wrong-footing the reader with dubious claims about quotes found in notebooks (*Su* 263) or imaginary composites like Daniel's *Mother and Child*. They seem to stand in complete contrast with the concrete presence of the other artworks in the *Quartet*. No, the curator thinks, she agreed with Liebermann. The slide

[187] Iser 7.
[188] Iser 8.
[189] Iser 10.

between fact and fiction serves "to destabilise the idea of ultimate 'truth' and … problematise the relationship between language and reality and … objective knowledge."[190] Furthermore, the slide supports Smith's interest in "the boundary-shifting and border-crossing that all art does."[191] Remaining agile, flexible and adaptable are attributes that Smith champions. The curator wonders if the ability to move across genre, time, mood and modes of thinking kept possibilities alive, while keeping convention and apathy at bay. Smith has spoken about the need to resist being fixed, in a world that wants to fix you.[192] Immutable boundaries and borders are certainly her enemy.

Then this happened. The curator is midway through a perfunctory exchange regarding the blooming of her late summer roses, when the security guard is suddenly distracted. They are surprisingly swift on their feet. A young couple are in (too) close dialogue with the Hepworth … the young woman is actually embracing the *Monolith*. In truth, she can barely get her arms around half of it, apropos its bulk, so one limb has taken a short cut through its central cavity, and she is now counterbalanced slightly outwards, left hand raised, a phone above, tilted back toward her. A selfie.

Please! DO NOT touch the artwork, the security guard says. Move away.

The young woman saunters off, unfazed by the rebuke.

The curator crosses the floor. The young woman hasn't gone far. She is now sitting on a low wooden bench, scrolling through the photos (unfortunate shadow, squinting, too toothy, cute), editing and filtering, as her friend studies a large black and white portrait on the wall. It's the photo of Hepworth working on her mould for *Oval Form (Trezion)*. The sculptor has almost climbed inside the structure she is working on. Bright curves of plaster coil around the dark profile of her face and hair, echoing the bend of her arm, while her right hand gently stills the white surface of a cresting wave as it swells over her head.

Is this the look you were going for, the friend says, leaning in close to the granulated silver surface of the photograph. 'Self Portrait with Holes'?

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[190] Liebermann 137.
[191] Greengrass.
[192] Hessel.

"[P]eople with their phones held up above their heads in the air," saluting "[t]he space in front of a painting where people stand and don't look at it" (*W* 12). That's Sophia's perplexed estimation of selfie-takers in the gallery. Sophia had seen the *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre, where there was a "large mob of people standing in front of it taking its photo" (*W* 11). And she had visited the Pantheon, observing the tomb of the Renaissance artist Raphael, along with "a thousand people flashing their phones and cameras at the box all day from the moment they opened" (*W* 267). What was it they wanted, the curator wonders, Raphael's genius, Mona Lisa's enigma, the warmth of Hepworth's hand as she ran her chisel against the smooth stone? Yes, to capture the essence of something original, not mechanically reproduced, to share in the artwork's thisness: "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."[193]

Smith is alerting us to the presence of what Benjamin calls "aura," the curator thinks. Many of the encounters in the *Quartet* are prefaced on a physical meeting with an art object, an acknowledgment of the powerful "presence of the original [a]s the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity."[194] The unruly crowds of souvenir hunters taking photos, Daniel's reverential homage to Boty (*A* 10,15: *Su* 175), Sophia's desire to possess the Hepworth stone (*W* 7, 73, 141, 267) and Richard's sublime encounter with *The Montafon Letter* (*Sp* 78-9), all bear witness to the intensity of art's presence. Smith acknowledges not only the artwork, but how it effects and potentially moulds the receiver too. The characters in the *Quartet* are struck by art's powerful aura in a way that no postcard or reproduction calendar could ever rival. But as readers we share the experience by proxy, through the translation of the visual object into a lingual representation. It's a kind of doubled experience, Cheong believes. And that "when faced with these two experiences we are made more conscious of the sensory, cognitive, and imaginative process that are activated in each encounter."[195]

Indeed, a sceptic might question whether Smith exploits our attraction to aura, the curator thinks. The artists forming the spine of the *Seasonal Quartet*, the doyenne, Dame Barbara Hepworth, the Turner Prize winning Tacita Dean, the author and film-

[193] Benjamin and Arendt 247.
[194] Benjamin and Arendt 248.
[195] Cheong 349.

maker Lorenza Mazzetti and Boty, newly crowned Only Female British Pop Artist, surely add their creative weight to the narrative. And the references are not just to the visual arts. The novels positively heave with allusions to great writers, poets and playwrights, musicians, mathematicians and thinkers. The curator gives credence to Brosch's critical claim that "[r]eferencing works of high art can confer on the referencing medium an instant rise in status … the motif of a visual art object confers a surplus boost of prestige and value."[196] So, is this Smith's aim? Does she hope the *Quartet* will catch something transcendentally contagious, a bad case of the highly-reputables? Perhaps she envisions an advantageous transferal of distinguished signs and symbols, stealthily spread from one form to another, from the text to the reader?

But the curator is unconvinced. She feels the conjuring of aura helps to establish shared affective response between the character and the reader. The reader understands not only the extraordinariness of the artwork, through the character's engagement with it but then is also privy to its emotive and analytical after-effects upon the character via narratorial commentary. Surely, the aim is to transfer intensity, the curator thinks. Ekphrastic descriptions involving aura and the power of art might generate transformation, new insight, or trigger moral and ethical revision in the character and by extension, the reader. Surely this is what Brosch means when he says, the "qualities of ekphrasis rest less in its ability to represent than in its ability to move its audience."[197] The artworks may act as vehicles, working in tandem with Smith's creative descriptions, to move both the characters *in* the novels, and the readers of them.

Slow motion of the curator not watching where she's walking. She's looking back over her shoulder at the young woman editing selfies on her phone.

Oh, my goodness, I'm so sorry, the curator says, unexpectedly gatecrashing the space between four members of The Putney Page Turners as they gather around Dean's chalk clouds in Spring.

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[196] Brosch "Ekphrasis in Recent Popular Novels" 405.
[197] Brosch "Ekphrasis in the Digital Age" 234.

I couldn't buy into it, the first book club member says. I just didn't understand how looking at a chalk drawing of an avalanche and a few surrounding clouds could "ma[k]e space to breathe possible" (*Sp* 79).

(On the other hand, the curator thinks, all that "arty art" (*A* 229) could really rub a person up the wrong way.)

I mean, the member says, there's an essentialism in how Smith's characters encounter artworks. I think popular ekphrastic novels, like the *Seasonal Quartet*, rely on canonical works of art, to "reinstate and affirm traditional cultural axioms about the 'nature' of Art."[198] We're *supposed* to feel a certain way about art, that it's transformative, sublime, inspiring, other-worldly. But 'Art' isn't always magical, sprinkling fairy dust, and not everyone gets hooked in the same way. I mean, personally, I just don't get the fuss about the Dean. *Feeling* this about Dean, or Dubuffet for that matter, is "neither universal nor purely idiosyncratic but shaped by the pressures of class and culture. This point needs to be insisted upon, against those who believe that aesthetic appreciation requires nothing more than personal sensitivity or a refined mind."[199]

The curator extracts herself and negotiates a path around the group. She silently agrees. The curator 'gets' Dean's *Why cloud* (and feels some frustration at the book club member's lack of insight, their cultural conditioning at odds with her own), but she also accepts that artworks are mediated; attachments are not autonomous, meaning is not inherent, and aesthetics are not universal. And yet, she recognises that the encounters with artwork portrayed in the *Seasonal Quartet* often attest to what Cunningham claims is "the astonishing power of art to tell, convince, persuade, overwhelm … to celebrate the wonder, the miracle, the shock of art, the *aura* of the art-object… ."[200] Exactly the kind of postulates attributed to art that the book club member rallied against.

It would be fair to say that some of the aesthetic encounters in the *Quartet* use art to tell or persuade, the curator thinks. Both Daniel and Elisabeths' engagement with Boty's work could be construed as "recognition … revelation and even epiphany …

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[198] Brosch "Ekphrasis in Recent Popular Novels" 404.
[199] Felski *Hooked* 60.
[200] Cunningham 65.

premised on the connection between sight and insight."[201] The curator suspects Smith is attempting to direct the reader, encouraging them to align with the character's realisations, or her own sensibilities, to participate in and embrace a new way of seeing.

Boty's eyes allow Daniel to "let you see where you are, who you are" (*A* 160). Her vision crystallises his vision. Elisabeth writes that Boty's work has the ability to "*examine and make possible a reassessment of the outer appearance of things*" (*A* 229). As the characters are led to question the politics of seeing and representation, so too the reader is encouraged to reflect on "the representation of representation" (*A* 156). Certainly, the politics of seeing and representing are present in Boty's work, the curator thinks. But the ideas reached further than that. The *Quartet* also asks the reader to consider how borders, refugees, 'otherness' and even 'truth' are staged for us. The curator thinks this extends to the very novels themselves. The *Quartet* is inextricably bound up with matters of representation, both in the physical form of the text and in the employment of ekphrasis. The work constantly plays with translation and questions about who sees and who receives, who represents and what is represented. And that is the very heart of politics, she thinks.

What about the inclusion of Mazzetti's short films? Do they also work to persuade or shock, the curator wonders. As a panacea to Ashley's hopelessness, their presence becomes a lesson, their aim, perhaps, to inspire the reader to resist complacency and indifference (*Su* 109-10). The encounters with Mazzetti feel cerebral, weighted politically and morally. They feel like an allusion to contemporary times. The curator mentally sifts back through some of the vignettes from the *Quartet*. The long red Nazi banner falling from a building in Nice in *Autumn*, a prop for a film being shot on Alois Brunner, or the little house in a small English village graffitied with "GO and HOME" (*A* 53). Or Sophia, in *Winter*, numbed by the ordinary, everyday terribleness of life on British streets and the endless news cycle of catastrophes, her heart stripped of empathy, she has "fe[lt] nothing for some time now. Refugees in the sea. Children in ambulances. Blood-soaked men running … dust-covered dead people …" (*W* 29). It isn't hard to see a correlation between Mazzetti's work or the politics of representation, and the reader's world of Brexit or the mushrooming of Trumpism.

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[201] Brosch "Ekphrasis in Recent Popular Novels" 416.

But then Sophia's encounter with the Hepworth stone is physical, centred around touch and surface and attunement. There is wonder. Her connection with the sculpture reflects a sexual awakening, an exploration of a "wordless thing," "so good it's frightening" (*W* 276). And other encounters suggest felt beauty and miracle. In *Autumn* Daniel recalls that Mozart reduced him to tears, "the high, sweet notes … like tiny orgasms" (184). Lux declares the most beautiful thing she has ever seen is "a mark made on words by a flower" (*W* 212). While in *Summer* Kurt's performance of LEISE evokes shock, an intense climaxing and release of emotion (175). Those encounters are affective, sensuous, emotive. Undeniably, the curator thinks, the creative encounters portrayed in the *Seasonal Quartet* explore accepted ideals about art and wonderment, intoxication, epiphany, direction and realisation. But what makes them so significant is the feelings these descriptions potentially evoke in the reader, too. Sliding between the world of the text and that of the reader, these emotions may have powerful consequences; translating "ways of processing information about the world more rapidly than our conscious brains … as [a] means of communicating with others and … judging how things are unfolding … ."[202] 'Awe' is not *just* awe, it holds the potential to spark new ways of meaning-making.

It's true, the second book club member says, I think the encounters with art are about nurturing shared feelings. It's not so much about the pictorial illusion but about Richard's sense of shock before the Dean, his physical response to the scale, the enormity of that frozen moment, an acknowledgement that his perspective has changed.

It's probably a bit old-fashioned, a third member says, but I'm not really wedded to meaning and extrapolation. I'm more in tune with theorists from the past on this score: "From Plato to Dryden … the responses [to art] considered significant were primarily moral and/or affective, rather than interpretive."[203] So I don't think you have to 'get' *The Montafon Letter,* just embrace and be open to its impact.

How about Mazzetti's film *K*, in *Summer*, the second member says. The balancing man, "burdened … grave, slim, preoccupied, terribly keen" (5). The ekphrastic

[202] Jasper "Introduction: Thinking Hearts."
[203] Willis 10.

description allows the reader to register the tension in his body, the precariousness of his movements. I don't think we fully appreciate the weight of this vignette until later in the novel. Like so many other vignettes, they connect over time. Further into the narrative we learn that Mazzetti's films might provide comfort to Ashley, driven to self-imposed silence by the overwhelming injustices of the world. Then, further again into *Summer* we discover the awful truth of Mazzetti's traumatic life story. Ashley's silence and Mazzetti's pain allow us to reassess the scene Smith has described, and we recognise alienation, struggle, and a kind of wild madness. But there is also hope and agility and freedom amongst the darkness and destruction. There is an ethical lesson here. "The artist's task is a moral task"[204] and Smith's evocation of *K* is true to that. She has Mazzetti warn the reader: "*while boredom was dozing reality was preparing the apocalypse*" (*Su* 262). Be mindful, be alert. I like Nussbaum's take on this: "In the war against moral obtuseness, the artist is our fellow fighter, frequently our guide."[205]

Uhlman's drawings in *Summer* have a similar sensibility, the fourth member of the book club says, quiet until this point. The reader is faced with this terrible mental image of a small child walking among bloated corpses, dismembered bodies, scaffolds and gibbets, through a ruined landscape. You're aware of the child's fragility, alert to the light balloon bobbing above her head, in playful contrast to the depravity of her surrounds. I think "this moment highlights the ways in which ekphrasis is often concerned with empathy … both figuring and eliciting the reader's emotional responses."[206] Uhlman tells Daniel the drawings are a "homage to Goya" (*Su* 173). But the wee girl dances, smiles and plays, holds on to innocence. You can see them here actually. They're in the space next door, in Summer.

Or Boty, the second member says.

Oh please! Boty's hardly going to give us a lesson on ethics, is she, the first member responds.

Absolutely she does, the second member says. I mean, I recognise the emotional response is not comparable to the vision of that small child in hell. And you may not get distressed (although … the member thinks) about an argument pitting

[204] Nussbaum 527.
[205] Nussbaum 528.
[206] Meek 17.

"cunt-throb" (*A* 244) against heart-throb, but the inclusion of Boty's work does raise questions about equality and power. And that's ethics. Smith's ekphrastic description of the work, along with the narrator's biographical information *and* Elisabeth's dissertation, points the reader toward a feminist reading. Importantly, her work is "witty and joyous and full of unexpected colour" (*A* 151). It's also loaded with "lush and coquettish porn magazine poses," "genital looking" rose formations, and salutations to the "beautiful female arse" (*A* 155; 139; 151). Just think about those descriptions! Boty's painted women are not the gendered, passive objects of the ekphrastic gaze, they're the result of both female looking and female verbal and visual translation. Clearly the paintings are sexual. But at their core they're political too. Boty lived in a time when "*female emancipation [wa]s a password and not a fact*" (*A* 153). Can you imagine what it was like "to be a young woman in the world right then" (*A* 150)? "The ethical note is clear: the voice of the ekphrastic is … morally weighted, admonitory, instructive; the ekphrastic encounter is commonly for the good of the fictional character."[207] But it's more than that, the second member says. Smith's work is also for the good of us, her readers.

Oh dear, the third member says. Sometimes I just want to be swept away. If we can forget ethics and meaning-making for a moment, maybe we can just embrace presence instead.

Back to aura then, the original member says.

It is a day of the week after the exhibition has opened but prior to this day, right now. The curator can't remember which, as she is so busy that time is a blur. She is passing through the Summer hall and can see a volunteer art guide addressing a group of visitors, as they peer down into a long display case.

Sometimes ekphrasis works as a type of hermeneutic quest, the guide says. The reader is provided with clues, some light framework, and then encouraged to solve a mystery laid out by the narrative. Sometimes the mystery is not directly stated, just implied. The ekphrastic images may suggest allusions, create gaps or spark a curiosity

[207] Cunningham 65.

that impels the reader to discover more. (Or they may not.) Leaving something uncertain or undefined invites co-creation and participation. (Or it may not.)

The guide opens a small moleskin notebook, retrieved from a pocket, and quotes Iser: "[T]he indeterminate elements of literary prose … represent a vital link between text and reader. They are the switch that activates the reader into using his own ideas … to fulfil the intention of the text."[208] Iser believes that when the reader fills indeterminate gaps with their background knowledge, their experience and their learning, they sense a merging with the text, a feeling of co-production, participation, and great satisfaction. But what if the reader's knowledge, learning and experience is inimical to the text's "intention"? Perhaps this is where new, unintended ways of thinking and being may be created?

I wonder how many of you registered signals or inferences within the text, the guide says. And which ones you missed completely? Some are quite subtle, others apparent, but when you spot them, they inspire a fact-finding quest of your own. And within the novels, the characters model this activity of fact-finding themselves. In *Spring* Richard spends time "browsing online to see if he can find the image that will have been on the postcard Katherine Mansfield sent to the young writer" (95). Just as we might. Richard checks Google Images and eBay, as well as "countless other sites that come up when you look up her name and the word *postcard*" (95). Richard helpfully provides the reader with search criteria. However, much like Richard, I came up empty-handed, the guide says.

I checked Google for an image of that flower which "runs across two late pages in *Cymbeline*" (*W* 315), a guest to the right says. I knew it wasn't at the British Library. So, yeah, instead I punched in the librarian's instructions to Arthur in *Winter:* page 319. Fisher Library: Toronto. Because Arthur's quite taken by it, isn't he? By the ghost flower, "the real thing long gone … the mark of the life of it reaching across the words on the page" (*W* 319). There's a real sense of that *reaching across* – across presence and absence, the physical and the ethereal. A bit like the real world and the world of the fiction, right?

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[208] Iser 28.

Yes, the guide says. This idea can be expressed as *umwelt*, that which "seeks to convey the dynamic and open-ended nature of a being's relation to its surroundings."[209] Characters and their fictional objects move amongst us, they cross media and genres, they infiltrate alternate narratives, they turn up online and even host festivals. And they also "mediate our relations to stuff … mementos, fetishes, totems, tokens, love objects."[210] The fictional world seeps out into the concrete world. It inhabits our world just as we also bed down in the life of the novel.

The curator pauses in the shadow behind the group and absently raises her hand to the collar of her black jacket. She feels the small, cool enamelled surface of the pin against her fingers. It is an original Butlin's Clacton badge, 1939. It is the exact badge Daniel is given by Cyril in *Summer* which he then loses. He puts "the badge down on the lid of the suitcase … Next moment, gone" (158). But the curator had found it. Sally Bosleys Badge Shop, 40 GBP. Easy, if you know what you're looking for. The gallery had applied for copyright and reproductions had been made for the Design Centre. But she knows hers is original, had the authority of time and place. There was no mass reproduction here. The hands of Bernard French from Clacton-on-Sea had fashioned her swimming girl, painstakingly applied the enamel. No stamped crap from Alibaba, no Temu.

The fact that the curator had bought herself the Butlin's badge, and visited Hepworth's studio in St Ives, even hunted out her old copy of Katherine Mansfield's collected short stories, had, in the words of Felski, "the effect of making the novel more real, not less real. Art's power and presence are not attenuated by its relations, but made possible by its relations."[211] Yes, she feels her actions were vindicated, not soppy or delusional. The curator had willingly chosen to participate in the interior life of the novel. She had met with the narrative and built a composite space that encompassed the inside, fictional world and the outside, physical world. And in doing so, her ties with the *Quartet* had strengthened.

But Hepworth's *Mother and Child* in the *Quartet* isn't actually real, is it?, a guest to the left says. It seems to be a combination of several of her works exploring the idea

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[209] Felski *Hooked* 102.
[210] Felski *Hooked* 105.
[211] Felski "Comparison and Translation" 750.

of two forms. Smith continually blurs the line between reality and fiction throughout the *Quartet*. Richard has an imaginary daughter, and Arthur constantly fears he's a fake (*Sp* 74; *W* 49, 183, 88). In *Winter* Sophia sells "things that look like they've got a history, reclaimed looking things" (177) that are, in fact, new. The Hannah Arendt quote in *Summer* is real but the narrator's quote later in the text, about 'creativity healing', appears to be fictional (8, 263). Katherine Mansfield and her writing definitely exists, but Nella/ Bella and her novel *April*, does not (*Sp* 33). Boty's *Scandal 63* used to exist … (*A* 226) and Daniel's sister Hannah both exists and does not, appearing to be a modified facsimile of the artist Hannah Gluckenstein, who went by the moniker 'Gluck' and famously painted flowers (*Su* 189). Too weird not to mention. Honestly, it feels like Smith is toying with, and muddying a boundary, unsettling "the binary between fact and authenticity on one hand and fiction and imagination on the other."[212] I think Smith is messing with these boundaries to confound binary approaches and cultivate flexible thinking. Or maybe her aim is to expose the subjectivity or obfuscation of assumed truth? Because, surely, if we can accommodate more porous boundaries, embrace them in fact, we can be better thinkers, better creators, more lithesome and less judgemental participants.

The curator is impressed. This guest is quite the sleuth. Who could deny the thrill of the chase, the pleasure gained from dots connected, the value felt in ordering the scattered and the disparate. She recognises in the guest the satisfaction in her own methods of reading and interpreting, and hears Felski again in her ear: "The issue is not just attachment … but of attachment to one's attachment."[213] Whether you tapped into the internet for traces, identified with Elisabeth's academic pursuit, aligned yourself with Iris's politics, or enjoyed the aesthetic wash of bright, pure pigment across a page, there was always a fealty to your own mode of attachment.

We're very fortunate to have the internet as a source, the guide says. Though it's also the internet that's amplified the co-mingling between fact and fiction. Truth Social and Fake News. The postmodern challenge to the reality of the real. Undoubtedly, "we are gaining more and more of our knowledge from elsewhere: the world-wide network of

[212] Liebermann 137.
[213] Felski *Hooked* 49.

the internet. How does the digital age influence how and what we perceive to be 'real'?"[214] And does this result in a craving for the 'really' 'real,' as antidote?

I felt, a guest to the front says, that the ekphrastic descriptions of major artworks, such as the Botys, the Hepworth and Dean's *Montafon Letter*, as well as the minor pieces, like the Boubat and the Schwitters, helped to establish a claim to truthfulness. It's as though Smith is suggesting fiction is not just fiction, that it holds truths as well, because real people and discernible, physical objects exist in the world beyond its pages. And if these things are knowable and tangible, by proxy, this fiction is truthful too.[215]

Sure, those described things are 'real,' the guest to the left says (making air quotes with their fingers), if you accept that verbal representations can ever capture the material nature of a physical presence. And how do we know if physical presence is 'reality' anyway? (the curator has a sudden 'if-a-tree-falls-in-a-forest' moment). And I certainly noticed a sense of shifting sand as I tried to unravel other 'truths,' mentioned in the *Quartet*. Of course, some of them aren't quantifiable. Like Uhlman claiming "[d]rawing is the true thing," Sophia declaring that "beauty is truth," or Richard describing the mountains as "bleak and true" (*Su* 172; *W* 211; *Sp* 13). And then to throw 'truth' into shadow, we're told Iris is a "mythologiser," while Daniel suggests "[w]e're all apocrypha" (*W* 156, 274). It's not only the characters that *aren't* real. The reader must also question their own authenticity, the truth of their own storytelling or world view. And what's more, the computer algorithm in *Winter* tells us "[p]oetry, the novel, painting … were all dead, and art was dead," even "[t]ruth and fiction were both dead" (*W* 3).

Hang on! I can't believe that Smith thinks art is dead, or fiction, a guest at the back says. Maybe she's suggesting a re-orientation? A collapse of the boundaries? I heard her on the BBC. She said "[f]iction allows us to get to truths that facts can't open windows to."[216] I think both the *Quartet,* as an artwork itself, and the artworks described within, offer "an alternative to news in understanding the present."[217] Like … ok, let me explain. I'm reminded of the silent men in Mazzetti's *Together*, generating new forms of

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[214] Liebermann 138.
[215] On the alliance between real world objects and the truth of writing see Cunningham 62.
[216] BBC.
[217] Schmitz-Justen 320.

communication. Against the odds they make headway, despite the calamity around them they push forward, to create a place of dialogue. So, I imagine that Smith hopes we too can come together, find a place of communication; citizens and refugees, the left and the right, the marginalised and the dominant, and break through boundaries to establish common ground.

Boty's collage has contemporary relevance for sure, a guest leaning against the display cabinet says. If you accept that "[c]ollage highlights how information is organised and the recontextualization of information."[218] As a form, collage seeks to disrupt, to throw up contrasts, create juxtapositions. Collage challenges accepted ways of seeing and framing. Boty used collage to critique power and representation. I think her work has clear parallels to the cut-and-paste nature of our digital world, the disinformation, the glut of information, the way we frame and manipulate, divide and absorb. Fake news, deep fakes, conspiracy theories, the abuse of power; *Scandal 63* and Boris Johnson's oeuvre are perhaps closer than we might imagine … .

Possibly, the guide says. Dewey certainly believes "[a]rt is created in a contemporary sphere but has to travel over the ages to remain relevant."[219] So it's quite conceivable that Smith is employing past artworks to highlight issues in the present. Smith feels that "the life force in art holds steady and true."[220] And the artworks of the *Quartet* feel very much alive, meaningful and true.

Back in the present, twenty minutes has passed since the curator left the escalator. It is getting close to 11:00. She breezes past the display cabinet where the guide had stood some days ago.

The golden light of Summer is dwindling. She steps through the exit, away from the seasons and into the consumption-inducing glow of the Design Centre. The space is bountiful with bright displays of designer homewares, printed cushions, and aromatic candles. An entire wall is heaving with books and postcards, prints hang in vertical columns between shelves. There are rows of knickknacks, coloured journals, puzzles,

[218] Schmitz-Justen 322.
[219] Dewey 113.
[220] Greengrass.

magnets, soap bars and stickers. There are sleek reading lights and leather notebooks, fancy metal fruit bowls and glass cabinets spruiking jewellery and *objet d'art*.

The curator recognises a writer loitering amongst the coffee mugs, absentmindedly turning over a receptacle constructed of elliptical shapes and Hepworth-like holes. In avoidance, she adjusts her route and tries to place a row of mannequins laden with silk scarves and canvas totes between them.

Hey! Hello. The writer says. I was hoping I might see you today.

The curator is trapped.

Oh. Hi. Hello. Look, I'm awfully busy. It's just that I have this 11.00 o'clock … .

The writer tells the curator they won't take much of her time. They tell her they are writing a piece on Smith's use of metafiction in the *Seasonal Quartet*. They talk on about the self-reflexive act of literature alerting and involving the reader to both the construction of the novel and the construction of meaning. They tell her this self-reflexive approach is ultimately political, that Smith herself avows "[f]iction is political. Fiction can't not be … Fiction tells you, by the making up of truth, what really is true."[221] They suggest such metafictional elements help the reader to think "about the system itself: about the people, processes and institutions involved in the production, transmission, distribution and circulation of messages and texts."[222] They tell the curator that Smith's novels uphold the "goal of postmodernism to destabilise the idea of ultimate 'truth' and … generally problematise the relationship between language and reality and the possibility of objective knowledge."[223] They tell her that the metafictional elements of the *Quartet* help highlight the artificial/ authentic paradox.

The curator's head swims.

She tells the writer she agrees, and that how the reader encounters the *Quartet* is part of the creative process. She tells them the reader must negotiate the creative encounters of the characters, synthesising the emotive and cognitive portrayals, as well as negotiate the content and format of the novels themselves. She talks on about living in an era where the "life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation

[221] Begley.
[222] Willis 5.
[223] Liebermann 137.

of its audience."[224] (She was pleased to summon Jauss at a time like this.) She tells the writer that she concurs; the metafictional elements of the *Quartet* draw attention to and problematise the creative process of writing and reading.

The writer asks the curator which are her favourite metafictional references from the *Quartet*.

Well, there're many succinct examples, aren't there? The curator says. Daniel asking Elisabeth "[w]hat you reading?" and "what did it make you think about?" "Always be reading something," (*A* 68, 69, 68) he says. Which is more about thinking and knowledge than plot, I believe … . Hmm, "there'll always be more story" (*A* 193) because it suggests the life cycle, and it reflects Jauss's belief that literature is perpetually mobile, morphable, and interpretable and therefore is always changing. Jauss writes that the "literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same view to each reader in each period."[225] You know, the whole conversation between Daniel and Elisabeth around the Goldilocks story and the game of Bagatelle furthers that point (*Sp* 116-121). Stories are organic, not set in stone, and each reader makes sense of them anew. Each reader is a kind of co-author.

But I rather like the *Art in Nature* blog, the curator says. Could this have been an alternative title for Smith's *Seasonal Quartet*?! Arthur says the blog is a "thoughtful analysis of the shape things take in art and nature and … language too, and the structure of the ways we live" (*Su* 96). I could almost be reading a publisher's blurb on the back of *Winter*.

Then there're the artists in *Summer*, arguing "Should The Artist Portray His Own Age" (189). Quite self-reflexive, the writer says. There's an obvious correlation between their topic of debate and Smith's objective to publish the *Quartet* on a tight timeline, to capture contemporaneity and 'novelty.'[226]

Florence's Hot Air book, the curator says, it's "full of little written pieces … like little stories," (*Sp* 199), which leach out of her journal and into the narrative of *Spring* (*Sp* 3, 25, 119, 223, 323). The reader becomes disorientated and must re-assess the twitter

[224] Jauss and Benzinger 8.
[225] Jauss 21.
[226] On Smith publishing the four novels quickly to capture contemporaneity see Purvis 445-46.

rants, the inveigling websites, and the folk stories they've read as part of Smith's 'story' and re-synthesise them as Florence's creative work, rather than the author's.

Stories within stories, the writer says. How about Bella's novel *April*? Richard quite likes it. His summary; "A lot of language. Not much happens", though it's "[l]iterary … [a] season changes" (*Sp* 33, 35). Seems like the kind of imagined criticism that could be levelled against the *Quartet*.

Ha. Yes. The curator says. Well, according to Sophia "quality literary fiction" should be "thoughtful, dignified, conventional in structure" (*W* 31). Which feels rather like a metafictional poke at Smith's own unorthodox creative form. And although this statement appears to cast Sophia as a "member of the educated elite" (*Su* 70) (as Robert likes to condemn), she could actually be accused of promoting "culinary or light reading."[227] Jauss is dismissive of this kind of writing, saying it "demands no horizon change … [and] fulfils expectations … for the reproduction of familiar beauty, confirming familiar sentiments, encouraging dreams [and] making unusual experiences palatable."[228]

The writer tells the curator that she feels Elisabeth desired a horizon change when approaching her dissertation on Boty. She wanted to talk about Boty's lifeforce, her presence and aesthetic. She wanted to write something emotive and thoughtful that explored imagination as well as interpretation (*A* 224-8). Elisabeth wanted to write that Boty "*made it look like a blast … she looked like she'd be really good fun … energy comes off her in waves … she adds something crucial and crucially female about pleasure*." "But you can't write that in a dissertation" (*A* 224), she complains. The writer tells the curator that "it has often been held that attachment is an obstacle to interpretation – that a felt closeness to a work of art will hamper one's ability to analyze it."[229]

The curator recognises the edict from Felski's *Hooked*. She tells the writer she agrees that Elisabeth felt compromised, compelled to conform to the institutional rules laid out by her supervisor and the norms of critical writing.

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[227] Jauss and Benzinger 15.
[228] Jauss and Benzinger 15.
[229] Felski *Hooked* 139.

The writer talks on and on about interpretive communities (the curator recognises Stanley Fish in their argument) and about how Elisabeth is an actor playing out a code within an institution, adhering to its systems of intelligibility.[230] Ones that were very hard for her to break out of, and resulted in "a kind of work that is eating her soul" (*Su* 158). After all, the writer tells the curator, not all academic writing is open to Iser's gaps and indeterminacy.

The curator tells the writer that we're all part of an interpretive community or rather, interpretative communities. That these communities enshrine dominant values and beliefs that hold sway in a particular setting or time or place and shape the way we interpret the world – and how we read. She talks about the readers within the *Quartet*. Hannah reads several books at once to gain multiple perspectives, Grace is part of a feminist re-interpretation of *David Copperfield*, Lux reads Shakespeare, Elisabeth reads *Brave New World,* the prisoners of the internment camp share old, torn classics by Dickens, Hardy, and Kafka (*Su* 97; *W* 170; *A* 331; *Su* 187).

I agree, the writer says. The role of the reader is acknowledged quite explicitly within the *Quarte*t, through metafictional references and the inclusion of characters as readers. Recognising the reader's contribution to meaning-making extends to all acts of interpretation, all acts of perception. This "assumes that our relationship to reality is not a positive knowledge but a hermeneutic construct, that all perception is already an act of interpretation, that the notion of a 'text-in-itself' is empty … subject and object are indivisibly bound."[231]

The curator's head is swimming even more. She wishes she'd been able to avoid this encounter. She says that she is late for her 11.00 o'clock. But she tells the writer that her essay on Smith's metafictional elements sounds like it has legs. She agrees that the *Quartet* self-consciously places emphasis on the acts of writing and reading and the act of interpreting – of art, words, others.

The writer replaces the Hepworth mug on the shelf and shrugs a goodbye.

The curator makes her way around the stack of jigsaw puzzles (Boty's collaged wall from her real-life apartment; 1000 pieces of tiny black and white images; can you

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[230] Fish 320.
[231] Freund 5.

imagine what this will do to your vision?) and checks her phone. There are multiple banners running across the home screen; messages, weather alerts, notifications from X, a software update available, 3 missed calls, a Smart Watch weekly summary, a new episode of *The Andy Warhol Diaries* on Apple TV and her Spotify list still playing … in a lounge room somewhere.

There is also a notification from Instagram (she follows the tag #encounterswithart because monitoring audience engagement has become an obsession lately). The curator clicks the link and an image of a young woman embedded in Hepworth's *Monolith* appears in the square before her. Her face is in chiaroscuro. She is surrounded by dark dramatic curves. She is simultaneously embracing and being embraced by the sculpture. The caption to her post reads:

"Artworks must be activated to exist."[232]

[232] Felski *Hooked* 20.

Conclusion: The Project Closure Report

Jump forward to the end. It is late, late summer, and the air is heavy and listless, saturated with weekend picnics, beer garden sprawls, belching black cabs and flustered, red-faced city workers. The curator is at her desk, compiling and sorting documents for the Project Closure Report for *Encounters with Art*. It is the final phase of the exhibition, a chance to summarise and assess the goals of the project, including objectives met and outcomes achieved, as well as an opportunity to reflect on the project's limitations and possible adaptions.

She opens a file titled A. Smith. EWA Project Scope. The Project Scope had helped to create a framework for the curator and her team to operate within. It outlined the work required to bring the project into fruition and it established parameters to limit scope creep, keeping the project within the confines of time, space and direction (and cost). Crazy, the curator thought, it's almost two years since this roadmap was written, long before we brought Ali Smith and the *Seasonal Quartet* to life in the gallery. She always felt a pang of nostalgia when she looked back over the founding documents of a now retired project.

The Word file escapes its small blue folder and obscures her desktop wallpaper (Maurizio Cattalan's duct-tape banana) with its bright, flat LED page. Just a quick consultation with the Project Scope, the curator thought, to check whether the goals for *Encounters with Art* had been fulfilled.

Project Scope for Ali Smith and the *Seasonal Quartet: Encounters with Art*

1. Objectives and Goals

The project will explore and discuss how Ali Smith portrays encounters with art in the four novels of the *Seasonal Quartet*. It will follow the lead of the novels, emphasising sensorial engagement of characters, and by extension readers, with the artworks, encouraging emotive and interpretive responses. The project will examine the idea that the fusion of feeling and thought, brought about by affective connection, can promote in the reader/ viewer a realignment of perspective, an opportunity to reassess, an occasion to think imaginatively and to see anew.

The project will encourage a reconsideration of the diverse encounters with art illustrated in the tetralogy, spanning bodily, affective, emotive and interpretive responses. Special attention will be paid to the four artists and artworks that create the 'spine' of each individual novel and the accompanying responses that they illicit in the characters, along with their potential translation into reader/ viewer experience.

The project will attempt to encourage viewers to experience, and consider, the emotive response to art portrayed in the novels: Daniel's emotive entanglement with the creative vision of Boty, in *Autumn*; Sophia's sensuous and bodily encounter with Hepworth's sculptural form, in *Winter;* Richard's physical confrontation with Dean's *Montafon Letter*, in *Spring*; and to the tension and alienation of Mazzetti's cinematic characters, in *Summer.*

The project will offer viewers a chance to feel the effect of encounters with art, like those described in The *Quartet* when characters confront and engage with art. Smith portrays these encounters as transformative, and ethical, beneath or before cognition. Paradoxically, Smith suggests that this pre-cognitive, bodily and affective response heightens cognitive engagement in a continual feedback loop of feeling and thinking. The project will argue that Smith portrays her characters' engagement with artworks as emotive. They respond to the artwork's presence before contemplating their meaning or formulating an interpretation. Via her ekphratic descriptions, she invites her readers to witness art's power to initiate change, suggest alternative understanding and promote flexible thinking that crosses and subverts boundaries. The project is premised on the contention that Smith's portrayal of the characters' affective connections supports the reader to participate in kind. Through description of the characters' responses and her ekphrastic descriptions, Smith inspires the reader to experience the artworks that feature in the novels, and potentially builds on the feeling-thinking process beyond the fictional world. This exhibition aims to similarly foster viewer participation in responsive engagement with art in ways that may extend to the revaluation of social, political and ethical issues.

The project will run over four exhibition spaces on the ground floor, each space centred on one of the novels and its associated 'season.' Artworks by or associated with the four main artists featuring in the *Quartet* will be selected from the gallery's permanent collection and requested from National and International institutions. The goal is to attract in the vicinity of 2000 visitors per day over the three-month summer run and to … .

The curator closes the Project Scope file, a click onto the red left-hand dot of her tool bar triggers its collapse into the housing folder like a reverse magic trick. Yes, she thinks. That sums up her thesis on curating the exhibition *Encounters with Art*. She believes Smith is using ekphrastic description to affirm the affective power of artworks in the *Seasonal Quartet,* seeking to both celebrate their aura and to spark alternative thinking in both characters and readers about social, cultural and environmental issues in the first decades of the twenty-first century. The curator hopes viewers of the exhibition have experienced a similar fusion, of wonderment, of awe, of transformation.

She has a digital archive box on the top right of her screen, broken into a number of coloured folders, which holds all the correspondence and documentation from across the life of the project. The curator toggles through the descriptions: budget, contracts, learning and participation, logistics, marketing, reviews/ articles … they would all need to find a place somewhere in the report.

The courier is here, her intern says, leaning over the curator's desk, wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the slogan "*we make works of art even as they make us*." [233]

Do you have the parcel ready for the Library and Archive Reading Rooms?, they ask.

Nice, the curator thinks (a Felski quote). The t-shirt was part of the merchandising collection for *Encounters with Art*. It was gratifying to see it walking all over the city, a top seller, rivalling images of waterlilies and starry nights.

Yep, she says, handing over the heavy pile of reference books encased in DHL yellow plastic. She'd recently completed her final appraisal for the report, outlining the secondary critical material used to inform and guide her response to Smith's portrayal of creative encounters in the *Seasonal Quartet*.

Project Closure Report for *Ali Smith and the Seasonal Quartet: Encounters with Art*

Overview of the project's journey, key achievements and outcomes.

[233] Felski *Hooked* 79.

Three critical frameworks were used to help explore and discuss the encounters with art illustrated in the *Seasonal Quartet* and inform the exhibition – that of American scholar Rita Felski and the tenets of postcritique, ekphrasis as both stylistic technique and critical discourse, and reader-response theory, which recognises the reader/ viewer as an active participant in the sharing and making of encounters – responding to the artworks described in the novels, the novels *as* artworks themselves, and the physical artworks of the exhibition.

Felski and the arguments of postcritique helped set the stage for a response that primarily acknowledged the artwork's presence and emotive power *before* moving onto secondary (though equally important) interpretation of the creative encounter. Postcritique positions itself as a counterpoint or alternative to what has been termed the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. Rather than yielding to the (often linguistically violent) overtones and approaches of interpretive interrogation, which embrace a digging down, an unmasking and exposing, postcritique instead advocates for an attention to the surface, the recognition of an artwork's presence, the discipline to withhold judgement and the willingness to become involved with, attached to and invested in the work under consideration.

A postcritical sensibility, as outlined by Felski and other postcritical writers, promotes ideas about the value of affective and emotive responses to artworks, responses that emphasise engagement and connection, yet also open a doorway to the critical analysis of our aesthetic attachments. Taking this concept one step further, she argues, along with scholars such as Jasper, Meeks, and Sedgwick, that feelings are not exclusive to thought but are complimentary stimulants in meaning-making.

The fusion of these two responses, the affective and charged, followed by the contemplative, are abundantly portrayed in the *Seasonal Quartet*. Many of the novel's characters are shocked, overwhelmed, enlightened or awed by their encounters with artworks which then triggers in them a perspective change. They imagine different ways of being and seeing, they re-think their relationship to the physical world and others, and they question accepted modes of communication, representation and understanding. Their 'feeling' sparks reflection, taking on a political, social or ethical dimension. The reader/ viewer witnesses the character's contemplation in the face of each described encounter and may share in or re-conceptualise the vignette, responding to both the novel and the artworks described, influenced by their own individual attachment biases, as argued by Felski in *Hooked*.

Right, the curator thinks, as she watches the intern sign off the delivery form, that shibboleth: 'we make works of art even as they make us.' Felski describes an encounter with art as a blend of active and passive perception, a dichotomy between the traceable and the ineffable.[234] The statement championed both the artwork's unique agency while acknowledging that attachments were mediated and influenced by a reader's/viewer's social, educational, cultural and ideological background.

Smith's ekphrasis within the *Seasonal Quartet* is a stylistic device that acts as both a descriptive translation from the visual to the verbal, and as a technique to alter narrative pace. However, considering ekphrasis as a mode of critical discourse was more beneficial to the project as it helped to robustly explore the richness and diversity of encounters with art described in the novels. Ekphrasis within the *Quartet* is explored as a critical lens to probe, question, dismantle and/ or reaffirm western cultural beliefs about concepts such as the physical and fictional world, aura and reproduction, truth and imagination, the politics of seeing and representation, and the power of art to teach, transform and transcend. Furthermore, via the exploration of ekphrasis in the *Quartet*, *Encounters with Art* highlights the process of translation from one form to another (and back again!) and compels the viewer to examine the act of seeing and describing, reading and observing.

The final critical framework used to consider the creative encounters within the *Seasonal Quartet* is reader-response theory. By extension, we believed reader-response theory would translate into reception theory and encompass the viewer of the exhibition in turn. The word 'encounter' has been central to the project's thesis. It is defined as a meeting, a face-to-face engagement that is often unexpected, sometimes confrontational. Therefore, 'encountering' requires two entities in some form of action or dialogue. The project is premised on the argument that the reader's participation was doubled via the characters' encounters with artworks (whether the response of each was harmonious or divergent) and through their own encounter with the novels themselves. Smith makes the act of reading and writing explicit in the *Seasonal Quartet*. The reader is alerted to the work being done by the words and to their own process of decoding them. They potentially discern the novels' movements between the material and fictional world, the translation between visual and verbal description, and note the use of paratextual and metatextual references. This encourages ekphrasistic questing, the seeking out of answers to clues, discovering 'originals' or conversely, the blurring of

[234] Felski *Hooked* 79.

reality and imagination, as well as the awareness of synaesthetic language that arouses sensual responses beyond the visual.

The senior art technician is standing at the curator's door.

I thought you might want to know they're de-installing the Hepworth's today, they say. Crating them up. Do you want one last look before they're gone?

The Hepworth was on the move again, the curator thinks, and it was fitting the work should flow across time and space. Marble was hardly fluid, and yet the piece blends the incongruous, the permanent, the monumental and the abstract with de-stabilised, pierced holes and organic, figurative-leaning form. Like the *Quartet*, the curator thinks, slipping around boundaries. That was part of the project's argument, of what she tried to *show* in the exhibition: that art has the ability to be fluid, to define its moment and still escape its moment, to move through time, to evade borders, and create new moments. The four major artists in the *Quartet* remain relevant now, though only Dean practices concurrently with Smith. Smith seems to harness them, the curator thinks, to explore ideas around borders, whether formal, physical, political or ideological. Art, the novels imply (and she hoped the exhibition had reflected), can spark flexible thinking that challenges boundaries and creates room for new ways of seeing.

Unfortunately, I'll have to visit them at St Ives instead, the curator says. I'm working to a deadline and I'm trying to wrangle all of this (she circled a finger at the computer screen) into a good summation.

She still had to write about the project's limitations and its scope for future expansion. She'd teased all those ideas out last week though, when a young curator had contacted her via email, asking questions about touring the exhibition to an institution halfway across the globe. She'd hunt out her reply and go from there … .

Dear Head Curator of the Gallery … blah blah blah … **interested in bringing *Ali Smith and the Seasonal Quartet: Encounters with Art* to the southern hemisphere** … blah blah … **few questions about your process** … yeppity yep … **challenges and insights gained** … **future projections** … okay, here we go … .

Can you explain a little about your process in presenting *Encounters with Art*, as I can see your approach is not in the conventional critical format usually found in this discipline?

You're correct! And that was somewhat of a gamble for me. But I felt it was not out of place, in the light of Ali Smith's work *Artful* and postcritique's demand to enrich academic writing and thinking through cross-genre, creative and explorative methods. Felski asks, in *Hooked*, whether "our critical languages need to be more attuned to their objects."[235] So, in many ways I was trying to capture something of Smith's intention and mood. But I also think my approach grapples with several of the tenets behind my thesis, that playing with boundaries promotes adaptability and inspires new ways of thinking, and that affective responses can drive a rich cycle of thinking-feeling. Sara Ahmed argues for the importance of unifying thought and feeling, suggesting "what is relegated to the margins is often, as we know from deconstruction, right at the centre of thought itself."[236] There are several passages in *Autumn* where Elisabeth struggles with the rigid style of communication required for her art historical dissertation on Boty. She wants to blend how she *feels* about Boty's work with what she understands about Boty's work. I believe Smith is aware of this dichotomy and works to destabilise this boundary. I was trying to do the same.

I'm curious as to why *Encounters with Art* didn't focus more on aspects such as time, or politics, as these themes appear very explicit to me in the *Seasonal Quartet*?

I agree that the concept of time, the blending of past/ present/ future and that of cyclic and linear time are significant and reoccurring themes across much of Smith's work. However, I was constrained by time (haha) and space. I simply didn't have the scope to cover this. I tried to incorporate discussion around aspects of time where it converged with my thesis, in the presentation of the project and also in my argument about art's ability to move through time. Both Dewey and Jauss have stated that the experience of art is not a static event but rather is a dialogue between different readers/ viewers situated in different times. David Joselit further insists, "the nature of a work of art lies in its experiential inexhaustibility."[237] These points were relevant to my argument that art can spark change through affective-led

[235] Felski *Hooked* 134.
[236] Ahmed 4.
[237] Joselit xiv.

response, regardless of whether the work is contemporary or historical. Nevertheless, if you would like to read more on the *Seasonal Quartet* and its relationship to time, I could recommend Grace Cowtan's "Every Story Tells a Picture," and "The Seasons" by Tess Somerville, in *Climate and Literature*.

Regarding the political dimension of the *Quartet*, again, my focus was on encounters with art and their ability to effect change in the characters and potentially the reader/ viewer. I chose to concentrate on affective response and subsequent analytical, perspectival change. These responses certainly encompass ideas about politics, ethics, and society but I decided not to centre on the overt, quantifiable, contemporary events alluded to or portrayed in the novels. You might read Nicole Schrag's "Metamodernism and Counterpublics" for a more comprehensive approach to politics in the *Seasonal Quartet*.

I notice that you reference Rita Felski and ideas around postcritique quite extensively in your exploration of the described encounters with artworks in the *Quartet*. Yet I note many of her arguments in both *The Limits of Critique* and *Hooked,* are generalist, unfounded and frankly, anti-critique. Are you aware of similar criticisms?

Oh, absolutely! Sheila Liming in *The Los Angeles Review of Books* is quite damning. She believes *Hooked* is "a project that makes a lot of sense if one refuses the work of making sense, of explaining and accounting and engaging." She says that Felski "offers very little in the way of attachment, or concerted attention, to the objects she discusses," and that she "sidesteps explanation in favor of 'gloss.'"[238] Robert Tally expresses similar misgivings, complaining that "Felski's choice to focus on such nebulous forms as the *rhetoric, tone*, or *mood* of critique, as opposed to working through various examples of actual critical readings … makes it rather difficult to grapple with her argument at a substantive level."[239] Tally thinks that the postcritical stance capitulates to the status quo, is resistant to looking deeply or to questioning the way the world presents itself, and is therefore anti-interpretation. Whereas, he argues, there is "so much that needs to be subjected to rigorous critique these days … in an epoch like ours, in which fake news, truthiness, and various visions of the 'new normal' reign."[240] And then, there's Theo Davis, who laments a perceived loss of academic rigor, when he acerbically asks, "[w]hat has to happen to a discipline for an inability to explain

[238] Liming.
[239] Tally 71.
[240] Tally 74.

things to look like insight?"[241] So yes, I am aware of the arguments raised against Felski and postcritique.

And while I acknowledge these criticisms, my interest in Felski and the axioms of postcritique is centred on the importance given to primary, emotive experience with artworks – before secondary, analytical understanding. Not in the battle over whether critique is fundamental or exhausted as a means of understanding the world. It really shouldn't be a matter of either/ or … but both … (with credence given to the affective!) as merging, not conflating boundaries, seems most appropriate to this project.

If we were to exhibit *Encounters with Art* at our institution, what changes might you recommend? Are there aspects that were challenging or insights you could share?

At times I found the merging of critical and creative approaches challenging. I sometimes found my imagination pushing against the confines of the critical framework. For example, I often wanted to do less 'explaining' and allow more of Iser's 'gaps,' to be less demonstrative and more suggestive. But I understood the importance of maintaining a balance between creative narrative and satisfying academic criteria. Afterall, an exhibition is a blend of both storytelling and research. You're creating a journey for the viewer while at the same time applying information panels, giving lectures and producing catalogues to help explore and extend ideas. Despite my occasional uncertainties, I enjoyed the critical component and found the research stimulating – and in the end, its union with the creative was quite symbiotic.

If you decide to exhibit *Encounters with Art* you might consider narrowing the scope (depending on the scale of your exhibition space naturally!). There was quite a lot of ground to cover when incorporating postcritique, ekphrasis and reader-response theory. While I believe they married nicely and complimented each other in the creation of my critical framework, I imagine you could build an equally strong, perhaps more detailed project by focusing solely on ekphrasis or affect theory, for example.

Alternatively, you might choose to expand the scope, add another hall to the exhibition space, if you have the time and space, and include research around time and the political aspects of the *Quartet*. Or perhaps this is another show entirely? A new project.

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[241] Davis.

Look! Is that the time?, the curator thinks. It's drinks at The Harp in 30 minutes, to celebrate the project's end with her team. She saves and files all the documents floating on her desktop screen. She suspects the project's come in slightly over budget, despite the excellent ephemera sales. Couldn't be helped, so much to discover, so much to corral. But that's ok. She's had a blast and learned a tonne. Now she's ready to put *Encounters with Art* to bed. In fact, she's already had an idea for something new. It would need to be bigger. She'd ask for more space, more time. Maybe "1001 Paintings You Must See Before You Die"?

The curator looks down from her office window at the plane trees on the Embankment. Their leaves are faded, battered from a long, dry summer. At the end of the row, she can see a lone tree, taller than the others, exchanging its spent green canopy for a mottled, brown lace. The discarded leaves are slowly pooling around its trunk.

Fitting, she thinks, *Autumn*/ autumn/ Autumn is where it all began. Both the beginning and the end.

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