Zola's Experiment: Perception and Attention in *Les Rougon-Macquart*

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Abstract

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In contrast to traditional readings of his work, I argue that Zola stages the mediation of sensory data in the urban metropolis and *in his own writing* in order to curate different modes of spectatorship that can navigate the disruptive, dissociative effects of modernity. This differs from the conventional discourse of theorists such as Simmel and Benjamin who consider the 19th century – with its industrialization, technological innovation, and rapid urban expansion – an era of fragmentation and overstimulation. Recent scholarship reinforces this position and places focus 1) on the visual, and not other senses, and 2) on the writer's supposedly negative representation of social entropy.

I begin with the cultivation and adaptation of touch in *Au Bonheur des Dames.* How do literature and capitalist enterprise reformat human information processing? Following Benjamin's dictum that "technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training," I consider the *grand magasin*, and Zola's fictional version of one, as a site of haptic training. Examining the shopper's contact with fabrics, I argue that the department store fosters an empowering form of calculation along with phantasmagorical experience. Next, I turn to sensorial mismatching and fantastical descriptions of produce in *Le Ventre de Paris* to illustrate that Zola's naturalism joins together scientific discourses and aesthetic trends of his era. His use of synaesthesia, I argue, is just as much a fruitful conversation with Baudelaire's poetics as it is a serious dialogue with psychologists, such as Helmholtz, who are trying to map out perceptual incongruities. Zola's focus on distorted perception provides not only an artistic education of the senses, but also a kind of "cognitive architecture" meant to simulate the processes through which sensory input is received and (dis)ordered by the brain.

Finally, I read *La Curée* as an enactment of modernity's proliferation of copies. I step through a scientific treatise (Duchenne) and a theatrical debate (over a production of *Phèdre*) that provide theories on how to accurately duplicate "human expression" across media. I show that Zola's tableaux vivants and his embedded *Phèdre* scene are not meant to produce, or suggest higher fidelity; instead, his copies of copies depict perceptual practices encouraged by different, competing media. By depicting various modes of attention within his narratives, and by explicitly showing how sensory data is mediated (and manipulated) in various media, the author ultimately experiments with reader awareness and participation. If we can consider this perceptual reformatting as entailing knowledge sets and adaptive tools, then we can begin to rethink the notions of dissociation and loss in modernity.

To Leo and Roman

Table of contents

List of figures

Introduction

Emile Zola is known as one of the founding figures of literary Naturalism, the French writer who famously approached his *Rougon-Macquart* series as a scientific and sociologic endeavor. Zola considered his narratives miniature laboratories that could chart the interplay of genetics and environmental factors in the modern, human subject. With photographic precision and encyclopedic detail, Zola's work chronicles the particular atmosphere of various nineteenth-century milieus – the coal mines, the railway system, the brothel – while examining the 'logical' outcomes of poverty, mental illness, alcoholism, debauchery, etc. Notably influenced by the works of Hippolyte Taine, Prosper Lucas, and Claude Bernard, Zola's "étude exacte du milieu" was designed, in part, to shed light on the "états intérieurs des personnages," the mental and psychological operations that are shaped both by one's biological makeup and material conditions.[1]

The living conditions and psychic states conveyed in the *Rougon-Macquart* series are generated by the era's industrial and technological revolutions, by its unruly urbanization and rapid commercial growth, and by its spectacularization of the everyday. Nineteenth-century modernity is clearly thematized in Zola's novels. For instance, the writer recounts the transformation of Paris under Haussmann, he describes the expansion of railway networks, and he records the arrival of mass capitalism and consumerism. A variety of scholars from different disciplines – from T.J. Clark and Wolfgang Schivelbusch, to David Harvey and Vanessa Schwartz – discuss the modification of, and growing concern with, forms of consciousness and/or perception in the mid-to-late nineteenth century as human experience undergoes increased technological mediation. Indeed, Walter Benjamin's influential account of nervous (over)stimulation in this era has directed numerous literary studies towards the themes of alienation, fragmentation, dissociation, and manipulation. Scholarship on this historical period frequently highlights an 'epistemological crisis' that arises as novel technologies – from photography and phonography, to factory machinery and mechanical locomotion – reorient the human sensorium. As Jonathan Crary remarks, "part of the epistemological dilemma of modernity has been about the human capacity for synthesis amid the fragmentation and atomization of a cognitive field."[2] As the human sensory apparatus is required to perform new tasks within modernity's mutating industrial, commercial, and technological contexts, it is not surprising, then, that the subject's ability to quantify and qualify external phenomena becomes a scientific, philosophical, and aesthetic concern.

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[1] Emile Zola, *Le Roman Experimental* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 224. Zola thus explains the function of his (seemingly vulgar) descriptive practice: "Nous cessons d'être dans les grâces littéraires d'une description en beau style; nous sommes dans l'étude exacte du milieu, dans la constatation des états du monde extérieur qui correspondent aux états intérieurs des personnages."

[2] Jonathan Crary, "Unbinding Vision: Manet and the Attentive Observer in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R Schwartz (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 47-8. Crary continues, "That dilemma became especially acute in the second half of the nineteenth century, along with the development of various techniques for imposing specific kinds of perceptual synthesis, from the mass diffusion of the stereoscope in the 1850s to early forms of cinema in the 1890s. Once the philosophical guarantees of any a priori cognitive unity collapsed, the problem of 'reality maintenance' became a function of a contingent and merely psychological faculty of synthesis, whose failure or malfunction was linked in the late nineteenth century with psychosis and other mental pathologies."

According to Crary, nineteenth-century achievements in the arts and human sciences (developments that are, in fact, contingent upon technological progress) open up a new inquiry into the status and function of the perceiving subject. Crary turns to a variety of institutional discourses and scientific studies, notably in psychophysics, psychology, and physiology, to highlight new models of, and approaches to, visual attentiveness in the late nineteenth century.[3] Crary explains that "most of the crucial areas of research – whether of reaction times, of sensory and perceptual sensitivity, of reflex action, or of conditioned responses – presupposed a subject whose attentiveness was the site of observation, classification, and measurement, and thus the point around which knowledge of many kinds was accumulated."[4] A subject's sensory experience of the world, despite its unreliable, malleable aspect, becomes a site of potential knowledge. Moreover, Crary's work foregrounds the fact that humans can be trained – via technologies – to contemplate sensory data differently. "Within modernity, […] vision was merely one layer of a body that could be captured, shaped, directed by a range of external techniques, a body that was also an evolving sensory-motor system capable of creating and dissolving forms."[5]

In my dissertation, I draw at once from Crary's methodology and argument in order to question how literature of this period functions as an "external technique" – a technology – that depicts and reorients the activity of sense perception. The term technology, especially in nineteenth-century studies, carries a multifaceted conceptual freight. In this dissertation technology designates, on the one hand, technical (mechanical) means of reproduction and representation – such as photography, lithography, and literature itself. I also consider modern engineering and commercial infrastructures as forms of technology that impact the sensory-motor system. And I recognize various medical-scientific instruments and methodologies that test human sensory organs as technologies.

Zola's investment in scientific procedures infuses his representational techniques. I argue that the novelist strategically uses the perceiving subject in his narratives as a means of experimentation. By displaying distinct forms of attention and perception, the *Rougon-Macquart* novels describe, in fact, the evolving sensory system in the nineteenth century and articulate the various demands made upon it. While my work is anchored in close literary analysis, I place Zola's treatment of sensory data in dialogue with contemporary scientific studies, opera criticism, journalistic writing, notes from business meetings, medical discourses, and advertisements to produce a different understanding of the representation of (mediated) sense perception in the nineteenth century. How and why does the writer set up a literary experiment that tests the ways in which the five senses are understood by the modern spectator/reader? How do technological, scientific, and commercial contexts of the era – for example, the rise of department stores and developments in physiology – inflect literature's ability to identify, challenge, and ultimately train perceptual practices? To what extent might the Naturalist's portrayal of characters' attentiveness provide an *apprentissage* of the senses that moves beyond the gaze/the visual? How does the Zolian text trace a different historical, scientific, and/or aesthetic recognition of the human sensory system?

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[3] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

[4] Crary, "Unbinding Vision: Manet and the Attentive Observer in the Late Nineteenth Century," 49.

[5] Ibid., 51.

In response to these kinds of questions, the following chapters show that Zola's representation of sense perceptions illuminates at once a shift in consciousness and an alteration of the ways in which modern readers and spectators approach sensory experience as well as its technological reproduction. Key passages in *les Rougon-Macquart* describe the reactions and sensations of spectators as they encounter technologically altered experience (for instance, we can think of the dazzled shoppers in Mouret's department store). In these moments, the prose also demonstrates its particular reformatting of the sensorial, its own technical manipulation of details. Zola's perceptual mimesis does not describe a systematic desensitization of the individual brought about by technological innovation. By delineating various sensitivities and ways of being attuned to external phenomena, Zola's work (1) offers a critical examination of modern spectatorship, and (2) provides a kind of perceptual training, or guidance in apperception, for the reader. The *Rougon-Macquart* novels are filled with characters who actively, even critically, watch, feel, smell, and hear their urban surroundings and thus provide models of attention and perception (that are the result of/reaction to an evolving industrial, commercial, technological ecosystem). Moreover, Zola presents his characters as spectators who increasingly experience (and consciously consume) 'reality' and sensory data in terms of its remediation, its re-structuring in a variety of media as well as in different industrial, commercial locations. In this regard, Zola makes spectatorship, and more precisely the spectatorship of mediated experience, something that can be studied, scrutinized, critiqued, or even replicated. The *Rougon-Macquart* novels orchestrate a pedagogy of perception that enables readers/spectators to better navigate the sensorium's rearrangement at this moment.

Perhaps the most compelling – and overlooked – aspect of Zola's ambitious series is that the writer creates a literary blueprint of cognitive functions (or – a literary model of the human sensory system) that exposes the human subject's ability to process and pay attention to sensory information. And he does this while exposing the mechanism of literary mediation. The Zolian text conscripts its reader as an active observer of (the mechanics of) sense perceptions and their reorientation in various technological, industrial, commercial, and aesthetic contexts. Phenomenological explorations in Zola's writing also crucially generate a metacommentary on literature itself for the description of the sensorial often entails an explicit demonstration of the text's aesthetic development, its structure, and its particular effort *and* effect as a technology of representation. Zola's literary experimentation is most apparent when it identifies, showcases, and challenges perceptual practices of the reader/modern spectator. By examining literary techniques that intentionally showcase – and modify – perceptual practices, I aim to trace a different historical recognition of the nervous system and offer a new account of modern spectatorship. My claim is that literature functions as a technology that transcribes and replicates sense perception and in so doing recalibrates, and even fine-tunes, the five senses.

Although there has been considerable scholarship on forms of nineteenth-century perception, most literary and sociohistorical studies of the subject emphasize vision and visual strategies, bypassing the auditory, olfactory, and tactile experiences that contribute to the complexity of the modern sensorium. In general, the theorization of an aesthetic modernity (and, by extension, a modern spectatorship) revolves around discussions of various modes of *seeing* in this period and the ways in which an observer can focus on or tune-out stimuli within a given visual field.[6] Such scholarship studies the ways in which artists and writers redefine their

[6] See David Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); David Michael Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkely:

mediums to capture the chaotic influx of visual data and the experience of fragmentation and dissociation.

Similarly, most scholarship that considers perception specifically in Zola's work ultimately showcases the novelist's ability to represent visual experience. For instance, it is standard in Zola studies to align the writer's naturalist description with contemporary movements in the visual arts, namely Impressionism, or with the emergence of technologies that impact visuality, such as photography, in order to stress the ways in which objects and their textual appearance proliferate perspectives (points of view) and create a hybridization of style.[7] In other studies, Zola's own eyesight and ocular operations are closely examined to explain his interest in details and colors, thereby (supposedly) elucidating his descriptive technique.[8] Others have noted that the author's engagement with the gaze, specifically his use of visual encounters and exchanges, transcribes a shift in visual (consumer and aesthetic) cultures.[9] The *Rougon-Macquart* series continues to surface in film studies because of Zola's decidedly "pre-cinematic eye."[10] Jacques Rancière, in *Le Destin des images,* calls Zola's description in *Le Ventre de Paris* a "montage" that organizes the gaze in a particularly cinematic fashion.[11] And Anna Gural-Migdal's recent analysis of the series shows that the Zolian novel is fundamentally iconic and

University of California Press, 1993); Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*; James Krasner, *The Entangled Eye: Visual Perception and the Representation of Nature in Post-Darwinian Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*.

[7] William J. Berg, *The Visual Novel: Emile Zola and the Art of His Times* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); T J Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Robert Lethbridge, "In the Looking-Glass: Zola and Contemporary Painting," *Dix-Neuf* 1, no. 1 (2003): 43–56; Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992); Jean-Pierre Leduc-Adine, "Roman de l'art et l'art du roman: à propos des descriptions de Paris dans *Une Page d'amour*," in *Zola and the Craft of Fiction: Essays in Honour of F. W. J. Hemmings* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), 89–97.

[8] Edouard Toulouse, *Enquête Médico-Psychologique Sur Les Rapports de La Supériorité Intellectuelle: Emile Zola* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1896); Henri Mitterand, "The Eye of the Painter: Zola's Dossiers," in *Zola and the Craft of Fiction*, ed. Robert Lethbridge and Terry Keefe (New York: Leicester University Press, 1990); Robert Lethbridge and Terry Keefe, eds., *Zola and the Craft of Fiction: Essays in Honour of F.W.J. Hemmings* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990).

[9] Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking (Routledge Revivals): Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

[10] Susan Blood, "The Precinematic Novel: Zola's La Bête Humaine," *Representations* 93, no. 1 (February 2006): 49–75; Anna Gural-Migdal, "Rhétorique filmique de la métaphore chez Zola: *Le Ventre de Paris*," *Excavatio* 2 (1993): 11–23; Kate Griffiths, *Emile Zola and the Artistry of Adaptation* (London: Legenda, 2009); Gilles Deleuze, "Introduction," in *La Bête humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, Folio classique, 2001); Jacques Rancière, *Le Destin des images* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2003).

[11] Rancière, *Le Destin des images,* 58. He notes in addition that nineteenth-century writers invented a style of cinematic montage in order to organize the chaos of modernity: "Les écrivains du XIXe siècle qui ont découvert derrière les histoires, la force nue des tournoiements de poussière, des moiteurs oppressives, des cascades de marchandises ou des intensités en folie ont aussi inventé le montage comme mesure du sans mesure ou discipline du chaos."

cinematic.[12] Yet, Zola's novels supply an ample account of the other senses that is largely overlooked.[13]

I see Zola experimenting with all of the senses in two highly original ways. On the one hand, he employs a very particular *style indirect libre*, or free indirect discourse, that maps out cognitive pathways and mobilizes the reader's attention towards an awareness of the mind's (and text's) handling of sensory information. In narratology, free indirect discourse is typically approached as "narrated monologue" that represents a character's speech and internal thoughts within the third person narration.[14] It is a narratological technique and rhetorical device closely associated with the rise of the novel form in the nineteenth century and with European and Anglo-Saxon modernism in particular.[15] By fusing together the narrator's voice and the intimate thoughts of characters, free indirect discourse portrays a spectrum of (modern) consciousness.[16] My close reading of Zola's novels detects not only thoughts and speech represented in moments of free indirect discourse, but in addition, an elaboration of sensations and sense perceptions that is not reducible to a standard understanding of free indirect discourse. Indeed, Zola plays with point of view and famously integrates 'lower' linguistic registers into his narration. But points of touch, taste, smell and hearing are equally folded into the narration, creating an ambiguous slippage between the character's perceptual activities and the narrator's description. This 'free indirect sensation,' this polyaesthesia as it were, conscripts the reader in a phenomenological experiment.

A scene from *L'Assommoir* in which Gervaise assesses her surroundings while contemplating her life's trajectory illustrates Zola's unique 'free indirect sensation.' Following a series of mishaps and poor decisions, the laundry maid spirals into deeper poverty. Standing before her tenement building, Gervaise has an acute sensorial experience.

> Un jour, se penchant, elle eut une drôle de sensation, elle crut se voir en personne là-bas, sous le porche, près de la loge du concierge, le nez en l'air, examinant la maison pour la première fois ; et ce saut de treize ans en arrière lui donna un élancement au

[12] Anna Gural-Migdal, *L'Écrit-Écran des Rougon-Macquart: conceptions iconiques et filmiques du roman chez Zola* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2012). See also Gural-Migdal, "Rhétorique filmique de la métaphore chez Zola: *Le Ventre de Paris*."

[13] It should be noted that Pierre Solda has analyzed the sense of smell. Pierre Solda, "Les Odeurs dans l'œuvre romanesque d'Emile Zola jusqu'au 'Docteur Pascal'" (Université Bordeaux 3, 2000). And Ferguson has championed Zola as a writer of the senses, explaining that his art moves beyond Balzac's realism in its elaborate description and evocation of sense perception. Whereas "Balzac took the city as an intellectual rather than a sensual phenomenon," and did "not seek to bring his readers into the realm of the senses, to have us participate in the sensory disarray of his protagonist," Zola understood the importance of presenting the experience of the senses in order to articulate " a new and distinctive relationship to the city and to the senses." Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, "The Sensualization of Flânerie," *Dix-Neuf* 16, no. 2 (July 4, 2012): 215–17 . And yet, the dominant discussion of sensorial experience in Zola relates to the visual.

[14] Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978). See also Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

[15] James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008). I will not elaborate a history of free indirect discourse at this moment, nor will I enter into a discussion of all the various approaches – i.e. Ann Banfield, a communicative paradigm vs a Chomsky-esque, linguistic model…

[16] At this point I will not go into the ambiguities of this 'double consciousness' – the combination of narrator and character. The question of whether or not free indirect discourse usurps and dissolves a character's feelings and thoughts into the 'master voice' of the narration will be considered at a later time.

> cœur. La cour n'avait pas changé, les façades nues à peine plus noires et plus lépreuses ; une puanteur montait des plombs rongés de rouille ; aux cordes des croisées, séchaient des linges, des couches d'enfant emplâtrées d'ordure ; en bas, le pavé défoncé restait sali des escarbilles de charbon du serrurier et des copeaux du menuisier ; même, dans le coin humide de la fontaine, une mare coulée de la teinturerie avait une belle teinte bleue, d'un bleu aussi tendre que le bleu de jadis. Mais elle, à cette heure, se sentait joliment changée et décatie.[17]

The passage starts in third person narration, but the act of comparison (beginning with the line, "la cour n'avait pas change") thrusts the reader into the perceptual activity of the character. The parataxis of sensory details guides us through Gervaise's perception of the scene – from her visual appraisal of the dilapidating walls to her consideration of the stench of rusting pipes and fecal matter, to her contemplation of textures and moistures and movement. The vivid account of the protagonist's thought process is delineated by a list of sensations that trace, in fact, certain operations of her sensory-motor system. The perceptual activity described in this passage additionally directs the reader's attention toward the narrativization of the experience. The text identifies and links disparate sensations into a coherent sequence, demonstrating an organizational effort that (1) emulates the character's assessment of the setting and (2) structures the reader's appraisal of the same scene.

Another experimental feature of Zola's writing that I analyze in the pages ahead is a mise-en-abyme of spectatorship. Zola draws attention to perceptual practices when characters in the *Rougon-Macquart* become essentially spectators of their own sensory experiences (sight, touch, smell, hearing, and taste) being filtered and redirected by external techniques. For instance, my reading of *Au Bonheur des Dames* shows that the clientele in the department store are not simply manipulated by the illusory display of luxury goods. The author embeds the descriptive sequences with an awareness of the fact that one's senses (notably touch) are strategically reoriented and called upon to perform different tasks.

Zola often stages a multilayered spectatorship that foregrounds different modes of attention, cognitive skills, and/or means of recognition. Think of moments when the narration describes a physical environment in a sensuous and stylistically lush manner and then illuminates the characters' perceptions of the same setting. Despite its frequent blending of perspectives (its doubling of consciousness with free indirect discourse), the narrative nonetheless reveals a perceptual dissonance or incongruity. The characters' sensorial experience of their surroundings (their focus, their awareness of sensations) does not consistently match the narrator's careful, tedious representation of those same surroundings. In *Le Ventre de Paris*, for example, the vendors' olfactory experience of dairy is decidedly distinct from the narrator's account of the "symphony of cheeses." It might initially seem as though we are guided in these instances by an unreliable narrator (or, we are the witnesses of an unreliable Naturalism, as it were) since there is a blatant gap between the observations of the narrator and the experience of the characters. The depiction of different (competing, contradictory, complementary) means of being attentive to sensory information forces the reader to evaluate the ways in which he/she 'makes sense of' the described sensorial event.

[17] Émile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart. Tome II* (Paris: Pléiade, 1961), 673.

In his analysis of Zola's Naturalism, Brian Nelson detects a "loophole" located in the descriptive passages relating to point of view:

> His formulation of the naturalist aesthetic, while it advocates a respect for truth that makes no concessions to self-indulgence, shows his clear awareness that 'observation' is not an unproblematic process. He recognizes the importance of the observer in the act of observation, and this recognition is repeated in his celebrated formula, used in "The Experimental Novel", in which he describes the work of art as 'a corner of nature seen through a temperament' ['un coin de la nature vu à travers un tempérament']. Zola fully acknowledges the importance, indeed the artistic necessity, of the selecting, structuring role of the individual artist and of the aesthetic he adopts."[18]

Observation is indeed presented as a problematic process in the *Rougon-Macquart*. In my reading, I consider Zola's work of art as the presentation of a multiplicity of observers and acts of observation which productively interfere with the "structuring role of the individual artist." Nelson continues by saying that "[Zola's] various narrative worlds, with their specific atmospheres, are always presented through the eyes of individuals, and are never separate from human experience."[19] I would like to extend this reflection to argue that the human experience – and the activity of the sensory organs – is never separated from the notion of mediated experience. We are cognizant of the ways in which characters perceive (and are attentive to) their surroundings (here we could think, for instance, of the audience's 'devouring' of Nana, Serge's olfactory overload when he smells flowers in the garden, Etienne's visceral encounter with the coal mines, and Claude's visualization of les Halles). The protagonists' encounter with, and response to, sensory data typically occurs within the framework of a heavily detailed descriptive sequence in which the narration calls attention to its own careful manipulation and reworking of sensorial information. We are asked to perceive the process of perception, as it were, while acknowledging the artifice, or craft, that went into its representation.[20] When the novel's own technicality is on display and when the experience of external phenomena is rendered multidirectional, then Zola's work appears intriguingly *modern* and less beholden to Naturalist criteria.[21]

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[18] Brian Nelson, "Zola and the Nineteenth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Zola*, ed. Brian Nelson (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.
[19] Ibid., 5.
[20] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens* (Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de philosophie), 1996), 24. Here we could use a broadly construed phenomenological approach and borrow from Merleau-Ponty's reflections on Cézanne. Zola conveys the somatic experience of coming into commerce with an object and its presence, or station, in a particular horizon. Just as Cézanne, according to Merleau-Ponty, did not wish to "séparer les choses fixes qui apparaissent sous notre regard et leur manière fuyante d'apparaître," but rather to "peindre la matière en train de se donner forme, l'ordre naissant par une organisation spontanée." Zola likewise writes in such a manner as to reveal the "matière en train de se donner forme"; however, the spontaneity of the sensorial experience is called into question Although, on a surface level, the literary narrative may seem to show "une organisation spontanée," it operates in the other direction as well**,** demonstrating a deliberate, structured account of the sensorial event.
[21] In their seminal work on literary modernism, Bradbury and McFarlane explain that "The Modernist novel has shown, perhaps, four great preoccupations: with the complexities of its own form, with the representation of inward states of consciousness, and with a sense of the nihilistic disorder behind the ordered surface of life and reality, and

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The *Rougon-Macquart* cycle (subtitled, *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*) elaborates a *history of evolving perceptual practices*. The series, comprised of twenty novels, depicts emergent forms of information processing. The novelist selects quintessentially modern phenomena, such as speed, mobility, spectatorship, and consumerism, to experiment with forms of literary representation.[22] The narrative techniques that I explore throughout the dissertation – 'free indirect sensation' and the mise-en-abyme of spectatorship – are indicative and emblematic of an evolving understanding of the sentient, physiological subject in nineteenth-century modernity, a new approach to subjective experience that is the result of – and reaction to – these major ontological shifts.

Susan Harrow's recent scholarship on Zola encourages us to examine the *Rougon-Macquart* as a modern/modernist project because of its thematic content *and* its aesthetic form.[23] Harrow demonstrates that stylistic and formal elements in his writing produce varying rhythms: repetition and lavish description create a slower pacing, she argues, whereas ellipsis and elision accelerate the narrative. Harrow suggests that the movement between narrative rhythms "impart[s] something of the chaotic rhythms of modernity and of the rival pressures affecting subjectivity."[24] As the writer creates his own means of capturing the physical and perceptual jolts of the modern cityscape, he ultimately maps out the reorganization of the senses. In this regard, the Zolian text plays out the social theories presented by thinkers such as Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin who considered nineteenth-century modernity as a traumatic moment of extreme shock and discontinuity.[25] Indeed, many scholars (such as Susan Harrow, Christopher Prendergast, and David Baguley) have pinpointed the vivid entropy and atrophy displayed in Zola's œuvre. While I do not deny the significance of dystopic forces in the *Rougon-Macquart* (after all, Gervaise devolves into a pile of rotting flesh), I believe there is another more constructive, educational – or, dare we say 'positive' – side to these narratives that remains overshadowed by the prevailing discourse of chaos, loss and alienation. By offering an enactment and analysis of evolving sense perceptions, the Zolian narrative charts the human subject's ability to make sense of stimuli. In the *Rougon-Macquart*, perceptual mimesis establishes a kind of democratization of the senses. Sensory input is received and interpreted by the human sensory-motor system, a system that has the potential to function in a similar fashion across socio-economic classes.

In his seminal work on mimesis, Erich Auerbach says that Zola achieves a "sensory immediacy" in his description of the working class. Auerbach argues that Zola captures the plight of the coal workers in *Germinal* by transcribing their experience into ostensibly gritty, "sensory terms," and in so doing, the writer expresses the growing consciousness of one's

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with the freeing of narrative art from the determination of an onerous plot. In all of these areas what is being questioned is linear narrative, logical and progressive order, the establishing of a stable surface of reality." Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism, 1890-1930* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 393.

[22] See, for example, David Bell, *Real Time* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004). Bell examines accelerated mobility and its effects on the narrative form. He reads Zola's *La Bête humaine* as a cinematic exploration of visual strategies affected by speed (the railway).

[23] Susan Harrow, *Zola, the Body Modern: Pressures and Prospects of Representation* (Oxford: Legenda, 2010).

[24] Ibid., 104.

[25] See Georg Simmel's 1903 work "The Metropolis and Mental Life" and Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).

situation in modern existence (here Auerbach is explicitly interested in class consciousness).[26] Auerbach notes that Zola's critics "worked themselves into a fury over what they called the repulsiveness, the filth, and the obscenity of his art"[27] precisely because the writer treated his subjects not in "the low style" but rather as serious, moral material. I would like to suggest that what is radical is not the raw sensory terms used to portray the life of the working class individual. Rather, it is the fact that Zola humanizes them by making the bourgeois public aware of similar cognitive operations and sensorial experiences that they have in common. I would like to take Auerbach's assessment of Zola's portrayal of "the repulsive" and "the jarring" one step further, and stipulate that his sensory description stimulates an awareness/consciousness *chez le lecteur,* an awareness both relating to and derived from the experience of mediation in modern existence. The development of rich "sensory terms" produces new methods of recognizing, scrutinizing one's own apperception as well as the sensory processes of others.

Auerbach refers to Zola as "the last of the great French realists"[28] and notices his ability to mix linguistic, stylistic, and formal registers. Auerbach credits Zola's success, in part, to his ability to intrigue his bourgeois readership. This notion of the "last of one's literary kind" and the drive to appeal to an evolving audience brings to mind Walter Benjamin's essay *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*. Benjamin's essay on Baudelaire's lyric poetry and the poet's quintessentially modern subject matter has shaped an entire body of scholarship that examines modernity and urban, Parisian culture in terms of its shock factor.[29] My interest in this essay, however, relates to its assessment of changing readerships and reader expectations. Baudelaire's work appears at the exact moment when lyric poetry entered a state of obsolescence. According to Benjamin, the work receives positive reception because it depicts a modern structure of experience that resonates with its reader.[30] It also enjoys a favorable reception, he contends, because Baudelaire incorporates (rather implicitly) the figure of the metropolitan crowd in his poetry and prose. Benjamin remarks that the crowd became a customer in nineteenth century who "wished to find itself portrayed in the contemporary novel" – like patrons of past eras.[31]

A similar recognition of the reading public transpires in Zola's œuvre, only this time it is not the crowd who is represented, but spectators of mediated experience. This is a new level of metacommentary/discourse bringing to the fore the reader's ability to parse out his/her mediated reality. In the *Rougon-Macquart,* the amorphous jumble of passers-by shifts into more or less *active receptors* of technologically reformatted experience. Subjectivity comes across differently in Zola. Baudelaire's "crowds" are largely an undifferentiated mass of bodies that the poet can

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[26] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (1953; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 512. Auerbach analyzes a scene from *Germinal* and says that the miserable material state of the workers is "unreservedly translated in to sensory terms, with no hesitation before the most unambiguous words and the ugliest scene. The art of style has wholly renounced producing pleasing effects in the conventional sense of the term. Instead it serves unpleasant, depressing, desolate truth." Zola "felt and exploited the sensory power of suggestion of the ugly and the repulsive" and through his attention to these details, Auerbach writes, Zola represented "the situation and the awakening of the fourth estate."

[27] Ibid., 510.

[28] Ibid., 515.

[29] We could think, for example, of Elissa Marder, *Dead Time: Temporal Disorders in the Wake of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Ben Singer, "Modernity, Hyperstimulation, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism," in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 72–99; as well as Susan Buck-Morss.

[30] Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 156. "If conditions for a positive reception of lyric poetry have become less favorable, it is reasonable to assume that only in rare instances is lyric poetry in rapport with the experience of its readers."

[31] Ibid.,166.

navigate, dive into – taking his "bain de multitudes." Zola's representation of the spectator invokes a kind of privileged reader who can jump into, test, and 'take on' the sensory functions of others.

Zola's meticulous representation of urban ecologies and networks, combined with his experimental approach, produces remarkable literary innovation. Speaking of Zola's ingenious, and at the time controversial, integration of multiple linguistic registers, Sandy Petrey notes that, "The effect of the socialized language prominent in *L'Assommoir* is to introduce polyphony into the canonically single-voiced structure of the naturalist description."[32] I would like to suggest, however, that it is Zola's introduction of a certain *polyaesthesia* (multiple and varying perceptions of external phenomena) that crucially restructures the literary landscape of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, creating new possibilities in both form and content, and sensitizing a new readership. As we read the *Rougon-Macquart* series, whose perception and attention are tested, if not, to a certain degree, our own?[33] I will argue that the Zolian narrative notably interpolates a certain reading consciousness when sense perception and modes of attention are displayed.

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Over the course of my dissertation, I argue that the author's multifaceted portrayal of sense perceptions cultivates a new, modern readership that is attentive to cognitive functions and their modifications in various social, technological contexts. The author shows how a contemporary audience (readership) can critically watch, touch and/or hear 'reality' in its re-mediated, enhanced format. For example, in my first chapter on *Au Bonheur des Dames* (the 1883 novel about the rise of modern commercial infrastructures), I delineate forms of haptic training produced in and by the department store *and* Zola's prose. The technological mediation of touch ultimately develops different means of detecting textures, weights, and temperatures. Examining the shopper's contact with fabrics in particular, I show that the *grand magasin* and the Zolian text both prompt a mode of tactile calculation that supplies a distinct counterpoint to the overtly illusory relationship with displayed luxury goods, or what Benjamin calls "phantasmagorical experience." I place Zola's treatment of sensory data in dialogue with contemporary advertisements, journalistic writing, Chambre de Paris business meetings, and a wood engraving to further illustrate that touch and proprioception (the awareness of one's spatial orientation) were being re-thought and represented in ways that suggest a new understanding of the observer's ability to process sensory information (and a training thereof).

In the following chapter, I consider moments where the senses are explicitly conducted, as in orchestrated *and* transmitted, by the writer in order to calibrate, and even heighten, the

[32] Sandy Petrey, "Nature, Society, and the Discourse of Class," in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 777.

[33] In this regard, some scholars have discussed the experience of reading Zola's work in terms of pacing and rhythm. Roland Barthes admits that, with Zola's work, he often skips over bulky descriptive passages in order to establish his own, enjoyable reading pace: "nous ne lisons pas tout avec la même intensité de lecture; un rythme s'établit, déinvolte, peu respectueux à l'égard de l'intégrité du texte; […] nous sautons impunément (personne ne nous voit) les descriptions." Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir Du Texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), 21. Susan Harrow's recent study masterfully shows that Zola's writing "resists linearity with forms of enfolded writing (circularity, repetition)" and in so doing, his texts ask that the reader experience a different narrative flow than what the Realist/Naturalist text would normally produce. Harrow, *Zola, the Body Modern: Pressures and Prospects of Representation*, 93-4. My work, on the other hand, will consider the reading consciousness evoked by Zola when he displays the mediation of sensory information.

reader's experience of smells and sounds. A scene in Zola's novel *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873) elaborates a "symphony of cheeses" in which the odors of various cheeses are registered as distinct textures, weights, and acoustic frequencies. My goal in analyzing these kinds of synaesthetic moments is to show that cross-modal perception (i.e. the sound of smells) is not a simple foray into symbolist poetics, or a Baudelairean correspondence of the senses. Rather, the use of synaesthesia mirrors scientific studies of the period that measure perceptual (in)accuracies and probe the mechanics of the sensory organs, notably the eye and the ear. Like his scientific peer Hermann Helmholtz, Zola draws analogies between the senses in his prose to track the potential rerouting of data. The text offers a new understanding of the human subject's physiological and psychological ability to encounter and qualify external phenomena**.**

After focusing on touch, taste, smell, and hearing, I turn more centrally to visual experience in my last chapter. I consider Zola's *La Curée* (1872) as an account of modernity's transfiguration of art – specifically, its manufacturing of copies – and the impact this has on the observer. Here I focus on "human expression" (facial cues and other physical gestures that connote emotional states) and the ways in which human expressivity is perceived, examined, and rendered legible (*and* spectacular) through its reformatting in new media. *La Curée* is typically approached as an adaptation of Racine's *Phèdre* that intentionally deforms the classic tragedy. But it should also be understood in relation to a nineteenth-century blending of media and proliferation of representational forms (photography, dramatic arts, literary texts, and tableaux vivants in particular). Physiognomical studies (Duchenne, Darwin) and opera criticism of the era strategically turn to reproductions of "human expression" to activate new observation techniques. The novelist's 'flawed' remake of the play both depicts and cultivates a form of spectatorship/readership in which human expressivity becomes legible precisely through its overt technological, theatrical, and/or literary re-phenomenalization. By highlighting a certain homology between science, performance art, and naturalist writing, I shift the discussion of the copy away from the notion of inauthenticity to explore instead how derivative art is a source of knowledge and enchantment.

‘Numbed Fascination’ or Heightened Awareness?
Perceptual Modalities in Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames*

> Think of a treatise on ornament for women or by women, based on their manner of observing, of combining, of selecting their fashionable outfits and all things. On a daily basis they compare, more than men, a thousand visible things with one another.
>
> - Degas[34]

Zola famously thought of his 1883 novel about the rise of department stores, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, as a poem of modern activity.[35] Critical and literary accounts of modernity have firmly anchored the discussion of this era in the context of (over)stimulation, fragmentation, shock and disorientation.[36] Modernity, seen as the great modifier of perceptual experience, has come to represent the ultimate site of sensory confusion and human adaptability. In Zola’s novel, modern activity appears synonymous with frenetic commercial activity. The modern commercial system involves a considerable management and navigation of sensory data. The dense and dazzling labyrinths of luxury goods in *Au Bonheur des Dames* are the result of the business entrepreneur Mouret’s revolutionary “école du brutal et du colossal.” His aesthetic-commercial project is meant to shock his clients’ senses with sharp, unanticipated juxtapositions and gigantic, lush arrangements. Finding a classically designed silk display mediocre, Mouret promptly asks his salesclerk: “pourquoi cherchez-vous à ménager l’œil?”[37] The eye should not be gently or logically engaged. Rather, the point is to bedazzle and to confuse normal perceptual activities. “En sortant du magasin, disait-il, les clientes devaient avoir mal aux yeux.”[38] Customers are frequently enchanted, dumbstruck, or dizzy as they circulate through the carefully orchestrated sensorium of the department store.

There is, I will argue, another component of modern activity played out in Zola’s narrative that remains largely underappreciated: a perceptual reformatting which, rather than implicating a dystopian, alienating force, instigates a novel sensorial relationship with phenomena that furnishes a different, and perhaps even empowering, knowledge set. Following Walter Benjamin’s famous dictum that “technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training,” it is worth examining how the rise of the *grands magasins* in the

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[34] Edgar Degas. Quoted in Roberta Smith, “The Cross-Dressing of Art and Couture: ‘Impressionism, Fashion and Modernity,’ at the Met,” *New York Times*, February 22, 2013, C23.

[35] Zola writes in his *dossiers préparatoires*: “Je veux dans *Au Bonheur des Dames* faire le poème de l’activité moderne. Donc, changement complet de philosophie : plus de pessimisme d’abord, ne pas conclure à la bêtise et à la mélancolie de la vie, conclure au contraire à son continuel labeur, à la puissance et à la gaieté de son enfantement. En un mot, aller avec le siècle, qui est un siècle d’action et de conquête, d’efforts dans tous les sens.”

[36] We need only mention a few ‘heavy hitters’ who spin modernity in these terms: Simmel, Benjamin, Freud, Baudelaire, Marx.

[37] Émile Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883; Paris: Le Livre de poche, 1968), 99.

[38] Ibid.

second half of the nineteenth century entails a kind of instructional force and/or message, be it subliminally or concretely felt by the consuming public, which significantly bears upon perceptual function. One key to better understanding Zola's "poem of modern activity" then is to analyze its representation of the ways in which humans adapt to and create meaning out of jumbled, accelerated stimuli. I would like us to think of the novel as not only a *depiction* of sensorial training, but moreover as a training ground of the senses, for Zola's writing serves to develop and shape the reader's sensorium as well.

The physical environment of the *magasin de nouveautés* – everything from the iron staircases, plush carpeting, full length mirrors, elevators, electrical lighting, and heating system to the displays of merchandise and the circulating clientele – creates a specific space that fosters new and different relationships between humans and objects/*things*. In *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*, Rosalind Williams argues that this is precisely the historical function of the department store: to inaugurate a different set of interactions between people and material goods. In her view, the department store of this particular era induces a "numbed hypnosis."[39] Shoppers are essentially spectators lulled by what Williams calls a "chaotic-exotic" style – an eclectic, flamboyant and sometimes illogical combination of merchandise. In an argument indebted to thinkers such as Simmel and Benjamin, Williams underscores the notion that intense stimulation produces an anesthetic effect: "The counters of the department store present a disconnected assortment of 'exhibits,' a sort of 'universe in a garden' of merchandise. The sheer variety, the *assault of dissociated stimuli*, is one cause of the *numbed fascination* of the customer."[40] Speaking of Zola's novel, she concludes that the exhibit of Oriental rugs, the display of endlessly opened umbrellas, and Mouret's stunning exposition of white essentially *numb* the store's clientele into a dreamlike state because of an accumulation of repeated details with slight, almost undetectable, variations.[41] Here Williams offers us a narrative of late nineteenth century consumer culture (and observation practices) based on the idea of sensory overload and desensitization, an idea that permeates the past few decades of scholarship on modernity. And yet, there is something suggestive, curious and perhaps incongruous in Williams' notion of "numbed fascination" that deserves more attention. What would it mean to have an intense interest or focus based on a sapping of sensation? Is this fascination truly contingent upon the experience of being numbed? And, more importantly, can this fascination relate instead to a kind of *sensitization* or refinement of perceptual techniques? In this chapter, I shift the emphasis on fragmentation and (over) stimulation away from shock and desensitization to cognition and potential forms of agency or mastery. In order to change our terms of engagement, I suggest that we use Zola's depiction of encounters with commodity goods as a means of reconceptualizing how people experience – and, more significantly, are *trained* to experience – objects and their 'shocking,' destabilizing effects on the human sensory apparatus.

It is worth considering how the type of fascination induced by Mouret's arrangements of merchandise involves a cognitive process that Williams' account overlooks. If, as the epigraph to this chapter states, women in this time period are developing and employing new – and perhaps enhanced – manners of observing, combining, and selecting miscellaneous things, we may be able to actually attribute these perceptual practices and mental faculties to the emergence of the *grands magasins* and to the multifarious ways that they encourage shoppers to experience

[39] Rosalind H Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 67.
[40] Ibid., 69. (emphasis mine)
[41] Ibid., 69-70.

objects – and to be cognizant of their experience of objects.[42] *Au Bonheur des Dames* shows us that new commercial systems in the nineteenth century produce an aesthetic experience which is amplified, resisted, and ultimately recognized and appreciated through forms of calculation and assessment which are, in fact, perceptual processes generated by the department store. Fascination in this Zolian narrative is not simply a source of mystification. It is not something which must be overcome. It is a fundamental part of "l'activité moderne," as is a certain heightened awareness of – and active, participatory engagement with – the commodity objects which charm the consuming public.

My discussion of the department store as a generator of modern aesthetic practices and as a trainer of sensorial experiences extends to the novel itself and to the reader's encounter with stylistic features of the Zolian text. The lavish descriptive sequences are a cluttered assemblage of varying registers and semiotic elements that the reader is required to navigate.[43] *Au Bonheur des Dames* is a moment where Zola champions modern aesthetics. He set out to write a poem of modern activity. But the *poem* is itself modern – not just in its thematic content, but notably in its execution and construction as well. "[T]he industrial and commercial processes which supply the thematics of the *Rougon-Macquart* have their analogue in the transformative aesthetics of Zola's writing," explains Susan Harrow. "As a response to the generative capacity of modernity's 'machines', Zola registers – in his style and in his thematics – processes of invention, selection production and consumption."[44] Working with Harrow's argument, then, we may say that it is not simply the representation of modern *nouveautés* and of the activities associated with modern commerce which fill Zola's pages with a certain modern sensitivity; more importantly, it is the depiction of the perceptual contact with materiality that points to a decidedly modernist perspective. Harrow's thorough and astute engagement with Zola's "anxious embrace of modernity," however, lingers predominantly on Zola's preoccupation with entropy.[45] Indeed, the leitmotifs commonly found in modern art are disintegration, fragmentation, a kind of kaleidoscopic swirl, and disruption of forms. In an unmistakable manner, *Au Bonheur des Dames* touches upon these general (and generalizing) modernist themes.[46] But does Zola's depiction of contact with modern phenomena always correlate to a kind of negative energy? Is the Zolian narrative of modern experience exclusively made up of estrangement, alienation, and dehumanization? And if not, what then conveys a modern aesthetics in his description of mid to late nineteenth-century mercantile culture? In order to address these questions I want us to investigate how Zola's prose (de)constructs the jarring, phantasmagorical, and/or fragmentary experience of consumable objects in such a way that the reader is given an awareness of the fabrication of particular sensations. The format of the narrative provides the consumer of

[42] Other notable influences on perceptual practices in this era include: World Fairs, panoramas, dioramas, science expositions, museums, technologies of reproduction, etc.

[43] These descriptive montages impart Barthes' notion of a modern text: a plurality/multiplicity of voicings, styles and registers…

[44] Susan Harrow, *Zola, the Body Modern: Pressures and Prospects of Representation* (Oxford: Legenda, 2010), 45.

[45] Ibid. If we continue from the quote above, Harrow states: "Modernity stirs both excitement and trepidation, and this equivocal response to modernization expresses itself in anxious fascination that fixes on the destructive energies of those same machines, on their susceptibility to overheating, to depletion and collapse – in other words, to entropy."

[46] We could think, for instance, of the architectural reformatting of the store and of the destruction of former commercial systems. Au Bonheur des Dames is described as a fiery furnace, an unstoppable mechanism. We see throughout the novel moments where human bodies appear fragmented or dislocated. And points of view are presented in such a way as to designate a certain perceptual confusion.

literature with a spectacular, oneiric vision of things *as well as* a means of sorting through textual minutiae.

Critical literature on *Au Bonheur des Dames* tends to stress commodity fetishism, the nineteenth-century "dream world" or display culture, structures of surveillance, as well as the exploitation of female desire.[47] And, in general, much scholarship on Zola accentuates the dystopic, destructive forces expressed in his prose. One of my intentions, here, is to think about how we could effectively reposition Zola's novel in a more positive light. What, if anything, is celebratory or affirmative in *Au Bonheur des Dames*? In his *dossiers préparatoires,* Zola explains that he intends to capture the energy, action and joy of modern existence, rather than express a kind of pessimism or melancholic state. On one level, I believe, the notions of energy and action link up with transformations in the contact with – and appreciation of – the vastly multiplying array of objects in modern commercial society. Zola's poem of modern activity reveals a story where shoppers' sensorial experiences are being curated (as in selected, organized, and exhibited) and cultivated (as in grown and nurtured) alongside commercial fares. And there is something invigorating and perhaps even empowering for the consumer in this reorientation of sense perception. If the store's clientele is asked to participate in a crafted daydream, they are simultaneously encouraged to hone their skills of observation, selection and calculation.

Another characteristic element of *Au Bonheur des Dames* which relates to the novelist's drive to represent the action, energy and joy in modern culture is, to borrow Jane Bennet's terminology, the vibrancy of matter.[48] Zola's department store foregrounds the dynamic relationship between the human and the non-human, the consumer and the consumable goods. A traditional reading of objects/things in Zola's writing points to a growing sense of dehumanization, to the menace that objects pose to the "authentic" human self. "Ainsi, l'écriture zolienne […] suppose-t-elle une frontière si fragile entre les êtres et les choses qu'elle atteste d'une crise de l'humain et enregistre un désarroi fondamental devant la prolifération et l'invasion de la matière," writes Chantal Bertrand-Jennings.[49] If "things in Naturalist literature are never passive,"[50] and if there is an increasing imbrication of subjects and objects in Zolian narrative, I am not convinced that this automatically necessitates an antagonist relationship. There are forms of enchantment, mediation and orientation derived from the "active" presence of objects, for

[47] See Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (London: Methuen, 1989); Brian Nelson, "Désir et consummation dans *Au Bonheur des Dames*," *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 70 (1996): 19–34; Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*; Hannah Thompson, "The Erotics of the Department Store," in *Naturalism Redressed* (Oxford: Legenda, 2004); Andrew Hill, "Iron and Glass: Imprisonments in Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*," in *Criminal Papers: Reading Crime in the French Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rosemary A. Peters (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 151–70.

[48] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xiv. Bennet calls for "a cultivated, patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside the human body." Her engagement with the vibrancy of matter strives to move past the assumption that the world "consists only of active human subjects who confront passive objects and their law-governed mechanisms."

[49] Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, "Le Troisième règne: Zola et la révolution Copernicienne en littérature," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 3 (1980): 405.

[50] Joseph Howard Matthews, "Things in the Naturalist Novel," *French Studies* XIV, no. 3 (1960): 220. Matthews, speaking of Zola's œuvre, thus writes: "It is man's fate to be at the mercy of the things around him, to feel their presence, to submit however unwillingly to their attraction and influence. It is simply the irony of the human condition which makes us believe that things are sympathetic and encouragingly share our experience. Man is, in fact, 'possessed' by things."

instance, which do not inevitably estrange people but rather, articulate and generate shifts in modes and models of perception.[51]

The interplay in Zola's text between a state of "numbed fascination" and a more calculating frame of mind is evident if we focus on a particular luxury item that is emblematic of the new and plentiful commodity goods the shoppers encounter: *fabric*. In many ways, fabric constitutes the bulk of Zola's text. We encounter masses of folded or disheveled, packaged or displayed silks, worn or discarded wools, laces, linens, cottons, ribbons, etc. An entire chapter is devoted to the store's inventory and all materials are meticulously accounted for, meter by meter. There is a "silk war" between Mouret and his rival Robineau that drives the plot forward. We are informed about how fabrics are bought from manufacturers, how they are strategically priced, how they move about and are placed within the store, and how they flow out into the public. Fabric is an incredibly mobile entity in *Au Bonheur des Dames*. Zola's attentiveness to its circulation cannot be overstated. In the second chapter of the novel, we follow Mouret as he methodically checks every aspect of his commercial machine, including the "service de la réception" where fabrics flood into the store: "la glissoire lâchait dans le sous-sol un flot intarissable, les soieries de Lyon, des lainages d'Angleterre, les toiles de Flandres, les calicots d'Alsace, les indiennes de Rouen"[52] and the "service du départ" where "les paquets que les clients n'emportaient point y étaient descendus, tries sur des tables, classes dans des compartiments dont chacun représentait un quartier de Paris."[53] As the 1877 image of stocking and packaging of merchandise at the Grands Magasins du Louvre shows us, the department store creates a controlled frenzy of luxury goods. Zola's initial representation of Mouret's enterprise includes an account of its formidable (and unprecedented) ability to receive and disperse materials quickly. Fabric from the store reaches every inch of Paris – physically and verbally, concretely and abstractly. Here, Zola highlights how commodities are increasingly experienced as mobile, attainable, and omnipresent entities. As Mouret states about the store's exclusive silk: "je veux que dans huit jour le Paris-Bonheur révolutionne la place. […] On ne parlera que de lui, la lisière bleu et argent sera connue d'un bout de la France à l'autre."[54] The dispersal and availability of fabrics on such a large scale is important on an obvious level: an increasing number of people are exposed to an increasing variety of textiles. And this exposure to fabrics and to their circulation, as we shall soon discuss in more detail, invokes different perceptual activities.

[51] For more on this line of thought, see works in New Materialism and Thing Theory: Bjørnar Olsen, "Keeping Things at Arm's Length: A Genealogy of Asymmetry," *World Archaeology* 39, no. 4 (December 2007): 579–88; Ewa Domańska, "The Return to Things," *Archaeologia Polona* 44 (2006): 171–85; Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 1–22; Tim Ingold, "Toward an Ecology of Materials," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 427–42; Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).
[52] Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, 84.
[53] Ibid., 88.
[54] Ibid., 87.

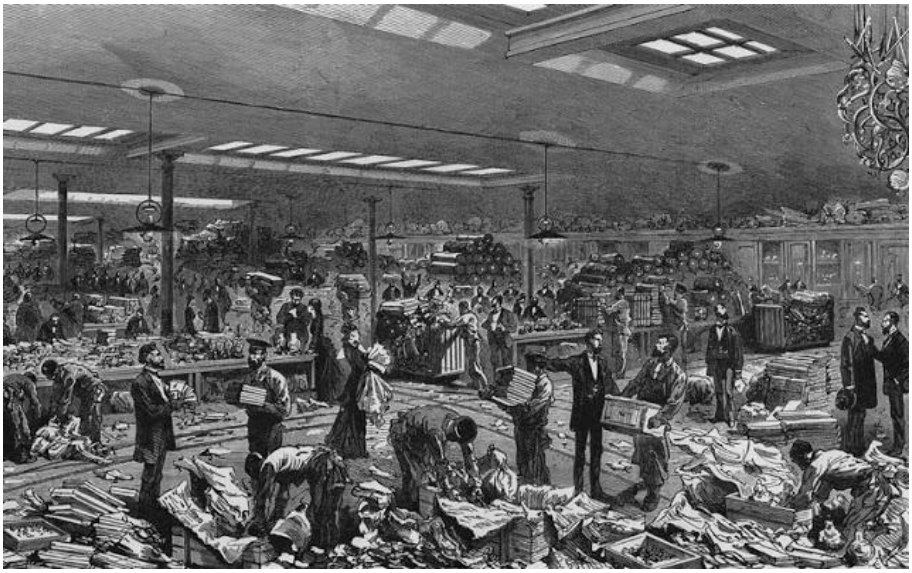

Fig. 1-1. *Sous-sol usine des magasins du Louvre*. Available from: http://laboratoireurbanismeinsurrectionnel.blogspot.com/2013/05/france-grands-magasins.html (accessed July 24, 2013).

The rapid movement of goods depends, of course, on affordable prices. Due to modern industrial techniques, luxury items, such as silk, become reasonably priced for a wider range of consumers, thereby extending their presence in society. Changes in silk manufacturing technologies (the kinds of looms employed, the number of workers needed, etc.) are, in fact, mentioned in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, specifically when Mouret's competitors attempt to start new silk trends. Many fabric scholars of Zola's era, such as Natalis Rondot, speak of an undeniable 'democratization of silk.' Rondot is keenly sensitive of the ways in which the demand to create textiles at cheaper prices has an effect on the overall quality of materials: "Dès lors, amoindrissement de la qualité, abaissement de la valeur des étoffes de soie, et cette autre conséquence d'augmenter la surface de consommation, de donner satisfaction à ce gout de vêtements élégants qui s'est répandu chez les femmes."[55] Zola's narrative is fascinating because it illustrates how shoppers are asked to gauge the value of particular articles. The department store offers a controlled space in which clients are required to be attentive to an entire spectrum of textures and grades, qualities and prices.

Zola's concern with the movement of fabrics and the consuming public's contact with them furthermore relates to a pace of life and to an experience of external phenomena commonly associated with modernity: the momentarily fashionable and quickly disposable or replaceable commodity good is, in fact, a perfect example of the fleeting, transient, Baudelarian object of beauty. Silks and other luxury goods are not meant to last forever. A large part of their allure derives from their ability to constantly and erratically shift in and out of fashion. Zola's text highlights this by showing the way items are stocked up, quickly dispersed, and then 'gone' – making way for the next item of consumption. The consumer-observer in the department store is aware of the fact that articles and fabrics will be temporarily 'in season'. Shoppers consequently anticipate the exposition of new items, the perpetual proliferation of *nouveautés.*

[55] Natalis Rondot, *L'Industrie de la Soie en France* (Lyon: Imprimerie Mougin-Rusand, 1894), 74. Rondot already voiced a similar statement in his account of the silks at the 1878 Exposition Universelle.

This shifting culture of consumption imposes an acceleration of perception. And for this restructuring of the senses to be successful, or even possible, there needs to be a widely effective circulation and communication of subjects, objects and perceptual activities. For this reason there is a strong connection between the *grand magasin* and nineteenth century transportation systems. Schivelbusch has thus noted that the *grands magasins* of the nineteenth century are similar to railroad networks in that they produce, via their speedy circulation of commodities, a perceptual experience based on motion, a blurred vision. Discussing "panoramic vision" Schivelbusch explains:

> It is perception based on a specific developmental stage of the circulation of commodities, with corresponding specific stages of technology in general, traffic technology in particular, retailing merchandising, etc. Panoramic perception of objects, panoramic ways of relating to objects, made their appearance in connection with, and based upon, the accelerated circulation of commodities – as distinct from the traditional mode of perception, which, being still attuned to a prior development stage of circulation, found it difficult to deal with the now accelerated objects.[56]

When I turn to Zola's text, I want us to keep in mind the idea that there is a new difficulty (a perceptual challenge) in dealing with the accelerated pace of objects. Zola's writing captures the ways in which consumers adapt to and deal with this bombardment of stimuli. I will argue, though, that the confusion of perceptions presented in *Au Bonheur des Dames* is balanced, to a degree, by a kind of fixation on, or attention to, tangible details within the 'blurred' vision of goods.

David Bell fittingly calls *Au Bonheur des Dames* a story about communication and communication systems. He writes that commerce and communication go hand in hand. It is not simply merchandise which is exchanged, but also "le réseau des rapports interhumains qui permettent et facilitent cet échange, aussi bien que l'infrastructure des transports qui acheminent biens et personnes dans un mouvement constant."[57] Zola's poem of modern activity depicts the mass dissemination of luxury products, the complex circulation and intersection of humans and nonhumans. But it also depicts another kind of communication, one which mobilizes human perceptions. The circulation of specific sensibilities – and sensitivities – to the material (consumer) world is the crux of Zola's narrative. Mouret's formidable shop "traffics" not only desires and luxury goods. It traffics sensory experiences. It circulates methods of observing. It exchanges modes of perception. The department store supplies not only a spectacular/illusory experience of goods but also a heightened awareness of the physical attributes of *things*. Therefore the burgeoning commercial system depicted in Zola's narrative should not be thought of only, or even primarily, as a manipulative force which fundamentally alienates or estranges the consuming, modern public from themselves and/or from their material world. It is worth considering, rather, how the department store innovates perceptual practices and mediates relationships between people and objects. To do this, let us focus on fabric for a moment.

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[56] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 193-94.

[57] David Bell, "La Communication Instantanée: *Au Bonheur des Dames*," in *Émile Zola: Mémoire et sensations*, ed. Véronique Cnockaert (Montreal: XYZ éditeur, 2008), 241–42.

Fabric is particularly interesting because of the ways in which perceptual modalities regarding this consumer good – as well as the ways in which discussions of these perceptual modalities – changed over the course of the nineteenth century. To put the pairing of fabric and perceptual modalities into context, there are two quotes concerning textiles – one from the early and another from the late nineteenth century – that I would like to put side by side. They represent discourses on consumerism and both reveal a concern with modes of perception. The first comes from a gentleman by the name of Chaptal, speaking to a crowd of fellow merchants at a *Chambre de Paris* session in 1824. Here we notice that the senses of the consuming public are deemed inefficient at judging materials:

> Let us not assume that the consumer will be adept, when making a purchase, at distinguishing the degrees of quality of a material. No, gentlemen, the consumer cannot appreciate these degrees; he judges only according to his senses. Do the eye or the touch suffice to enable one to pronounce on the fastness of colors, or to determine with precision the degree of fineness of a material, the nature and quality of its manufacture?[58]

And the second quote is from D'Avenel's *Le Mécanisme de la Vie Moderne*, a serial published at the turn of the century in which we discover that the consumer is expected to observe materials in an intelligent, informed manner:

> …un cabaretier de Saint- Mandé, après avoir fait emplette pour sa fille d'un coupon de popeline – dont le nom désigne justement un composé laine et soie – vint le lendemain, furieux, redemander son argent, sous prétexte que le tissu n'était pas de la soie pure. Le cas est rare toutefois ; l'acheteur est assez intelligent pour savoir qu'on ne le trompe point. Il comprend que la proportion de soie augmente ou diminue selon le prix de l'article : un satin tramé coton par exemple contient encore moitié de soie ; le rapport des deux textiles se modifie, suivant le but à atteindre, à l'avantage du coton qui forme les trois quarts, les sept huitièmes et *jusqu'aux dix-neuf vingtièmes du tissu*, lequel ne conserve plus de la soierie que le mirage, une sorte de verni fragile.[59]

Together, these discussions demonstrate how the role and perceptual capacity of the consuming individual are in a state of modulation. If, in the first quarter of the century, it is assumed that the buyer is unable to correctly distinguish the defining qualities of a given material, by the end of the nineteenth century, it was assumed that the average customer had a working knowledge of not only primary textiles (here, silk), but also their various hybridizations and correlating price ranges. In Chaptal's account the shopper cannot depend on his own senses to determine the

[58] Jean-Antoine-Claude Chaptal, Chambre de Paris session of July 17, 1824. Quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 51.
[59] Georges D'Avenel, *Le Mécanisme de la vie moderne, 2e Série*, 6th ed. (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1921), 257. (italics in original)

subtleties and worth of a fabric. In fact, Chaptal seems to mock the customers' ill-suited sensory apparatuses that cannot "appreciate the degrees" of shade and softness. The art of a particular manufacturer is lost on them.[60] But when D'Avenel later writes about the mechanics of modern life, it is the rare fool who does not understand the nature and quality of a specific textile and who cannot appropriately calculate the spectrum of its worth in various contexts. Sometime in the nineteenth century, then, the customer became "assez intelligent" to be able to mentally piece apart fabrics into their component parts (D'Avenel discusses the silk content of items in halves, quarters, seven-eighths, and nineteen-twentieths) and to employ a rich vocabulary and savoir-faire about them (everyone should know that 'popeline' designates a mélange of wool and silk!).

Chaptal's argument questions the consumer's perceptual acuity, her finesse. D'Avenel's anecdote emphasizes that the general customer should have an understanding of the pecuniary details of exchange based on an assessment of the material make-up of a product. These two statements complement each other, for they are both concerned with the ways in which a buyer encounters merchandise. In the interval between these two passages, the shopper evidently turned into a different kind of observer and experiencer of objects for sale. Chronologically, Zola's narrative falls between Chaptal and D'Avenel's positions and it captures one of the crucial socio-economic events to take place between 1825 and 1900: the emergence and success of the *grands magasins* – which ushered in major shifts in consumer habits and changed perceptual practices. In keeping with his meticulous writing methods, Zola based Mouret's fictional department store off of a real one, Boucicault's *Le Bon Marché* (which opened in 1852) and gathered extensive documentation to appropriately represent the transformation in retail commerce.[61] Some principles of this commercial system include 'entrée libre' (the public is free to enter the store with no formal obligation to purchase), the fixed price (merchandise is clearly marked with price tags and therefore customers can no longer bargain) and affordable or heavily discounted commodity goods (Mouret speaks of a 'democratization of luxury'), all of which produce a new understanding of and relationship with materiality. Because of this system, consumers encounter fabrics, for example, in a more tangible and concrete way: 'entrée libre' allowed anyone to come into physical contact with the merchandise; the fixed price provided a clear equation – *this* cloth is worth exactly *this* much; and the cheap prices ensured that particular fabrics would be widely distributed throughout various social spheres. Crucially, this system breaks down the perceptual field into manageable, processable bits of information.

[60] Walter Benjamin notes that this quote can be seen as the position of manufacturers/produces taken in reaction to growing specialization and burgeoning consumer know-how: Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 24.
[61] See Zola's *dossiers préparatoires*. See also David H. Walker, *Consumer Chronicles: Cultures of Consumption in Modern French Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 155-167.

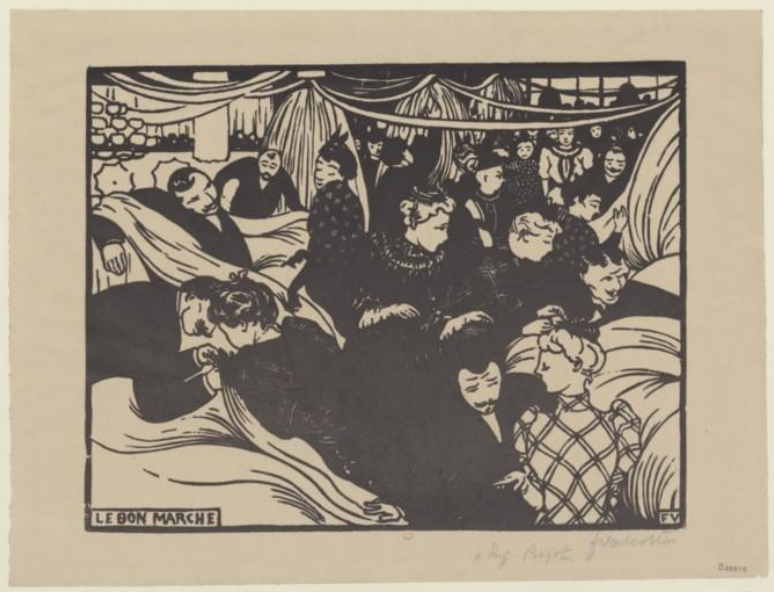

Fig. 1-2. Félix Vallotton. *Le Bon Marché.* 1893. Available from: Bibliothèque nationale de France, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69516708 (accessed September 5, 2015).

In the 1893 woodcut by Félix Vallotton entitled *Le Bon Marché*, billowing fabrics surround a mob of customers. In this representation of the Bon Marché department store (appearing ten years after Zola's literary depiction and serving, most likely, as an advertisement for the store), I want to draw our attention to the *handling* of the material. Notice the commotion of hands: hands grabbing, touching, pointing, and reaching. At the very center, two gloved hands hover expectantly over a cascade of fabric which is being caressed by a different pair of hands. In the bottom left, a woman and a salesclerk hold onto a corner of the material for closer inspection. Behind them, another clerk drapes fabric over his arm while a female shopper pokes at it. In the background we observe a man leaning over and unfolding the fabric. Another man raises his hand toward the arrangement of dangling material.

Within the small frame of this woodcut, Vallotton manages to cram so many people that their density prohibits any effortless movement. The lines and coloring make us want to move diagonally upward across the piece, yet we are hampered by the compact positioning of the heads and hands. These heads and hands are inspecting and experiencing material. A close look at the faces reveals that no one is actually making eye contact with one another; rather, individuals are absorbed in contemplating, understanding, explaining, and/or selecting fabric. We can also detect a sense of empowerment in the female shoppers: the merchants bend to them and they boldly approach the fabric. (The image therefore speaks more to D'Avenel's consumer than to Chaptal's.)

In many ways, Vallotton's woodcut echoes the central elements we find in Zola's depiction of the *grands magasins*. In it, we see how the department store – in particular, the way it showcases merchandise – promotes a visceral encounter and physical contact with objects. People see and touch and *feel* something about the product. There is also an unmistakable whimsicality at play in the textiles. The sweeping lines of the fabric, its abundance (implied in its openness/whiteness and in its omnipresence), and the way it festively floats above the shoppers underscore how the material enchants and captivates the consumer-observer. The department

store is a site of myriad perceptual activities in which the encounter with merchandise activates a kind of thoughtful calculation *and* stimulates a dream-space.

It is likewise important to note that Vallotton's woodcut most likely served as a form of advertisement for the department store. As such, it provides us with another example of the ways in which late nineteenth century consumers came into contact with specific luxury products. As a publicity image, the woodcut showcases the kinds of pleasurable tactile and visual experiences one can have with fabrics for sale at the Bon Marché. And to return to our discussion of the training of the senses, Vallotton's art instructs potential customers how to approach and enjoy the displayed materials.

The same multiplicity of perception in which *touch* is such a central form of knowledge is also characteristic of Zola's text. As shoppers first enter the Bonheur des Dames, pieces of materials hang in arm's reach so that they can be felt and assessed by the crowds : "Des mains en l'air, continuellement, tâtaient "les pendus" de l'entrée, un calicot à sept sous, une grisaille laine et coton à neuf sous, surtout un Orléans à trente-huit centimes."[62] The fabrics are ceaselessly caressed. Their prices are duly noted. Throughout the novel women touch merchandise – they take off their gloves to "palper doucement des pièces de Paris-Bonheur";[63] they experience a "besoin sensuel d'enfoncer les mains dans les tissus."[64] And while this tactile encounter with merchandise is frequently registered on an erotic level, it nonetheless supplies women with useful sensory information. Shoppers are not simply held in the thrall of commodity goods; they simultaneously undergo a kind of training process which sharpens their skills of observation. For instance, in one scene, a shopper gets to touch and compare imitation Alençon lace with "de l'Alençon véritable."[65] When one feverish woman plunges her hands into an overflowing counter of lace – pillow lace, Mechlin lace, Valenciennes, and Chantilly – her fingers tremble with ecstatic delight.[66] But I want to suggest that this haptic and visual encounter with multiple laces critically allows her to compare minute details and to gain a better appreciation of the materials.

A gratifying and informative contact with fabric abounds throughout Zola's text. In another scene, Mme Desforges has difficulty deciding on what fabric to purchase. The salesclerk thus takes down numerous bolts of material for closer inspection:

> Il y avait là des cachemires, des serges, des vigognes […] il descendit l'escot, qu'elle jugea trop rude. Ensuite, ce furent une cheviotte, des diagonales, des grisailles, toutes les variétés de la laine, qu'elle eut la curiosité de toucher, pour le plaisir […] le comptoir avait disparu sous le grain soyeux des cachemires et des popelines, sous le poil rêche des cheviottes, sous le duvet pelucheux des vigognes. Tous les tissus et toutes les teintes y passaient.[67]

The samples are a pleasure to touch. Mme Desforges handles them: she considers one piece too coarse for her taste ("l'escot, qu'elle jugea trop rude").[68] Indeed, the narrative focuses on the

[62] Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, 306.
[63] Ibid., 153.
[64] Ibid., 498.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., 165.
[67] Ibid., 157-58.
[68] Ibid.

palpability and substance of the cloth. The counter disappears beneath a mass of distinct and proliferating textures. Here, it is not so much the fabric, but the fabric's *qualities* that clutter the space: "le comptoir avait disparu *sous le grain soyeux* des cachemires et des popelines, *sous le poil rêche* des cheviottes, *sous le duvet pelucheux* des vigognes." The overlapping and piling-up of perceptual cues causes the narrative frame to bulge, as it were. A textual-sensual excess unfolds. The repetition of the adjective *tout* also speaks to the experience of excess (of texture and text). And, this *tout* reflects a particular experience of excess which is in a state of motion and accumulation ("il *descendait* […] toutes les variétés de la laine"; "Tous les tissus et toutes les teintes *y passaient*"). Although the consumer and the reader may feel bombarded by *every kind of fabric* in this passage, the narration selects and, in a way, compares features of specific textiles. The consumer is shown to have a personal sense of taste and an inquisitive mind. In case the consumer-observer did not have ample opportunity to feel and see and be overwhelmed by the store's array of fabrics, its extensive advertisement campaign includes a catalogue with swaths of cloth conveniently glued onto the pages so that the consumer can contemplate the quality of a particular *tissu* at home. By the close of the novel, Mouret sends out more than a hundred thousand francs' worth of fabric samples in his catalogues: "…on déchiquetait plus de cent mille francs d'étoffes pour les échantillons."[69]

While consumers are encouraged to discover and learn the fabrics by touch and by sight (to use their senses to come to certain conclusions and to categorize the materials themselves), the store nonetheless influences its clientele by providing them the vocabulary and designated means to do so. It would, in fact, be difficult to talk about any unmediated experience of objects in Zola's novel. Advertisements, skilled salesclerks, the opinion of other shoppers, and the magnificent *étalages* inevitably influence the experience of the merchandise. In a more conventional reading of modern consumerism, one would assume that the perceptual training taking place here is meant to ultimately control and condition (in an unequivocally negative way) the consumer as organism. While there are sparks of truth in this thought, I would like to suggest that the mediation of the consumer's experience could, taken in another light, be seen as a means of confronting and/or adapting to the quintessential malaise of modernity: the sense of alienation, estrangement, and fragmentation. The mediation provided by the department store allows consumers to articulate, process, and break-down the experience of material goods.

The Bonheur des Dames offers its own, exclusive silk called Paris-Bonheur. Mouret widely promotes his silk in journals before it is revealed to the public. At a private party, Mouret explains its quality and defining features to his entourage of female shoppers: "un article extraordinaire, une faille à gros grain, souple, solide … Vous la verrez, mesdames."[70] Before the product is even available, consumers are given a vocabulary with which to decipher, approach, and appreciate it. It soon becomes a sensation because of its affordable price and distinctive quality. But when Paris-Bonheur is first rolled out it undergoes close scrutiny. "C'est qu'elle n'est vraiment pas vilaine pour cinq francs soixante, dit Mme Desforges, qui avait réussi à s'emparer d'une pièce, sur le bord d'une table."[71] The shoppers examine the material to see if they are in fact getting a good deal. They are critical of the silk, and since Mouret creates such hype about it, some women are even disappointed when they get to see and touch it in person. "Mme Marty et sa fille Valentine éprouvaient une désillusion. Les journaux en avaient tant parlé,

[69] Ibid., 468.
[70] Ibid., 131.
[71] Ibid., 161.

qu'elles s'attendaient à quelque chose de plus fort et de plus brillant."[72] What is remarkable in this example is that the information provided by Mouret's publicity (the description of his merchandise) is called into question when the consumer encounters the object in person. Although it seems that the salesmen and their vocabulary control the shoppers, here they do not. The women take their education and make autonomous judgments. We may even detect in this "désillusion" an instance where the sensorium's 'training process' breaks down, as it were. The sensorial information detailed in the advertisement does not entirely correspond with the sensorial effect experienced in the store. This is, however, yet another way in which the *grand magasin* manages and orients perceptual practices. In the same way that customers get to touch and compare various textiles in the department store, the publicity likewise furnishes the customer with two fabric samples to compare: a flattering representation/description of the object (provided by the publicity) and the object itself (experienced at the store).

The consumer-observer in Zola's narrative is neither Chaptal's perceptually inept consumer whose eye and touch cannot "pronounce on the fastness of colors, or […] determine with precision the degree of fineness of a material," nor is she the savvy connoisseur of textiles in D'Avenel's account. Although shoppers engage their senses to assess the materials, they remain in many ways dependent upon marketing techniques and the design of *Au Bonheur des Dames* which tell them how to experience and judge an object.[73] The consumer-observer is being (re)programmed to process sensory data. In the store, the shoppers learn more – and perceive more – about the silk (even if in a manner designed to propel consumer capitalism).

> - Madame, quel genre de soie? […]
> Quand la pièce de Paris-Bonheur fut dépliée, sur un coin étroit du comptoir, entre des amoncellements d'autres soies, Mme Marty et sa fille s'approchèrent. […] Des paroles à demi-voix s'échangeaient, Mme Desforges conseillait son amie.
> - Oh ! sans doute, murmurait-elle, une soie de cinq francs soixante n'en vaudra jamais une de quinze, ni même une de dix.
> - Elle est bien chiffon, répétait Mme Marty. J'ai peur que, pour un manteau, elle n'ait point assez de corps.
> Cette remarque fit intervenir le vendeur. Il avait une politesse exagérée d'homme qui ne peut se tromper.
> - Mais, madame, la souplesse est la qualité de cette soie. Elle ne se chiffonne pas… C'est absolument ce qu'il vous faut.

[72] Ibid.

[73] The consumers in *Au Bonheur des Dames* are positioned at an interesting commercial and aesthetic cross-road. The store is training them to develop observational skills that tie into its capitalist project. The act and art of sensing/perceiving become increasingly featured as a means of judging and calculating merchandise. Obviously, the system attempts to train consumers to judge and calculate the products in a manner that ensures their massive and rapid consumption. There are a few crucial moments in the story where consumer agency breaks free from Mouret's machinery, so to speak. This happens mostly when the booths/displays do not properly appeal to the sensuality of the clientele (when the machinery itself is not functioning at full capacity). There is an interesting moment in Zola's narrative where one shopper goes to a rival shop and complains about the quality of a silk garment, saying that Mouret's Paris Bonheur is a superior material. When the frustrated salesclerk explains to her that the garment is in reality made from the very Paris Bonheur silk she praises, she walks out. Once this story is spread through the consuming public, the rival shop fails.

> Impressionnées par une telle assurance, ces dames se taisaient. Elles avaient repris l'étoffe, l'examinaient de nouveau […][74]

When Madame Marty asserts that the material is too fine, the salesclerk gives her a lesson in the silk's determining qualities: it is flexible and will not crease. With that added information, the ladies contemplate the material differently. Examining and re-examining items, questioning and calculating value – these are activities generated in and by the department store. The relationship here between the female shopper and the merchandise is not one based on pure illusion – and it does not fully hinge upon manipulation or exploitation either. An art of detection, differentiation, and examination is cultivated in the store.

Another way in which the store furnishes information about its products and encourages a different perception of goods is with designated price points. As briefly mentioned, the fixed price system was an integral part of the new set of commercial practices ushered in by the *grands magasins* and it restructured consumer habits by clearly defining and setting the value of goods. In Zola's narrative, price tags have a great impact, in part, because of their novelty. Price tags are found throughout Zola's store and they participate importantly in the production of both fantasy and knowledge about materials. These items are strategically located within the *étalages* and their presence often brings a concrete – yet surreal – element into the narration. My reading of these quintessential commercial items is that they operate as crucial pivot points around which the consumer moves – consciously and subconsciously – between various states of perception and calculation. Price tags contribute to both an aesthetic and cognitive experience of textiles.

The opening chapter introduces us to the protagonist, Denise, and to her initial appraisal of Mouret's formidable enterprise. As she stands in front of Au Bonheur des Dames with her brothers, she utters, fittingly, the first words of the novel, "regarde un peu." What they begin to see is the ambulatory frenzy of salesclerks within the building, the eminent store front and decorative sign, and then the magnificent *étalage de la porte central*. This is the novel's first description of Mouret's shop windows. Here, I would like to point out the playful swirl between modes of apprehending fabrics which is accented by the placement of price tags.

> Cela partait de haut, des pièces de lainage et de draperie, mérinos, cheviottes, molletons, tombaient de l'entresol, flottantes comme des drapeaux, et dont les tons neutres, gris ardoise, bleu marine, vert olive, étaient coupés par les pancartes blanches des étiquettes. A côté, encadrant le seuil, pendaient également des lanières de fourrure, des bandes étroites pour garnitures de robe, la cendre fine des dos de petit-gris, la neige pure des ventres de cygne, les poils de lapin de la fausse hermine et de la fausse martre. Puis, en bas, dans des casiers, débordaient des articles de bonneteries vendus pour rien, gants et fichus de laine tricotés, capelines, gilets, tout un étalage d'hiver, aux couleurs bariolées, chinées, rayées, avec des taches saignantes de rouges. Denise vit une tartanelle à quarante-cinq centimes, des bandes de vison d'Amérique à un franc, et des mitaines à cinq sous.[75]

[74] Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, 162-63.
[75] Ibid., 46.

At first glance, the shop's central display is about tantalizing the consumer-observer with an abundance of *nouveautés* and their creative arrangement. Not surprisingly, we are met with an entangled, dense composition of colors and textures and styles. The specific varieties of cloth and fashionable accoutrements are dangled ("*tombaient* de l'entresol, *flottantes* comme des drapeaux", "*pendaient* également des lanières de fourrure") and projected ("*débordaient* des articles") in such a way as to evoke a consideration of their physical *and* financial weight. The sweeping motion of the wools' airy tones is sliced up, rather violently, by white price cards. These cards cut up and call attention to the phantasmagoria. Yet, they are interestingly registered as "blank," without numbers. The "pancartes blanches des étiquettes" become part of the color scheme, as it were. This is followed by a recognition of the gradation of strips of fur – from the pure, snowlike quality of swansdown to the fakeness of imitation ermine. Moving from the "pure" to the "fausse" and from the "de haut" to the "en bas" we are, in fact, moving along a price range. Heaped at the bottom of the display are the frivolous articles "vendus pour rien." Denise scans the display and thus sees "une tartanelle à quarante-cinq centimes, des bandes de vison d'Amérique à un franc, et des mitaines à cinq sous." Within this rich collage of articles individual objects appear with – or perhaps even because of – a *chiffre*. The price tags contribute to the overall effect of the display, that is, to the movement between a dreamscape and a certain mathematical computation/recognition.

Zola calls our attention to the fact that prices are increasingly visible and are experienced by the consuming public in a variety of ways. The *grands magasins* use of clearly marked price cards makes shoppers conscious of the designated value of merchandise, which, in turn, supplies the shopper with a kind of equational approach to luxury goods. If we return to the D'Avenel quote examined at the beginning of the chapter, we can see that the average consumer is expected to have a knowledge set that includes not only the ability to differentiate between types and hybrids of fabric but also the capacity to consider methodologically the price point of articles: "l'acheteur est assez intelligent pour savoir qu'on ne le trompe point. Il comprend que la proportion de soie augmente ou diminue selon le prix de l'article : un satin tramé coton par exemple contient encore moitié de soie ; le rapport des deux textiles se modifie, suivant le but à atteindre, à l'avantage du coton qui forme les trois quarts, les sept huitièmes et *jusqu'aux dix-neuf vingtièmes du tissu*."[76] There is an understanding of the standard cost of each separate fabric and how the price of mixed materials varies depending on the exact combination of cloths.

Although price tags elicit a computational encounter with merchandise which seems to point toward a more logical assessment of materials, Zola also illustrates that price tags can have an unsettling and uncanny effect on the consumer-observer. They do not always disrupt or call attention to a certain fantasy realm; rather, they sometimes enhance and/or distort it. In one scene, Henriette wanders through Mouret's store and is disoriented by the (omni)presence of price tags: "Mme Desforges ne voyait de toutes parts que les grandes pancartes, aux chiffres énormes, dont les taches crues se détachaient sur les indiennes vives, les soies luisantes, les lainages sombres."[77] The price tags pop out and fill the visual field with larger-than-life numbers. There is something garish in their directness and in the way they interact with the animated qualities of different fabrics. If the *prix fixe* is a means of structuring the client's experience of textiles, Zola's novel depicts this shift in consumer habits in a multi-dimensional manner. The *étiquettes* simultaneously ground and destabilize the encounter between consumers and

[76] D'Avenel, *Le Mécanisme de la vie moderne*, 257.
[77] Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, 319.

commodity goods and thus reveal a process of moving back and forth between perceptual modalities.

The oscillation – and tension – between a fantastical and a more logical relationship with fabrics is further highlighted in Zola's narrative when he takes us beyond the confines of the department store. The perceptual techniques stimulated in *Au Bonheur des Dames* circulate in other domains as well. In the third chapter of the novel, Henriette Desforges entertains company at her lofty residence. On a basic level the chapter establishes various connections and associations between key characters. But a careful look reveals that the milling about of guests occurs in tandem with a circulation of merchandise and, more importantly, with a distribution of modes of assigning worth to particular luxury items. As we are introduced to the circle of bourgeois women we are simultaneously introduced to their manners of imagining, examining, and assessing material objects. While enthusiastically chatting about the latest fashions and fabric trends, each woman dreams up her special attire:

> - …je me fais faire un corsage pareil avec un satin…
> - Moi, interrompait Mme Bourdelais, j'ai voulu du velours, oh ! une occasion !
> Mme Marty demandait : Hein ? combien la soie ?
> Puis, toutes les voix repartirent ensemble. Mme Guibal, Henriette, Blanche, mesuraient, coupaient, gâchaient. C'était un saccage d'étoffes, la mise au pillage des magasins…[78]

The women thus envision apparel in silks, satins and velvets. They consider the price point of various luxury items. They *measure, cut,* and *waste* the imagined materials. This episode outside of the department store reveals new and developing modes of approaching and assessing materiality – be it imagined or real. In this instance, we note that the women/consumers engage in a creative process, extending and improvising upon Mouret's project.

Along with imagined luxury goods, other, tangible items float through Henriette's drawing room and come into contact with each woman. The first actual object to circulate is a fan [éventail]. The chapter begins *in medias res*: Mouret's entrance has apparently interrupted the ladies' discussion of Henriette's recently purchased fan. After flirtatiously greeting him with the fan in question ("du bout de l'éventail, elle lui donna gaiement un léger coup au visage") she returns to her guests, and returns the fan to them ("elle remit l'éventail à une des quatre dames"). As the fan is passed around, each woman critiques it, discusses it, handles it:

> « Mais il n'est pas vilain du tout, ce chantilly ! » s'écrira Mme Bourdelais, qui tenait l'éventail » […] « Et tu as payé le morceau vingt-cinq francs ? reprit-elle en examinant chaque maille de la dentelle.
> […] l'éventail faisait le tour de ces dames. Mme Guibal lui accorda à peine un coup d'œil. […] « Regarde donc le chiffre, Blanche. Quel joli travail !... C'est le chiffre qui a dû augmenter ainsi la monture » […] Elle (Mme des Boves) paraissait toute remuée par

[78] Ibid., 128.

> la délicatesse du chiffre, comme envahie d'un désir dont l'émotion pâlissait son regard.[79]

Here, the women are engaged in a collective examination of the fan and its component parts. Each stitch of the lace is contemplated by Mme Bourdelais. Mme Guibal dismisses it for she finds the "monture" gastly overpriced. And Mme de Boves incites her daughter to appreciate the intricate work of the "chiffre". As the fan passes around, the women pass around their reactions.

When Mouret presents his opinion of Henriette's fan, he explains how the parts and materials of the fan could have all been found at his store for a considerably cheaper price. This proclamation that the fan could have been had at a lower price point causes it to circulate energetically once again among the ladies: "Elle [Mme de Boves] avait repris l'éventail, l'examinait de nouveau avec sa fille Blanche […]. Puis, une seconde fois, l'éventail fit le tour de ces dames, au milieu des remarques et des exclamations."[80] Mouret upsets the flow, so to speak, by spreading the notion of cheaper prices. The fan, whose practical application as an object is to circulate air, now aids in the dispersal and movement of ideas, desires, and critical thought.

At the social gathering, Mme Marty's red leather sack becomes another major focal point. It first gains attention because she announces that it contains newly purchased merchandise from the Bonheur des Dames. Since she cannot decide whether or not to display the contents of the sack (for fear that her husband might see and disapprove of her excessive spending), Mme Marty unintentionally creates extra intrigue by constantly shifting its position and thereby drawing further attention to its mysterious contents: "Et elle n'ouvrait pas son sac, elle le serrait sur ses genoux" […] "Elle se décida enfin à ouvrir son sac. Ces dames allongeaient le cou" […] "Vivement elle avait refermé le sac, et elle le fit disparaître sous un fauteuil" […] "elle le reprit sur ses genoux."[81]

In this passage the sack is given priority not simply for comedic effect. (The ladies laugh at Mme Marty because she fumbles with the sack and blushes about how she handles it). And while the little red bag playfully elucidates the uncanny morphing/overlapping qualities of humans and objects (Mme Marty *is* her red leather sack), my main interest in it relates to its evocation of Au Bonheur des Dames. The sack clearly serves as a kind of micro-version of the department store itself, where objects go in and out, where pleasures are stirred and activated, and where accessibility and affordability are advertised. This is most evident once Mme Marty, driven by "une sorte de besoin sensuel" frenetically begins to *étaler* her new acquisitions by opening and closing her sack:

> Et, brusquement […] elle ouvrit le sac, sortit quelques mètres d'une étroite dentelle roulée autour d'un carton.
> - C'est cette valenciennes pour ma fille, dit-elle. Elle a trois centimètres, et délicieuse, n'est-ce pas ?... Un franc quatre-vingt-dix.
> La dentelle passa de main en main. Ces dames se récriaient. Mouret affirma qu'il vendait ces petites garnitures au prix de fabrique. Pourtant, Mme Marty avait refermé le sac, comme pour y cacher des choses qu'on ne montre pas. Mais, devant le succès de

[79] Ibid., 111-12.
[80] Ibid., 134.
[81] Ibid., 113-14.

la valenciennes, elle ne put résister à l'envie d'en tirer encore un mouchoir.
- Il y a aussi ce mouchoir… De l'application Bruxelles, ma chère… Oh ! Une trouvaille ! Vingt francs !
Et dès lors, le sac devint inépuisable. Elle rougissait de plaisir, une pudeur de femme qui se déshabille la rendait charmante et embarrassée, à chaque article nouveau qu'elle sortait. C'était une cravate en blonde espagnole de trente francs ; elle n'en voulait pas, mais le commis lui avait juré qu'elle tenait la dernière et qu'on allait les augmenter. C'était ensuite une voilette en chantilly : un peu chère, cinquante francs […].
- Mon Dieu ! les dentelles, c'est joli ! Répétait-elle avec son sourire nerveux. Moi, quand je suis là-dedans, j'achèterais le magasin.
- Et ceci ? lui demanda Mme de Boves en examinant un coupon de guipure.
- ça, répondit-elle, c'est un entre-deux… il y en a vingt-six mètres. Un franc le mètre, comprenez-vous ![82]

The enumeration of items along with their particular measurements and values turn Mme Marty's sack into a magical receptacle for endless volumes of miscellaneous material. The red leather sack offers a seemingly perpetual "il y a aussi…" Her *sac inépuisable* contains an eclectic mix: Valenciennes, a handkerchief with Brussels trimming, a scarf with Spanish lace, a veil in Chantilly, scraps of lace material with a pretty little pattern. Each article is revealed in accordance with its price point and here too, the sack appears to expand as the costs crescendo: one franc ninety, twenty francs, thirty francs, fifty francs. When Mme Marty confesses that she could easily buy the entire store ("quand je suis là-dedans, j'achèterais le magasin") the sack supplies the proof with its disparate articles and wide range of prices. Mme Marty unequivocally brings the store into Mme Desforges' drawing-room.

Along with her red leather purse, Mme Marty notably brings a set of behaviors and practices fostered by Mouret's emerging commercial system. On the one hand, she adopts the language of a salesclerk, enticing her companions with the right combination of practical and whimsical product descriptions ("Elle a trois centimètres, et délicieuse, n'est-ce pas ?... Un franc quatre-vingt-dix"). Mme Marty effectively echoes the register and message that Mouret himself provides a few pages earlier when he states that his store is filled with: "d'autres étoffes étonnantes de bon marché et de richesse […] Ainsi je vous recommande notre Cuir d'Or, un taffetas d'un brillant incomparable… Dans les soies de fantaisie, il y a des dispositions charmantes, des dessins choisis entre mille par notre acheteur; et, comme velours, vous trouverez la plus riche collection de nuance."[83] Mme Marty promotes the idea of cheap luxury goods and recommends specific products out of the store's massive selection. On the other hand, Mme Marty's nervous arousal and her coquettish handling of her purchases set her firmly in the role of seduced consumer. Even though she does not want the "cravate en blonde espagnole de trente francs" the clerk easily persuades her to buy it. This overlapping of identities arguably relates to the modulation of the consumer's interactions with merchandise. Her perception of material is

[82] Ibid., 134-35.
[83] Ibid., 132.

mediated and altered by the department store. She engages in a fantastical, passion-oriented relationship with the fabrics that also includes a certain amount of calculation and assessment. We should ask ourselves not only what Mme Marty *feels* about these luxury objects (aroused, excited, pleased, slightly embarrassed, etc.), but also what she knows specifically about them (the styles, measurements, prices, discounts, etc.). The Bonheur des Dames clearly generates a kind of knowledge about consumable items along with the sensorial-sensual pleasures of them.

Furthermore, this encounter with Mme Marty's selected fabrics and accessories reveals an important network – or meshwork – of humans and *things* where the boundaries between subjects and objects appear porous and where the non-human entities have a distinctly animated quality. The tight-knit social circle (the narration metonymically refers to the ladies as "un étroit cercle de jupes" multiple times) is bound together in the action of touching and examining material. The circle is likewise formed/linked by a circulation of desire and fantasy concerning the materials. Within this loop of collective, sensorial experience, it is the lace – the thing – which is given agency. The passage continues:

> …ces femmes n'avaient pas lâché les dentelles. Elles s'en grisaient. Les pièces se déroulaient, allaient et revenaient de l'une à l'autre, les rapprochant encore, les liant de fils légers. C'était, sur leurs genoux, la caresse d'un tissu miraculeux de finesse, où leurs mains coupables s'attardaient.[84]

The women, in rapture, contemplate the lace in their hands and across their knees. The sack's contents come to life as they weave their way among the women, connecting the characters with metaphorical and literal threads. There is sense of animation, motion and energy in the lightness and gentleness of the material. The narration emphasizes the contact – or communion – of bodies and fabrics. Here, the fabric is actively *doing* something.

This scene effectively offers us another means of approaching the question of 'numbed fascination' and heightened awareness in Zola's novel. The women are attentive to the fine details of the merchandise and display a willingness to gain more knowledge about particular items (i.e. they carefully listen to Mouret's explanation of his luxury goods and their assigned worth). They are captivated by the Bonheur des Dames' merchandise and let the objects lead them into a realm of pseudo-erotic reverie, which speaks more to the notion of "numbed fascination" than to "heightened awareness." However, the women's dream scape neatly concludes when "Mme Marty replaçait les dentelles au fond de son petit sac."[85] Why, then, did the enormity and magnificence of Mme Marty's red leather sack suddenly disappear? How did the lace – that once awe-inspiring material – sink, almost unnoticed, to the bottom of an unremarkable sack? The scene's closing *litote* calls attention to the fantastically out-of-proportioned sack and its contents. The women's sudden disinterest in the luxury goods could be explained in multiple ways. From one standpoint, we could interpret this as a farcical representation of the bourgeoisie's shopping whims and habits, and as a commentary on modernity's quickly changing, irrational fashion trends. We could see this 'deflated' sack in yet another light: as a depiction of the complex and sometimes contradictory perceptual activities of modern consumers. If at one moment Mme Marty's fine fabrics are experienced as quasi-mystical entities that arouse primordial passion, the next minute they are perhaps seen

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 137.

differently, more 'realistically' or clear-headedly, as pieces of cloth purchased for *x* amount per meter. This is also an instance where the fabrics are "tamed." Their excessiveness fits tidily into an unassuming "petit sac." The fantasy can be reeled in. The illusion can be contained.

Throughout Zola's novel, especially within the *grand magasin*, the eye and the touch of the consuming public are called upon to participate in spectacle, to get caught up in full-blown illusion, to perform a perceptual (in)activity that correlates, in many aspects, to Rosalind Williams' concept of 'numbed fascination.' The illusory force of the merchandise on display (its power to arrest and stun and furnish elaborate dream sequences) is also emblematic and informative of the sensorium's complex training by the department store. Williams stresses that the chaotically and exotically organized saturation of details in a shop display makes the viewer 'zone-out'. Undeniably, shoppers *are* mesmerized by Mouret's displays. However, considering the physical involvement with – and the more or less active assessment of – material exhibited in the store, these spectacular, illusory instances could be approached differently. I would like us to think of Mouret's fantastical arrangements in terms of their ability to open up, assign, and express modes of apperceiving objects. Mouret's displays offer a form of *apprentissage* about materiality.

To be clear, let's examine a moment in Zola's narrative where there is a hypnotic experience. This is a description of one of Mouret's famous silk displays, a display that he personally and intentionally (dis)organizes to (re)orient and enhance the sensitivities and sensibilities of the store's clientele.

> …comme un ruissellement d'étoffe, une nappe bouillonnée tombant de haut et s'élargissant jusqu'au parquet. Des satins clairs et des soies tendres jaillissaient d'abord : les satins à la reine, les satins renaissance, aux tons nacrés d'eau de source ; les soies légères aux transparences de cristal, vert Nil, ciel indien, rose de mai, bleu Danube. Puis, venaient des tissus plus forts, les satins merveilleux, les soies duchesse, teintes chaudes, roulant à flots grossis. Et, en bas, ainsi que dans une vasque, dormaient les étoffes lourdes, les armures façonnées, les damas, les brocarts, les soies perlées et lamées, au milieu d'un lit profond de velours, tous les velours, noirs, blancs, de couleur, frappés à fond de soie ou de satin, creusant avec leurs taches mouvantes un lac immobile où semblaient danser des reflets de ciel et de paysage. Des femmes, pâles de désirs, se penchaient comme pour se voir. Toutes, en face de cette cataracte lâchée, restaient debout, avec la peur sourde d'être prises dans le débordement d'un pareil luxe et avec l'irrésistible envie de s'y jeter et de s'y perdre.[86]

The varieties of silks, satins, and velvets gush forth, bubble over, and flow past the enchanted observer in a sublime manner. As the fabrics playfully shimmer and ripple, solids transform into liquids. A sense of overflowing is achieved not only from the composition of a bucolic lake and waterfall scene, but additionally from the excessive outpouring of objects (*first* the satins *gush forth*, *next come* thick fabrics, *at the bottom* are heaped more velvets) and from the accumulation

[86] Ibid., 159-60.

of disparate, interlocking visual and tactile elements: pale satins, pearly nuances, transparent silks, thick fabrics, brocades, velvets of all kinds.

This "débordement" depends on the ordering of singular and fragmented items into a kind of structure that evokes a whole. As Jean Baudrillard notes in *La Societe de la Consommation*, the abundance of the grands magasins is strategically organized into collections of objects in which individual objects *speak out* because of relational juxtapositions and/or arrangements. Baudrillard writes: "Presque tous les magasins […] offrent une gamme d'objets différenciés, qui s'appellent, se répondent et se déclinent les uns les autres. […] Peu d'objets sont aujourd'hui offert seuls, sans un contexte d'objets qui les parlent." He further explains how the order – and sometimes apparent disorder – of consumable objects is always designed to "orienter l'impulsion d'achat dans des *réseaux* d'objets."[87] And while Baudrillard's analysis deals specifically with twentieth century consumerism, the notion that there exists a certain semiotics in the arrangements of consumer goods is relevant for our appraisal of Mouret's commercial system and its effects on sensorial experience. For this particular silk display, Mouret wanted "des écroulements, comme tombés au hasard des casiers éventrés, et il les voulait flambants des couleurs les plus ardentes, *s'avivant l'un par l'autre*."[88] In Zola's narrative, the renaissance satins or the duchesse silks alone could not produce the same level of stimulation – or simulacrum. There exists a communication system, a peculiar grammar, which is being read and/or experienced, even if subliminally, by the consumer-observer. The variegated fabrics speak to and with one another - and to the consumer-observer.

With this passage in mind, we could also return to Williams' concept of the "exotic-chaotic" style. She notes that in over-the-top arrangements of eclectic goods, "the purpose of the materials is not to express their own character but to convey a sense of the lavish and foreign. Why the hodgepodge of visual themes? Because the purpose is not to express internal consistency but to bring together anything that expresses distance from the ordinary."[89] It is the careful and alarming amalgamation of fabrics – the interplay of silks and satins, the juxtaposition of colors and qualities, the entanglement of suggested eras and locations (renaissance satin, Nile green, Danube blue) – that supplies an impressive illusion and mode of escapism for the consumer-observer. But to what extent does the bombardment of stimuli in *Au Bonheur des Dames* numb the spectator? How does the observer relate and react to the display – to its parts, to its whole? What is implied when shoppers are *lost* in the materials?

The female shoppers occupy an interesting position in relation to the merchandise. On the one hand, they are situated as external, contemplating entities. Consider, for example, the spatial proximities set up in the passage. The shoppers are leaning over, face-to-face with, standing there, and finally, wishing to throw themselves *into* the display ("elles *se penchaient*", "toutes, *en face de* cette cataracte lâchée, *restaient debout*", "envie de s'*y* jeter", etc.). The space and distance between the consumer and the materials is also connoted in the description of the display itself. Moving from the top of the display downward, the narration highlights how different objects come into motion and focus because of their alignment with other objects, and, implicitly, because of the way they engage spatially with their human counterparts. But whereas the shoppers are predominantly figured as (trans)fixed, the luxurious materials are never static,

[87] Jean Baudrillard, *La Société de consommation: ses mythes, ses structures* (Paris: Denoël, 1986), 21.
[88] Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, 97. (emphasis mine)
[89] Williams, *Dream Worlds*, 71.

always fluid and incredibly vibrant[90]: "une nappe bouillonnée *tombant de haut et s'élargissant jusqu'au parquet*", "des soies tendres *jaillissaient d'abord*", "*Puis, venaient* des tissus plus forts […]*roulant* à flots grossis." And yet, the viewer and the viewed participate with one another. Part of the brilliance in Mouret's arrangement is the way it entices the female shoppers and the luxury items to become one, as it were: "l'irrésistible envie de s'y jeter et de s'y perdre."[91] The narcissistic drive to see oneself in the silks' reflections, or to lose oneself completely in its allure, further establishes an interactive bond between the consumer and the consumable object. The spatial and psychic orientations set up by Mouret bring our attention to the ambivalent relationship/entanglement of shoppers and merchandise. The positioning of customers and fabrics exemplifies the department store's capacity to conflate fantasy and objective facts[92] and its ability to get consumer-observer to move between these spheres.

Zola's description of the silk display intimates that the fine materials are experienced as things more dynamic and enigmatic than mere fabrics and accessories. Clearly, the women are charmed: pale with desire they are stealthily swept into a space of dream and illusion. But, the items in the display also seem to be registered and apperceived by the shoppers as specific, commodity objects: a duchess silk, damasks and brocades. The description (which, in typical Zola fashion, artfully weaves together different points of view, seamlessly incorporating the protagonists' perspectives with that of the 'objective' narrator's) pieces apart the illusion into its component parts. The itemization of products in the narration conveys that shoppers could very well be paying similar attention to the individual fabrics and to their particular sensory details.[93] Furthermore, this enumeration and specification of objects in the naturalist text furnishes the reader a means of navigating the merchandise and its effects. This offers us a way to rethink the "*assault of dissociated stimuli"* experienced in the department store. Instead of perpetuating the claim that the consumer-observer is only always numbed by the sheer variety and density of data, we need to recognize that this intensification and multiplication of stimuli in one compact setting helps to develop modes of comparing and contrasting miscellaneous objects. So we may return once more to this chapter's epigraph – women-shoppers "compare […]a thousand visible things with one another." Glutted with an assortment of merchandise, the shopper in *Au Bonheur des Dames* must sort through and single out particular objects for further inspection.

In his essay, "Wonderland," Christoph Grunenberg touches upon this subject when he asserts that the act of "piecing apart" information is the corollary of capitalism.

> In the capitalist economy, perception had not only become disjointed by the uncontrolled proliferation of commodities and relentless spectacle of promotion but also through the atomization

[90]Here I am borrowing the term "vibrant" from Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter,* xiv. Bennet calls for "a cultivated, patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside the human body." Her engagement with the vibrancy of matter strives to move past the assumption that the world "consists only of active human subjects who confront passive objects and their law-governed mechanisms."

[91] Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, 159.

[92] Williams thus notes that one defining feature of nineteenth century cultures of exposition is a "new and decisive conjunction between imaginative desires and material ones, between dreams and commerce." *Dream Worlds*, 65.

[93] Similar lists and itemizations occur in other display sequences. The "exposition d'ombrelles", for example, mentions the various shapes, colors, and price points of the umbrellas – there is a strange entanglement of styles and values that ultimately underscores the defining features of each consumable item. And this attention to elements comes within the dreamscape: the umbrellas are festive garlands evoking Venetian lanterns *as well as* specific, identifiable umbrellas. See also the Oriental rug display and the 'flowerbeds' of fabrics. There is a mish-mash of the fantastical and the empirical.

> of surfaces through intricate decoration – an almost destructive act by which the modern individual would 'see beyond' the ordinary visible: 'take it to pieces, dismember it, take bits out, observe that part for a moment, this part more closely and a third part down to the smallest detail, each according to its practical interest.'[94]

Grunenberg illustrates that merchandising techniques of the mid to late nineteenth century disrupt sensory experience by cramming too many changing, consumable objects into one perceptual field. But, instead of instigating a blasé, desensitized encounter with materiality, Grunenberg suggests that the proliferation and presentation of commodities can, at least in an initial phase, produce the inverse: a hyper attention to things and their details.[95] It is curious, though, that this adaptation in perception is seen in primarily negative terms. Perception is *disjointed* by commercial forces and the modern observer performs a seemingly violent act when she *dismembers* the visual field into smaller parts. It is as if there once existed another mode of apprehending materials that provided a more "natural" or "authentic" or perhaps even "unmediated" relationship with objects. This, I believe, is not exactly the case. What is revealed in this discussion is, as Schivelbusch has put it, a reasonable unease brought about by modern, industrial renovations when their technologies restructure perceptual activities. Only when there are drastic changes does one look back and consider previous, 'traditional' modes of experiencing things and being in the world more 'natural.'[96] Another potential reason why there is a hesitancy to endorse capitalism's training of the senses, it seems, is because it is unclear to what extent this modified perception links to a kind of deceptive, illusory engagement with external phenomena and to what extent it brings forth a heightened awareness of the (consumable) material world. If the *grands magasins* – specifically, their *étalages* and their *réclames* – cause shoppers to experience an "atomization of surfaces" what purpose does this orientation of the senses serve? Is the "seeing-beyond" merely another form of illusion?

The piecing apart of intricate compositional elements and the close examination of certain specific parts becomes commonplace in the era of *Au Bonheur des Dames*. It is, in my estimation, part of the training process brought about by modern commercialism, by mass retailing. One way in which the consuming public is given instructions on how to deal with the deluge of sensory data is through advertisements. Zola's capitalist mastermind, Mouret, has a

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[94] Christoph Grunenberg, "Wonderland: Spectacles of Display from the Bon Marché to Prada," in *Shopping: A Century of Art and Consumer Culture*, ed. Christoph Grunenberg and Max Hollein (New York, NY: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 29. He is quoting August Endell's 1908 article "Die Schönheit der grossen Stadt".

[95] Grunenberg looks at the trajectory of marketing techniques and their effects. Here he is discussing mid to late 19th century shop displays. Later, he explains the minimalist styles of the early 20th century as the back-lash of such excessive sumptuousness. The turn to simple, sparse shop displays demonstrates, in fact, that a certain desensitization has occurred. My discussion focuses on the era depicted in Zola's novel: an era, I believe, that remains enchanted and invigorated by the baroque displays…

[96] See Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*, 121. Speaking of train travel, Schivelbush writes: "As long as the pre-industrial methods and their forms of work and travel were the dominant ones, a Carlyle or Ruskin or Morris would never have thought of seeing them in an esthetic light. As every travel journal and every social history of artisanship demonstrates, they were quotidian and cumbersome. When industrialization suddenly caused these old forms to be seen from an esthetic and romanticizing viewpoint, we learn less about those forms themselves than about general attitudes towards industrialization. On the other hand, the aestheticization of the outworn forms brings out one of their aspects that had not been noticed before because there was no conscious need, i.e. a valued esthetic quality, only at that moment when a new technology arrived and demonstrated the monotony of industry."

formidable marketing campaign that makes use of balloons, billboards, horse carriages, newspapers, journals, posters, and magazines. As previously noted, the Bonheur des Dames' widely circulated magazine features visual and tactile means of assessing the store's materials: "il les faisait illustrer de gravures, il les accompagnait même d'échantillons, collés sur les feuilles."[97] The experience of purchasable materials is therefore heavily mediated and perhaps, in some cases, even determined by certain cues/prompts provided by advertisements. Even if a cloth does not "live up" to its purported value, marketing techniques nonetheless affect the perception of it. Importantly, these advertisements showcase *pieces* in and out of contexts. For example, we could think of the manner in which ads – and their format – break down the data into manageable bits of information: prices, descriptions of fabrics, examples of the various applications of material, etc., all the while providing the potential buyer with an alluring presentation of materials.

To give an example of the sort of "piecing apart" activities inspired by nineteenth century publicity, I want to point out a poster from 1879. Although this *affiche* is designed to promote a fashion magazine, the presented luxury goods would be purchased, most likely, at a department store. Fashion reviews and trend-setting *grands magasins* are intimately fused together in their promotion of and preoccupation with consumable objects. Moreover, the format of the *Revue de la Mode* poster cues a method of processing information that is arguably called upon as well in department stores. What concerns us here is how the viewer of the advertisement is asked to identify and examine objects.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

[97] Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, 301.

Fig. 1-3. *Revue de la Mode*. Available from: Bibliothèque nationale de France, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9007996g (accessed September 10, 2015).

In the *Revue de la Mode* poster, particular items such as bonnets, shawls, and corsets are detached from the crowded scenes where they would evidently belong. The viewer is therefore asked to contemplate the features of these hovering, fragmented objects outside of their normal context. Then, below the representations of affluent social parties, we discover segments of fabric patterns and lace designs that are strategically magnified for inspection and appreciation. Items are therefore displayed in such a way as to encourage the viewer to zoom in and linger on key decorative moments. The poster unequivocally demands the observer to "take bits out" for further examination. In fact, the poster *does it* for the observer. It actively decontextualizes, fragments, and magnifies objects. Likewise there is a motion to suspend and feature individual commodities in Zola's description of shop displays. Zola is arguably invested in the formatting of consumer experience. He therefore constructs a literary representation that elucidates the ways in which new configurations of merchandise impact perceptions by actively directing the reader's encounter with objects. Just as the poster instructs the viewer how to "piece apart" and (de)construct the images, Zola's description trains readers to visualize and approach items in a similar vein.

This perceptual (re)formatting, clearly illustrated in the *Revue de la Mode* poster, could be interpreted, as in Grunenberg's account, as a distortion and/or dislocation of sensory experience. It is my opinion, however, that this redirected perception should be approached, not exclusively as a form of disjunction, but rather as a potentially helpful means of differentiating and discerning the physical make-up of an increasingly chaotic urban existence. In his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin occasionally mentions the fashion and popularity of "Chinese puzzles" while analyzing iron construction and, specifically, the architectural structures of the *grands magasins*. (A Chinese puzzle provides the player with different geometrical shapes or patterns which must be reconfigured to create the desired image. In Europe, these puzzles oftentimes had drawings of people or things cut up on the shapes and so the player had to construct the scene with the pieces.) It seems to me that these kinds of kaleidoscopic entanglements speak not only to the architectural structures of the mid to late nineteenth century, but additionally to the forms of spatial-visual-tactile configurations encountered in the innovative merchandise displays of the *grands magasins*. My point here is that the "chaotic-exotic" style of the displays forces the consumer-observer to enter into a collage of disparate, fragmented – and yet interlinked – sensorial elements, and is therefore asked to perform a certain assessment and rearrangement of parts. The consumer-observer must see how specific objects fit into and stand out within a framed experience. A playful yet useful mental activity takes place. The rapid diversification in mass retailing of the nineteenth century – in particular, the presence of different kinds of merchandise in one compact setting – inevitably produces and necessitates a new approach to materiality.[98] What is interesting about the *Revue de la Mode* poster and Zola's representation of arranged luxury goods is that they reveal a moment in consumer culture where perceptual adaptation takes place. They demonstrate how advertisements and shop displays structure sensorial experiences in such a way as to instigate a certain piecing apart. Moreover, they document a particular, bygone era: the époque where lavish, excessive, baroque-style

[98] For specifics on the grands magasins' quick diversification and expansion, see Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 48-53.

presentations of objects were incredibly novel, exciting and enchanting. Instead of demonstrating a "zoning out," these texts represent a "zoning in" on miscellaneous details.

By extension, we may consider how Zola's prose – his particular form of Naturalism – orients reader practices and expectations through his descriptions of modern materiality and its effects on the human sensorium. Just as the department store trains perception and necessitates new habits, so does the novel. Zola's descriptions, in particular, shape an act of apperception. Not surprisingly, the Zolian description has occasioned a spate of literary criticism from his day to ours. His descriptive technique is deemed exhaustive, encyclopedic, documentary, hallucinatory, dehumanizing, superfluous, superficial, boring, irrational, impressionist, surrealist, hyper-realist, cinematic and modernist. His descriptive sequences have even been considered a form of entropy. As Christopher Prendergast notes (speaking of description in *Le Ventre de Paris*):

> Plus la description devient détaillée (et en principe exhaustive), plus il devient difficile de la maintenir dans le cadre d'une vision stable. Les matières de la description risquent toujours de déborder les efforts de l'écriture pour les encadrer ; le texte devient une sorte de 'machine à vapeur' littéraire qui engendre, même furieusement, des signes, mais où la conséquence de cet effort générateur est, selon l'expression de Michel Serres, une certaine vaporisation du signe, une perte de netteté dans les desseins esquissés par l'écriture […].[99]

In this account, Zola's attention to *stuff* potentially destabilizes and encumbers the narrative frame by threatening semantic coherency. Prendergast's statement reveals a concern with containment and clarity ("il devient difficile de la maintenir dans *le cadre* d'une vision stable", "Les matières de la description risquent toujours de *déborder* les efforts de l'écriture pour les *encadrer*."). On one hand, this assessment describes the modern consumer's confrontation with a world brimming with commodities. In a meaningful way, *Au Bonheur des Dames* details the experience of increasing excess (of commodities and of perceptions prompted by them). But do the novel's descriptive montages actually impart a sense of 'vaporization'?[100] What is generated by the novelist's "effort générateur" if not a state of disintegration, destabilization or decomposition? I would like to suggest that there is something highly compelling and energetic – and perhaps more *compositional* – occurring in Zola's description of luxury goods in *Au Bonheur des Dames* which equally relates to the transformative and generative atmosphere of modernity. When Zola describes the *étalages* he simultaneously constructs a way for the reader to approach the chaotic jumble of goods.

William Berg remarks in *The Visual Novel* that Zola's representation of material objects regularly provides the reader with clear demarcations of lines and geometric figures and that Zolian description tends to employ contrasting features in order to evoke solidity and depth. Berg thus writes: "Zola's perception of value, unlike that of the impressionists, often derives from a

[99] Christopher Prendergast, "Le Panorama, la peinture et la faim : Le Début du *Ventre de Paris*," *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 67 (1993): 70.

[100] The notion of a "vaporization of signs" resonates with Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquid modernity: modernity entails a transformation of solid forms into 'liquid' forms when traditional modes and formats are broken down by the demands and features of modern industrialization and urbanization.

contrast with other values, which lends his descriptive passages a large measure of their overall sense of solidity. Specific objects, perceived in terms of their value, need the background of other objects from which they can detach and define themselves."[101] In this perspective, Zola's lexical abundance is not interpreted as an overextension that problematizes the narrative frame. Rather, his agglomeration of (material) details, strategically positioned for optimal contrasts, creates a process of definition. Berg also notes that Zola uses the "progressive style" where "phenomena emerge from vague images, impressions, parts and effects to gradually assume line, form, definition, then identity."[102] If we return once more to the silk display passage, we notice that the narration sets up a series of contrasts. There are contrasts in motion and in the alignment of goods in space: different fabrics are falling, cascading, jumping out, rolling along, floating, etc. There are obvious juxtapositions of sensorial elements: various colors, thicknesses, and degrees of softness abound in the passage. These variations and oppositions place specific objects and/or qualities in relief – thereby initiating a "piecing apart" and an identification of the parts that contribute to the ensemble. And although I agree with Berg that Zola's descriptions engage a "progressive style," what I find even more intriguing about the display sequences in *Au Bonheur des Dames* is that there is a playful swirl between a fantastical, illusory, and/or sensational (sensorial) encounter with objects (or the parts and aspects of objects) and a more logical, definitional approach to them (as a whole, as a series, as a display). In this novel, there is not always a clear progression from a vague sensation/impression to the recognition of an object or a rectified vision. Instead, the narration slips back and forth between these modes of registering phenomena. At the close of the silk display, shoppers and readers alike are aware of the effects and construction of the scene: "Toutes, en face de cette cataracte lâchée, restaient debout, avec la peur sourde d'être prises dans le débordement d'un pareil luxe."[103]

Oftentimes, in Zola's description of displays, the disparate parts coalesce to make an illusion or sumptuous trompe-l'œil. But as we have noted with the silk waterfall display, specific fabrics come in and out of focus (*as fabrics*) and are arguably perceived as separate, 'real' entities within an illusory/phantasmagorical experience. Elsewhere, to cite another example, umbrellas and parasols gather into a luminous sequence resembling a string of Venetian lanterns. Within the spectacular arrangement, commodities emerge and are recognized for their part in the fantasy: "Dans les angles, il y avait des motifs compliqués, des étoiles faites d'ombrelles à trente-neuf sous, dont les teintes claires, bleu pâle, blanc crème, rose tendre, brûlaient avec une douceur de veilleuse ; tandis que, au-dessus, d'immenses parasols japonais, où des grues couleur d'or volaient dans un ciel de pourpre, flambaient avec des reflets d'incendie."[104] While the effects of the colors and lighting are indeed "féerique" and portrayed as such (an entire cosmos appears to glitter within the display), the narration additionally points out concrete elements that ground the illusory, mimetic stars: "des étoiles faites d'ombrelles à trente-neuf sous."

A similar cluttering of items that simultaneously occasions a dreamscape *and* solicits a more rational piecing apart can be found in the famous Oriental rug display. The opulence of the store's 'harem' boggles the shoppers, and, by extension, the readers as well. Surrounded by an agglomeration of Middle-Eastern tapestries and trinkets, Mouret's clients (and Zola's readers) enter into a sensuous and imaginative space where "des visions d'Orient flottaient sous le luxe de

[101] William J. Berg, *The Visual Novel: Emile Zola and the Art of His Times* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 181.
[102] Ibid., 275.
[103] Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, 159.
[104] Ibid., 309.

cet art barbare, au milieu de l'odeur forte que les vieilles laines avaient gardée du pays de la vermine et du soleil."[105] Yet, the wonder of the objects is balanced, so to speak, by an indexical motion in the narration. The delineation of objects could, in effect, relate to the perceptual practice of "piecing apart" or "seeing beyond." The description sorts through the merchandise in a logical, sequential manner and highlights the parts deemed worthy of our attention. (i.e. "D'abord, au plafond, étaient tendus des tapis de Smyrne, dont les dessins compliqués se détachaient sur des fond rouges."[106] And although the proliferation of rugs can be interpreted as a form of repetition meant to numb the spectator, as Williams has suggested, we still need to account for the attention to individual items within the stunning compilation.[107] "A terre, les tapis recommençaient, une jonchée de toisons grasses: il y avait, au centre, un tapis d'Agra, une pièce extraordinaire à fond blanc et à large bordure bleu tendre, où courraient des ornements violâtres, d'une imagination exquise; partout, ensuite, s'étalaient des merveilles, les tapis de la Mecque aux reflets de velours […]."[108] In general, the objects in the displays are placed in configurations which produce an initial confusion – or illusory experience – followed by a process of apperceiving individual objects in a new light.[109] But once we are at the level of "heightened awareness," Zola will occasionally spin us back into a state of "numbed fascination." Mouret's wish to redirect his clients' senses with spectacular arrangements (pourquoi cherchez-vous à ménager l'œil?) usually brings about a perception of the most salient elements employed and pieced together in them while opening up a creative dreamscape for the observer. In a similar vein, Zola's descriptive flourishes (which redirect the reader's senses) ultimately draw attention to the presence and combination of specific words and figures which combine and contrast to provide a simultaneously oneiric and documentary experience of objects.

During the final "White Sale" of the novel, we notice that the observer-consumer (and reader) is required to differentiate between increasingly similar minutiae in order to appreciate the display and its melodious effects. Up to this point, Mouret has never attempted anything so vast; his "chanson du blanc" is thus defined as "le coup de génie de son art de l'étalage." (And, evidently, this is a very self-referential moment for Zola in that he draws attention to his own, distinct "art de l'étalage.")

> Sous l'écroulement de ces blancheurs, dans l'apparent désordre des tissus, tombés comme au hasard des cases éventrées, il y avait une phrase harmonique, le blanc suivi et développé dans tous ses tons, qui naissait, grandissait, s'épanouissait, avec l'orchestration compliquée d'une fugue de maître, dont le développement continu emporte les âmes d'un vol sans cesse élargi. Rien que du blanc, et jamais le même blanc, tous les blancs, s'enlevant les uns sur les autres, s'opposant, se complétant, arrivant à l'éclat même de la

[105] Ibid., 142.
[106] Ibid., 141.
[107] Williams thus notes: "within one exhibit not chaos but repetition is often employed to numb the spectator even further. When rugs are placed on the ceiling, walls, and floor of the vestibule, when the same item is repeated over and over with minor variations […] the sheer accumulation becomes awesome in a way that no single item could be." *Dream Worlds*, 69.
[108] Ibid., 142.
[109] William Berg brilliantly discusses Zola's "progressive style" in *The Visual Novel*. A major feature in Zola's writing, according to Berg, is a confrontation with materiality that begins as an imaginative/subjective encounter with external objects and eventually transitions into a 'rectified' or rationalized perceptual experience.

> lumière. Cela partait des blancs mats du calicot et de la toile, des blancs sourds de la flanelle et du drap ; puis, venaient les velours, les soies, les satins, une gamme montante, le blanc s'envolait avec la transparence des rideaux, devenait de la clarté libre avec les mousselines, les guipures, les dentelles, les tulles surtout, si légers, qu'ils étaient comme la note extrême et perdue ; tandis que l'argent des pièces de soie orientale chantait le plus haut, au fond de l'alcôve géante.[110]

This passage is important because it is marked by an attention to Mouret's art and artifice. Nothing is perceived as random in the display ("*l'apparent désordre* des tissus", "tombés *comme au hazard*"); rather, the entire configuration is noted as the careful *development* of a theme – "l'orchestration compliquée d'une fugue de maître." Mouret's arrangement of white plays with dissonance and harmony ("tous les blancs, s'enlevant les uns sur les autres, s'opposant, se complétant"). There are layers of thickness and softness, density and airiness. Ultimately, the display asks the consumer-observer to navigate an outpouring of white, to distinguish the subtle variations in tone and texture. The insistence that there is "rien que du blanc" and yet "jamais le même blanc, tous les blancs" demonstrates that shoppers, even when bombarded by the repetition of a singular feature (here, one color), are capable of detecting slight nuances, thanks to the manner in which Mouret positions the fabrics with one another. The notion that consumers are playfully exposed to *every color of white* also points to a heightened consciousness – white can *be more* and *do more* in Mouret's/Zola's poetic arrangement.

To a certain degree, it is easy to forget that this passage is fundamentally a description of fabrics (of commodity goods). Since the narration moves seamlessly into modes of synesthesia, the materials seem to recede behind the rich perceptual experience and confusion that they create. The calicos, linens, wools, muslins, laces and silks, with their particular weights, physical structures, and unique white qualities, become varying dimensions of light. Lightness (density *and* luminosity) is perceived as a spectrum of acoustic frequencies. The genius of the display resides precisely in this constructed medley of objects and sensory experiences. Consumers are offered a pleasantly new and disorienting perceptual experience of merchandise. In this case, the department store instructs its clientele to "listen" to fabrics, to engage with objects in unaccustomed ways, to let objects speak – or even *sing* – to them differently. Arguably, the multi-modal encounter with fabric has two main results: the display fascinates *and* informs. The consumer's soul takes flight with the fabric's musical arabesques ("le développement continu emporte les âmes d'un vol sans cesse élargi"). At the same time, a process of recognition takes place. Each cut of fabric clearly announces itself through its unique, synesthetic potential ("des blancs mats du calicot et de la toile, des blancs sourds de la flanelle et du drap"). Ultimately, the perception of individual sounds or colors is the recognition/appreciation of individual fabrics.

If women in Au Bonheur des Dames are seduced by an imaginative assemblage of merchandise, they are so, however, because they have a certain appreciation of the craft that went into the display. Or, at the very least, they are attentive to the effects produced by the curated merchandise. They revel in the dreamscape. As one lady comments after gazing at the silk display: "Hein? c'est prodigieux, cet étalage ! On en rêve…"[111] In fact, the customers in Mouret's store judge the displays based on their spectacular, illusory effects. While female

[110] Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, 475-76.
[111] Ibid., 159.

shoppers are unambiguously manipulated by the store's layout, design, and arrangement of goods, and as such are often assigned a distinctively passive, tractable role, I wish to emphasize that women in *Au Bonheur des Dames* represent an emergent kind of observer-experiencer-consumer whose engagement with material objects and their sensory landscapes is perhaps more informed and conscious than we tend to think. If women seem spell-bound by Mouret's intricate and shocking displays, it is, in part, because they intentionally seek such sensory stimulation. As one female shopper tells Mouret about his upcoming sale: "Vous savez, nous irons toutes… On dit que vous préparez des *merveilles*."[112]

This explicit recognition on the part of the shoppers of the spectacular dimension of Mouret's designs is another way in which Zola problematizes the notion of a purely illusory experience. Most of the display passages in the text (sequences that underscore the merchandise's illusory powers) are interrupted or fragmented by the consumers' commentary. "Ravissant! Mon dieu! Quel succès!" ; "Et le salon oriental, as-tu vu le salon oriental? - Oui, oui, extraordinaire!"; "Avez-vous vu le salon oriental? – Superbe! Inouï!"; "C'est féerique!"; "Magnifique!" The more elaborately and unexpectedly the merchandise is combined, the more powerful its impact, the more appreciative the audience. We can think of the sensorium's complex training by the department store, then, as entailing an appreciation and recognition of illusion/fantasy. In a sense, Au Bonheur des Dames is a space where the shopper can have her fantasy and know it too. And, in another sense, Zola calls attention to the artifice of his own narrative and to the ways in which it charms (or seeks to charm) his readers. (When the customers say "Magnifique!" it is as if they are speaking for the reader who just experienced the descriptive montage as well…)

Our interest in the grand magasin's spectacular configurations of merchandise and in the consumer-observer's perception of objects on display resonates with some concerns brought up by Georg Lukács in his essay *Narrate or Describe*. Specifically, Lukács' concept of still lives in Zola's descriptive technique as well as his examination of the relations between things and humans in nineteenth century literature will contribute to our questioning of perceptual modalities in *Au Bonheur des Dames*.[113] Critically, I think, Lukács' contention with Zola's "whirlwind of details" reveals an anxiety about the evolving presence and function of objects/things in modern literature and society. Although Lukács does not analyze *Au Bonheur des Dames* explicitly, the descriptions of displays under our current consideration are the kinds of narrative moments that Lukács would deem questionable, ineffective, and/or "deleterious." In Williams' treatment of department store displays, the orchestrated details are a source of overstimulation which numbs and fascinates the passer-by. Similarly, in Lukács' critique of naturalism's descriptive sequences, human characters are situated as mere by-standers who are distracted, passive, and perhaps even de-humanized by the kaleidoscopic, discontinuous array of images.

One notion that frequently surfaces in Lukács' essay is that objects are becoming increasingly separate from their human counterparts and are given significance outside of human action. The problem, he contends, is that a lack of meaning results from this subject-object disconnection or reconfiguration. He writes that "the loss of the narrative interrelationship between objects and their function in concrete human experiences means a loss of artistic

[112] Ibid., 131. (emphasis mine)
[113] Georg Lukács, "Narrate or Describe," in *Writer and Critic*, ed. Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 110–48.

significance."[114] But here Lukács seriously overlooks what is, in fact, striking about Zola's use of description: the insistence on how objects are *perceived* and *encountered* by various subjects. As I have suggested throughout this chapter, *Au Bonheur des Dames* concentrates on modes of experiencing (concretely and imaginatively) materiality. It captures the effects produced by objects, and it represents alterations in consumer practices, notably perceptual practices. Lukács denies the descriptive details of objects any particular value of their own. Despite the claim that there exists an "intensive existence of things" brilliantly illustrated in Naturalism's exposition of materiality, there is no "poetry of things," Lukács tells us, apart from the activities and relationships of human beings. In my reading, however, Zola's descriptive details do not decompose or discombobulate the imbrication of subjects and objects. Instead, they represent human experience and activity. They illustrate the ways in which the human sensorium adapts to and is modified by shifting material landscapes. They capture a significant turn in aesthetic expectations and possibilities.

Throughout his essay, Lukács is frustrated by the extent to which "important" and "unimportant" details (i.e. objects/things) are given equal voicing in Naturalist description. In a way, Lukács refuses to notice that reading Zola's content (i.e. the department store and all its *stuff*) allows us to approach the form (Naturalism) differently. Because the critic views certain details as disengaged and superfluous, he believes that they reduce human characters to spectators of gratuitous and (ironically) insubstantial "still-lives." Speaking of Zola's "spurious objectivism," the critic remarks that:

> The composition consists of the assemblage of all the important details as seen from various points of view. The result is a series of static pictures, of still lives connected only through the relations of objects arranged one beside the other according to their own inner logic, never following one from the other, certainly never one out of the other. The so-called action is only a thread on which the still lives are disposed in a superficial, ineffective, fortuitous sequence of isolated, static pictures.[115]

Excessive details are therefore inappropriate because their arrangement and succession within a narrative appear illogical and because they are experienced as a series of inert, meaningless tableaux. It is curious, though, that Lukács does not consider how the irregularity or the lack of connectivity of these "static pictures" might be conceived of differently for the supposedly passive spectator.[116] In other words, Lukács' analysis does not fully acknowledge how these still lives accurately reflect practices of observation which correspond to an evolving experience of and interaction with materiality in modern, commercial existence. This is precisely the point that Rachel Bowlby makes in *Just Looking* when she notes that:

> the episodic structure of naturalist novels to which Lukács alludes with some deprecation […] in fact suggests its connections to the

[114] Ibid., 131.
[115] Ibid., 144.
[116] Lukács envisions characters who partake in these narrative still lives as static entities. "Description debases characters to the level of inanimate objects" (133). And: "Description provides no true poetry of things but transforms people into conditions, into components of still lives" (138-39). At the close of *Narrate or Describe*, Lukács gives us the image of naturalism's fatalistic hero as a "walking corpse" within an arrangement of still lives.

> structures of experience in urban consumer society: to the positioning of subjects as viewers and consumers of "still lives" or "static pictures" seemingly without origin, to the seriality of fashion in the endless appearance of new images of "the new," and to the cycle of "monotony" and "novelty."[117]

The new format of modern commercial experience (which we could envision in terms of a sequence of still lives as well as in terms of a chaotic-exotic style) plays with the role and function of the consumer-observer. And, Zola's text performs a similar adjustment to the tasks and capacities of its reader. In his descriptive montages, Zola integrates and exposes shifts of consciousness and a multi-dimensional approach to objects, which render his 'still lives' less about an inactive enthrallment with things and more about the various levels of engagement that one has with things.

Scholars such as Rachel Bowlby draw parallels between the spectacle of merchandise in consumer capitalism and cinema. This analogy can be useful for us if we add in Walter Benjamin's astute observation that technologies of reproduction provide a glimpse of the world that was previously unable to be seen or experienced. The technologies of the store – especially its displays – perform a similar action whereby the consumer-observer encounters an object in a completely different light which allows a new or deepened appreciation of it. The discussion of the *etalages* as a form of proto-cinematic entertainment, however, neglects the other sensorial cues and experiences organized and directed by the store.

The female shoppers become so accustomed to having all their senses engaged and their sensuality perked in the department store that when Mouret's organization of merchandise occasionally proves inadequate at stimulating the senses (and the women's sexuality), the women are disappointed and slightly annoyed. Displayed objects are expected to do more, perform more, provoke more. *Au Bonheur des Dames* is fundamentally about aesthetic experimentation, and throughout Zola's ode to modern activity we follow Mouret's artistic endeavors. Thus far, our discussion has centered on the ways in which the *grand magasin* cultivates and curates specific perceptual gestures for its clientele. There is another angle to this story, though. The shoppers themselves – in particular their reactions and expectations – shape Mouret's aesthetic efforts (and by extension their outcomes). Over the course of the narrative Mouret discovers, mostly by trial and error, what is – or is not – spectacular enough for his eager crowd of shoppers. In one early scene in the novel, Mme Desforges is unimpressed by the glove counter : "L'odeur des gants de Saxe, cette odeur de fauve comme sucrée du musc, la troublait d'habitude ; et elle en riait parfois, elle confessait son goût pour ce parfum équivoque, où il y a de la bête en folie, tombée dans la boîte à poudre de riz d'une fille. Mais devant ce comptoir banal, elle ne sentait pas les gants, ils ne mettaient aucune chaleur sensuelle entre elle et ce vendeur quelconque faisant son métier."[118] Here, Mouret misses an opportunity to seduce women through a careful combination of olfactory, haptic and visual cues. During the final big sale of the novel, Mouret reveals his new "rayon de parfumerie" from which "une odeur pénétrante de sachet enfermé […] embaumait la galerie."[119] Here, glass cases exhibit a variety of cosmetic and hygienic products: powders, creams, scissors, brushes, toothpaste, and bottles of eaux de toilette. In this pristine and antiseptic showcase, these objects are strangely removed from their everyday

[117] Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 13-14.
[118] Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, 156.
[119] Ibid., 496.

use (specifically, from the human body) and as such have an extra allure, as it were. The fantasy realm created by the perfume counter significantly provides multi-sensorial stimulation: "Ce qui ravissait, c'était, au milieu, une fontaine d'argent, une Bergère debout sur une moisson de fleurs, et d'où coulait un filet continu d'eau de violette, qui résonnait musicalement dans la vasque de métal. Une senteur exquise s'épandait alentour, les dames en passant trempaient leurs mouchoirs."[120] This is a more 'successful' display than Mouret's earlier arrangement in the glove department. It is so, I think, because it calls for the employment of different perceptual energies and strategies.[121] The shoppers notably stop to smell and discuss the store's name brand soap, le Savon Bonheur, and thus participate in the reflective process of selection and calculation. And on the other hand, the consumer-observer-smeller enters into a space which manipulates and excites sensorial experience and causes a dream-like encounter with hygienic products. Similar to the silk display, the customer in this sequence feels compelled to enter into the fantasy. But whereas in the silk display the women hesitate to throw themselves into the mirage, here, the women dip their handkerchiefs into the scented water fountain. These over-the-top arrangements cultivate expectations and perceptual activities, and they are meeting and addressing new demands that the 'trained' consumer-observer brings to the store.

Zola's novel highlights the progressive perceptual transformations that accompany mid to late nineteenth century consumerism which are not reducible to previous dystopian accounts of this work. By calling our attention to the ways in which the store's presentation of materials stimulates a multiplicity of perceptual practices, some of which involve an active, participatory engagement with sensory data, I have provided one possible explanation for Zola's enthusiastic conception of *Au Bonheur des Dames*. Zola had, in fact, intended to explore the positive forces and actions of his era. In his *dossiers préparatoires,* the writer explains:

> Je veux dans *Au Bonheur des Dames* faire le poème de l'activité moderne. Donc, changement complet de philosophie : plus de pessimisme d'abord, ne pas conclure à la bêtise et à la mélancolie de la vie, conclure au contraire à son continuel labeur, à la puissance et à la gaieté de son enfantement. En un mot, aller avec le siècle, qui est un siècle d'action et de conquête, d'efforts dans tous les sens.[122]

Zola decides to highlight the constant labor, the energy and the joy of life he discerns in modern existence. This is a moment of action, conquest and efforts. So while we could effectively think of the Bonheur des Dames as an exploitative system which preys on female desire and

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[120] Ibid., 497.

[121] Georg Simmel, "Sociology of the Senses," 111.The idea that an external object can be approached with different perceptual *energies* is brought up by Simmel in his essay "Sociology of the Senses." Sense perceptions, writes Simmel, "lead us into the human subject as its mood and emotion and out to the object as knowledge of it. With respect to non-human objects, these two tend to be widely separated. In their sensory presence we may emphasize their subjective emotional value: we experience the scent of the rose, the loveliness of a sound, the attraction of the branches swaying in the wind as a joy occurring inside our spirit. Or we want to recognize the rose or the tone or the tree - for this we employ quite different energies, often deliberately turning away from the former." According to Simmel, the relationships we establish with humans - as well as with material things - are based on sensorial interactions that can involve incredibly different modes of attention: from a kind of subjective, emotional appreciation to a more objective, knowledge-driven assessment of the object…

[122] See Zola's *dossiers préparatoires.*

sensuality,[123]we should also stop to consider how we might take seriously Zola's optimism about the modern activity exemplified in Mouret's commercial mechanism. Mouret's "école du brutal et du colossal" does more than create general stupor – it encourages different techniques of approaching aesthetic and commercial forms. Upon exiting his store, the shoppers are supposed to "avoir mal aux yeux"; however, what is more significant in this project is the fact that Mouret is making their senses function *differently*. The department store, as a nineteenth century location and source of illusion, reorientation, calculation, and social interaction necessarily trains shoppers to think, feel, and perceive differently.

[123] Zola, *Au Bonheur Des Dames,* 300. Here we could use the oft-cited passage from the novel: "Mouret avait l'unique passion de vaincre la femme. Il la voulait reine dans sa maison, il lui avait bâti ce temple, pour l'y tenir à sa merci. C'était toute sa tactique, la griser d'attentions galantes et trafiquer de ses désirs, exploiter sa fièvre."

Conducting the Senses:
Zola's *Le Ventre de Paris*

In the first chapter, I argued that the *grands magasins* of the nineteenth century create new methods of comparing, touching, and assessing luxury goods such as fabric. Zola's fictional account of modern commercialism trains the reader to appreciate, and critically analyze, the store's (and the text's) spectacular displays. In addition, *Au Bonheur des Dames* presents a variety of models of observation and attention that allow us to be cognizant of the ways in which commercial infrastructures – and Zola's literary representation of a department store – reorient our perceptions of external phenomena. In this next chapter, I examine Zola's use of synaesthesia and his elaboration of sense perceptions in *Le Ventre de Paris* to further explore the writer's experimentation with literary form *and* forms of attention.

Le Ventre de Paris (1873) captures the intricate mechanics of les Halles, the great the great Parisian marketplace designed by Victor Baltard that flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century.[124] Zola notably demonstrates how sensory data is consumed, recycled, contaminated, and digested, as it were, by the narrator, characters, and even its readers. The story follows Florent, who, recently escaped from years in the penal colony of Cayenne, returns to Paris to discover the newly constructed commercial infrastructure and all the raw, perceptual data circulating throughout it. He befriends Claude Lantier, an aspiring Impressionist painter, who has a particularly surreal vision of the market's produce. The opening chapter presents a collision of perspectives and cognitive processes as the narrator, Florent, and Claude each navigate the sensate objects of les Halles.[125] This mixed focalization permeates the entire text, relays the characters'sensory experiences, and fundamentally enlists the reader as an observer, or surveillor, of distinct mental activities (including his/her own).

From the first pages, the elaborate display of sensations experiments with literary form and readership. Critically, sensations are rendered palpable in a kind of free-indirect-perception that draws attention to itself as highly stylized. (c.f. "A droite, à gauche, de tous côtés, des glapissements de criée mettaient des notes aiguës de petite flûte, au milieu des basses sourdes de la foule. C'était la marée, c'étaient les beurres, c'était la volaille, c'était la viande."[126]) The depiction of sensory experience ultimately assigns a specific observational activity to the reader and has a pedagogical function. Sensorial information is handed over to the reader (to be apprehended and assimilated), *and* it is packaged as mediated, manipulated material (to be perused and consumed as such). It is precisely when the narration conducts the perceptions of its characters that Zola showcases the ways in which the literary text filters data and redirects its reader's attention.

In what follows, I will develop several interrelated claims. Zola's description of the sensorium interpolates a different kind of reader by exposing the literary mechanisms that construct a representation of sensorial experience. On the one hand, this is important because the writer's reordering of the senses is generated through the use of what could be considered

[124] Émile Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris* (Paris: Pléaide, 1960).
[125] For an established close reading of this passage that dissects points of view, see Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 66-73.
[126] Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris,* 633.

modernist or even avant-garde writing devices. Although Zola's naturalism falls under the umbrella of literary realism,[127] his 'realist' project seems to unravel when he describes an encounter with material surroundings. As one critic put it, "l'œil de Zola, ou sa plume, déforme ou agrandit tous les objets."[128] Objects are not the only things that are 'deformed' by his sensory writing. In *Le Ventre de Paris*, the plot appears to dissolve into highly descriptive sequences. The narrative reveals its own technicality and problematizes the progressive, linear organization of plot.[129] The overflowing of sensations, on the other hand, can be additionally read as an engagement with neurological processes. The writer demonstrates how the text creates and re-wires information pathways, oftentimes distorting stimuli. Moreover, I will argue, Zola's articulation of cross-modal perception is not a simple foray into symbolist poetics. Synaesthesia does not disrupt his Naturalist methodology. Rather, the writer's blending of sensory data mirrors various physiological, psychological, and scientific studies of the period that measure perceptual (in)accuracies and probe the relations among the senses. The fact that Zola was a subject of one such investigation, as we will discuss shortly, proves that the writer is deeply invested in quantifying and understanding sense perception. Like his scientific peer Hermann Helmholtz, Zola draws analogies between the senses in his fictional prose to illustrate the body's (and the text's) ability to receive, distort, and process simultaneous stimuli. My close reading of the symphony of cheeses will conclude with the following argument: by presenting a study of the senses that dramatizes the manipulation of sensory data, Zola wishes to fine-tune perceptual practices in the modern era. To be clear, the novelist does not train his readership to 'hear' his symphony 'perfectly' (in the way that Helmholtz, in *Sensations of Tone,* guides the listener's attention to properly recognize harmonics and combinational tones); instead, Zola encourages his reader to encounter literature as an adaptive system – and technology – that, like the human sensory system, filters and re-circuits data, and critically has its own saturation point.

This chapter is divided in two parts. I begin with a discussion of the novel's setting and briefly turn to other contemporary representations (historical and fictional) of les Halles in order to define the particularities of Zola's sensory writing. In part one, I will additionally examine the overlapping of plot and description and show how Zola places the narrative's drama in the representation of sensations. "L'une des principales conquêtes du 'naturalisme,'" asserts Philippe Jousset, is to have substituted "comme véritable moteur Romanesque le mélodrame des choses et des matières aux mobiles des personnages, et d'avoir transporté le *drame* dans la vue."[130] But *whose* sight, hearing, smelling, and sense of touch is effectively transformed into action in the narrative ? And why? Those questions will lead me into part two of this chapter where I will argue that Zola's synaesthesia, in particular, experiments with his reader's observation skills. The second half of this chapter will conclude with a close reading of the symphony of cheeses and I will position Zola's text as a kind of technological device that replicates and replays cognitive functions, testing the capacity of the human sensory system.

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[127] Pericles Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39.
[128] Gustave Lanson, *Manuel illustré de l'histoire de la littérature française* (Paris: Éditions Hachette, 1953), 685.
[129] Bradbury and McFarlane, *Modernism, 1890-1930*. In their seminal study of literary modernism, Bradbury and McFarlan signal out some general, defining features of modernist novels: an overarching concern with the text's fictiveness, an attention to and integration of shifting spatial-temporal relationships, an innovative application of tropes (such as synaesthesia, metaphor and metonymy), and a desire to destabilize linear action.
[130] Jousset, "Une Poétique de la 'Nature Morte': sur la pratique descriptive dans *Le Ventre de Paris*," 340.

The novel's setting is significant because the markets are a space in which sensations – and an analysis of sensory data – are regulated and supervised. *Les Halles, a quintessential site of nineteenth century (dis)infection and deodorization, serves as the perfect milieu for Zola to examine and document the containment, control and even curation of perceptual processes. The central markets* and the surrounding neighborhood shops function intermittently as the background and foreground of *Le Ventre de Paris.* Along with the produce they sell, they are never completely out of sight (or *smell*) or out of mind. ("Alors, Florent, après avoir assisté à la fermature des grilles, emportait avec lui la poissonnerie dans ses vêtements, dans sa barbe, dans ses cheveux."[131]) Les Halles is a space of neverending encounters and exchange.[132] In this setting, observation practices are encountered and exchanged. As the preeminent site of confluence in the modern metropolis, it is not surprising that the central markets were subjected to an elaborate system of regulation and surveillance, imposed by both the police and the préfecture de la Seine.[133] Maxime Du Camp writes about les Halles in 1883 (ten years after the publication of Zola's novel), stating that they are "un lieu de transactions sévèrement surveillées, un réservoir où la population parisienne peut venir en sécurité puiser les subsistances dont elle a besoin."[134] On the one hand, Zola's novel is about monitoring the displacements of people and things, creating an inventory of the myriad transactions taking place in the markets. And, on the other hand, the text displays a kind of perceptual chaos.

As we first enter the markets along with the exasperated and disoriented Florent, we are initiated into a world of timetables and tickets, carefully measured spaces for carts, administrative agents overseeing the unloading and packaging of produce, and police officers circling the area. Florent eventually fills the position of the fish market inspector and, at night, on his own time, draws out plans to reorder the administrative system of the markets for greater movement and ease of commerce. A significant part of Zola's story is none other than a representation of management and supervision. The characters themselves – from the sly Mlle Saget to the self-righteous Lisa – participate in strategic acts of surveillance. This in turn offers the reader another mode of surveying the markets and their happenings, of registering how events are perceived and interpreted by others. We, the readers, are involved in this observational enterprise, sometimes knowing more than characters about the perceived phenomena and events, sometimes knowing less.

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[131] Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris,* 729.

[132] Alain Corbin, "Préface," in *Les Halles, images d'un quartier*, ed. Jean-Louis Robert and Myriam Tsikounas (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2004), 10. Alain Corbin thus remarks that "Les Halles constituent le centre vers lequel confluent et duquel rayonnent les êtres et les choses. Elles sont dès lors perçues comme le lieu d'un afflux et d'un reflux. Elles aimantent les parcours d'individus dissemblables […]. En elles se résument les contrastes de la ville, s'accumulent les marchandises et les détails pittoresques."

[133] Ali Coffignon, *Paris Vivant: L'estomac de Paris* (Paris: Paris Librairie, 1889), 119. Coffignon describes the jurisdiction of the police and prefecture over the markets and their imposed order. Speaking of the massive, daily movement of people and goods, he writes: "tout cela s'opère avec l'ordre le plus parfait, malgré une apparent confusion, sous le double contrôle de la préfecture de la Seine et de la préfecture de police; la première perçoit les droits, autorise le placement de chacun des vendeurs; la seconde veille au bon ordre, assure la fidélité du débit et inspecte les marchandises en vente au point de vue de la salubrité." For another account of the supervision and regulation of les Halles, see Christopher Curtis Mead, "An Urban History of the Central Markets," in *Making Modern Paris: Victor Baltard's Central Markets and the Urban Practice of Architecture* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 144–226.

[134] Maxime Du Camp, *Paris: ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1875), 123.

And yet, this system of regulation along with the impulse to establish order constantly appear in a precarious state: the cacophony of voices and sounds, the vapors and odors that permeate the air, the transience of people, and the omnipresent excess of goods threaten any true sense of order. In this wildly stimulating ambience, Florent feels himself swept up by an aggressive ocean of objects which carries him through the pathways of the market and holds him in its monstrous waves. "Il essaya de sortir de ce flot qui l'atteignait dans sa fuite […] Et il s'arrêta, découragé, effaré, ne pouvant plus se dégager de cette infernal ronde d'herbes qui finissaient par tourner autour de lui en le liant aux jambes de leurs minces verdures."[135] If the structure of les Halles and its bureaucratic organization are designed to introduce and enforce an order to the act of exchange, Zola's aesthetic rendering of the overflowing of foodstuffs and the perceptual chaos of the markets evoke, in contrast, a space of anarchy and dissonance. This apparent disarray is, of course, the result of Zola's careful (fictional) organization and embellishment of objects and actions. The sea imagery that inundates the opening chapter effectively delivers what Christopher Prendergast calls "an extended tone-poem."[136] The unruliness is ordered and arranged as such by the writer and thus rendered into an aesthetic object and experience.

Around the time that Zola published *Le Ventre de Paris*, other representations of the central markets were cropping up or were already in circulation. From cartoon caricatures of market-goers to skillful oil paintings of the venue and its produce, from official records and statistics to poems celebrating the markets' abundance, artists and documenters alike were fascinated by the modern structure and its contents. Michel Clément's poem, "Les Halles de Paris en 1861," for instance, strikingly resembles the opening chapter of Zola's novel. In it, the first person narrator reflects upon his experience of spending an entire night and early morning wondering throughout les Halles. Similar to Florent's ongoing appraisal of the space and its dizzying wares, the poet adjusts his vision of the architectural structures and wide-ranging produce while being carried away by a relentless flow of merchants and buyers. But whereas Zola's description of the markets lingers substantially on sensations produced when one encounters materiality and oftentimes imbues the markets' objects with startling qualities (as we shall discuss shortly), Clément's engagement with goods is rather static and one dimensional, with the occasional imagery such as: "Bientôt de toutes parts, s'élèvent promptement/ Des monceaux effrayants, d'énormes pyramides/ Des légumes divers encore tout humides."[137] And when it comes to listing and describing the actual contents of the pavilions, Clément's narrator (a proclaimed sensitive flâneur) admits having difficulties:

> Dire les quantités de légumes, de fruits,
> Qu'on amène et qu'on vend ici toutes les nuits,
> Serait pour un flâneur, une rude besogne
> Et donc je m'abstiendrai sans honte et sans vergogne ;
> Car il faut avoir vu, pour se l'imaginer,
> Tout ce qu'en une nuit il s'y peut amener :
> C'est comme un grand jardin, comme un bazar immense
> Ouvert à la richesse ainsi qu'à l'indigence[138]

[135] Ibid., 630.
[136] Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 70.
[137] Michel Clément, *Les Halles de Paris en 1861* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1861), 9-10.
[138] Ibid., 14.

Clément's narrator skips over details, or else presents objects and the experience of them in a straight-forward, quickly legible manner. Zola, however, expends tremendous energy enumerating specific items and veers back and forth between descriptive registers, creating a lush juxtaposition of not only objects, but, more importantly, of manners and styles in which they are named and perceived. When Florent is introduced to the fish markets, the narration spends multiple pages detailing fish (saltwater and freshwater varieties), moving deftly between Linnaean nomenclature, figurative prose, and vernacular terms: "les grands turbots, les grandes barbues, d'un grain serré et blanc comme du lait caillé; les thons, lisses et vernis, pareils à des sacs de cuir noirâtre; les bars arrondis, ouvrant une bouche énorme, faisant songer à quelque âme trop grosse, rendue à pleine gorge, dans la stupefaction de l'agonie."[139] This accumulation of modes of perception and modalities of registering things seems to aptly mirror the chaotic experience of les Halles, the kaleidoscopic arrangements of goods. It also creates a playful challenge for the interpolated reader who, as Philippe Hamon writes, is exposed to an encyclopedic proficiency and a variety of vocabularies. "Expository description," Hamon explains while speaking of nineteenth-century texts such as Zola's and Flaubert's, is "the locus for the deployment of professionalized language (the vocabulary of botanists is brought to bear on the descriptions of gardens, that of sailors is applied to a port, that of architects is applied to buildings)," and what is significant here is that "description automatically becomes the place to exhibit the lexical work that has been carried out on language."[140] Zola's *étalages* call attention to themselves as a location of great semantic effort. They can also be interpreted, as Lawrence Schehr does, as the site of confusion and inaccuracy, a place where the reader becomes baffled by polyvalency: "the details of the display call into question basic issues of communication, knowledge, and transmission of a cultural and artisanal heritage."[141] Zola's narrator would never admit to having difficulties describing a milieu and its particularities (as does Clément's); generally speaking, he does not 'skim over' details or paint in broad brush strokes. Instead, his language creates a kind of difficulty and density in the act of reading which emulate his own creative efforts and portray the intellectual, cognitive process of sorting through stimuli.

But it is not just Zola's penchant for description and his ability to make us feel the mechanics of language that sets *Le Ventre de Paris* apart from other representations of les Halles. Although Clément's narrator mentions odors while meandering through the fruit and flower markets and speaks of the momentous noise experienced in this venue, "Les Halles de Paris en 1861" does relatively little to represent the central markets' complex sensorium. It privileges, first and foremost, the visual field – "il faut avoir vu…" Zola, on the other hand, experiments with intercalated and overlapping sensorial fields. Clément wanders mostly through the familiar territory of the visual and keeps the senses neatly separated from one another. Zola radically and emphatically combines resonances and atmospheres. And in this regard it is important to recognize that the saturation of sensation illustrated in *Le Ventre de Paris* frequently *feels* artificial. From overly erudite or bizarre metaphors to heavy-handed synesthesia, the description of produce frequently turns away from a strictly 'realistic' point of view. I would like to suggest that the point of this blatant artifice, as it were, is not just literary or artistic showboating. Zola is

[139] Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris*, 697.
[140] Philippe Hamon, *Expositions: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 118-119.
[141] Lawrence R. Schehr, *Subversions of Verisimilitude : Reading Narrative from Balzac to Sartre* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 97. Here Schehr is discussing Zola's maritime étalage.

not an author we readily associate with *l'art pour l'art*.[142] As the novel foregrounds its own technicality and fictiveness, it incites the perceptive reader to be more attuned to the ways in which the senses are filtered, altered, and enhanced through different mediums and in designated milieus. It captures the feeling that modern experience is increasingly mediated.

Metaphors and synaesthesia animate Zola's text. Cheeses are redolent of harmonic intervals. The texture of cauliflower evokes a wedding bouquet. Cadine's flower arrangements employ color and scent pairings that denote specific emotional states: "elle avait des bouquets féroces, des bouquets de fille en colère, aux parfums rudes, aux couleurs irritées"[143] La Sariette's fruit giggles and seductively shows off its curves: "Les groseilles, les cassis, les noisettes, riaient avec des mines délurées ; pendant que des corbeilles de raisins, des grappes lourdes, chargées d'ivresse, se pâmaient au bord de l'osier, en laissant retomber leur grains roussis par les voluptés trop chaudes du soleil."[144] As Claude and Florent meander through the flower market, followed by "une odeur exquise," the flowers resonate with color and affect. The blossoms exude "une chanson aiguë de couleur, les panachures vives des marguerites, le rouge saignant des dahlias, le bleuissement des violettes, les chairs vivantes des roses."[145] This Baudelarian moment of sensory correspondence continues with a personification of the fragrance of flowers: "rien n'était plus doux ni plus printanier que les tendresses de ce parfum rencontrées sur un trottoir." Zola thus modifies Baudelaire's *passante,* changing the muse into the fleeting, *olfactory* presence encountered amidst a bombardment of other sensations.[146]

Jean Béraud's 1879 painting "Les Halles" offers us another insightful counterpoint to Zola's representation. Both works provide us with images of people, produce and architecture in two different mediums. And while much could be said about the differences and similarities between painting and literature and their unique forms, that discussion is not my primary goal. I wish to compare, rather, *what* is (re)presented in each work and how each *tableau* provides the reader or viewer with a spectacle of the central markets and more specifically a spectacle of sensory data.[147] Zola announced in his *ébauches* that the artistic side of this work would be the modern central markets, "les gigantesques *natures mortes* des huit pavillons, l'éboulement de nourriture qui se fait chaque matin au beau milieu de Paris."[148] I want to show, moreover, that the author's 'natures mortes' serve to detail – and even sculpt – perceptual habits.

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[142] Zola, in fact, strongly rebukes Théophile Gautier for describing just for the sake of describing. See *Le Roman experimental*.
[143] Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris,* 769.
[144] Ibid., 823.
[145] Ibid., 622.
[146] While Zola's novel has been compared by scholars to Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* – see, for instance, Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, *To Kill a Text: The Dialogic Fiction of Hugo, Dickens, and Zola* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010). – its curious and fruitful dialogue with *Les Fleurs du mal* is left critically unexamined.
[147] From Zola's time to ours, the dominant tendency has been to draw parallels between the writer's descriptive style and the aesthetic practices of contemporary painters. See Henri Mitterand, "Le Regard d'Emile Zola," *Europe* 46, no. 468 (1968): 182–99. Joy Newton, "Emile Zola and the French Impressionist Novel," *L'Esprit créateur* 13, no. 4 (1973): 320–28. Kate E. Tunstall, "'Crânement beau tout de même': Still Life and Le Ventre de Paris," *French Studies* LVIII, no. 2 (2004): 177–87. Jousset, "Une Poétique de la 'Nature Morte': sur la pratique descriptive dans Le Ventre de Paris." Prendergast, "Le Panorama, la peinture et la faim: le début du Ventre de Paris." Bertrand Tillier, "Le Ventre de Paris: un objet pictural?," in *Les Halles, images d'un quartier*, ed. Jean-Louis Robert and Myriam Tsikounas (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2004), 67–77. Berg, *The Visual Novel: Emile Zola and the Art of His Times*. Catherine Gautschi-Lanz, *Le Roman À Table: Nourritures et Repas Imaginaires Dans Le Roman français:1850-1900* (Geneva: Slatkine Erudition, 2006).
[148] Michel Conan, *L'invention des lieux* (Saint-Maximin: Théétète, 1997), 337. Zola explains in his notes: "l'idée générale est: le ventre, le ventre de Paris, les Halles où la nourriture afflue, s'entasse, pour rayonner sur les quartiers

Fig. 2-1. Jean Béraud. *Les Halles*. 1879. Available from: The Haggin Museum, http://hagginmuseum.org/Collections/JeanBeraud/LesHalles (accessed December 12, 2016).

The open-air market scene in Béraud's oil painting is framed by Saint Eustache on the right and les Halles on the left. (Interestingly, this is the same exact perspective that Claude contemplates in *Le Ventre de Paris* when he announces that: "Il y a là tout un manifeste: c'est l'art modern, le réalisme, le naturalisme […] qui a grandi en face de l'art ancien")[149] On Béraud's canvas, the space is filled with much activity as members from disparate social classes mingle around vividly colored fruits and vegetables which sparkle against the drab cityscape. Despite the foods' chromatic intensity, though, people are arguably positioned as the major focal point. They occupy the central line of vision, with the chic bourgeois woman standing squarely in the foreground. Béraud's Parisian street scene is fundamentally about people and people watching. The canvas gives the viewer a glimpse of diverse social interactions and class distinctions: the clothing, posturing, and various market activities (chatting, bargaining, touching produce, carrying produce in bags, etc.) serve to illustrate a modern crowd. The clusters of produce catch our eye because of their iridescent coloring, the fresh country quality they bring to the dark city streets – but they are largely engulfed by the crowd. And if we pay attention to the individual faces in the scene, we note that people are engaging with other people: on the bottom left, the gentleman in the top hat and the female vendor look at each other while discussing the fruit they handle; to the far right, two men step aside to talk with one another; merchants call out to potential buyers or talk amongst themselves. If we follow the angle of the heads and faces in

divers […] Le côté artistique est les Halles modernes, les gigantesques natures mortes des huits pavillons, l'éboulement de nourriture qui se fait chaque matin au beau milieu de Paris."

[149] Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris,* 799. Working a few years after Zola, Béraud is likewise inspired by the strange clash of architectural styles.

Béraud's painting, people are generally not looking directly at the produce. The strewn aliments on the ground are largely neglected by the passersby. We, the viewers, note the disheveled carrots in the foreground much like how we pay attention to the indistinguishable mob scattered in the background: as a kind of 'filler,' functioning to designate the peripheral contours of the space and to provide context.

But Zola's novel zooms in on the fallen scraps, on the bushels of cabbages, on the roundness of fruit and thus creates a more dynamic collage – or colliding – of people and produce, of the animate and inanimate. Béraud's painting does not inherently challenge modes of spectatorship/viewership. The viewer of the painting can comfortably and casually scan the scene – just like the market goers (flâneurs) it depicts. Zola's writing, however, produces a vibrant contact with the produce and its relationship to people. The novelist sets up the markets as a place to "food-watch." *Le Ventre de Paris* shows a space of sensorial reconfigurations.

> A l'autre bout, au carrefour de la pointe Saint-Eustache, l'ouverture de la rue Rambuteau était barrée par une barricade de potirons orangés, sur deux rangs, s'étalant, élargissant leurs ventres. Et le vernis mordoré d'un panier d'oignons, le rouge saignant d'un tas de tomates, l'effacement jaunâtre d'un lot de concombres, le violet sombre d'une grappe d'aubergines, ça et là, s'allumaient…[150]

Here, the legumes are set in movement. They perform actions. And their sensational colorings and textures are in dialogue with one another.

Zola writes this novel during what Alain Corbin refers to as the "perceptual revolution" which, Corbin explains, altered and heightened a kind of collective sensibility to odor in particular.[151] The desire and need to create discipline and new techniques of surveillance within les Halles thus relates to a growing awareness of contamination that is increasingly associated in the nineteenth century with sensory cues such as smell. In a 1875 *Rapport sur les travaux de la commission chargée d'examiner les questions qui se rattachent à l'assainissement des Halles centrales,* a large commission made up of doctors, engineers, architects, police inspectors and politicians sorts through a series of past and present complaints about the supposedly unhygienic smells of the markets and question the effects of noxious odors on people as well as on the produce.[152] They note the measures taken to properly ventilate the markets, in particular, the underground areas where live poultry are kept and where livestock is slaughtered. They list cleaning agents (l'eau chlorurée, l'acide phénique, le chlorure de chaux, les sels métalliques, le sulfate de zinc, l'acide chlorhydrique, etc.) and cleaning procedures (the standard, daily sweeping, washing, and removing of 200-220 cubic meters of detritus). Yet, despite all these

[150] Ibid., 627.

[151] See Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant. Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 232. Speaking of the period between 1750 and 1880, he concludes that "This episode in the history of disgust, affinities, and purification, spanning the nineteenth century, revolutionized social perceptions and symbolic references."

[152] Here, the commission explicitly follows Alexandre Jean-Baptiste Parent du Châtelet, "Recherches pour déterminer jusqu'à quel point les émanations putrides provenant de la décomposition des matières animales peuvent contribuer à l'altération des substances alimentaires," *Annales d'hygiène publique et de médecine légale* 1, no. 5 (1831): 5–54. Another text that the commission seems to be implicitly in dialogue with is Auguste Tessereau, *Etudes hygiéniques sur les halles centrales de Paris* (Paris: Imprimerie de Hennuyer, 1847).

efforts, les Halles remain notorious for their gamut of smells. The markets cannot escape the bourgeois movement to deodorize and disinfect, both morally and physically, social spaces. A persistently perceived threat throughout *Le Ventre de Paris* is, of course, infection (both literal and figurative) which manifests its destructive potential via an olfactory onslaught. The novel describes a motion to compartmentalize and contain the messy, unpleasant details of human consumption and commerce. The stench of animal blood and the sickening scent of live poultry, for instance, are kept conveniently separate in the carefully organized market caves.

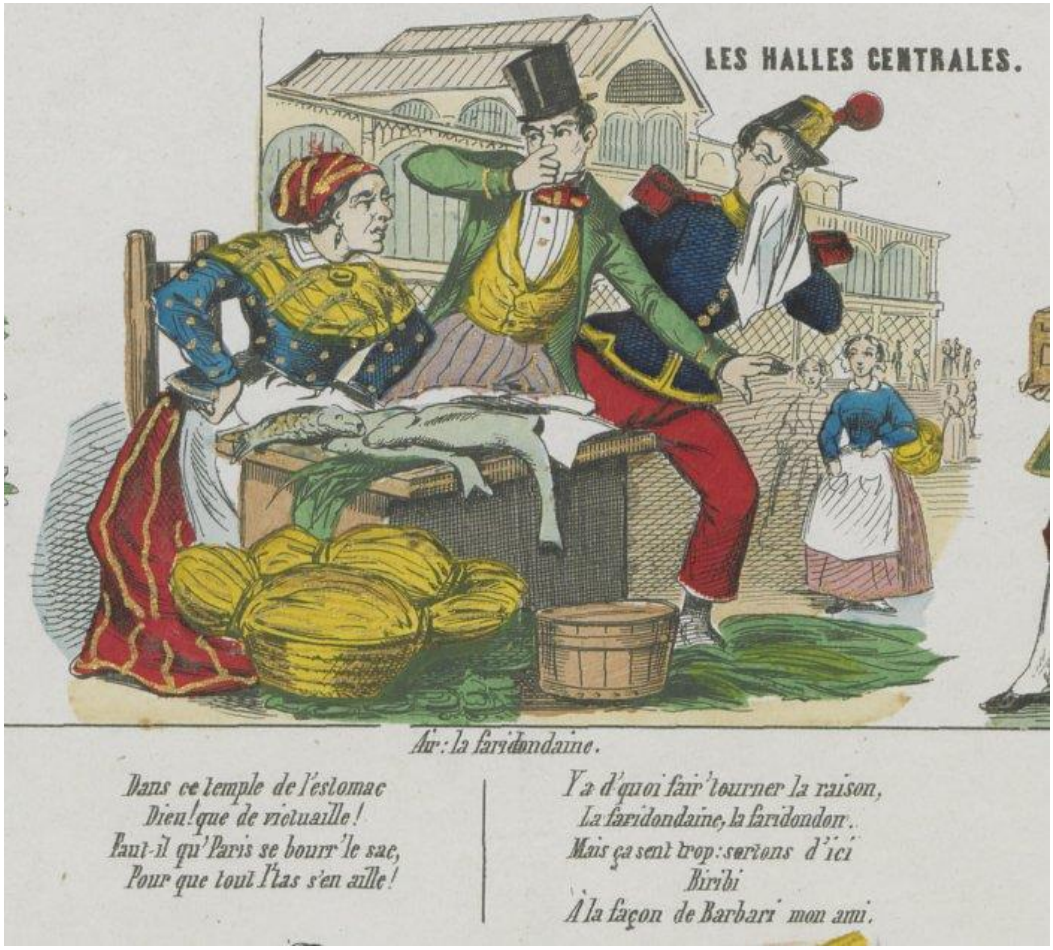

Fig. 2-2. Panel from *Voyage burlesque dans la capitale*. 1859. Available from: Bibliothèque nationale de France, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69382908 (accessed September 5, 2015).

The project to contain and control messy, unpleasant sensations may additionally relate to a nineteenth-century desire to define and even normalize perceptual experiences. (We will consider this point more thoroughly in part two). *Le Ventre de Paris* is interesting precisely because it does not represent 'clear', 'easily digestible' perceptions. It not only confuses sensory information, it likewise combines and confuses the plot and description. In a sense, I would argue, the concern with contamination extends to the spread and influence of descriptive techniques over traditional plot structures within the novel, and to the ways in which perceptual techniques "spread" through contact with different modes of representation. The notion of a "spilling out" or contamination of description throughout the novel links up with the narration's penchant for repetition, reverberation, and remastering of sensory details and I will pursue this

further when I turn to the symphony of cheeses. For now, we could briefly think, for instance, of Florent's account of escaping the penal colony (which includes a starvation story) and the way in which the story is remixed when retold in the Quenu's kitchen amidst the smells, sounds, tastes, and temperatures involved in making a batch of blood sausage. The description of cooking (how the onions are chopped, how the pots are stirred, how spices are added, how the intestines are held, filled, and hung, etc…) provides a backdrop to Florent's embedded narrative. It is the sensory details, especially the odors and sounds of the cooking food, which infuse – and flavor – the plot that Florent is attempting to tell.

> Il venait de couper dans la marmite des rondelles d'oignon qui prenaient, sur le feu, des petites voix claires et aiguës de cigales pâmées de chaleurs. Ça sentait très bon. La marmite, lorsque Quenu y plongeait sa grande cuiller de bois, chantait plus fort, emplissait la cuisine de l'odeur pénétrante de l'oignon cuit.[153]

As the kitchen is filled with Florent's narrative, the sensory details of the filling of the sausage spill out into his story, thickening the air and ultimately lulling the storyteller. "La voix avait baissé de plus en plus." Florent, who is unable to properly conclude his account, watches silently as the kitchen workers triumphantly raise the finished blood sausage out of the boiling pot of water, making sure not to puncture it or accidentally knot the ends together.[154] What this sequence manages to accomplish is, in fact, a knotting together of perceptual details and plot that do not go together (Florent's story of a decomposing body eaten by crabs does not fit well within the context of the Quenu's savory batch of sausage). The description of sensorial elements (sensations experienced outside of the embedded tale) saturates Florent's narrative to the extent that his story disintegrates. The reader watches as description overrides the act of storytelling.

One commonly held belief about the naturalist genre is that it gives a primacy to description that usurps, or perhaps even contaminates, to varying degrees the plot.[155] As David Baguley has previously noted, there exists "an essential dialectic of naturalist texts" which involves the vital interchange of description and plot. The descriptive sequences tend to reveal a dynamic tension, "which offsets the rigorous 'logic' of the deterministic or repetitive plot […] with more disruptive, discontinuous procedures."[156] But what are we to really make of the descriptive 'obstacles' set along the narrative's forward-marching path?[157]

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[153] Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris,* 686.

[154] Ibid., 693. "Pour ne point crever ni nouer les bouts ensemble, il les prenait avec un bâton, les enroulait, les portait dans la cour, où ils devaient sécher rapidement sur des claies. […] Ces guirlandes de boudin, qui traversaient la cuisine, toutes suantes, lassaient des traînées d'une fumée forte qui achevaient d'épaissir l'air."

[155] See, for example, David Baguley, *Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 197. Baguley writes, "In so far as the naturalist writer generally considered complex plot development to be a fundamental characteristic of types of literature he rejected (Romantic, escapist, 'feuilleton' novels), of 'literature' as opposed to 'life', then the descriptive is most decidedly opposed to plot. Descriptive passages thereby tend to take on a certain autonomy and develop their own aesthetic forms. The functions of plot are apparently suspended and, as Martino remarks of the typical Goncourt text, 'le roman semble renoncer délibrément à son caractère romanesque.'" Here, we could also consider Georg Lukács' famous essay, "Narrate or Describe," in which he critiques Zola for his over-descriptive writing.

[156] Ibid., 187.

[157] One explanation for Zola's strange tug-of-war between action/event and description/perception in *Le Ventre de Paris* is, as Fredric Jameson points out in *The Antimonies of Realism*, the fact that Zola stands at a literary crossroads. Here, the naturalist writer is still dependent upon traditional realist models that depend heavily on plot,

For one thing, the 'descriptive diversions' which trigger associative pathways and open up discussions of how a given subject (reader) perceives an object may not be a counterbalance to the plot and its particular telos, but instead a kind of reinforcement or even reenactment of it. Description in *Le Ventre de Paris* comes in waves, in repeated yet reworked instances that spill out into and over the characters' actions and dialogues. The series of descriptions that punctuate the plot make us acknowledge the make-up (artifice) of the novel as a whole, the constant manipulation and reworking of objects and events, and in so doing, reveal a modern aesthetic enterprise. [158] Furthermore, I would argue that Zola uses his descriptions to experiment with modes of being attentive to stimuli (and to a text). Technological advancements in the nineteenth century arguably prompt an acceleration and even mechanization of perceptual experience. Zola's writing – notably his complex figures of speech and reverberation of sensory details – can be cast in an almost reactionary light as it causes the invested reader to experience fleeting sensations in a decelerated and concentrated manner.

Throughout *Le Ventre de Paris*, the descriptive sequences gesture to a transitioning kind of reader/observer who is increasingly asked to participate in the perceived event. Well steeped in the nineteenth-century society of spectacle and likely accustomed to the participatory mode of observation known as *flânerie*, Zola's reader is challenged to not just *look at* the representation, but to *produce* some form of meaning from its vibrant descriptions.[159] However Zola positions his more precocious readers in yet another role: they are encouraged to reflect upon how the text manipulates and sculpts the representation of sense data and how they are therefore interpolated in the process.

When a character (and by extension the reader) begins to focus on a particular item, it blossoms, or fragments, into a series of other objects and sensations.[160] As Florent listens to M. Verlaque explain the fish market to him, a beam of light hits the various shells and fish scales, causing the protagonist to experience the seafood as strange jewelry:

> C'était comme les écrins, vidés à terre, de quelque fille des eaux, des parures inouïes et bizarres, un ruissellement, un entassement de colliers, de bracelets monstrueux, de broches gigantesques, de bijoux barbares, dont l'usage échappait. Sur le dos des raies et des chines de mer, de grosses pierres sombres, violâtre, s'enchâssaient dans un métal noirci ; et les minces barres des équilles, les queues et les nageoires des éperlans, avaient des délicatesses de bijouterie fine.

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that is, on a meaningful and chronologically coherent sequence of events which sets the characters and story in motion.

[158] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism, 1890-1930* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 393. Bradbury and McFarlane explain that "the Modernist novel has shown, perhaps, four great preoccupations: with the complexities of its own form, with the representation of inward states of consciousness, with a sense of the nihilistic disorder behind the ordered surface of life and reality, and with the freeing of narrative art from the determination of an onerous plot. In all of these areas what is being questioned is linear narrative, logical and progressive order, the establishing of a stable surface of reality." All of these preoccupations are evident in Zola's novel.

[159] See David Trotter, "Modernity and Its Discontents: Manet, Flaubert, Cézanne, Zola," *Paragraph* 19 (1996): 252–53. "Modern viewers produce, in the act of viewing, […] the value of the image they view" , 252.

[160] Aktulum, "Les Métamorphoses de l'objet dans le ventre de Paris d'Émile Zola," 346-347. Aktulum notes the writer's tendency to "créer d'un seul objet plusieurs images." In Aktulum's reading, objects are not appealing to Zola unless they can be transformed into something else.

The metamorphosis of marine life into an odd assortment of necklaces, bracelets, and broaches with no distinguishable purpose ("dont l'usage échappait") reveals an artistic urge on the part of the writer to transform materiality into something more – something *other.* The scene is disorienting in that it positions large and hideous elements with dainty and attractive details. There are gems and delicate designs lurking in the rough jumble. Zola is, in a way, dumping out his own box of trinkets and asking us to consider their use and value. Part of their value, I would suggest, is found in their ability to produce new reading and observation practices.

Zola's style (which essentially displays modes of information processing) is demanding for the reader. The metaphors in the scene complicate the encounter with objects by defamiliarizing them. It seems, then, that Zola employs what Shklovsky, in his *Theory of Prose*, calls the device of 'enstrangement.' "By 'enstranging' objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and 'laborious.' The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. *Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant*."[161] Shklovsky remarks that the fundamental purpose of the poetic image is to create a "vision" of an object, meaning, a *process* of perceiving an object, rather than an understanding or "recognition" of it.[162] It is worth remembering that Shklovsky draws a distinction between the language of poetry and that of prose. Whereas common prose tends to "automatize" the object, thereby requiring the least amount of perceptual effort, poetic speech does the opposite by forcing the reader to linger over the text.[163] *Le Ventre de Paris* is innovative and disruptive because its figurative exploration of objects upsets the established or expected pacing of a realist/naturalist text.

It may appear as though Zola's engagement with sensory data has an exclusively aesthetic agenda. Zola's rendition of sense perception in this novel is certainly indebted to the figurative sensorial crisscrossing inaugurated by nineteenth century poets (most notably by Baudelaire). But the Naturalist writer's use of syneasthesia, in particular, intersects with a growing scientific concern of the day. In the mid to late nineteenth century, various scientists and pseudo-scientists asked psychological/physiological questions, such as, what particular smells provoke a hysteric? Do 'more intelligent' people remember shapes and/or colors better than 'less intelligent' people? Or, especially in the case of smells, certain inquiries and rapports relate to the pursuit of better public hygiene and safety.[164] Though these kinds of studies sought to isolate a particular sense or to focus intently on one sense organ and its own function, many other experiments and scientific treatises were concerned with slippages between modes of perception, evident in the growing notion of *colored hearing.*[165] A shift in the way in which we understand and approach the function and spectrum of human sense perception was underway, and this shift would have great effects on artistic practices.

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[161] Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 6.
[162] Ibid., 10.
[163] Ibid., 12. Shlovsky notes that in poetic language, "an artifact […] has been intentionally removed from the domain of automatized perception. It is 'artistically' created by an artist in such a way that the perceiver, pausing in his reading, dwells on the text."
[164] We could think here of the work of Louis Pasteur and of Jean-Martin Charcot. See also Ernest Monin, *Les Odeurs Du Corps Humain Dans L'état de Santé et Dans L'état de Maladie* (Paris: Carré, 1886). Auguste Henri André Duméril, *Des Odeurs, de Leur Nature et de Leur Action Physiologique* (Paris: Rignoux, 1843). Joseph Joal, *Vertiges et Odeurs* (Paris: J. Rueff, 1901). For a study on the cultural-history of smells and the notion of hygiène, see Alain Corbin, *Le Miasme et La Jonquille : L'odorat et L'imaginaire Social, 18e-19e Siècles* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1982).
[165] See Ferdinand Suárez de Mendoza, *L'Audition colorée: étude sur les fausses sensations secondaires* (Paris: Octave Doin, 1890).

In Zola's time, sounds and colors were being increasingly linked together, as were smells and sounds. With the expanding perfume trade in the nineteenth-century, work was done to meticulously categorize scents and their effects on smellers. The English chemist and perfume maker, Septimus Piesse, stipulated in the early 1860s that sounds and smells were stimulated in a similar region of the brain and that, due to potential cross-over in the nerves, it was possible to create a musical score of odors. His widely successful work, which included a theory of odors, was translated into French by 1865. In this thorough work devoted to the particularities of scents, Piesse provides olfactory compositions in set musical keys (see example image on the following page). Although it is difficult to say if Zola was actually familiar with Piesse's theory, my point here is that there was a serious discourse taking place around the time of *Le Ventre de Paris* which questioned the workings of the human brain and in particular, the ways in which sensations could overlap – or be perceived as overlapping. Zola's intense symphony of cheeses beautifully demonstrates the convergence of scientific and aesthetic discourses. In it, there is a representation of how the mind maps out stimuli and connects sensations.

By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, a topic in both scientific fields and literary studies was *l'audition colorée*, or *colored-hearing*.[166] By the early twentieth century, colored-hearing becomes associated in literature with modes of making the listener/reader *feel*. And here we can think of Zola as a crucial forerunner to this movement. As Jean de Cours writes in his 1916 *Mercure de France* article, "L'audition colorée et la sensation du poème," a sonic-visual combination (or, some might say, confusion) allows the reader to *sense,* or *feel,* the poem ("[l'audition colorée] reste un des moyens les plus féconds pour aider non seulement à comprendre le poème mais à le sentir"). For de Cours, what is crucial about moments of syneasthesia is that they let the reader participate directly with the writer or poet in the creative process:

> Par [l'audition colorée] non seulement notre intelligence s'éclairera, mais encore notre sensibilité éveillée s'approfondira singulièrement. Notre conscience s'enrichira d'une façon magnifique. Par cette communion à l'état d'âme de l'artiste, nous deviendrons à notre tour comme des créateurs.[167]

When Zola's descriptions culminate in radical moments of synaesthesia, the writer interpolates a different kind of reader: one who should almost feel, in his/her nerves and fibers, the sensory impressions described. In this call to *sentir*, the reader must forge a new synapse, as it were, in order to receive the transmitted signal. And in this building of connections and associations the reader (to follow de Cours's logic) becomes part of the creative process.

[166] Ibid. See also René Ghil, *De La Poésie scientifique* (Paris: Gastein-Serge, 1909).
[167] Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris,* 661.

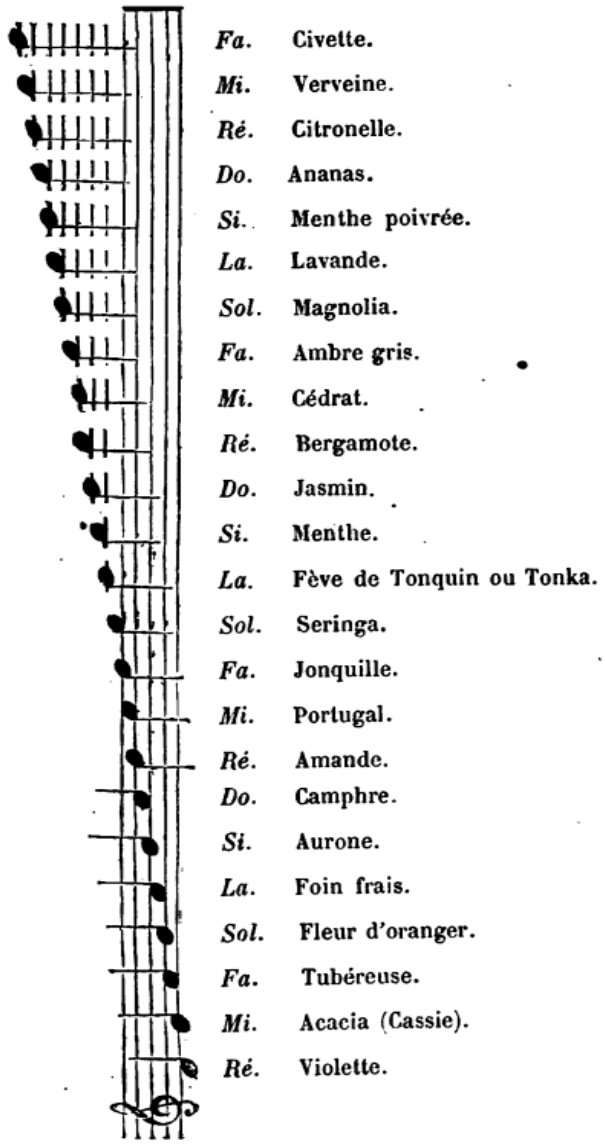

Fig. 1. — Gamme des odeurs, dessus ou clef de *Sol*.

Fig. 2-3. GW Septimus Piesse, F Chardin-Hadancourt, and Henri Massignon. *Gamme des odeurs, dessus ou clef de Sol*. From: *Des odeurs des parfums et des cosmétiques.* Paris: J-B Baillière et fils, 1877.

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At the close of *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873), Zola orchestrates a synaesthetic masterpiece in which cheeses express miasmic tones, textures, pressures, and frequencies. For over 140 years, these frenetic odors have received critical attention. In Zola's time, Barbey D'Aurevilly cynically commented on the scene, chastising his fellow author for having sacrificed the novel's plot and dialogue to this 'vulgar', implausible description.[168] Recently, Fredric Jameson used the "cheese chapter" to describe a particular technique he detects in Zola's writing whereby "characters become the most perfunctory pretexts for what is virtually an autonomous unfolding of sense data."[169] My concern, however, is with the experimental quality of Zola's synaesthesia and more specifically with the ways in which this perceptual mimesis maps out and tests modes of information processing in the human sensory-motor system. The symphony of cheeses essentially experiments with narrative form and its reader's attention while setting up a literary model of cognitive processes.

Before my close reading of the symphony of cheeses, I will briefly turn to Dr. Edouard Toulouse's 1896 medical-psychological survey of Zola and then to Herman Helmholtz's *Sensations of Tone* (first published in 1863) to convey that Zola's writing sets up a similar experimental system that, on the one hand, materializes and examines various physiological/psychological functions (using a technology of inscription), and on the other hand, recalibrates the perceptual field (by training the reader to be aware of their experience and its mediation). These two studies thus will serve to frame and inform my analysis of Zola's.

Dr. Edouard Toulouse's investigation of Zola shows us that new scientific (and pseudo-scientific) approaches to the sentient body in the second half of the nineteenth century strive to calculate physical and mental reactions to stimuli, and in so doing define a normative, and normalizing, spectrum of perceptual experience.[170] *Besides a rigorous physical exam with a quasi-phrenological approach, Zola underwent hundreds of tests designed to determine the proficiency of his perceptual apparatus.* Toulouse indicates that there is an established, 'normal' range of percpetion when he remarks that: "M. Zola perçoit mieux que la moyenne les sensations simultanées" ; "le sens musculaire semble normal" ; "la sensibilité à la douleur est excessivement développée."[171]There is a strong link here to pathological discourses, as 'malfunctioning' nervous systems are associated with the degenerate and the criminal (i.e. Charcot's hysterical patients tended to smell things the wrong way).[172] One explicit goal of Dr. Toulouse's study is to determine the extent to which "nevropathie" manifests itself in both the madman and the genius. Another more nebulous objective of the study is an explanation of the author's peculiar realism. "Son réalisme, son besoin de vérité et d'animer les choses pourraient être en partie expliqués par la justesse de ses perceptions." In what appears to be a defense of Zola's descriptions, Toulouse concludes that "l'étude des sensations et des perceptions ne permet pas de vérifier cette critique

[168] Jules Barbey D'Aurevilly, *Le Roman Contemporain* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1968), 209-13.
[169] Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2015), 59.
[170] Jonathan Crary has masterfully discussed the quantifying and reshaping of attention, and visual experience in particular, in several of his works. See, for example, "Unbinding Vision: Manet and the Attentive Observer in the Late Nineteenth Century," 46-47.
[171] Toulouse, *Enquête médico-psychologique sur les rapports de la supériorité intellectuelle: Émile Zola,* 156-57.
[172] Elizabeth Emery, "Dissection or Narrative Surgery? Medical Inquiry and Writer Confidences in Fin-de Siècle French Magazines," *South Central Review* 29, no. 3 (2012): 93–109. Emery suggests that Zola's participation in Toulouse's study may relate, in part, to the author's desire to expose himself as not being degenerate, sex-crazed, or mentally un-sound.

qu'on lui a adressé de grossir les objets."[173] For my purposes, I want to keep the notion of a 'normally' functioning sensory system close at hand because I believe that Zola challenges this concept in the cheese symphony. Additionally, although the melodious smells are meticulously categorized in the text, they nonetheless resist being quantified and qualified, further destabilizing the notion of a straight-forward, definable sensorial experience.

Another point I wish to stress is that Toulouse's study is dependent upon technologies that record data and provide visual, graphic models of the cognitive processes and body functions the doctor investigates. His *Enquête* is replete with tables, charts, diagrams, photographs, lithographs. There are graphs of Zola's heart rate. There are images that break down, mathematically and geometrically, his field of vision. There is even a "trace pneumographique" showing his breathing rhythm. Physiological operations that had once been difficult to study are now rendered visible, even quantifiable, and can therefore provide clues about how stimuli is received and processed mentally, intellectually. The physical exam of the author segues into a series of *tests mentals* that examine particular sensory-motor functions (to cite but a few examples: "test sur la finesse de l'olfaction," "test sur la mémoire tactile des objets," "tests pour l'appréciation de la durée respective des sensations de nature différentes," "tests sur l'attention," "test sur la suggestibilité," "test sur l'association des idées"). Crucially, the scientist provides a transcript of his experiments (he lists the questions asked, describes how he set up variables, duplicates the tables and images shown to the subject, etc…) which shows how he collected data while giving a concrete representational form to it.

Toulouse gives his readers means and methods to contemplate their own perceptual apparatus and perform certain tests on themselves. He does so by incorporating various technologies of representation that furnish external models of internal operations into his study, and by stepping the reader of this text expressly through his methodology.When the doctor states that Zola smells more accutely than the average person and then lists the objects smelt, it is safe to say that some readers might feel the urge to compare and classify the workings of their own noses. Or at the very least, they consider abstractly how their perceptions might line up with the famous writer's. Like Toulouse's tests, Zola's narrative establishes representations of information processing and compels its reader to focus on his/her own attentiveness to external phenomena.

The notion that one might adjust an observer's attention through a detailed representation of perceptual practices (and experimentations with them) is explicit in another work from the period, Helmholtz's *On the Sensations of Tone* (first edition published in 1863). The German scientist theorizes on how a listener interprets the tone, quality, and pitch of acoustic events using physiological studies that show how the ear's structure and various nerve fibers receive/perceive soundwaves. But the text is also a kind of observation training handbook. An analysis of musical tones by the ear requires techniques that Helmholtz delineates and showcases in his experiments. "The attention of the observer has generally to be drawn to the phenomenon he has to observe, by peculiar aids properly selected, until he knows precisely what to look for," he explains. "I shall first give a description of such processes as will mostly easily put an untrained observer into a position to recognize [distinct tones …]. Success depends upon a peculiar power of mental abstraction or a peculiar mastery over attention, than upon musical training."[174] Indeed, the researcher gives instructions on how to produce specific musical phenomena that, when listened to and examined in the way he suggests, allow the observer to

[173] Toulouse, *Enquête médico-psychologique sur les rapports de la supériorité intellectuelle: Émile Zola,* 179.
[174] Hermann Helmholtz, *On the Sensations of Tone* (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 49.

experience a sensation that is usually overlooked. Explaining how he conducted a listening experiment by tapping on piano strings with different objects to obtain "a series of gradual transitional stages between the isolated partial and the compound tone," Helmholtz claims that he has "succeeded in making perfectly untrained ears recognize the existence of upper partial tones."[175] Helmholtz's project tests modes of attention and provides a means to formulate new perceptual habits.

Of particular interest to Helmholtz is the question of how one can (physiologically and psychologically) distinguish simultaneous auditory signals that make up a 'whole', and by extension, how one can be trained to effectively hear compound or combinational tones. This inquiry leads him to make analogies with other senses. "The phenomena of mixed colours present considerable analogy to those of compound musical tones," he says and then describes his experiments with visual sensations.[176] While Helmholtz never fuses sensations cross-modally in his analysis, he turns to the visual, tactile, and olfactory systems to better elucidate the ear's mechanism. These comparisons are largely pedagogical. We sometimes hear in a confused manner, Helmholtz explains – just as if we touch something cold we might perceive it as wet – because different external phenomena can stimulate a similar sensation, producing an "illusion."[177] To illustrate how different soundwaves can coexist simultaneously, he speaks at length of concurrent waves on a body of water. This leads the scientist to conjecture that the trained ear is capable of discerning a mixture of sonic frequencies just as the eye, surveying an agitated surface of water, "easily distinguishes the separate systems of waves from each other and follows their motions."[178] But *training* is key. Helmholtz makes this point repeatedly. "The difficulty felt in analyzing musical tones exists also for other senses," he writes. "The ingredients of our dishes and the spices with which we flavor them are not so complicated that they could not be readily learned by anyone. And yet there are very few people who have not themselves practically studied cookery, that are able readily and correctly to discover, by taste alone, the ingredients of the dishes placed before them."[179] Helmholtz argues that there are different kinds or "grades" of "our becoming conscious of a sensation."[180] Although we automatically register phenomena synthetically (our physiological body receives the incoming data) we should learn to perceive analytically to fully appreciate sensations, especially those that occur in tandem. *Sensations of Tone* pieces apart audio signals for us and endorses a particular attentiveness that would do the same: "we must begin by making the individual elements which have to be distinguished, individually audible, so as to obtain an entirely fresh recollection of the corresponding sensation, and the whole business requires undisturbed and concentrated attention."[181] In this study of sound, Helmholtz creates an awareness of tones – a concentrated auditory attention – via an explanation/exploration of other sensory organs and non-acoustic sensations. To become more conscious of how we hear tones (and how we might effectively hear them differently) we must break down data into processable bits of information, and this

[175] Ibid., 51.
[176] Ibid., 64.
[177] Ibid., 63. "When our hand glides unawares along a cold and smooth piece of metal we are apt to imagine that we have wetted our hand. This shows that the sensation of wetness to the touch is compounded out of that of unresisting gliding and cold, which in one case results from the good heat-conducting properties of metal, and in the other from the cold of evaporation and the great specific heat of water. We can easily recognize both sensations in wetness…"
[178] Ibid., 28.
[179] Ibid., 63.
[180] Ibid., 62.
[181] Ibid., 65.

analytical perception of sensations is facilitated if we draw similarities with various operations of other sensory organs.

Just as Doctor Toulouse's *Enquête* depends on technological innovations to collect and represent sensory data, Helmholtz's study of physiological acoustics also depends on new instruments that can replicate and/or represent sonic and visual information.[182] The ear is conceived of as a tuning-fork resonator, the nerves are compared to telegraph wires, synthetical perception is explained via the visual experience produced by the stereoscope. To illustrate how the ear senses tones, Helmholtz operates a technology with an analogous function. To enhance the listener's experience of sound, he explains how these technologies work. Likewise, I will argue, Zola uses the literary text as a cutting-edge technology that inscribes sensorial events, replays data, *and* offers various models of attentiveness.

When we arrive at the symphony of cheeses, Mlle Saget has just discovered the true identity of Florent and has gathered together La Sariette, the fruit vendor, and Mme Lecœur, the dairy vendor, to gossip and make plans in the cheese shop. Mlle Saget announces that Florent is a political criminal who has returned from "le bagne," at which point the cheeses around them start to take center stage and appear to encroach upon the narrative sequence. The subsequent description of cheeses is divided into five main "chunks" inserted between the dialogue and actions of the characters, each segment producing its own perceptual experimentation. It is significant that the symphony occurs in interupted stages because with each defined 'movement', sensorial information is re-presented and remastered, offering readers an occasion to fine-tune their attentiveness to the data/text (data/text *as* an adjuster of information).

The initial representation of cheeses experiments notably with proprioception – with the body's/mind's ability to orient itself spatially and, to a degree, temporally. The passage is filled with positional markers (Autour d'elles ; au fond ; sous la table ; dans des caisses ; au milieu ; posés bout à bout ; rangé à plat ; Là, à côté ; etc…) that guide the readers somatically through the dense collage of data. Yet it complicates spatial relationships through figuration. In this catalogue of cheeses, objects are ordered in such a way as to evoke other images, objects, and sensations. While the spatial indications often imply a reflexive, active quality (s'alignaient des mottes de beurre énormes; les fromages s'empilaient; un parmesan, au milieu de cette lourdeur de pâte cuite, ajoutait sa pointe d'odeur aromatique; se vidait d'une crème blanche), as if the dairy products were orienting themselves, the text constantly signals its mediation/construction of the scene. (Sensory information may appear to 'come to us' on its own, but our physiological-pscyhological structures are always already filtering and rearranging data.) The positioning of cheese ushers forth a superpositioning of metaphors and highly literary gestures: s'élargissait un cantal géant, *comme fendu à coups de hache;* puis venaient un chester, couleur d'or, un gruyère, *pareil à une roue tombée de quelque char barbare*, des hollande, *ronds comme des têtes coupées, barbouillées de sang séché ;* dans un plat, à côté, des fromages de chèvre, *gros comme un poing d'enfant*, durs et grisâtres, *rappelaient les cailloux que les boucs, menant leur troupeau, font rouler aux coudes des sentiers pierreux.* Although there is a more or less 'realistic' spatial alignment set up in the passage that guides the reader across the layers of images, Zola's description quickly shifts into a jumble of metaphors and registers. The stacking-up of similes removes the images from their physical location and situates them in a different realm, that of the sensorial and imaginative. The robust assortment of cheeses spins into a heteroclite mash-up of

[182] Ibid., vi. In the author's preface to the first edition, Helmholtz thus states: "The following investigations could not have been accomplished without the construction of new instruments."

associative figures: moons, white lakes, pebbles, rocks, blood, medals, discs from Antiquity, chopped off heads, syphilitic grimaces, the chubby hands of children, calm autumn evenings.

When presented with figures of style such as metaphor or synaesthesia, we, the readers, are required to perform a *déchiffrement* whereby our own perceptual habits (our brain's ability to make and recognize patterns) are called into action, disrupted, rewired. In her recent scholarship on Zola, Susan Harrow emphasizes that "metaphor draws attention to itself *as* metaphor, that is as a series of displacements of language material that solicit analogous participation on the part of the reader in calling up the memory of color, texture, density, and movement."[183] The metaphors in this passage chart the ways in which associations reroute sensory experience. Zola experiements with literature's ability to depict and reconfigure experience, and he tests his reader's ability to take note of how s/he apprehends the literary text. As Iser has explained in his phenomenological theory of reading practices, "the need to decipher gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity."[184] Zola gets us to feel, or perceive, the act of perception by ostensibly showing how his text (his particular technology of inscription) alters and transmits data. He does so by stepping us through the construction of the scene. In her work on sensory writing, Elain Scarry shows that the strategic use of "authorial instruction" in the verbal arts creates a mimesis of perception: by constructing a viable sensorial field and enlisting the reader's own cognitive structures, literature can evoke realistic (believable) tactile, kinetic, and visual phenomena in the mind's eye. [185] While there is arguably authorial direction in *Le Ventre de Paris* that conducts the reader's senses, the narration critically introduces the represented perceptual event as unstable, artificial and/or malleable.

Despite all the sensational oozing, the characters in the scene appear mostly indifferent to the rich sensorial atmosphere they find themselves in. For example, in a subsequent description that foregrounds smells, Mlle Saget has her nose directly above the most potent smelling *géromé* – one that "répandait une infection telle, que des mouches étaient tombées autour de la boîte"[186] – and yet, the disgust she expresses in this moment seems to correspond not necessarily to the noxious fumes around her, but to the thought of Florent's criminal past that infects her understanding of him ("Oui, répéta-t-elle avec une grimace de dégout, il vient du bagne."[187]). Although the women are encased by stinky cheeses, they are strangely distanced from any intense perception of – or involvement with – them. The characters do not qualify or contemplate their sensory experience; their perception seems 'untrained' or unrefined. At one point, the narration states "comme elles soufflaient un peu, ce fut le camembert qu'elles sentirent surtout,"[188] and, at another, "brusquement, des râles de limbourg arrivèrent entre les trois femmes, aigres et amers, comme soufflés par des gorges de mourants."[189] But, the elaborate and figurative encounter with cheeses is never presented through the perspective of the characters who, in fact, become themselves just as obnoxious to the senses: "il semblait que c'étaient les paroles mauvaises de Mme Lecœur et de Mlle Saget qui puaient si fort."[190] Therefore, the role of the observer – or the *experiencer* – of things and sensations is left largely to the narrator and his readership. Zola moreover forewarns his reader/observer that his descriptive writing is designed

[183] Susan Harrow, *Zola, the Body Modern: Pressures and Prospects of Representation* (Oxford: Legenda, 2010), 45.
[184] Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 294.
[185] Elain Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).
[186] Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris*, 828.
[187] Ibid., 828.
[188] Ibid., 830.
[189] Ibid., 829.
[190] Ibid., 833.

as a challenge to modes of literary representation, and this challenge presents different modes of being receptive to the work and its investment in the sensorial.

The opening cheese sequence foregrounds artistic effort.This is critical because the narration soon repeats and reworks the description of cheeses, confronting and challenging its own representational forms (and the perceptions it first describes).. The vocabulary that designates a creative process also relays a cognitive phenomnon in which sensory data is integrated by the nervous system. The blocks of butter "ressemblaient à des ébauches de ventres, sur lesquelles un sculpteur aurait jeté des linges mouillés," and throughout the passage, we find multiple references to scultping, cutting, and molding: "fendu à coup de hache," "ronds comme des têtes coupées," "d'autres mottes, entamées, taillées par les larges couteaux en rochers à pic, plein de vallons et de cassures." By calling attention to the act of carving and shaping physical material, Zola establishes a sense of texture and three dimensionality. But this palpability evidently extends to language itself, to the malleability of words and phrases, to the writer's construction of imagery. The passage furthermore integrates a vocabulary of painting effects and painterly activities: "mettaient une blancheur de craie," "faisaient des nappes plus sombres, tachées de tons verdâtres," "*barbouillé* de sang séché." Scarry has commented that great sensory writes often invoke or incorporate works of art into their text in order to "duplicate the phenomenology of perception, and to do so by taking what the imagination is best at (dry, thin two-dimensionality) and enlisting it into the operation."[191] Indeed, the reference to art and artifice may faciliate our *imagining* of the cheeses. But we become moreover attuned to the ways in which the text records and integrates multimodal sensations, and by extension, to the ways in which our perceptual systems register phenomena in equally 'anormal,' creative manners in an attempt to establish a coherent representation of objects.

Next, Zola builds and intensifies his symphony of cheeses with an acute attention to odors. This passage examines how the sensory system sorts through multiple modality inputs and parses incoming stimuli. Colors, temparatures, textures, and sounds combine. Yet the narration organizes the information processing in a kind of chronological order that is contingent upon specific, unambiguous sense perceptions of objects. (Like we noted in Helmholtz's analysis of combinational tones, there is a need to separate and calculate specific sensory information in order to assess 'the whole'.)

> Alors commençaient les puanteurs : les mont-d'or, jaune clair, puant une odeur douceâtre ; les troyes, très épais, meurtris sur les bords, d'âpreté déjà plus forte, ajoutant une fétidité de cave humide ; les camembert, d'un fumet de gibier trop faisandé ; les neufchâtel, les limbourg, les marolles, les pont-l'évêque, carrés, mettant chacun leur note aiguë et particulière dans cette phrase rude jusqu'à la nausée ; les livarot, teintés de rouge, terribles à la gorge comme une vapeur de soufre ; puis enfin, par-dessus tous les autres, les olivet, enveloppés de feuilles de noyer, ainsi que ces charognes que les paysans couvrent de branches, au bord d'un champ, fumantes au soleil. La chaude après-midi avait amolli les fromages ; les moisissures des croûtes fondaient, se vernissaient avec des tons riches de cuivre rouge et de vert-de-gris, semblables à des blessures mal fermées ; sous les feuilles de chêne, un souffle

[191] Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book*, 23.

> soulevait la peau des olivet, qui battait comme une poitrine, d'une haleine lente et grosse d'homme endormi ; un flot de vie avait troué un livarot, accouchant par cette entaille d'un peuple de vers.[192]

The list of names is not a fortuitous enumeration of dairy goods. It is a list of perceptions as each variety of cheese implicates a unique olfactory response. The organization of the passage produces a notion of both spatial and temporal sequence. The smells *start* ("Alors commençaient les puanteurs") and the individual cheeses and odors begin to pile up on top of each other ("les troyes […] d'âpreté déjà plus forte, *ajoutant* une fétidité de cave humide," "*puis enfin, par-dessus tous les autres*, les olivet"). Due to literary constraints, Zola cannot really verbalize simultaneous perception. Lewis Kamm thus explains, "the novelist finds it materially impossible to portray the contents of perception spatially, as existing simultaneously. As his words must be written one after the other in chronological order, his method of composition is necessarily enslaved in the process of succession. The accelerated description of certain things imposes the later portrayal of others."[193] The closest Zola comes to expressing an experience of simultaneous sensations in this passage is when "les neufchâtel, les limbourg, les marolles, les pont-l'évêque" each ring "leur note aiguë et particulière dans cette phrase rude jusqu'à la nausée" and their individual 'pitches' join forces. Although the writing format may prevent the description from articulating a dense combination of sense data, Zola nonetheless creates a kind of spatial and temporal confusion which may actually exemplify the effects of being in a multi-sensorial field. The use of the imperfect tense ("fondaient, se vernissaient," "soulevait," "battait," etc.) and the present participle ("puant," "ajoutant," "mettant," "accouchant," etc.) places all the objects in a similar state of being or becoming. The paratactic flow of names, smells, and imagery also contributes to a sense of imbrication. What we have, then, is perception represented as an incomplete or ongoing process. And the random, apparently inanimate object (a chunk of cheese) becomes invested with movement and frenzy.

At this point, the narration slips back into what could be considered a more traditional plot structure that provides the reader some much needed respite from the lengthy descriptive sequences.[194] But the text does not give us a break from its display of information processing for Zola continues to explore how our perceptual operations corroborate and reconfigure data. Mlle Saget, Mme Lecœur and La Sariette chat about Florent. While many critics and commentators consider the human characters in this scene a blip in the narrative[195], I would argue that their

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[192] Ibid., 827-28.

[193] Lewis Kamm, "The Structural and Functional Manifestation of Space in Zola's Rougon-Macquart," *Nineteenth Century French Studies* 3 & 4 (1975): 230.

[194] Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), 117. Barthes admits that, with Zola's work, he often skips over descriptive passages in order to establish his own enjoyable reading pace: "nous ne lisons pas tout avec la même intensité de lecture; un rythme s'établit, désinvolte, peu respectueux à l'égard de l'intégrité du texte; […] nous sautons impunément (personne ne nous voit) les descriptions." The implication, then, is that the description of things can slow down the plotline and frustrate the impatient reader.

[195] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 59, 63. Jameson contends that in Zola's cheese chapter, "characters become the most perfunctory pretexts for what is virtually an autonomous unfolding of sense data" and the women's gossip, affected by the "semi-autonomous 'symphony,'" becomes "a new and heightened cacophonous counterpoint." And Jules Barbey D'Aurevilly, writing as a contemporary critic of Zola, offers a condescending analysis of the cheese symphony which stresses that even though it is "dans cette atmosphère de fromages épiques que se trame le complot contre l'Icarien de Cayenne, entre des commères qui veulent le livrer à la police," the mixing of "le drame aux

dialogue crucially underscores a making-up of stories, an embellishment of the facts, and a process of revision and editing which refracts and refocuses the interspersed descriptive passages.

When Mlle Saget "conta l'histoire de Florent," the *histoire* she recounts mixes together 'historical facts' (i.e. he was deported by the police and spent several years in a penal colony) and a healthy dose of pure storytelling (in Saget's fabricated tale, Florent was arrested "pour avoir tué six gendarmes sur une barricade" and "il en a bien fait d'autres"). Once the women realize that Florent is Quenu's brother, "elles se regardèrent, surprises par ce côté du nouveau cas de Florent." They must revamp the story they previously envisioned between Lisa and Florent (that they were lovers), and: "Cela les ennuyait de lâcher leur première version."[196] Their toxic gossip spreads and adapts, presenting other versions ("en somme, l'histoire tournait au tragique," "alors ce furent des suppositions prodigieuses," "les commérages tournèrent," "Elles en revinrent à Florent. Elles le déchirèrent avec plus de fureur encore. Puis, posément, elles calculèrent où ces mauvaises histoires pouvaient les mener, lui et Gavard"). The conscious reformulation of stories and perspectives played out by the women embeds the scene's descriptive sequences. The writer uses the women's adjustments of information, I believe, to sharpen the reader's attentiveness to another series of adjustments that occur in the description of the cheeses. Zola's orchestration occurs as a series – as modulations on a theme – and increases its vocabulary and imagery with each sequential description, rendering the facts and details of reality (i.e. the brie smelled distinctly) into a full-blown, manipulated art piece ("les brie y mettaient des douceurs fades de tambourins humides"). Zola returns to the same cheeses but forcefully and poetically renovates their qualities and affects at each turn.

In this way, the novelist multiplies perspective, makes space and time encountered in a more fluid manner, and crucially presents his description, as Jousset has remarked, "comme une *expérience* qui se joue dans le movement de la lecture."[197] The two final descriptive segments expand into a dizzying network of synaesthesia that, in modernist fashion, calls attention to form as a dominant source of experience and experimentation.[198] But what is the particular, modern experience/experiment that unfurls in the act of reading the symphony of cheeses? The use of synaesthesia in *Le Ventre de Paris* discloses a growing scientific concern of the day. Doctors and philosophers in this era attempt to document processes of cognition and recognition and to experiment with perception, and in so doing, they initiated and defined what Jonathan Crary has excellently explained as "a general epistemological crisis in which perceptual experience had none of the primal guarantees that had once upheld its privileged relation to the foundation of knowledge." How a person might create and maintain a solid grasp of 'reality' became a significant topic starting in the 1860s. Citing the work of Helmholtz and Fechner, Crary draws attention to one defining dilemma of modernity: "the human capacity for [perceptual and

fromages" is rather tenuous and the women characters have awkwardly fallen into this over-the-top atmosphere of cheeses (*Le Roman contemporain,* 212-23).

[196] Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris,* 829.

[197] Jousset, "Une Poétique de la 'Nature Morte': sur la pratique descriptive dans *Le Ventre de Paris*," 346.

[198] Fletcher and Bradbury, "The Introverted Novel," 396-7. Analyzing James' work, Fletcher and Bradbury explain that "the form is not simply an enabling means of handling the content, but in some sense it is the content; experience generates form but form generates experience, and it is in the delicate intersections between the claims of formal wholeness and human contingency that we find some of the central aesthetics and tactics of Modernist fiction."

psychological] synthesis amid the fragmentation and atomization of a cognitive field." [199] Zola's naturalist prose equally tests the sensory system's filtering and integration of multimodal stimuli.

> Le camembert, de son fumet de venaison, avait vaincu les odeurs plus sourdes du marolles et du limbourg ; il élargissait ses exhalaisons, étouffait les autres senteurs sous une abondance surprenante d'haleines gâtées. Cependant, au milieu de cette phrase vigoureuse, le parmesan jetait par moments un filet mince de flûte champêtre ; tandis que les brie y mettaient des douceurs fades de tambourins humides. Il y eut une reprise suffocante du livarot. Et cette symphonie se tint un moment sur une note aiguë de géromé anisé, prolongé en point d'orgue.[200]

As I pointed out earlier, the "observer" in this scene is not necessarily its human characters, but rather the narrator whose point of view generates shifting layers of connotations. The multiplication of perspectives produces a kind of temporal-spatial collage in which competing odors vie for a recognition of their particular potency and specific smells come to dominant certain regions at different intervals and intensities. On the one hand, Zola makes us think about odors spatially ("il *élargissait* ses exhalaisons" " *au milieu de* cette phrase vigoureuse, le parmesan *jetait* […] un filet mince," " les brie *y mettaient* des douceurs"). But, perhaps more creatively, he also assigns the aromas their own temporalities and polyrhythms ("jetait *par moments,*" "*tandis que,*" "Il y eut *une reprise* suffocante du livarot," "*se tint un moment*," "*prolongé* en point d'orgue"), thereby capturing the intricate sensations experienced (simultaneously and in tandem) at precise moments in time. The text instructs the reader to 'hear the symphony' (smell the cheeses) and to 'watch the conductor' (narrator) as he effeciently elicits distinct tones.

The temporality of these sensory experiences, represented in the cheeses' *musicality,* likewise draws attention to the temporality unfolding in the surrounding sections. The symphony of cheeses is a brilliant montage that intermittently zooms in on the actions and words of the gossiping women *and* a perceptual encounter with dairy products. The sporadic movement back and forth between plot and description accentuates the fact that the novelist both dilates and constricts the representation of time, for he must show what is happening in both arenas at, theoretically, the same moment.[201] Yet descriptions are more demanding on the part of the reader. They require a slowing down in the reading process and seem to suspend or inflate the time of the narrative. Thus, when Zola juggles description and plot, he creates an unevenness not only in the linear structure of the narrative but also in the rhythm of reading.[202] This is intentional. As

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[199] Jonathan Crary, "Unbinding Vision: Manet and the Attentive Observer in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R Schwartz (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 46.

[200] Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris,* 830.

[201] Kamm, "The Structural and Functional Manifestation of Space in Zola's Rougon-Macquart," 230. Discussing Zola's *Le Débâcle*, Kamm emphasizes the need to dilate time in the narration in order to capture everything that occurs in one instance: "the events are concurrent and may even interpenetrate one another, but the novelist, subject to the restraints his genre imposes on him, must have recourse to succession in order to realize the convergence and fusion of the various themes and events."

[202] Harrow, *Zola, the Body Modern: Pressures and Prospects of Representation,* chapter 3. Harrow, using Mallarmé's reactions to Zola's text, beautifully analyzes how the texture of Zola's prose alternates between what she

Henri Mitterand noted, Zola has a an almost maniacal drive to 'perfectly' arrange his novels structurally, thematically, and spatially. His extensive efforts to mold the material make-up of his texts as well as his overarching concern with proportions entail "une grande attention aux variantes de la distribution des composantes du récit le long du parcours textuel."[203] Zola is never careless with the structural layout of his work. But he is experimental. The technique of moving the reader between focal points and establishing different reading rates (and reading styles) relates to the quintessentially modern predicament of how to pay attention to a chaotic sensorial field – and to be consciously aware of one's attention.

Just as the physiological-psychological body in the nineteenth century becomes increasingly a site of experimentation, the nineteenth-century text likewise becomes a location of inquiry into the nervous system's ability to coherently and meaningfully process sensations. Borrowing and extending an argument presented by Jonathan Crary in *Techniques of the Observer*, I would like us to consider Zola's literature as an optical-sensory device which guides the reader through practices of observation and forms of experience. He uses his writing as a technology that not only replicates percpetual processes, but also redefines them. In his instrumental use of synaesthesia, the writer presents, qualifies, and quantifies multimodal experience. Like Helmholtz and Toulouse, Zola, the experimentor, seeks to graphically represent perception so that the reader might better observe how the sensory organs integrate multimodal information.

The final representation of cheeses demonstrates a tremendous artistic brio that, to a certain degree, collapses in upon itself (almost out of sheer exhaustion it seems):

> Elle restaient debout, se saluant, dans le bouquet final des fromages. Tous, à cette heure, donnaient à la fois. C'était une cacophonie de souffles infects, depuis les lourdeurs molles des pâtes cuites, du gruyère et du hollande, jusqu'aux pointes alcalines de l'olivet. Il y avait des ronflements sourds du cantal, du chester, des fromages de chèvre, pareils à un chant large de basse, sur lesquels se détachaient, en notes piquées, les petites fumées brusques des neufchâtel, des troyes et des mont-d'or. Puis les odeurs s'effaraient, roulaient les unes sur les autres, s'épaississaient des bouffées du port-salut, du limbourg, du géromé, du marolles, du livarot, du pont-l'évêque, peu à peu confondues, épanouies en une seule explosion de puanteurs. Cela s'épandait, se soutenait, au milieu du vibrement général, n'ayant plus de parfums distincts, d'un vertige continu de nausée et d'une force terrible d'asphyxie. Cependant, il semblait que c'étaient les paroles mauvaises de Mme Lecœur et de Mlle Saget qui puaient si fort.[204]

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calls "folds and fractures" and how the narrative flow instigates different kinds of reading rhythms and allows for multiple kinds of reading practices which relate to the accelerated pace of modern life.

[203] Henri Mitterand, "Pour une poétique de l'espace romanesque: l'exemple de Zola," in *Zola and the Craft of Fiction*, ed. Robert Lethbridge and Terry Keefe (New York: Leicester University Press, 1990), 81.

[204] Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris,* 832-3.

The passage announces itself as a framed, coherent tableau, as it were, depicting the "bouquet final des fromages." The narration then proceeds to explain the gradation of odors occupying the same spatial-temporal field of perception. Initially, there is still some distinction lingering in the cacophonous atmosphere ("Il y avait des ronflements sourds du cantal, du chester, des fromages de chèvre, pareils à un chant large de basse, sur lesquels se détachaient, en notes piquées, les petites fumées brusques des neufchâtel, des troyes et des mont-d'or."), but as the smells accentuate and pile up their frequencies ("les odeurs s'effaraient, roulaient les unes sur les autres") confusion inevitably ensues. As the olfactory details explode into one sustained "vibrement general, n'ayant plus de parfum distincts," the description implodes: everything has become blurred and combined, there is no more specificity to be found. Even the women's words are indistinguishable from the sensorial mess that has finally exhausted the narration.

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The cacophonous cheeses can be read as Zola's attempt to transcribe and examine certain operations of the sensory-motor system. With *Le Ventre de Paris,* Zola sets up an experimental arena where scientific concerns and aesthetic devices can converge, where he can effectively explore the mechanics of the human mind (its ability to detect and arrange sensory data) while playing with the mechanics of literary narrative. The perceptually provocative quality of this text underscores and validates a quintessentially modern twist in literature: a cultivation and reassessment of the sensory field through artistic means. The true genius of the novel becomes particularly evident if we consider the following curiosity: *Le Ventre de Paris* was adapted into a play (Zola worked on this with the vaudeville dramatist, Busnach) and performed briefly on a Parisian stage in 1887. It was met with very little success. The audience did not understand why the stage kept getting filled with carts upon carts of produce. (The spectators were unable to 'properly' adjust their attention to the 'important' sensorial elements on stage.) Apparently vegetables make bad stage actors. But a bizarre perceptual encounter with them in which the senses are conducted differently, and innovatively, makes for a great literary narrative and reader experience.

Readership and Spectatorship in the Age of Reproduction:
Zola's *La Curée*

> Repeatedly comparing the reproduction to the original will nearly always make certain attributes of the latter apparent that would otherwise not have been remarked.
>
> - Erwin Panofsky[205]

The previous two chapters focused primarily on touch, proprioception, hearing, and olfactory sensations. In this final chapter, I continue my close analysis of Zola's depiction of sense perceptions by turning to visual cultures. In *La Cureé*, the experimental nature and pedagogical quality of Zola's literary project are evident in the writer's highly demonstrative re-presentation, or reproduction, of previous works of art. In its detailed description (and critique) of observational techniques, Zola's novel outlines an evolving relationship with reproductions (literary, theatrical and photographic) and provides training in how to encounter – and perceive – copied artwork.

La Curée (1872) is Zola's second novel in the Rougon-Macquart series and it traces the reconstruction of Paris under Haussmann and the immense, unchecked financial speculation that accompanies the city's transformation.[206] Zola exposes the Second Empire's corrupt financial system with his main character Aristide Saccard, a real-estate speculator with steel ingenuity who stops at nothing to amass large sums of money. As a government insider with many accomplices, Saccard buys up property earmarked for demolition, artificially inflates its value, sells it to the state, and makes incredible profit. Zola also chronicles the licentious and frivolous society life of the Second Empire: the heart of the story involves Saccard's wife, Renée, and his son from a previous marriage, Maxime, who carry out a steamy, incestuous love affair. The renovation of Paris along with the changing experience of the cityscape parallel other remodelings interspersed throughout the narrative. Reading *La Curée* involves watching a series of modifications and transformations – watching urban modernity take shape. Although the violent architectural rearrangement of the city stands out in this narrative, it functions as a background that spotlights a much more intriguing form of metamorphosis.

It is standard to read Zola's *La Curée* as an adaptation of Racine's *Phèdre* which self-consciously deforms the 'classic' and draws attention to the blurring of literary sources. In his preparatory notes, Zola admits "Décidément, c'est une nouvelle Phèdre que je vais faire." As he began work on the novel, Zola reread Racine's verse, taking notes and writing down a summary of the play for consultation.[207] Zola unmistakably set out to re-mix, or remaster, this

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[205] Erwin Panofsky, "Original and Facsimile Reproduction," ed. Timothy Grundy, *RES* 57/58 (2010): 332.
[206] Émile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart. Tome 1.* (Paris: Pléiade 1960).
[207] Henri Mitterand, Colette Becker, and Jean-Pierre Leduc-Adine, *Genèse, Structures et Style de La Curée* (Paris: SEDES, 1987), 29. Becker remarks "De fait, il construit le récit en cinq grands ensembles, sur le modèle de la tragédie classique à laquelle il fait plusieurs allusions ('J'ai écrit une tragédie, […] et j'ai trouvé le cinquième acte hier seulement', fait-il dire à Maxime aux dernières pages du chapitre V, au moment même où se prépare le

quintessential French variation of the Greek tragedy. In its preoccupation with changing forms and structures, we might additionally consider the story as a distorted reproduction of Ovid's Metamorphosis, as the reconstruction of a classical literary heritage. In fact, during the dénouement of the novel, Zola's incestuous lovers actually perform as Echo and Narcissus in a series of tableaux vivants. Renée and Maxime are thus caught in a state of perpetual repetition. Renée is relegated to echoing previous words and actions, doomed to repeat, or reenact, a past representation. Maxime, stuck in a game of mirrors, continually reproduces his image. Indeed, a close analysis of the embedded *Phèdre* production as well as the tableaux vivants sequence in La Curée will offer us the occasion to examine Zola's peculiar engagement with duplication across media. Why does the writer call so much attention to the fact that his work copies previous narratives and representations? And what is the reader to make of the intense and explicit repetition of narratives?

I read *La Curée* as an account (and enactment) of modernity's transfiguration of art – specifically, its manufacturing of copies and adaptations – and the impact this has on the observer or reader. Zola's blurring of narratives is not just a retelling, or modernization, of past literary texts. Nor is it a simple recycling of characters. La Curée should be read in relation to a nineteenth century blending of media and proliferation of representational forms. It articulates the plight of art in a rising culture of accessible duplications. Photography, dramatic arts, literary texts, and tableaux vivants overlap in *La Curée*, and signal the productive confusion of mimetic possibilities in an era of non-auratic duplication. Zola – as his literary reputation and Naturalist agenda make us think of him – is not typically included in the discussion of nineteenth century aura and authenticity. What happens to a reproduction when it is taken out of its temporal and spatial context? What is lost and gained in new formats of mediation? These are not the questions we normally ask while exploring Zola's Naturalism. However, in *La Curée*, Zola experiments with different forms of mediation, directly questioning the notions of accuracy, originality, as well as authorship. Zola's 'inauthentic' hybrid story grapples with the simultaneous dilemma *and* potential of copying in a society saturated with repeated images, subjects, and styles – a society where newness is constantly becoming obsolete and renovation a necessity.

It is important to keep in mind that Zola's novel appears in the context of a 19th century trend to copy or duplicate works of art, stylistically or thematically (here we could think of neo-classicism) but also technically, mechanically (as in photographic reproductions of artwork, the recasting of sculptures, "the miniature", or the tableau vivant) for both aesthetic and scientific pursuits. It is a moment concerned with re-incarnating, or re-envisioning the past with modern instruments and perspectives that promised higher fidelity or a freshly minted 'realism.'[208] Zola is moreover part of a community of scholars, scientists, and artists who are self-consciously mining previous forms of representations in order to experiment with 'accuracy' and 'naturalness' within the process of duplication and (re)embodiment. They are coming to terms with both the (il)legitimacy of copied art and, broadly speaking, various means of reconstructing and *experiencing* the past.[209]

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dénouement. Il multiplie, par ailleurs, en les soulignant fortement, les références à la Phèdre de Racine, qu'il a relue et résumée avant de se mettre à écrire)."

[208] See Goran Blix, *From Paris to Pompeii* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

[209] Ibid. Blix shows, for example, that with advances in archeological studies (and with the discovery of Pompeii in particular), the nineteenth century created an entirely modern rhetoric of retrieval.

Although nostalgia permeates Zola's account of transfiguration and *re*-presentation, he is by no means attempting to recuperate a lost aura. Zola is not advocating a return to a former mode of representation, and he is not championing a relationship between the viewer and the artwork that would recreate, in Benjamin's terms, a kind of reverential distance with the encountered object. Instead, he is designating and cultivating a modern spectatorship by carving out a conscious relationship with duplicated, repeated art. Zola guides his conscripted reader through the process of consuming and contemplating reproduced, re-cycled, or re-enacted artwork. And since *La Curée* is, in itself, one such example of modern adaptation and re-formatting, then Zola insinuates that *something* worthwhile is to be gained in the process of duplication, especially in the deliberate staging of the duplication process. One key to better understanding Zola's position and intervention vis-à-vis the duplicated and/or adapted representation, then, is to carefully consider the aesthetic *and* scientific angles of such a project, for it is precisely the copy that can serve as a fruitful sight of experimentation and advancement of both content and form. When there is a deferential gesture to past representations in *La Curée* it generally occurs at the moment in which previous representational forms are being copied and/or modified, ultimately providing the reader with a multiplicity of "texts" and generating new modes of observation. What, exactly, does *La Curée* tell us about the nineteenth-century reader's relationship with (experience of) copies?

To better focus the parameters of the discussion, I want to begin by paying attention to the depiction of "human expression" and to the nineteenth-century concern with how it is best copied or rendered in different media. This account of "human expression" and its legibility will set the stage for our later discussion of the tableaux vivants for it reveals the extent to which the viewer is supposed to have a different appreciation of an art work when it is (re)presented in different formats. The nineteenth-century experienced a rapid development of sciences – and pseudo-sciences – devoted to studying how external appearances reveal internal phenomena. In particular, physiology and physiognomy enjoy a certain popularity in the long nineteenth century. From phrenology to developments in comparative anatomy, there is a marked trend to classify and study physical features and facial expressions for various scientific and aesthetic ends. To name but a few examples, we can think of Balzac's *physionomies parisiennes*, Daumier's caricatures, Delsarte's "science of applied aesthetics," Darwin's study on the expression of emotions, and Cuvier's taxonomy. The scientific methodology of the day influenced aesthetic choices and procedures; scientific data, accumulated via 'objective' observation, optimistically offered the possibility of a more natural or genuine representation of human emotions in the fine arts. The nineteenth-century is also a time of great technological innovation which alters how the sciences and the arts approach, study and represent "human expression." Critically, changes in modes of representation shift the ways in which an observer can study, or even be aware of "human expressivity." The drive for a truer 'naturalness' in representation stems, in large part, from an intensified investment in mechanical, technological, and aesthetic developments – developments which recalibrate the perceptual field.

It is also worth questioning how physical gestures and poses, in this specific era of reproduction, are in many cases prescribed or pre-determined in order to exemplify – in a supposedly universal and unmistakable manner – a given human emotion. The representation of human "expressiveness" links to a kind of literacy campaign which teaches nineteenth-century audiences how to read facial cues and body language and, in turn, how to properly embody and communicate the affective as well. Zola, we might add, is invested in this project as well;

however, the writer additionally trains his conscripted reader to be aware of the ways in which legibility of "human expression" breaks down in the process of its representation (reproduction).

In order to clarify what is meant by "human expression" and what I think is at stake in its reproduction during Zola's time, I will step us through two separate *points de repère* – a scientific discourse and a theatrical debate – before turning to the central object of my investigation: the art of tableaux vivants. The scientific and theatrical positions I am going to elaborate here collide with one another and may seem at odds. And yet, the friction between the two parallels a kind of beautiful inconsistency chez Zola: while taking poetic liberties, he also carefully engages in scientific inquiry. His rigorous, scientifically-minded experimentation buckles, here and there, under the heft of blatant artistic illusion. The correct combination of real and fake, of organic and manipulated/unnatural materials, is precisely the conundrum of the modern copy which seeks to accurately portray "real," human expression while maintaining an emotional, or imaginative impact. By reviewing some of the scientific and aesthetic issues of Zola's time, I intend to illustrate just how significant Zola's model of representing (and re-presenting) "human expression" truly is. I will also show that science and aesthetics equally filter sensory data and influence perceptual habits.

Zola considers his Rougon-Macquart series a kind of literary laboratory in which he plays out various theories of heredity and determinism, and actively experiments with the influence of social milieu on an organism. Zola's literary depiction of "human expression" lines up with a scientific urge to take over and adjust previous versions of its representation in order to eliminate overly imaginative or improbable renditions. But how does scientific (and pseudo-scientific) 'insight' also participate in the manipulation and mediation of data?

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In 1862, ten years before *La Curée* is published, the French neurologist Duchenne de Boulogne prints his study, *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine ou analyse électro-physiologique de l'expression des passions applicable à la pratique des arts plastiques*, which identifies the exact facial muscles responsible for displaying inner, emotional states such as aggression, joy, agony, and lasciviousness.[210] By applying electrodes to various areas of his subject's face, Duchenne maps out a variety of human expressions. *Mécanisme* is considered revolutionary in that it is the first scientific treatise to use photographic illustration. The scientist explains that his photographic illustrations are relevant in the domains of anatomy, physiology and psychology, but can equally be applied to painting and sculpture. Comparing his photographs to iconic Greek statues, Duchenne observes that some of the expressions etched in sculpture are, in fact, impossible or inaccurate (due to the simultaneous activation of nerves required), and that some of the emotions connoted in the marble faces are unnecessarily difficult to read.

[210] Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne, *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression*, trans. R. Andrew Cuthbertson (1862; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Note that I am using the English translation because there are no circulating copies of the original French at this time.

Fig. 3-1. Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne. Detail from *Electro-Physiologie Photographique* plate 7. 1862. Available from: http://publicdomainreview.org/collections/the-mechanism-of-human-physiognomy/ (accessed June 4, 2015).

For example, Duchenne scrutinizes two copies of the Greek mythological figure Laocoon, one from Rome and one from Brussels. Analyzing the faces of the sculptures, the scientist declares that they each woefully represent a "faulty expression of physical pain and agonized convulsions."[211] Duchenne explains how the Laocoon of Brussels presents more genuine *reality* in that it foregrounds physical agony – the movement of the lips demonstrates intense pain, whereas the Laocoon of Rome overdramatizes paternal love: "The curve of the nasolabial folds and the everted lips (movements produced by *m. zygomaticus minor* and by the outer fibers of *m. orbicularis oris*) indicate that Laocoon is crying. The obliqueness, the sinuosity of his eyebrows, and the puckering of the heads of his eyebrows give his crying a character of extreme pain."[212] The Laocoon of Brussels has a similar sculpting of the eyebrows, Duchenne notes, but "the mouth is wider open and, finally, the lower lip and corners of the mouth are pulled obliquely down and out," which suggests a more "startling reality" in the "expression of physical pain."[213] And yet, most art critics and philosophers (Duchenne cites Lessing and Winckelmann) prefer, aesthetically, the faulty ideal, "the physiologically impossible forehead," the overly manipulated and dramatized figure.

Duchenne's commentary on Greek statuary is not particularly interesting. Other art critics and philosophers already assessed and compared the different versions of the Laocoon, and it was relatively common in educated circles of the time to have a position on the Laocoon(s).[214]

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[211] Ibid., 97.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid., 98.
[214] R. Andrew Cuthbertson, "The Highly Original Dr. Duchenne," in *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression*, ed. R. Andrew Cuthbertson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 237. Cuthbertson explains: "The Laocoon, accorded the highest praise by Pliny the Elder in ancient Rome and admired by Michelangelo when the sculpture was rediscovered in 1506, was almost a cult object for antiquarians of the 18th and 19th centuries. It was

What is remarkable, however, is that Duchenne, using his physiological research, wishes to actively intervene in the process of reproduction. Duchenne's obsession with accurate (physiologically correct) representation leads him to the museum, where he takes the plasters used to copy the artwork from antiquity, and has the marble faces recast to reflect the laws established by his electrophysiological experiments. The scientist takes the past representation and literally *reshapes* it. (He admits that his corrected plaster casts would have been more effective if they had been carried out by a real artist).

Understandably, Duchenne's insistence on applying precise, scientific rules in the artistic domain did not go over well. The scientist claims that studying and teaching the correct means of representing facial expression can "prevent or modify errors of the imagination,"[215] and, in an era accustomed to representing the affective in a more sentimental manner that emphasized ideal beauty, Duchenne's aesthetic program was, not surprisingly, largely rejected.[216] As one sympathetic critic writes, "Mr. Duchenne will be accused of stripping art of its ideal of beauty and reducing it to anatomical realism […]." To which Duchenne replies in an 1862 letter to the *Union Medicale*: "I am far from arriving at this modern realism that only shows us nature with her imperfections and even deformities, and that seems to prefer the ugly, the vulgar, or the trivial. On the contrary, the principles arising from my experimental research allow art to attain the ideal of facial expression, by teaching how to render correctly and with perfect exactitude, like nature herself, the language of passions, and even certain operations of intelligence."[217] Duchenne, caught up in the nineteenth century swirl and excitement of developing sciences, feels compelled to "reply to the *desiderata* of art" with his cutting-edge methodology.[218] In the end, however, there is no example of his photographic study having any concrete influence on artistic circles of his time.[219] And yet, Duchenne's work sits right in the pocket of a nineteenth century discursive trend which questions how to appropriate – scientifically and artistically – the art of copying, and more crucially, re-presenting in a different medium.[220]

Furthermore, Duchenne's particular aesthetic agenda reveals a concern with legibility. How do representations and reproductions properly communicate "human expression?" How does the beholder come to understand the meaning of facial expressions in a given representation? Although Duchenne mainly addresses artists when he demonstrates how to

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regarded by Winckelmann as the greatest sculpture of antiquity, and therefore of all time, and discussed at length by Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Hegel, and others. Thus the Laocoon was almost a household object to an educated Frenchman in the mid-nineteenth century."

[215] Duchenne, *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression,* 36.

[216] Mathias Duval, *Précis d'anatomie à l'usage des artistes* (Paris: A. Quantin, 1881), 299. Duval writes that "Les physiologistes, aussi bien que les artistes, montrèrent une certaine défiance pour un ouvrage qui prétendait venir donner des règles précises et des lois scientifiques là où l'on avait coutume de s'inspirer de fantaisies et de rapprochements sentimentaux."

[217] Duchenne, *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression,* 110. There are similarities between Duchenne's defense of his scientific work and Zola's defense of his literary work. Think, for instance, of the author's explanation of the vulgar in *L'Assommoir*.

[218] Ibid., 102.

[219] See Jean-François Debord, "The Duchenne de Boulogne Collection in the Department of Morphology, L'École Nationale Supérieure Des Beaux Arts," in *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression*, ed. R. Andrew Cuthbertson (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990), 242–56.

[220] Cuthbertson, "The Highly Original Dr. Duchenne," 237. Cuthbertson writes that the scientist's remodeling of the *Arrotino*, the *Laocoon* of Rome, the *Laocoon* of Brussels, and the *Niobe* relates, on the one hand, to a trend in aristocratic circles to collect copies of these famous works, and, on the other hand, to the standard training – or apprenticeship – of artists at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* since the plaster casts of antique sculptures were used in required drawing assignments. Cuthbertson also describes a fetishistic view of the copy in this era.

correctly portray the expressive lines of the face, his "orthography of facial expression," as he calls it, inevitably inflects the perceptual practice of the beholder. If he invents how to adequately "spell out" expressive lines, there has to be someone who can read that language (and take it seriously). Such a "reading practice" implies that there exists a universality of facial movements/muscle activation for standard, emotional states. Yet in his *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine,* the scientist must explain how the photographic plates are to be read and studied.[221] He also gives suggestions on how to view a face in segments, how to focus on different quadrants of the face at different times. And in his concluding synoptic plates, Duchenne actively covers up parts of his models' faces to better indicate how each fragment of the face designates its own meaning.

> Let us take only, for example, the four figures 78 or Table 8. The first of these figures (i-78) shows the experiment done on both sides at once; seen in its entirety, it is only a grimacing expression, for, on each side of the face, a different muscle is put into action in isolation. Two other figures (iii-78 and iv-78) let us see only one side of the mouth in such a way that comparison becomes easy and more conclusive. Thus the eye seems cold and disdainful in figure iv-78, whereas it is gay and mocking in figure iii-78. Yet, in reality, there does not exist any difference between these eyes; for the palpebral part of m. orbicularis oculi contracts in exactly the same manner on each side; this is quite convincing when we cover the parts situated beneath the eyes, as in figure ii-787. This apparent modification of the gaze results from the influence exercised on the eye by the form of the mouth.[222]

[221] The aesthetic section of Duchenne's treatise (published shortly after the scientific section) explicitly stages a reading process of the photographs. In response to the criticism that his work only showed disfigured and ugly individuals, Duchenne re-stages many of the facial expressions with more attractive models *and* provides a narration of the expression. One example: "If we look only at the face of the young girl, that is, by covering everything below the neck, we can ascertain that her expression is approximately the same as that of the old man (plate 21). In both we can recognize on one side (the right Plate 75, the left Plate 21) the expression of remembrance, which on the other side (left Plate 74, right Plate 21) becomes sorrowful. It must however, be noted that the young woman's slight lowering of the angles of the mouth and her lateral inclination of the head add despondency to her sorrow. The old man shows more firmness in his sorrow. Look, however, at Plate 76 as a whole: The scene enlarges and changes completely. This upturned look, instead of evoking remembrance, tells us that the young woman's spirit is being exalted by her ardent faith. […] If you cover the eye and forehead of the left side, the sadness of her features (due to the slight lowering of the angle of her mouth) makes you feel that she is not leaving her dearest ones without some regrets. And if you cover the eye and forehead of the other side, you see that her sacrifice is sorrowful" (Duchenne, *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression,* 107.)

[222] Ibid., 212.

Fig. 3-2. Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne. Detail from *Electro-Physiologie Photographique* plate 8. 1862. Available from: http://publicdomainreview.org/collections/the-mechanism-of-human-physiognomy/ (accessed June 4, 2015).

In this, Duchenne promotes a method of apprehending and comparing individual elements that make up a whole. By fragmenting his model's face and explaining how particular features function as the grammatical constituents of human expression, Duchenne shows us how to map out and assign meaning to the syntactic relations he detects in facial musculature. Duchenne concludes the aesthetic section of his work with a series of nine synoptic tables which repeat, combine, and even manipulate the larger-scale photographic plates included throughout his study.[223] The synoptic plates are supplementary and yet they shift the ways in which we visualize the material. As Duchenne remarks:

> …they have the advantage of showing reunited what we have already seen separately. We can comprehend in one sweep of the eye things that may not be apparent in isolation. They form the résumé of the experimental results and the synthesis of the

[223] I believe it is possible to say *manipulate* here because the synoptic plates block out, on the photographic negatives, portions of his models' faces.

> principles that constitute the grammar and the orthography of human facial expression.[224]

Duchenne's grammar speaks to a shifting visual culture in modern, urban settings, to the growing need to parse out, organize and make sense of random and excessive stimuli in large industrialized cities. When the doctor combines various images of faces on one plate and has the observer scan them for specific information (with one, effective "sweep of the eye"), he is, in a way, propagating a perceptual practice that comes in handy in an era of rising consumerism and rapid urbanization. To encounter "the synthesis of the principles that constitute the grammar and the orthography of human facial expression" is similar to confronting the modern crowd. Duchenne's drive to promote the legibility of expression, I would argue, links up with what became known in the later nineteenth century as crowd psychology.

Like many of the era's pseudo-scientific insights, Duchenne's 'universal language of facial expression' is undeniably fraught with paradoxes, and his findings are filled with culturally constructed conclusions. In a religious turn, Duchenne credits the Creator as having "giv[en] all human beings the instinctive faculty of always expressing their sentiments by contracting the same muscles. This rendered the language universal and immutable."[225] And while Duchenne's work is imbued with religious sentiment, his scientific approach is equally colored by socio-cultural, aesthetic fads, as it were. Duchenne is a man of his time. One of the photographed subjects in his treatise is a young actor, Jules Talrich. Some of Talrich's muscle contractions are instigated by electric shock. Others are not. The actor is believed to have such a command of facial expression that he does not need the medical apparatus to correctly sculpt his features when he channels and displays distinct human emotions. But as Jean-Francois Debord has reflected, nowadays the actor "appears somewhat ridiculous and almost fatuously sentimental in his attitude and expressions"[226] How "successful" the poses and gestures actually are in copying human expression depends on an aesthetic norm which, as it turns out, is subject to fashion trends and changing techniques of representation. Talrich's engagement of eyebrow muscles appears mannered and foppish. Our vocabulary and phrasing of 'human expression' has evidently evolved.

[224] Duchenne, *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression*, 212.
[225] Ibid., 19.
[226] Jean-Francois Debord, "The Duchenne de Boulogne Collection in the Department of Morphology, L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts," 249.

Fig. 3-3. Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne. Detail from *Electro-Physiologie Photographique* plate 3. 1862. Available from: http://publicdomainreview.org/collections/the-mechanism-of-human-physiognomy/ (accessed June 4, 2015).

While Duchenne's *Mécanisme* makes a strong argument for using scientific means to produce more anatomically and "emotionally" correct representations (reproductions), the study only gains relevance in the nineteenth century once it becomes itself the object of duplication and manipulation. (The era is rich with reproductions that alter data and change the perception of, and attention to, details.) Duchenne's work was picked up by Darwin, who reproduces, with permission, six of his photographic plates in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*.[227] The photographs used by Darwin are "true" to the original negatives and now enjoy a kind of iconic status. But Darwin additionally copies a few of Duchenne's images as wood engravings which modify the data *and* arguably affect the way in which they are perceived.[228] Whereas Duchenne's photographs show the instruments used to shock the subjects, and usually (and inadvertently) include a fragmented portion of the doctor or his assistant (his hands holding the electrical rods, his face peering out behind the subject, etc…), Darwin ordered a few prints to be reproduced as wood engravings that specifically removed the metal rods and presence of the doctor. As Philip Prodger has noted, this intervention profoundly changes the reception of the image: no longer distracted by the apparatus or the medical personnel, the observer sees the iconic images of fear, pain, and joy, and, not knowing what stimulated the expression, must enter into a more participatory experience with the image.[229] There is a (seemingly) direct encounter with emotion when it is copied in this format.

[227] Charles R. Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872). 1872 is also the year *La Curée* is published.
[228] See Philip Prodger, *Darwin's Camera: Art and Photography in the Theory of Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 85-87.
[229] Ibid., 87. "…as Darwin well understood, emotional expressions do not merely emanate from the person who displays them; they are also received in the mind of the person who witnesses them."

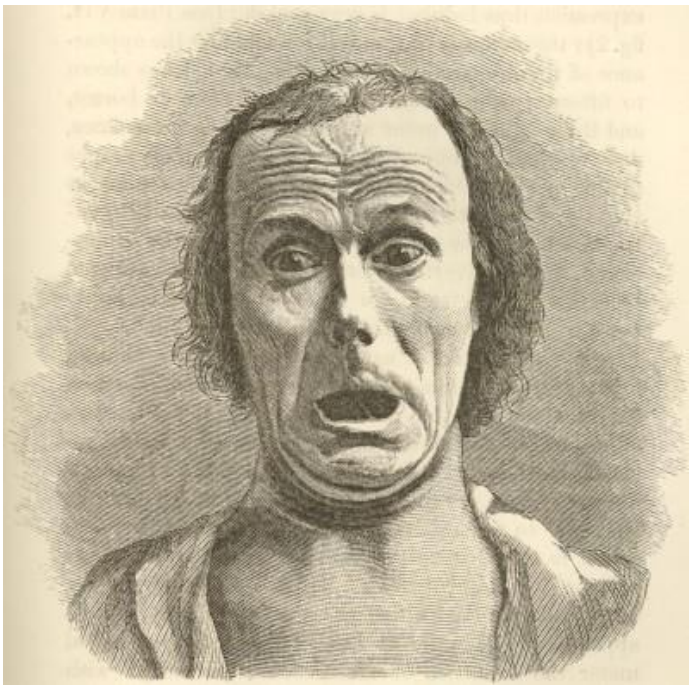

Fig. 3-4. Charles R Darwin. *Terror. From a photograph by Dr. Duchenne.* From: *The expression of emotions in man and animals.* London: John Murray, 1872. Available from: http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?pageseq=1&itemID=F1142&viewtype=text (accessed June 4, 2015).

Once Darwin modifies and reproduces Duchenne's images, they become required reading for students at the *Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts*, starting in 1874. Mathias Duval, the chair of the anatomy department starting in 1873, also uses woodgravings of Duchenne's subject to teach lessons on what he calls "l'abécédaire ou la grammaire de l'expression de la physionomie."[230] Once again, we encounter a reworking of Duchenne's photographs. Although Duchenne intended to transform and modernize representation by adding a level of accuracy and precision of detail, his most influential images are not exactly his "original" prints, but manipulated copies of them.[231]

I want to suggest that Zola is, to a degree, a kind of Duchenne figure for literature. Naturalism's agenda is to apply scientific procedures to narrative structures. Like Duchenne, Zola provides us with "images" of human expression. In his portrayal of swarming metropolis crowds, he handpicks and identifies features which provide the most revealing and visceral aspects of humanity and thus helps the reader move adeptly through the urban mob. In *La Curée,* Zola narrates encounters with photographic images and fixed poses, depicting a form of spectatorship while sculpting the perceptual habits of his own readership. Renée and Maxime create and consult a photo album of all the people in their lives – from the esteemed socialites who frequent imperial parties to the notorious characters of the "demi-monde": "Monde singulièrement mêlé, image du tohu-bohu d'idées et de personnages qui traversaient la vie de Renée et Maxime." Gazing at the album, holding a magnifying glass up to the photographs, and

[230] Duval, *Précis d'anatomie à l'usage des artistes.*

[231] Duchenne's legacy continues today. Facebook recently teamed up with Compassion Research Group and had Pixar studios develop Darwinian stickers – special emoticons to attach with messages and imbue the conversation with more expressiveness. Although they are called "Finch Stickers" and credit Darwin's scientific study of emotions, this is another mutation of Duchenne's work. The question of how "feelings" can be reproduced and connoted across different media remains relevant in our contemporary, social-media context.

critiquing the minute physical features of their entourage becomes a favorite pastime of the restless lovers. They use their photograph collection to make up countless stories and games. It is the kind of play that Duchenne would have likely condoned.[232] The lovers observe and make inferences. And even though their assessment of people is shallow and trite, they are essentially performing – on a much smaller scale – the work of the novelist (and pseudo-scientist).

In one pivotal scene, Renée stands before a mirror where "elle se contempla." As if she were following Duchenne's treatise on facial musculature, Renée examines her expression lines – the curve of her lips and the deep furrow across her forehead. She wonders who, exactly, carved that expression in her face: "La ride de son front se creusait si profondément, qu'elle mettait une barre sombre au-dessus des yeux, la meurtrissure mince et bleuâtre d'un coup de fouet. Qui donc l'avait marquée ainsi?"[233] Renée reflects upon her emotional state as she analyses the data in her reflected image. She envisions herself – her form, her expression – as manipulated, mediated data. So, to return to the work of Dr. Duchenne, we could ask the question: who is operating the electric rods, so to speak, in Renée's case? Renée will place the blame on the father-son duo; however, Zola makes it evident that his protagonist is the victim of hereditary factors and the product, or embodiment, of a vitriolic milieu. The narration reveals a causality and even a form of mutual influence between characters and their environments. As Henri Mitterand has remarked, Zola's work is fundamentally concerned with "des relations de l'être humain à son espace" and his insistence on milieu/materiality makes his characters part of various, modern ecosystems in which humans and objects must increasingly interact.[234] Renée's body and clothing become one with the rooms in her mansion: her pink flesh is camouflaged against the marble in the rose room, her prominent shoulders, greeting the guests, echo the busts of statues at the entrance of the hôtel du parc Monceau. Her poisonous desire is stimulated while she chews on a poisonous leaf and grimaces in the greenhouse filled with exotic plants, warm scents, and erotic statues. In the Café Riche sequence, Renée's countenance fluctuates with the atmospheric mood of the street. Renée is arguably unaware that these venues shift her disposition and modify her expression; however, the reader sees the correlations set up in the narrative between Renée's physicality/physiognomy and her physical location. Similar to Duchenne's photographs with the doctor's hands holding the metal rods up to his subject's face, *La Curée* illustrates the application and effects of stimuli to its readers. In the final mirror scene, Renée has direct access to her "human expression," and though she reflects upon her mediation, she is puzzled. Like the observer of Darwin's wood engravings where Duchenne's medical instruments are removed, she must ask: who or what made that face have that reaction? This scene marks the protagonist's demise. In it, Renée functions as a beholder/reader of a legible facial expression. She is also the vehicle/object of semiotic content. And yet, in this instance, Renée does not understand how her body, under the influence of social and spatial conditions, constructed the visual message reflected before her. In this reflexive/reflective moment, Zola calls for a multi-layered experience of his narrative. The reader should navigate modes of attention and awareness and be able to decipher Renée's "code" for her.

The reading of manufactured or heavily produced "human expression" comes up prominently in the novel when the lovers pose in fixed positions for M. Hupel de la Noue's

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[232] In fact, in his aesthetics section, Duchenne provides his own made-up narratives to accompany the photographs: a woman beside a cradle is relieved and happy since her child was recently saved from a fire, the girl is coquettishly refusing the advances of a gentleman, etc…

[233] Certainly, we can make a connection in *La Curée* between Renée and the city of Paris. Paris is also being violently slashed and cut apart – its physiognomy drastically shifting…

[234] Henri Mitterand, *Zola, l'histoire et la fiction* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), 260.

tableaux vivants. This is a moment where Renée consciously and deliberately participates in a staged production of human expression and is therefore able to claim some ownership of the outward aestheticization of her internal state. In the still life performance of *Les Amours du beau Narcisse et de la nymphe Echo*, the models' expressions and body gestures are designed by the 'artist' (Hupel de la Noue) and then measured by the audience: Maxime's "geste de refus" is remarkable because of the manner in which he extended his left hip, however, "tous les éloges furent pour l'expression de visage de Renée […] elle était 'la douleur du désir inassouvi'. Elle avait un sourire aigu… qui ne cach[ait] ses dents qu'à demi."[235] That the spectators are able to praise her facial expression for representing the 'agony of unsatiated desire,' demonstrates, on some level, that the spectator/consumer of images is expected to contemplate the efficacy as well as affective quality of the manufactured, posed expression. The success of the tableau vivant (and, we might add, the success of the literary narrative) depends on her ability to replicate a legible expressiveness. What is furthermore implied in this scene is that "la douleur du désir inassouvi" has a specific, recognizable figure – a set position of the face and body. Renée, working with Hupel de la Noue, has undoubtedly practiced and repeated this stance throughout the tableau vivant's *répétitions.* I will return to the tableaux vivants shortly in order to examine in greater detail the reading/observation practices of Zola's fictional audience and his conscripted readership.

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Throughout *La Curée*, Renée is, in fact, contemplated and consumed as a duplicate, or reproduction – by herself, by other characters, by the narrator, and by the readers. Renée, the *re-born* character, is always already a re-incarnation. She is legible as a copy. This is most evident during the embedded stage production of *Phèdre.* The use of Racine's play in *La Curée* relates, in fact, to a *polémique théâtrale* which provides us with another example of the ways in which the duplication of "human expression" comes up in the nineteenth century in a different medium and in a different cultural atmosphere. In the example of Dr. Duchenne's work, the scientific community, armed with new methods of reproduction, pushes for 'accuracy' and anatomical precision in the representation of "human expression." With his electrical mapping of physiological features, Duchenne attempts to remove the more eccentric and unrealistic flourishes from the plastic arts; yet, his study is unintentionally marked with an underlying aestheticism and a mild dose of theatricality. The theater community of Zola's period is likewise grappling with how to portray characters in a more 'authentic' and 'real' manner and, in this endeavor, falls equally prey to a series of inconsistencies. These two points of reference also converge thematically: they each take, as their object to be copied and modernized, a classic artwork from Antiquity: Duchenne re-works Greek statuary (the *Laocoon*, the *Niobe*, and the *Arrotino*), and on the nineteenth century French stage, *Phèdre* is re-adapted multiple times. In *La Curée*, we note that the author not only copies and adapts the Phèdre narrative, placing the intrigue in a lavish, Second Empire setting. In addition, Zola recounts his characters' experience of the transfiguration of Racine's play. This narrative move ultimately sheds light on the ways in which the reader might approach Zola's own transmutation of Greek mythology, specifically, his make-over of Phèdre. Significantly, the embedded production of *Phèdre* represents how an audience, or reader, pays attention to a copy.

[235] Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart (Tome 1),* 545.

In *La Curée* Renée and Maxime have been at their adulterous activities for a while and, "Un soir, ils allèrent ensemble au Théâtre-Italien " where "on donnait *Phèdre*." This scene is a conspicuous, heavy-handed mise-en-abyme. The narration steps through Racine's play and gives Renée's reactions. She is obviously drawn to La Ristori, the actress who performs the leading role:

> … la Ristori, avec ses fortes épaules secouées par les sanglots, avec sa face tragique et ses gros bras, remuait profondément Renée. Phèdre était du sang de Pasiphaé, et elle se demandait de quel sang elle pouvait être, elle, l'incestueuse des temps nouveaux. Elle ne voyait de la pièce que cette grande femme traînant sur les planches le crime antique.[236]

Watching la Ristori, Renée concludes "Comme son drame était mesquin et honteux à côté de l'épopée antique!" It is worth noting here that the narration steps us through an interpretation of the copy; however, the reader is not necessarily encouraged to trust Renée's 'reading' of the scene. The performance is depicted from multiple vantage points and perspectives. We have the narrator's description of the scene as well as Renée's emotional reactions to it. This layering of experience calls significant attention to Zola's reproduction.

On the one hand, it does not necessarily matter that Renée is a "bad copy." As Kate Griffiths has concluded, what is important is that she functions overtly as a reproduction: "Zola uses Renée's interaction with *Phèdre* in the theatre to undercut the binary division between original and copy, showing instead a plurality of copies and identities mixing and merging outrageously in his heroine's consciousness."[237] If, as Griffiths remarks, there is a whirl of copies colliding in Renée's consciousness, there is an even greater proliferation of Phèdres swirling around in the reader's mind and in the society of Zola's day (I will elaborate this point shortly). Griffiths reads the novel as a palimpsestic enterprise that breaks down the notions of authorship and authenticity: "… the reader is offered an act of rewriting (Renée's) within a rewriting of Racine's text (Zola's) which itself exists by means to Seneca's rewriting of the version of Euripides, behind which, somewhere, hovers the myth itself."[238] In this chain of duplication, then, originality does not matter. So what does? I want to suggest that the quality of the reproduction (its discrepancies with the "original" – what it adds or subtracts) is indeed relevant – especially in light of Zola's scientific impulse and his desire to provide the most precise rendition of human experience with all its gritty and vulgar elements. There is a reason why Zola intentionally creates a petty and shameful copy ("son drame était mesquin et honteux à côté de l'épopée antique!"), and *why he draws attention to it as so*. The inauthentic, imperfect reproduction does something to the perceptual apparatus of the reader/spectator.

Zola's re-working of Phèdre, I believe, is similar to Duchenne's re-plastering of Antique statues. Using various media at their disposal, both men demonstrate an urge to tweak the quality of a previous art form in order to produce a higher fidelity to life, to human expression. And they are both working across media to provide for their readership a certain form of perceptual education. Zola's novel does not simply accomplish a process of re-writing. It depicts, more importantly, a motion to re-format, re-shape (re-plaster) a past representation to offer higher fidelity. At first glance, the blatant comparison in Zola's novel between Renée and Phèdre/La

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[236] Ibid., 508.
[237] Kate Griffiths, *Emile Zola and the Artistry of Adaptation* (London: Legenda, 2009), 98.
[238] Ibid., 99.

Ristori appears too straight-forward, tastelessly obvious, borderline obnoxious. But here the great novelist gives us a refreshing, modernist gesture: he is overtly staging the process of mediation.

It is not a coincidence that Zola's spin on the Greek classic has its incestuous duo go to the Italian theater *specifically* to see the eminent artist, La Ristori, in the leading role. ("Ils n'avaient seulement pas regardé l'affiche. Ils voulaient voir une grande tragedienne intalienne, la Ristori, qui faisait alors courir tout Paris, et à laquelle la mode leur commandait de s'intéresser".) Zola thus folds historical fact into his fictional prose, for Adélaïde Ristori (1822-1906) was a renowned Italian stage actress who set off a polemical debate in France in the late 1850s. La Ristori performed as Phèdre in 1858, and again by popular demand in 1861 and 1867. Her rendition of the role sparked much commentary on the translation of Racine's play into Italian, and on its transformation into a modernized, revamped version. Specifically, her performance provoked a discussion about human physiognomy which questioned *how the physical expression of emotions could "disfigure" the classic role.*

Fig. 3-5. Undated photo of Adelaide Ristori (b. 1822 - d. 1906). Available from: http://www.borgotrentoverona.org/index.php?module=content&func=view&pid=107 (accessed June 9, 2015).

In 1858, Sébastien Rhéal writes an open letter, *Les Deux Phèdre: Mme Ristori et Mlle Rachel, lettre à M. Carini, directeur du 'Courrier franco-italien' sur quelques hérésies théâtrales.*[239] This letter provides us with an interesting account of the modern spectator's/observer's experience of a copy. In it, Rhéal addresses the critics who have declared Mme Ristori's embodiment of Phèdre an unjustified falsification of Racine's leading lady. It becomes clear in Rhéal's response that the main complaints against the renovated production are (1) that the actors are poorly suited to play the roles (*their stage presence is wrong*) and (2) that there is a terrible "profanation de la vraie *Phèdre*, traduite *dans le faux style d'un faux Racine*"[240]

[239] Sebastien Rhéal, *Les Deux Phèdre* (Paris: Dentu, 1858).
[240] Ibid., 4. (emphasis in original)

(this play – it is simply not *the play*). Rhéal underscores the parallels and divergences between the two actresses *and* the two scripts, ultimately applauding the Italian adaptation, *Fedra*, because the playwright, M. Dall'Ongaro, and the performing artist, La Ristori, together transform the play from a sixteenth century text into a nineteenth century one. According to Rhéal, the infidelity to Racine's pristine verse is overshadowed by a high fidelity to modern times. If we follow his argument closely, we notice that the perceived fidelity to the time period is marked by the manufactured quality of human expression in the reproduction.

Citing the German academic, Schlegel, whose *Cours de la littérature dramatique* comments on Racine's poetic liberties and fetishistic approach while adapting the Greek text, Rhéal excuses the contemporary Italian version of *Phèdre* on the basis that Racine's work was itself a transgressive copy*:* "l'erreur véritable de l'artiste italienne et de son poète, n'est-ce point d'avoir copié une copie multiforme, sans vie propre ni ensemble ni couleur indigène, plutôt que de remonter à la source?" The public should not be so quick to condemn the current incarnation of the myth, writes Rhéal, since Racine's play is an "assemblage hybride et inconciliable," clearly marked with alteration and "illogisme."[241] When Rhéal examines the hybridization and adulteration that takes place in *Fedra*, he first discusses the written verse, expounding upon the differences in meaning produced in translation, telling us where Dall'Ongaro is more literal in the translation and where he takes liberties. This leads him to the topic of *tonality* and *rhythm*. There are moments in Dall'Ongaro's version, notably in Phèdre's death scene, where the playwright "a tâché d'accentuer et de briser ici le rythme, comme en maint endroit, pour marquer les derniers soupirs convulsifs car la parole doit aussi réfléchir la température morale et physique."[242] The implication is that Racine's fluid verse does not adequately express what real, 'authentic' death throes would sound like. Although half of the audience cannot understand Italian, he writes, the rime, rhythm and sonority of the "langue dantesque" properly represent the tragic situation on stage: "il faut les avoir entendus dans la bouche de Mme Ristori, navrée, haletante, ironique et superbe". The critic likes the jarring palpability of her dying words.[243]

But the part of the Italian copy the critic likes best is the emotive physicality of the actress (and this may relate to the fact that her body language is more accessible then her Italian). By emphasizing human qualities, Rhéal contends, la Ristori's 'modernized' expression of passion pushes against theatrical convention: "elle a soufflé dans la statue son âme de feu, et son étreinte a disloqué la convention […] l'éminente artiste ne défigure pas ce rôle, en lui donnant des aspects plus humains, en le faisant applaudir sous des traits plus saisissants."[244] By giving her character more human features and by portraying Phèdre's traits in a more striking and intense fashion, she is not disfiguring the role. Rather, she is breathing life into a statue. And this aberration of the "original" should not be condemned. For, as Rhéal explains, Racine has already disfigured and mutilated the classic: "C'est Racine qui a défiguré toutes les traditions pour

[241] Ibid., 19-20. Speaking of plagiarized moments in Racine's text, Rhéal writes: "Tout cela entremêlé aux reflets romantiques de la Phèdre grecque, aux souvenirs classique de la Didon et aux terreurs infernales du moyen-âge, hurle de se trouver ensemble comme la fable du Minotaure avec les fadeurs sentimentales du moderne Hippolyte, si singulièrement instruit par Théramène. Le Minotaure, c'est Phèdre, semi-Grecque, semi-Romaine, semi-païenne, semi-chrétienne! avec ses remords pudiques et ses fureurs sensuelles avec ses artifices et ses vapeurs, avec ses aveux éhontés et sa vision d'un Tartare catholique : assemblage hybride et inconciliable."

[242] Ibid., 13.

[243] Ibid. Rhéal will state that the new rhythm which accentuates Phèdre's agony is great, but he wishes Dall'Ongaro would have done even more to break free from Racine's verse: "il aurait fallu recomposer, recréer, non plus traduire." Despite its novel, affective vocal inflection, the Italian version of this scene apparently sticks too closely to Racine's words for Rhéal's tastes.

[244] Ibid., 21.

composer sa pièce; un chef-d'œuvre soit! Le chef d'œuvre des imitations artificielles et discordantes."[245] Rhéal implies that la Ristori's "disfiguration" is somehow less artificial.

Rhéal's fondness for La Ristori's corporeal antics reveals a nostalgia for Romanticism's display of passions and 'authenticity.' Of course, modernity's explosion of representational forms and subsequent changes in the ways in which data is both organized and received inevitably brings out reactionaries and progressives alike. Rhéal, in this case, straddles both sides: there was (perhaps) a beautiful and ideal moment in representation; but, to be clear, representation in different formats and eras has always been experienced by some as unnecessary, nebulous distortion. Rhéal explicitly wishes to "édifier le lecteur." He wants, on the one hand, to recuperate something on the brink of being lost. His favorable account of the modernized copy is not meant to erode the glory of the Greek classic, as he puts it. Instead, he believes that the fresh incarnation of the play can "réstituer" the "côté vital" of classic literature. "La cause pour laquelle je me lève, vous l'avez compris, c'est la cause du progrès et de la vérité, la cause universelle du grand art, dont les traditions et les splendeurs s'éteignent parmi nous devant le hideux industrialisme accouplé aux idolâtries mensongères." Rhéal therefore expresses a curious aesthetic position: while supporting the renovation and transformation of Racine's play as well as the shifting tides of theatrical convention, he nonetheless assumes a reactionary attitude in that he holds onto a former ideal. Modern industrialism is destroying a past splendor, a golden era of art. La Ristori, somehow, is able to harken back to that time while presenting the role in a contemporary fashion.

By stepping his readers through the revised version of Racine's œuvre, and by commenting on the ways in which la Ristori invigorates the role, Rhéal shows us one way in which contemporary audiences would have potentially approached and contemplated reproduced, copied, or re-mastered art (or, at the very least, have been encouraged by some to do so). Rhéal articulates a common (and "safe") position in mid-nineteenth century artistic and dramatic circles: he constantly validates the classic subject matter in his effort to praise the novel, experimental style used in its representation. The progressive quality of the work is met with less resistance when the work depicts an approved classical subject.[246] The experience of a copied subject is therefore not so much about the context per se, but about detecting interesting mutations in its form. In Rhéal's perspective, the strikingly new elements of *Fedra* are the actress's physicality and vocal tonality, both of which are effusive and sumptuous. And according to Rhéal, la Ristori's version of Phèdre captures a modern spirit with "des aspects plus humains" and "des traits plus saisissants." The adaptation offers something seemingly more human and *moving*, as it were. Audiences should be looking for a more direct and genuine expression represented on stage.

Returning to Zola's novel, la Ristori's performance causes the lovers "une émotion particulière, dans cette langue étrangère dont les sonorités leur semblaient, par moments, un simple accompagnement d'orchestre soutenant la mimique des acteurs."[247] The actress's mesmerizing vocal quality and physicality create a strong reaction in the audience (Renée in particular): "elle emplissait la salle d'un tel cri de passion fauve, d'un tel besoin de volupté surhumaine, que la jeune femme sentait passer sur sa chair chaque frisson de son désir et de ses remords." The display of superhuman passion gets to Renée. This dramatization of "human

[245] Ibid.
[246] The nineteenth century salons come to mind here. We could even look at Alexandre Cabanel's painting, *Phaedra*, which was accepted by the Academy into the 1880 Salon.
[247] Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart (Tome 1),* 508.

expression" makes her replay her own drama. In fact, her doppelganger's powerful voice continues to resonate with Renée after she has left the theater: "elle entendait encore gronder derrière elle cette rude voix de la Ristori."[248] There is something universal and 'legible,' in the sonic quality of her voice.

The embedded Phèdre scene operates much like the mirror scene in the novel as it positions Renée's story – her emotions, her expression, her actions – in a state of remediation. Here, her own drama becomes a duller, paler reproduction. Maxime's and Renée's awareness of and engagement with their staged doubles serve as yet another devious duplication of the myth. At one point during the performance, Maxime leans over to Renée and whispers the lines that Théramène will soon deliver:

> – Attends, murmurait Maxime à son oreille, tu vas entendre le récit de Théramène. Il a une bonne tête, le vieux !
>
> Et il murmura d'une voix creuse :
>
> A peine nous sortions des portes de Trézène,
> Il était sur son char…

Maxime recites the memorized verse in French right before they will hear it performed on stage in Italian, thereby producing another instance of repetition in which the copied/replayed item is differentiated from the "original." Furthermore, Zola's narration underscores the mise-en-abyme by directly quoting from Racine's text. In the narration's repurposing of Racine's play, its protagonists not only copy the play's plotline and then go to the theater to watch it performed, they also *directly quote the verse*.

Maxime's reaction to the play reveals another moment where the narration self-consciously doubles-up, where it enfolds itself in more layers of repetition. Reflecting upon the play, he conjures up his own version of how they are repeating history:

> Dans le coupé, le jeune homme causa tout seul, il trouvait en général la tragédie "assommante", et préférait les pièces des Bouffes. Cependant Phèdre était « corsée ». Il s'y était intéressé parce que… Et il serra la main de Renée, pour compléter sa pensée. Puis une idée drôle lui passa par la tête, et il céda à l'envie de faire un mot :
> – C'est moi, murmura-t-il, qui avait raison de ne pas m'approcher de la mer, à Trouville.
> Renée, perdue au fond de son rêve douloureux, se taisait. Il fallut qu'il répétât sa phrase.
> – Pourquoi ? demanda-t-elle étonnée, ne comprenant pas.
> – Mais le monstre…
> Et il eut un petit ricanement.[249]

[248] Ibid., 509.
[249] Ibid., 509-10.

According to Maxime (who seems to be echoing Marx), their variation of the tragedy translates as a farce; however, he must repeat the punch line to his overwhelmed mother/lover who, at first, experiences her modern embodiment of Phèdre in a much darker light.

Maxime pushes their story in a farcical direction, and Renée equally disfigures their tale. When Maxime light-heartedly re-casts the tale, "cette plaisanterie glaça la jeune femme," and in her mental disequilibrium ("Tout se détraqua dans sa tête"), she creates an uncanny and satirical interpretation of *Phèdre*, further deforming the original version: "La Ristori n'était plus qu'un gros pantin qui retroussait son peplum et montrait sa langue au public comme Blanche Muller, au troisième acte de *la Belle Hélène* ; Théramène dansait le cancan, et Hippolyte mangeait des tartines de confiture en se fourrant les doigts dans le nez."[250] Zola's disenchanted leading lady thus brings up some good points for our consideration. In her (supposedly crazed) version, Renée conflates La Ristori and Phèdre. The actress playing the part and the tragic heroine are interchangeable. Hippolytus is called Hippolytus, not the actor who plays him. But in her strange daydream, there is no Phèdre, only La Ristori. The woman who assumes and embodies the role is the one who apparently counts.[251] At this point, however, La Ristori is envisioned as a grotesque puppet. Her dramatic expression is no longer noble. Her voice no longer resonates with truth. Her poses and gestures are just as distasteful and gratuitously sensual as Blanche Muller performing in the fluffy operetta which parodies life in the Greek court. Both actresses lewdly lift their skirts.

Zola's embedded theater scene brilliantly stages a series of transfigurations and deformations which ultimately raises questions about the integrity and meaning of the novel itself. For one thing, the Greek classic devolves into melodramatic farce. Initially, Renée places the actress and the myth on a pedestal: "cette grande femme traînant sur les planches le crime antique," and "comme son drame était mesquin et honteux à côté de l'épopée antique!" But her reverence for Phèdre declines as she considers the copy in its modern context. The contemporary production – with its staged passion and "volupté surhumain" – is, in the end, laughable. But what are we then to make of Zola's own reproduction of Phèdre? How does Renée's appraisal of La Ristori's version of Phèdre tell us how we might, as readers, approach the protagonist's incarnation of the same role? Are we to become just as cynical as Renée when we examine her character and its staged postures? And if so, why would the writer choose to spotlight his Phèdre in such an unflattering manner?

Reading Rhéal's letter and Zola's text in tandem, we can see that it is the "expressivity" of the actress, the accentuation of human expression, that is most appreciated – or captivating (in a potentially claptrap fashion). While Zola's story replays some of the points brought up by Rhéal, it also shifts the discussion. To begin with, Renée is entranced by la Ristori's "fortes épaules secouées par les sanglots, avec sa face tragique et ses gros bras" (508). Zola's narrative copies Rhéal's description and assessment of the stage actress, especially when it emphasizes her moving vocal effects and physical gestures. In both accounts, La Ristori's embodiment of the

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[250] Ibid.

[251] Rhéal, *Les Deux Phèdre,* 18. Likewise, in Rhéal's account it is only Phèdre/La Ristori who is truly worth commenting upon : "je n'ai pris […] que le grand role de Phèdre. Les autres, à vrai dire, n'existent pas, n'ont pu vivre dans aucun temps ni comme style, ni comme idée, ni comme conduit, ni comme caractère." The other characters are merely "des mannequins à ressort, affublés d'oripeaux bizarres comme leur langage" and "On peut leur appliquer indifféremment l'épithète qu'ils se donnent tour à tour : *un prince déplorable, un père déplorable*." It is also worth noting that Zola's working title for the novel was simply *Renée* which equally foregrounds the importance of the main character. And when Maxime gives his take on the performance in the novel, he indicates clearly that only Phèdre was worth watching.

role is effusive and demonstrative. In our present day, the gestures and tones of La Ristori would likely come across as overwrought and melodramatic, similar to the postures assumed by Duchenne's actor-model, Talrich. But for Renée and the general audience of the day, there is something compelling in the (manufactured/manipulated) exposure of "raw feelings," something that exudes a certain "naturalness." At least at first glance.[252]

Zola's Phèdre, however, breaks down la Ristori's acting, calling out its contrived elements and, in so doing, seems to invalidate the stylized "human expression" of the copy. At the same time, by re-contextualizing the myth in modern society and down-playing the seriousness of the crime, Renée exonerates her personalized version of the myth, her way of playing the part which is, in many ways, comparable to la Ristori's enactment. Renée's state of hallucination, and shock, brings forth clarity and cynicism. Her moment of disassociated experience serves to reorganize and repurpose data.

The version of the play that Zola uses to compare Renée's drama to Antiquity's is, in itself, a modernized and polemical copy. By embedding a revamped theatrical version of Phèdre into his own re-telling of the story, Zola offers his readers two conspicuous duplications for consideration. One key to understanding this period's relationship with the copy, then, is to consider how the duplicated piece is thought to manufacture/represent *differently* something essential such as "human expression." The copy opens up a new perspective precisely because it reveals a rephenomenalization of data – it showcases (re)mediation.

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As I turn now to an analysis of Zola's tableaux vivants, let us keep in mind the various aesthetic and scientific stakes previously elaborated in this study. In our discussion of Duchenne's *Mécanisme* we noted that scientific methods were applied to produce more (supposedly) physiologically accurate copies of human expressions, or more "natural" depictions of emotions, and we additionally noticed that the process of duplicating images or expressions, especially in such a multi-media approach, inevitably involves a manipulation of data. We saw, moreover, the extent to which the scientist's project implies a legibility and universality of expressions that ironically is caught up in – and defined by – a specific cultural-aesthetic atmosphere of the time period. That said, there are many compelling aspects of Duchenne's work. For instance, there is his steadfast belief that scientific intervention will productively and positively shift modes of representation, allowing copies of past art work as well as future forms of art to reach a higher fidelity to reality. And then there is Duchenne's inclusion of and involvement with his reader. The scientist's innovative use of photographic plates and his explanation of how to encounter and create meaning out of the visual data are indicative and emblematic of a change in nineteenth-century spectatorship (i.e. attention to and selection of details within a moment of sensory overload; the capacity to "scan" and "zoom-in"; differentiating between copies and repeated images; etc…). Likewise, in our examination of La Ristori's revival of Racine's heroine and Zola's own doubling-up of Phèdre, we came in contact with a similar urge to capture and portray something more "real" or "genuine" with the revised version. And in this both texts end up exposing a modernized *affectiveness* that has little to do with an "accurate" expression of physicality/physionomy and more to do with the theatricality of the age. Interestingly, the theatrical debate and Zola's fictionalized re-telling of it cultivate an

[252] I believe we could think of this overdramatization of *feeling* as a reaction to the techno-scientific 'accurateness' that is becoming more prevalent in arts and drama.

appraisal of the data conveyed in the copy (and in the process of copying) which underscores the artificial qualities of the adaptation. Zola's mise-en-abyme of Racine's play importantly dramatizes the act of experiencing a reproduction, thereby making the copy a study of the alteration which occurs in the act/art of spectatorship/readership.

The dénouement of *La Curée* is wonderfully set within a sequence of tableaux vivants in which the characters perform a modernized arrangement of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* designed by the prefect Hupel de la Noue and entitled "Les Amours du beau Narcisse et de la nymphe Echo." Zola's depiction of the tableaux ostensibly plays with the transmutation and entanglement of artistic forms. And it also underscores the fashionable, retro trend of the nineteenth-century: M. Hupel de la Noue "avait d'abord songé à écrire son œuvre en vers ; puis il s'était décidé pour des tableaux vivants ; c'était plus noble, disait-il, plus près du beau antique."[253] Through its staging of a series of elaborately crafted body postures, stunningly complicated costumes and pictorial scenes, the narration blurs together media, coalesces disparate time periods, and fixes "human expression" in static, readable positions. While the tableaux vivants in *La Curée* are typically approached in terms of their ability to fuse the story's thematic threads (they are, in Jacques Noiray's examination, "un microcosme qui renvoie au macrocosme qui l'enveloppe"[254]), I would like us to think of Zola's use of this peculiar art form as an attempt to inhabit and also trouble (or at the very least expose) a shift in perceptual operations. As Arnaud Rykner has remarked, the art of the tableau vivant "was pivotal in the gradual passage from a textual to a visual culture or at least from verbal to spatial drama."[255] I want to argue furthermore that the tableau vivant craze (and the changes in spectatorship manifested in that craze) relates to a shifting artistic landscape in which an interaction with copied, transposed, or 'riffed-off' art becomes increasingly paramount. Modernity's transfiguration, adulteration, and proliferation of art neatly crystalize in Hupel de la Noue's production. Moreover Zola's account of the tableau vivant performance forges a wild collision of descriptions, observations, and responses which destabilizes the legibility of the tableaux and openly challenges the possibility of mimesis.

The tableaux vivants scene is, evidently, a moment of ekphrasis. Through the process of directly verbalizing a visual image, the narrator defines and (re)shapes the reader's perceptions of the depicted work of art. Zola's description of the tableaux vivants is not simple or straight-forward. By layering the scene with various modalities and voices which interpret the work differently, Zola's ekphrasis ultimately turns on itself, creating a jarring cognitive effect that refocuses the reader's perception of the scene. As an emblematic *Naturalist* text, we might say that the goal of this moment of ekphrasis is to convey a 'scientifically accurate' depiction of the scene – and of the human expressions rendered in it; and yet, by focusing primarily on the reception and perception of the tableaux vivants (and here we must think of the reader of the novel as well as the fictional audience portrayed in the narration) the writer multiplies and fragments the experience of the textual images in "the mind's eye" and sidesteps traditional, mimetic conventions. Zola's use of the tableaux vivants intertwines varying degrees of perception, imagination, enchantment, confusion and recognition. In the context of modernity's rapid and accessible array of reproductions, these are precisely the kinds of perceptual issues, or challenges with which the nineteenth-century observer must come to terms. In addition, the

[253] Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart (Tome 1),* 537.
[254] Jacques Noiray, "Une 'Mise en abyme' de La Curée: 'les amours du beau Narcisse et de la nymphe Écho,'" *Littératures* 16 (1987): 74.
[255] Arnaud Rykner, "The Power of Tableaux Vivants in Zola: The Underside of the Image," *Image and Narrative* 12, no. 3 (2011): 100.

placement of the "Amours du beau Narcisse et de la nymphe Echo" in the narration merges and confounds the tableaux with the plot/action that frames – or is framed by – them. Crucially, then, this passage requires the reader to approach the narrative as a kind of tableau vivant with its own set of contrivances and staged expressions, and with its own fidelity to, or transgression of, a previous representational form. In his study on the growing importance of tableaux within eighteenth-century dramatic arts Pierre Frantz makes the following conclusion: "Quoique souvent utilisée pour defender ce qui ressemblerait à une esthétique platement réaliste, voire naturaliste, pour indiquer une voie directe, déniant l'artifice, évitant l'art, la métaphore du tableau a permis au contraire une réelle prise en compte des moyens de la representation."[256] Applying this line of thought to Zola's ekphrasis, we can see that, while using conventional devices of realism which intend to promote a more "realistic" encounter with the described object, Zola's description of the tableaux elucidates and dramatizes its own artifice.

Before analyzing Zola's textual tableaux vivants, I would like us to briefly explore some of the social, historical and aesthetic stakes of the art of tableau vivant during Zola's time. On the one hand, the tableaux vivants lend an unmistakable validity to the writer's depiction of extravagant life in the Second Empire. As Pierre de Lano describes in his detailed and illustrated1893 account of the Second Empire's penchant for bals travesties and tableaux vivants, living statuary was a veritable staple of high society entertainment.

> […] aux Tuileries, des tableaux vivants qui dépassèrent les bornes des convenances et que des scènes mythologiques ou bien relatives à l'Histoire grecques ou à l'Histoire romaine, furent représentées devant l'Impératrice et devant ses familiers par les plus jolies femmes du château, dans le costume trop exact exigé par les rôles choisis. Rien n'est plus vrai. Ces tableaux eurent même une très grande vogue ; les ministères, les salons s'en emparèrent, et […] on tenta de faire revivre, sous le Second Empire, par la pose et par la nudité, les principaux héros de la Fable et de l'histoire. [257]

Zola thus captures an important artistic trend that defined the era. Commenting on journalistic reports found in *L'Illustration*, Noiray surmizes that Zola's "Amours du beau Narcisse et de la nymphe Echo" principally function as "un élément de vraisemblance, un de ces nombreux indices qui garantissent aux yeux de Zola la véracité historique de *La Curée.*"[258]

But I believe it is more critical that Zola incorporates the tableaux vivants into his writing in order to demonstrate evolving trends in spectatorship/readership, and in representation more globally. The tableaux vivants sequence in *La Curée* is an unveiling of standardized perceptual practices. This passage, I contend, is all about – and for – the reader. It is not just the representation of an object; it is fundamentally a depiction of the manipulation and manufacturing of data that goes into the representation of that object

[256] Pierre Frantz, *L'Esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe Siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 23.
[257] Pierre de Lano, *Les bals travestis et les tableaux vivants sous le second empire* (Paris : H. Simonis Empis, 1893), 30
[258] Noiray, "Une 'mise en abyme' de La Curée: 'les amours du beau Narcisse et de la nymphe Écho,'" 70.

The tableau vivant was a form of entertainment with mainstream cultural relevance between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries.[259] One of the earliest documented accounts of tableau vivant is a theatrical *entre-acte* from 1761.[260] As McCullough's research has revealed, during a stage production of *Les Noces d'Arlequin* at the Comédie-Italienne in Paris, an unanticipated freeze frame took place. The actors meticulously arranged themselves as a copy of the popular Greuze painting, *L'Accordée de Village,* and posed silently and motionlessly for a few minutes, allowing the audience members to recognize and enjoy the duplication, before resuming the play.[261] Using living bodies to stage static scenes copied from famous paintings or literary narratives, the art of tableau vivant occupies a tenuous and bizarre artistic register. It is not fully theater, nor is it entirely plastic arts. It is never fully original, and yet, it is freshly inventive. It presents, almost simultaneously, a fixed and ephemeral vision. The most successful tableaux vivants made their human models as statuesque as possible, creating an uncanny spectacle of the alive yet inanimate object, the organic and inorganic commodity. In its selection of images to duplicate and in its mode of representing them, the tableaux vivants move about historical periods and aesthetic traditions, collapsing genre categories and violating medium specificity. And while early "living pictures" were very formulaic and literal, replicating to the best of their ability the exact content and form of specific paintings and sculptures that were in vogue, by the end of the nineteenth century it was common to have exploratory and abstract subject matter for the tableaux that would riff on and distort traditional themes and images from the plastic arts and classical literature.

The art of tableaux vivants arguably stimulated a mode of spectatorship throughout a vast range of social milieus. Although tableaux vivants became fashionable in aristocratic venues and were remarkable social events during the Second Empire, they seem to have had more humble, vaudeville-esque beginnings.[262] According to some scholars, it was only after Goethe aesthetically appropriated them in his writings that tableaux vivants gained significant socio-cultural weight.[263] The soaring popularity of tableaux vivants in the nineteenth century is usually traced back to Lady Hamilton, whose *attitudes* were admired and described by Goethe.[264] Then, Goethe's highly successful1809 novel, *Elective Affinites*, further advanced the popularity of the hybrid entertainment and, arguably, allowed this "low culture" art form to gain acceptance in

[259] But they are still around today. As part of the annual Festival of Arts of Laguna Beach, California, there is the "Pageant of the Masters", a contemporary, world-renown, ninety minute staging of living pictures. The art of tableau vivant is currently relegated to what could be considered kitsch performance, whereas in the nineteenth century, living pictures were a widespread domestic entertainment across European and American middle and upper class social circles.

[260] Diderot had previously described the perfect theatrical performance as a series of tableaux. See *Entretiens sur le fils naturel*.

[261] Jack W. McCullough, *Living Pictures on the New York State* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983), 6.

[262] On the fashion of tableaux vivants, see Pierre de Lano, *Les Bals Travestis et Les Tableaux Vivants Sous Le Seconde Empire* (Paris: H. Simonis Empis, 1893).

[263] See Peter M McIsaac, "Rethinking Rethinking Tableaux Vivants and Trivality in the Writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johanna Schopenhauer, and Fanny Lewald," *Monatshefte* 99, no. 2 (2007): 152–76.

[264] Aura Satz, "Tableaux Vivants: Inside the Statue," in *Articulate Objects: Voice, Sculpture and Performance*, ed. Aura Satz and Jon Wood (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 170-71. Satz writes "In March 1787, Goethe describes Emma enacting the stillness of a statue or painting for her admiring future spouse, sustaining each pose or 'attitude' long enough for the viewer to absorb her, unravel the *mise-en-abîme*, the multiplied view of the living, breathing Emma, the painting or sculpture she was posing as, and the mythological, biblical or historical scene the image represented."

aesthetically elite circles.[265] Indeed, the trend of tableaux vivants ties into an evolution in nineteenth century visual-aesthetic culture in which high and low art fuse together (vaudeville tricks combine with the *grand art* of the Salons) and genres become intertwined to the point that it is difficult to confidently assert what the exact nature (form and register) of the art work truly is.[266] As Rosemary Barrows explains, the blurred boundaries between theater and painting found in tableaux vivants are "part of a larger merging of art forms where the academic, aesthetic, and popular coexisted."[267] Situated at the crossroads of dramatic, narrative, and visual arts, tableaux vivants perfectly highlight a paradigm shift in modern aesthetics. The confluence of genres and registers along with the reproduction of recognizable images produce and necessitate a new and different approach to art and to spectacle. There was a widespread entertainment culture enthralled with such a creative mash-up of past tradition. By the mid to late nineteenth century, manuals explained in detail how to set up tableaux vivants (from how to construct a proper stage and find the right lighting, to how to dress the performers and do their make-up, to how to select an appropriate and pleasing subject matter) and journalists provided rich accounts of tableaux vivants performed in classy venues by famous people. These accounts instruct audience members on what to look out for or what to appreciate during a tableau vivant performance. In addition, these "how to" manuals would have encouraged the 'reader' of a tableau vivant to consider how he/she would have embodied the represented role or expression as well.

In this period, the art of living pictures and living statuary exposes audiences to paradoxical features. To begin with, spectators have "access" to an artwork, but as *a copy in a different medium.* There is a kind of comparative operation at stake – what is more "real," "believable," "accurate": living bodies or bodies depicted on canvas or in plastic arts? On the other hand, the manipulated physicality of the (female) actor is generally observed in this era as an efficient means to display and grant access to an internal, emotional arena (and this gets us get back to the topic of "human expression" and its reproduction.) As a touchstone for both literary texts and real-life adaptations, Goethe's descriptions of living statuary are usually considered in light of the projection of female desire, the voyeuristic male gaze, and the (male) artist's ability to mold the female body.[268] The established aesthetic stakes of this form of representation amount to the manipulation – and to the *clear manifestation of the manipulation* – of female expression and to the involvement of the beholder. The mania for tableaux vivants in the nineteenth century relates to the molding of "female expression" – to the sculpting of an emotive physicality. This, in turn, requires a molding of readership/spectatorship.

La Curée offers us a spectacle of spectatorship. Just as the embedded stage production of *Phèdre* in the novel primarily reveals Renée's perception/experience of the play (and of her/Zola's contemporary re-make thereof), the sequence of "les Amours du beau Narcisse et de

[265] See McIsaac, "Rethinking Rethinking Tableaux Vivants and Trivality in the Writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johanna Schopenhauer, and Fanny Lewald."
[266] Quentin Bajac, *Tableaux Vivants : Fantaisies Photographiques Victoriennes (1840-1880)* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1999). Quentin Bajac follows the parallel, and mutually influential, evolution of photography and tableau vivant. See also McIsaac, who studies the combination of high and low cultures in the practice and perception of tableaux vivants in "Rethinking Tableaux Vivants and Trivality," and Rosemary J. Barrow, "Toga Plays and Tableaux Vivants: Theatre and Painting on London's Late-Victorian and Edwardian Popular Stage," *Theatre Journal* 62, no. 2 (2010): 209–26.
[267] Rosemary J. Barrow, "Toga Plays and Tableaux Vivants: Theatre and Painting on London's Late-Victorian and Edwardian Popular Stage," *Theatre Journal* 62, no. 2 (2010): 210.
[268] See McIsaac, "Rethinking Rethinking Tableaux Vivants and Trivality."; and Satz, "Tableaux Vivants: Inside the Statue."

la nymphe Echo" likewise foregrounds the act of observing a performance, of *reading it*. After much buzz and anticipation, M. Hupel de la Noue displays his first tableau:

> Les rideaux s'ouvrirent doucement. […] Un murmure courut dans le salon, les dames se penchaient, les hommes allongeaient la tête, tandis que l'admiration se traduisait çà et là par une parole dite trop haut, un soupir inconscient, un rire étouffé. Cela dura cinq grandes minutes sous le flamboiement des trois lustres.[269]

Instead of going directly into a description of the tableau vivant, the narration slowly opens the curtains only to show us the audience's reaction to the scene. Stretching necks and audible sighs occupy the narrative space – which is drawn-out in time: "cela dura cinq grandes minutes." (The placement of the temporal marker in the passage suggests that it is the audience's reaction that lasts five minutes rather than the actual tableau vivant). Next, before the reader gets to "see" the tableau, we encounter the verbal ramblings of Hupel de la Noue. While the piano music "allait et venait dans un bercement sans fin, il donna des explications," the proud designer first provides a re-cap of Greek mythology, going over the genealogy of characters. Then he steps through his translation of Ovid's scene. Hupel's narration therefore takes over the (yet to be) narration of the tableau. "J'ai cru donner carrière à mon imagination," he explains. "La nymphe Echo conduit le beau Narcisse chez Vénus, dans une grotte marine, pour que la déesse l'enflamme de ses feux. Mais la déesse reste impuissante. Le jeune homme témoigne par son attitude qu'il n'est pas touché." These remarks serve to portray and even solicit another level of spectatorship. At this moment in the narration, we, the readers, are given a rough sketch of the tableau's core features and characters (and, along with the fictional audience members, we are told how to interpret the young man's pose/attitude). But we are also provided with the audience's own assessment of Hupel's account of the living picture:

> L'explication n'était pas inutile, car peu de spectateurs, dans le salon, comprenaient le sens exact des groupes. Quand le préfet eut nommé ses personnages à demi-voix, on admira davantage. Les Mignon et Charrier continuaient à ouvrir des yeux énormes. Ils n'avaient pas compris.[270]

By adding a lack of understanding to the reception of the tableau – and moreover to the explanation of it – Zola is setting up his reader for an intriguing encounter with his forthcoming description of the same scene. Critically, we are encouraged to watch how Zola sculpts the data, how he re-presents the representation.

Zola's description of the tableau vivant spares no details and accomplishes many stylistic exploits. The palpability of fabrics and textures stands out, from the "soie tendue à grands plis cassés, imitant des anfractuosités du rocher" to the "flot de dentelles" and "toutes ces étoffes légères et transparentes" which blend voluptuously with the contours and flesh of the female bodies. Even though "les groupes gardaient une immodbilité de statue ", the description of the intricate stage props and costumes signifies an animated quality: "la gaze, les dentelles […] se fondaient si bien avec les épaules et les maillots, que ces blancheurs rosées vivaient". The actors

[269] Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart (Tome 1),* 542.
[270] Ibid., 543.

transform into inanimate objects while the inanimate materiality which engulfs them translates into living, "natural" elements. The narration plays-up the illusory and metaphorical dimensions of the tableau – and, by extension, of its own craft. Renée's dress is defined as "toute une allégorie": "elle tenait des grands arbres et des grands monts, des lieux retentissants où les voix de la Terre et de l'Air se répondent; elle était rocher par le satin blanc de la jupe, taillis par les feuillages de la ceinture, ciel pur par la nuée de gaze bleue du corsage."[271] Echo wears a costume which contains Earth and Sky speaking to one another. Her attire includes satin rocks, thickets of leaves, and a billowing sky made of blue gauze. It is worth asking ourselves whether the wordy description adds to the comprehension of the outlandish ensemble, enriching our perception of the baroque image, or, if it fundamentally complicates the encounter with it instead. The fact that the text must call Renée's garb an allegory and then touch upon its salient, rhetorical features is indeed revealing: what the narration constructs in this moment of ekphrasis is a tableau of rhetorical devices. We discover the placement and interaction of metaphors, similes, personifications, and direct references to other bodies of work. This tableau is performing recognizable "poses" and "expressions" from an established literary repertoire.

Zola's narrative sculpting of Hupel's tableau vivant additionally guides our reading and assessment of it by focusing notable attention on specific facial expressions and body postures. In this regard, Zola is tapping into the notion of a universal language of expression and simultaneously debunking that claim. By selecting what kind of data to highlight, Zola not only helps his reader visualize the scene. In his choice of elements and features to zoom-in on, the writer also critically depicts what nineteenth-century audiences would, most likely, be keen on noticing. And yet, the narration is filled with explanations of the poses and attitudes. There is an impulse to provide the 'correct' meaning. Mme de Lauwerens, performing as Vénus, "avait compris son personnage en souveraine de l'amour, avec de grands yeux sévères et dévorants"; Mme Daste embodies Cupidon with her smirk and "sa tête malicieuse"; and "la comtesse Vanska faisait la Volupté; elle s'allongeait, tordue par un dernier spasme, les yeux entrouverts et mourants, comme lasse." Zola's writing provides us with its own docent, as it were, guiding us through a close reading/looking of the tableaux vivants on display.

The narration references other works of art in its description of Hupel's tableau: the three graces appear in the scene and the performers "se souriaient, s'enlaçaient, comme dans le groupe de Pradier"; the marquise d'Espanet and Mme Haffner – with their interlaced arms and intertwined hair – evoke "un souvenir de Lesbos". Once again, Hupel explicitly tells his (male) audience members what they should see: the female posers "mettaient un coin risqué dans le tableau, un souvenir de Lesbos, que M. Hupel de la Noue expliquait à voix basse." Since the artist must point out his references there is a strange gap in 'reconnaissance.' In Peter Seibert's consideration of the art of tableau vivant, it is precisely the effective recognition of themes and images that defines the art form: "l'image vivante doit confronter la société avec des matériaux connus: c'est dans la reproduction, la reconstitution, que se trouve le sens; c'est la comparaison entre le modèle et la copie qui est porteuse de la signification dernière, laquelle est perdue lorsqu'il ne peut y avoir de 'reconnaissance'."[272] When the narration steps us through this staged tableau vivant, it is also stepping us through a set of postures and facial expressions, classical art forms and literary narratives which are, in theory, already recognizable/legible, but which need

[271] Ibid., 544-545.
[272] Peter Seibert, "Le Tableau vivant comme composante de la sociabilité dans les salons autour de 1800," in *La Lettre et la figure: la littérature et les arts visuels à l'époque moderne* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1989), 30–44.

to be explicitly described and commented upon. In "Les Amours du Beau Narcisse et de la Nymphe Echo "Zola masterfully piles up – and plays with – different layers of recognition and lack thereof. The narration describes the images to the reader. The guests are being told what to appreciate (perceive) in the tableau by its creator. The reader is being told what the audience is being told to pay attention to. And then the reader is provided with the audience's reaction to the tableau. All of this (mis)recognition stresses the importance of reading the poses and characters and detecting the possible referents. The spectator of a tableau vivant is expected to associate and equate various *poses plastiques* with established emotional landscapes. ("Dans son geste de refus, [Maxime] développait sa hanche gauche, qu'on remarqua beaucoup. Mais tous les éloges furent pour l'expression de visage de Renée. […] Elle avait un sourire aigu qui cherchait à se faire humble, elle quêtait sa proie avec des supplications de louve affamée qui ne cache ses dents qu'à demi"[273]) And while the observer oftentimes has a "successful" reading of the tableau, there is a notable margin of error.

What is remarkable in Zola's treatment of the tableau vivant and what sets his text apart from other nineteenth-century fictional narratives that explore this art form (for instance, Goethe's *Electives Affinities* and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*) is that the novelist expects his reader to use and be aware of the observation skills supposedly honed in the spectatorship of tableaux vivants while perusing his own writing. The action and plot that surrounds Zola's tableaux vivants, for example, can (and should) be perceived as a kind of tableau vivant in and of itself. If, in the account of the first tableau vivant, we encounter a strange barrage of characters and costumes, a similarly dense and colorful array of people fill the narrative space which frames, or is framed by, the series of tableaux vivants. Since the Saccards' guests are dressed and ready for a costume ball, the audience members constitute an equally intriguing collage of historical personae and fictional, mythical characters: "…le grand salon se trouvait plein, et comme il y avait bal ensuite, les femmes étaient là, costumées, assises sur des fauteuils rangés en demi-cercle devant le théâtre improvise."[274] In his narrativization of the Saccards'company, Zola employs the same kind of descriptive approach as he does with the tableaux vivants.

> Les rangées de fauteuils offraient la plus étonnante cohue de marquises, de châtelaines, de laitières, d'espagnoles, de bergères, de sultanes ; tandis que la masse compacte des habits noirs mettait une grande tache sombre, à côté de cette moire d'étoffes claires et d'épaules nues, toutes braisillantes des étincelles vives des bijoux.[275]

There is an emphasis on the placement or positioning of characters and the effect this has on the perception of the scene. There is an aesthetic "sense" to be made out of this jumble of figures. The audience is, in effect, described like a scene of a painting. Or, that of a tableau vivant.

> Le groupe au milieu duquel se trouvait Saccard s'était formé derrière les derniers fauteuils. On avait même tiré un fauteuil hors du rang. Pour le baron Gouraud, dont les jambes enflaient depuis quelque temps. Il y avait là M. Toutin-Laroche, que l'empereur

[273] Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart (Tome 1),* 545.
[274] Ibid., 538.
[275] Ibid., 539.

> venait d'appeler au Sénat ; M. de Mareuil, dont la Chambre avait bien voulu valider la deuxième élection ; M. Michelin, décoré de la veille ; et, un peu en arrière, les Mignon et Charrier, dont l'un avait un gros diamant à sa cravate, tandis que l'autre en montrait un plus gros encore à son doigt. Ces messieurs causaient.[276]

This particular passage is found before the description of Hupel's first tableau vivant, and we could arguably consider the initial sequence of "Les Amours du Beau Narcisse et de la Nymphe Echo" as a refracted image of it. Similarly filled with important people's names and their "positions" and "decorations", both tableaux offer the reader a *staged composition*.

The second tableau vivant of the soirée has the wildest success, a success which hinges on Hupel's ability to modernize an old classic and tantalize the crowd with a display of monetary abundance. Once again, the prefect elucidates his tableau vivant before the audience and the reader encounter it. And at the same time he admits the extent to which he modifies the original text. "Vous allez voir, murmura M. Hupel de la Noue; j'ai poussé peut-être un peu loin la licence poétique." As I now begin to analyze the second tableau vivant, then, I want to continue our reflection on perceptual practices while turning the focus toward the encounter with (experience of) the revised copy. How does Zola's novel address the manipulation and re-playing of data, the modernized adaptation which seeks artistic and aesthetic relevance?

The second tableau vivant is figured as an entirely new take on an old classic. After receiving Hupel's synopsis of the scene ("La nymphe Echo, voyant que Vénus est sans puissance sur le beau Narcisse, le conduit chez Plutus, dieu des richesses et des métaux précieux… Après la tentation de la chair, la tentation de l'or"), M. Toutin-Laroche responds smugly: "C'est classique […]. Vous connaissez votre temps, monsieur le préfet." This dialogue serves as the preface to the tableau vivant. The description of the tableau wraps up with the audience's full approval: "la hardiesse des pièces de vingt francs, ce ruissellement de coffre-fort modern tombé dans un coin de la mythologie grecque, enchanta l'imagination des dames et des financiers qui étaient là." The description of the tableau vivant is bookended by an insistence on the tableau's ability to evoke and portray a highly modern scenario while remaining 'classic.' The second tableau is a crowd-pleaser precisely because of this mish-mash of styles and themes.

The central story of the second tableau vivant repeats that of the first, but the tale of Echo and Narcissus is completely swallowed up, rather literally, by the radiant cave of glowing gems in which the scene is set. This tableau vivant is mainly portrayed in the text as an experience of– and subsequent adjustment to – its sheer brilliance. "Le rayon électrique tombait sur une splendeur flambante, dans laquelle les spectateurs ne virent d'abord qu'un brasier, où des lingots d'or et des pierres précieuses semblaient se fondre." In its density and duration, the narration's description of Plutus's underground dwelling stockpiles sparkling heaps of gold and precious metals, "les richesses incalculables." It culminates in a glittery mound of contemporary coins: "A terre, par un anachronisme hardi de M. Hupel de la Noue, il y avait un écroulement de pièces de vingt francs; des louis étalés, des louis entassés, un pullulement de louis qui montaient." (Note here that the text equally piles up descriptors, connecting and amassing multiple strings of objects in its parataxis). The wonderfully lush description of the second tableau includes what seems like a quick, dry aside: "Puis, au premier plan, le drame restait le même : la nymphe Echo tentait le beau Narcisse, qui refusait encore du geste." Obviously it is not the foreground of the tableau vivant that catches the spectator's eye; rather, "les yeux des spectateurs s'accoutumaient

[276] Ibid.

avec ravissement à ce trou béant ouvert sur les entrailles enflammées du globe, à ce tas d'or sur lequel se vautrait la richesse d'un monde." If "le drame restait le même" then it is its modern currency that gives Hupel's second tableau such a superlative review and overshadows/outshines the actual plot.[277]

A close reading of this second tableau exposes a displacement of focus – if during the first tableau vivant "on remarqua beaucoup" the unique pose of Maxime and the expressiveness of Renée's facial features, in the viewing of the second one, "on remarqua beaucoup les bijoux originaux" worn by the characters who represent various gem stones. The precious metals become the main figures and not the actors who wear them and play their part.

> Au sommet de ce tas d'or, Mme de Guende, en Plutus, était assise, Plutus femme, Plutus montrant sa gorge, dans les grandes lames de sa robe, prise à tous les métaux. Autour du dieu, se groupaient, debout, à demi couchées, unies en grappe, ou fleurissant à l'écart, les efflorescences féeriques de cette grotte, où les califes des *Mille et Une Nuits* avaient vidé leur trésor : Mme Haffner en Or, avec une jupe roide et resplendissante d'évêque ; Mme d'Espanet en Argent, luisante comme un clair de lune ; Mme de Lauwerens, d'un bleu ardent, en Saphir, ayant à son côté la petite Mme Daste, une Turquoise souriante, qui bleuissait tendrement ; puis s'égrenaient l'Emeraude, Mme de Meinhold, et la Topaze, Mme Teissière ; et, plus bas, la comtesse Vanska donnait son ardeur sombre au Corail, allongée, les bras levés, chargés de pendeloques rouges, pareille à un polype monstrueux et adorable, qui montrait des chairs de femme dans des nacres roses et entrebâillées de coquillages. Ces dames avaient des colliers, des bracelets, des parures complètes, faites chacune de la pierre précieuse que le personnage représentait. On remarqua beaucoup les bijoux originaux de Mmes d'Espanet et Haffner, composés uniquement de petites pièces d'or et de petites pièces d'argent neuves. Puis, au premier plan, le drame restait le même : la nymphe Echo tentait le beau Narcisse, qui refusait encore du geste.[278]

A complex spatial arrangement ("Au sommet de," "Autour du dieu, se groupaient, debout, à demi couchées, unies en grappe, ou fleurissant à l'écart," "à son côté," "puis s'égrenaient," "et, plus bas," etc…) moves the reader/observer across and down the stage to confront a glimmering three-dimensional mash-up of jewels. But for all the depth presented in this montage, the guests are mostly in awe of the shiny, surface-level appearance of the tableau. The story does not even matter to the audience, only its ornate décor. Here, there is faulty spectatorship, as it were The guests do not follow, or even appreciate, the tableau's portrayal of metamorphosis.

The importance of repetition cannot be overstated in this sequence. Repetition further implicates the reader. Once again, we are asked to experience the narrative as another mise-en-abyme. The second tableau vivant has its key actors, Renée and Maxime, embody the same

[277] And here we could apply this line of thinking to *La Curée.* The Phèdre-inspired plot offers nothing new, per se, but Zola's innovative treatment of it does.
[278] Ibid., 548-49.

attitudes and display the same scenario as in Hupel's first creation. But what is truly innovative in this series of duplications is the way in which Zola uses the repeated scene to portray an echo chamber in which dialogues reverberate and also become distorted copies. Everything – from the commentary on the performance and reactions to the décor, to Mme Sidonie's conspiracy theory as well as the marquise's witticism – is churned out as a series of repetitions which vie for sustained relevance. The audience members ecstatically murmur: "que de pièces!," "que d'argent!" Then, the public officials Mignon and Charrier exclaim with "une naïveté brutale: Sacrebleu! il y aurait là de quoi démolir Paris et le rebâtir." On the following page, the minister (Eugene Rougon) declares: "tout cet or était un merveilleux spectacle…Nous ferions de grandes choses, si M. Hupel de la Noue battait monnaie pour nous." And, just to make sure that the reader fully appreciates these variations on a theme, the narration bluntly states: "C'était, en langue ministérielle, le même mot que celui des Mignon et Charrier." While this particular repetition leads to a more sophisticated phrase, other repeated conversations seem to devolve instead. This is the case of Hupel's 'joke' (when he complimented the marquise on her costume for the first tableau, she replied, "j'en ai un bien plus joli dessous!"). The prefect goes around sharing this *mot* and, to begin with, "on le trouva tout à fait réussi. Ces messieurs se le répétèrent." Yet, after the second tableau vivant, in a more troubled state, the prefect tries to tell the *plaisanterie* to M. de Saffré, who interrupts him with the punch line to inform the poor fellow that "C'est vieux, mon cher, très vieux." M. de Saffré is also caught in repeat mode, so to speak, as he must repeat himself to explain to the incredulous prefect why the joke is no longer pertinent: "Vieux, vieux comme le monde, répétait le secrétaire, Mme d'Espanet l'a déjà dit deux fois aux Tuileries." That the dialogue surrounding Hupel's modernized version of the myth is such a flurry of reiterated comments is revealing: by using recurrence in this context, Zola plays with the idea of how much duplication people can really stand.

The third and final tableau vivant of "Les Amours du Beau Narcisse et de la Nymphe Echo" is where everything gets interesting, where the representation and its legibility appear to overtly and intentionally devolve. When we examined the embedded Phèdre scene in this novel, we noted the ways in which the story shifted through the process of its duplication and re-embodiment. And here, once again, we have a similar trajectory: the tragedy turns increasingly abstract and even farcical the more it is repeated and observed and commented upon. Moreover, the actors, taking their roles into their own hands, become less understandable, less readable. In this, the sequence poses many questions, including: what role or agency does the artist truly have when he is translating, adapting, and/or re-casting a previous work of art? What happens when the copy *goes wrong*, so to speak?

For the final tableau vivant, the ladies and Maxime have gone and positioned themselves without Hupel's assistance and the narration explores the prefect's frustration via free indirect discourse: "Elle s'étaient placées toutes seules! […] ça n'était pas ça, ça ne valait rien!" The alarmed artist then openly critiques the performance: "La nymphe Echo est trop au bord… Et cette jambe du beau Narcisse, pas de noblesse, pas de noblesse du tout…" Even the guests are bewildered, asking "ce que le jeune homme et la jeune fille faisaient, couchés par terre." This annoyance, criticism and confusion prelude the description of the scene. Relinquishing artistic control is part and parcel of trying to re-present a canonical work. And there is no way of controlling its meaning and reception. So Zola seems to imply.

And yet, the tableau vivant, as represented by the narrator, is arguably a beautiful and comprehensible composition, albeit incredibly stylized and rigorously executed. At no point, for instance, does the reader need to question what the characters are doing or why a body is fixed in

a certain position. In order to get an adequate sense of the accentuated grandeur and rhetorical vivacity of the description of this third tableau, I would like to cite a rather lengthy portion of it. This will offer us a glimpse at a unique and curious *décalage* between what the narrator allows the reader to experience verses what Zola's fictional audience actually perceives on stage. I want to emphasize here that no one in the audience encounters the tableau vivant in the exact manner and style in which the narration depicts it. And I shall explore the implications of this shortly. Another reason why I choose to cite such a large section of the text is to give us a proper feel of the duration and rhythm of this account which will ultimately allow us to reflect upon the effect this has on the perceptual apparatus of the reader.

> …C'était une clairière idéale, avec des arbres bleus, de grandes fleurs jaunes et rouges, qui montaient aussi haut que les chênes. Là, sur une butte de gazon, Vénus et Plutus se tenaient côte, entourés de nymphes accourues des taillis voisins pour leur faire escorte. Il y avait les filles des arbres, les filles des sources, les filles des monts, toutes les divinités rieuses et nues de la forêt. Et le dieu et la déesse triomphaient, punissaient les froideurs de l'orgueilleux qui les avait méprisés, tandis que le groupe des nymphes regardaient curieusement, avec un effroi sacré, la vengeance de l'Olympe, au premier plan. Le drame s'y dénouait. Le beau Narcisse, couché sur le bord d'un ruisseau, qui descendait du lointain de la scène, se regardait, dans le clair miroir ; et l'on avait poussé la vérité jusqu'à mettre une lame de vraie glace au fond du ruisseau. Mais ce n'était déjà plus le jeune homme libre, le rôdeur de forêts ; la mort le surprenait au milieu de l'admiration ravie de son image, la mort l'alanguissait, et Vénus, de son doigt tendu, comme une fée d'apothéose, lui jetait le sort fatal. Il devenait fleur. Ses membres verdissaient s'allongeaient, dans son costume collant de satin vert ; la tige flexible, les jambes légèrement recourbées, allaient s'enfoncer en terre, prendre racine, pendant que le buste, orné de larges pans de satin blanc, s'épanouissait en une corolle merveilleuse. La chevelure blonde de Maxime complétait l'illusion, mettait, avec ses longues frisures, des pistils jaunes au milieu de la blancheur des pétales. Et la grande fleur naissante, humaine encore, penchait la tête vers la source, les yeux noyés, le visage souriant d'une extase voluptueuse, comme si le beau Narcisse eût enfin contenté dans la mort les désirs qu'il s'était inspirés à lui-même. A quelques pas, la nymphe Echo se mourait aussi, se mourait de désirs inassouvis ; elle se trouvait peu à peu prise dans la raideur du sol, elle sentait ses membres brûlants se glacer et se durcir. Elle n'était pas rocher vulgaire, sali de mousse, mais marbre blanc, par ses épaules et ses bras, par sa grande robe de neige, dont la ceinture de feuillage et l'écharpe bleue avaient glissé. Affaissée au milieu du satin de sa jupe, qui se cassait à larges plis, pareil à un bloc de Paros, elle se renversait, n'ayant plus de vivant, dans son corps figé de statue,

> que ses yeux de femme, des yeux qui luisaient, fixés sur la fleur des eaux, penchée languissamment sur le miroir de la source. Et il semblait déjà que tous les bruits d'amour de la forêt, les voix prolongées des taillis, les frissons mystérieux des feuilles, les soupirs profonds des grands chênes, venaient battre sur la chair de marbre de la nymphe écho, dont le cœur, saignant toujours dans le bloc, résonnait longuement, répétait au loin les moindres plaintes de la Terre et de l'Air.[279]

It is, in fact, difficult to envision this scene performed successfully on stage. So much of the description involves rhetorical twists and turns. "Et le dieu et la déesse triomphaient, punissaient les froideurs de l'orgueilleux qui les avait méprisés"; "Mais ce n'était déjà plus le jeune homme libre"; "elle sentait ses membres brûlants se glacer et se durcir" – these kinds of images and sensations are not readily translated or copied into the dramatic, spatial arts. The final sentence of this quote brings into strong relief the impossibility of this tableau vivant to be experienced 'correctly' by the Saccards' guests. "Et il semblait déjà…" but to whom, exactly does it appear this way? Who in the audience can actually hear the rustling sounds of the forest, the mysterious groans of the branches, as they beat relentlessly against the marble flesh of Echo whose heart still pumps within the solid block of stone?

The media affects the reception of an artwork. Zola's narration of the tableau vivant seems to enact what the German philosopher Lessing (discussing the Laocoon) presented as the divide between the experience of plastic arts and the experience of literature. Arguing that poetry unfurls as an extension in time while the plastic arts are encountered spatially, physically, Lessing debunks the traditional notion of *ut pictura poesis.* Different formats of representation produce strikingly different modes of experiences. In this passage, Zola's narrative description comes across as more dimensional and dynamic than the actual 3-D performance it depicts. It connotes a fluidity and motion (a *metamorphosis*) that would not be easily felt or perceived in a 'regular' spectatorship of the tableau vivant (an encounter with it as purely plastic arts). The tableau vivant consists of fixed, held poses; its literary description, especially the use of the imperfect verb tense which creates a sense of duration in fluctuation, establishes movement and development: "il devenait fleur," "ses membres verdissaient," "la mort le surprenait," "et la grande fleur naissante, humaine encore, penchait la tête vers la source, les yeux noyés, le visage souriant d'une extase voluptueuse." Zola's reader can experience the tableau as an ongoing process of perception, as a process of organizing and ordering data and sensations.

The sheer duration of this moment of ekphrasis makes it so that the novel's reader might very well become lulled by the literary illusion, drawn into the rich description without questioning its 'naturalness'. The reader is offered a version of the fixed poses, the complex costumes, and the myth which makes the tableau vivant legible, approachable, accessible. However, the audience members have a rather 'flat' experience of the tableau. Unmoved, they focus on the ridiculous getup they put Maxime in and on the overuse of rice powder on the actors' faces. They pick out the 'unsuccessful' elements of artifice. Their reactions appear in quick bursts after this long descriptive sequence, aggressively interrupting and shifting the rhythm of the passage. Just when the reader gains a stable sense of the scene, the narration swiftly breaks it down and challenges the legitimacy of what it portrayed. "Oh! l'ont-il affublé ce pauvre Maxime! […] Et madame Saccard, on dirait une morte." By presenting a layered

[279] Ibid., 552-53.

spectatorship of the third tableau vivant, Zola almost teases his own readership for going along with his particular alteration of details. Since the fictional audience debunks the grandeur of Hupel's tableau vivant, are we not encouraged on some level to do the same for Zola's narration? If we consider the rhythm and pace of this sequence, we additionally notice that Zola plays with and presents different attention spans. His narration of the scene demands a slow and patient reading of the representation, while his characters are seemingly unable to have a sustained and thoughtful encounter with the same material. In this, Zola's writing unveils and incites a variety of perceptual practices vis-à-vis a reproduced work of art and gives his scrupulous reader a privileged position from which to gauge the scene. The fictional audience's perception of the performance (their ability to process sensory information) becomes a major focal point of the narration, thus recruiting a readership that will be attentive to the disjointed spectatorship.

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I began this chapter by stating that *La Curée* should be considered in the context of the nineteenth century's proliferation of copies across media and, more specifically, in relation to changing modes of spectatorship and readership. By analyzing the re-presentation and reproduction of "human expression" in a scientific study (that showcases the 'accuracy' of the photographic medium) and a theatrical debate (that underscores the dramatic arts' ability to capture/exude emotion 'correctly'), I situated Zola's literary art of adaptation within a contemporary discussion of legibility, authenticity, and high-fidelity and argued that the writer's treatment of copies essentially creates a meta-commentary on modes of perception and awareness (and the representation thereof). What is strikingly about Zola's re-make of Racine's *Phèdre* is not the fact that he replays the classic tragedy within the context of Second Empire debauchery (in the same way that Hupel de la Noue's second tableau vivant 'successfully' modernizes Ovid). Rather, the most innovative feature of this adaptation is the way in which it foregrounds the mediation, and re-mediation, of sensory experience. While Zola's protagonists may – or may not be – attuned to their role as spectators of copies and, by extension, what that form of spectatorship entails, his reader, on the other hand, *is*.

Susan Harrow has expertly commented that "Zola's writing reveals aspects of what is viewed more typically as a late modern innovation: the tendency of fiction to reflect – and, even, explicitly to *reflect upon* – the process of its creation."[280] Indeed, Zola's copy of a copy, *La Curée*, is very self-reflexive and spotlights its mimetic operations. But more critically, the text/copy reflects upon the multifarious ways in which its particular process of creation might be perceived by an evolving readership. *La Curée* asks its readers to reflect upon their own attention to the work, their relationship with copies. Just as the character Saccard violently slashes up the Parisian cityscape to make way for urban modernity, Zola, in his own way, breaks down the traditional reading practice by tearing apart and exposing the mechanism of mediation in order to pave the way for literary modernism.

La Curée is the second novel in the Rougon-Macquart series. And, as scholars have noted, it is the first novel to be completed and published after the fall of the Second Empire. This historical coincidence allowed Zola to situate his *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Sécond Empire* in a decidedly closed past. Speaking of the fact that History fortuitously made Zola's subject matter into a "more workable form," Frederick Jameson explains that:

[280] Harrow, *Zola, the Body Modern: Pressures and Prospects of Representation*, 140.

> Zola's investigation now has closure, and a different kind of experimental spirit takes the place of the older, politically committed one. Now the viruses of the Empire may be allowed to develop autonomously, in their own local petri dishes and according to their own specificities; the laboratory itself is now sealed […].[281]

It would seem, then, that the determinism of the Naturalist narrative should thrive with this clear-cut ending. The experiment has defined parameters, decided variables, and a predetermined outcome. Yet, *La Curée* strangely avoids a complete sense of closure. The reader knows how the story will end from the very beginning. Arguably, Renée even knows that she is doomed to self-destruct, like her literary doppelganger. But the cyclical nature of the story, the explicit repeat mode of history (here we can think of the financial speculators walking through the construction rubble in the last chapter of the novel and finding a relic of debauchery from the previous era's *petites maisons*) along with the narrative's constant embedding of past representations and frequent mise-en-abyme structures ultimately give us a perplexingly open-ended conclusion. While Renée dies she is metaphorically reincarnated in her childhood doll that continues to unravel and decay in the corner of the attic. But if history seems to inevitably repeat itself, if the Phèdre myth is to be re-embodied throughout time, if representations must represent what has already been presented, then Zola's writing shows that the techniques of representation and the modes of being attentive to representation (including reproduction, duplication, and adaptation) are not inherently doomed to merely copy, or repeat. Rather, Zola's 'inauthentic' hybrid story tells us that great renovation can occur when readerships and spectatorships are altered to experience repetition and reproduction in a new light. The novel is an exposé of observation practices and of a changing atmosphere of spectatorship.[282]

[281] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 47.

[282] In *Antimonies of Realism*, Jameson states that *La Curée* was "a relatively didactic exposé of the corruption of the Second Empire – corruption in sexuality (incest), corruption in money (gentrification), even corruption in botany (exotic, dangerous tropical plants) and corruption in architecture (Saccard's palace), etc. The problem is that all of these richly explored dimensions, when juxtaposed, simply give off the univocal meaning of the hieroglyph (or ideogram) for 'corruption'" (50). I would add that the story also explores unequivocally the alteration ("corruption" without such a strong, negative connotation) of representational forms and spectatorships.

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