

“IT’S YOU PLUS IT’S ... ART”: THE #ARTSELFIE DEBATE FROM DOUGLAS COUPLAND TO TOLSTOY

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Erwin Wurm, *Big Disobedience*. VAG Offsite, Vancouver, 2019. Photo by the author.

In contrast to a regular selfie, the *#artselfie*, Douglas Coupland writes, “contains upscale branding semiotics within the frame itself. Crop and apply a hashtag and suddenly you don’t feel like an ant any more” (Jordan et al. 13). Instead, “It’s you plus it’s ... art!” (Jordan et al. 13). Coupland, though, still misses the old analog era, and in particular “that wicker basket next to the landline phone filled with bad party shots and unflattering posed shots taken on windy days” (Jordan et al. 11). The selfie, Coupland points out, “allows all of us to pose and put forth a model of who we think we are, as opposed to who we actually are” (Jordan et al. 11). Taking a giant step further, the *#artselfie* brings Da Vinci and Van Gogh into this equation, rather than simply adding an *Instagram* hashtag.

- Does the *#artselfie* diminish art? Is the conversation between its two protagonists (art and the self) one-sided? In addition to Coupland’s “Notes on Selfies,” the thought-provoking volume on *#Artselfie* includes a substantial critical component couched as a dialogue between *DIS Magazine* and Simon Castets. According to *DIS*:
- 28** “You could argue that when people are taking *#artselfies* in the museum, it somehow devalues the work that is behind them, if for no other reason than the fact that it appears as a thumbnail on your iPhone” (Jordan et al. 79). *DIS* further states: “Art suddenly becomes a status-apparatus, it becomes—with the *#artselfie*—a beautiful background” (Jordan et al. 79). Castets, who is a French art curator and director of the Swiss Institute in New York, takes issue with this:

To me, it’s the opposite, if I don’t take a picture of the artworks I’m interested in, I remain on the surface and I am keeping myself from a deeper understanding of the work. I photograph the label, the artwork, but I am not necessarily going to do an *#artselfie*. (Jordan et al. 79)

This article considers a number of diverse takes on the often tangled interaction between art and the viewer. In addition to the *#Artselfie* contributors, I discuss Johan Idema’s *How to Visit an Art Museum*, which proposes a range of productive strategies designed to help the viewer conduct a more meaningful dialogue with art. My case studies include Alex Prager’s short film *La Grande Sortie* (2015), as well as Prager’s photographs associated with it, both addressing the complexity of this exchange between art and the viewer—especially the consequences of breaking the fourth wall separating performers and audience. Martin Parr’s set of photographs *Playing to the Gallery*, shot for *Vogue* (2019), also raises some tough questions regarding the museum and/or theatre environment. The article further refers to Tolstoy’s classic *War and Peace*, particularly the chapter set at the Opera Theatre in Moscow, where, to the narrator’s indignation, the stage and the auditorium are found at complete odds. In contrast to Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov refrains from judging the characters in his play *The Seagull* or his story “The Lady with the Dog.” The article is illustrated with a selection of my images portraying viewers interacting with art at two prominent locations in Vancouver.



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Erwin Wurm, *Big Disobedience*. VAG Offsite, Vancouver, 2019. Photo by the author.

Commissioned by the Paris Opera Ballet and shot at the renowned Opera Bastille, Alex Prager's short film *La Grande Sortie* (2015) stars the celebrated dancer Émilie Cozette as a prima ballerina, who returns to the stage "after an unexplained hiatus" (*"La Grande Sortie"*). In her *New York Times* article coinciding with the opening of Prager's 2016 exhibit at the Lehmann Maupin in New York, Isabel Wilkinson writes:

At first, the performance resembles what Prager calls a "PBS-style" movie, "when you're searching for something to watch late at night—until its perspective switches into the dancer's mind, and things start to quickly unravel." Consumed by her own anxiety and stage fright, the dancer becomes acutely aware of the audience—people who are bored or who are staring right back at her—until their gaze almost consumes her. (Wilkinson)

Prager's photographs, shot alongside the making of the film, depict a crowd of spectators, whose faces are "both eerily specific and wholly anonymous—so that viewers can 'put their own intentions' into the work" (Wilkinson). In Prager's images, the auditorium could entirely take over the show, as, for example, in her *Orchestra East, Section B* (2015), in which the stage is left out altogether, with not even a "thumbnail" image of it remaining. Instead, the image's sole focus is the spectators, who appear to stage their own show. As pointed out in the Lehmann Maupin Press Release, the photographs "delve further into the dynamics between the artist and viewer through the opposing lens of performer and audience" (*"La Grande Sortie"*). More specifically, the viewer "must interpret the variety of expressions of the theatregoers that range from

boredom and judgement to concentration and enjoyment” (“*La Grande Sortie*”).

Discussing Prager’s exhibition *Alex Prager: Silver Lake Drive* (2018) at London’s Photographers Gallery, Eddy Frankel makes a similar point, but takes it a step further:

You, the viewer, see the crowd at a cinema as if you’re the screen, you see a beach from high up like you’re an airborne beach ball. Prager sticks you in it. You’re a character in these familiar yet totally alien scenes. Are you the director of these fake movies? Are you complicit in Prager’s fictional crimes? Are you the audience? (Frankel)

Frankel adds that through “her perfectly staged photographs and gorgeously immersive films—like moving versions of her still images—[Prager] dumps bucket after bucket of cold, isolating paranoia over you” (Frankel).

Prager’s *La Grande Sortie* refrains from issuing a final verdict on the relationship between performers and spectators. The *#Artselfie* volume is also hesitant to privilege one point of view over another. Having argued that the *#artselfie* reduces art to a “thumbnail,” or a “beautiful background,” *DIS Magazine* takes a step back to con-

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temple the other, more reassuring, side of this coin:

We all know those people who are very “selfie-aware or “selfied out,” and they take many, many selfies just to get the right one. But it could turn out to be valuable—when you’re taking your time with a selfie and then you start realizing: wow, look at that piece. Have you ever had this experience where you feel you didn’t look long enough? (Jordan et al. 81)



Erwin Wurm, *Big Disobedience*. VAG Offsite, Vancouver, 2019. Photo by the author.

To elaborate on this, *DIS* refers to Susan Sontag's writings on "image-junkies": "It's Susan Sontag's notion of 'image-junkies' embarking on aesthetic consumerism. We hope it's not replacing the viewer's experience entirely, but inherently part of the engagement is consuming and sharing that experience" (Jordan et al. 81). Equally important, *DIS* points out, is that today "this is done with a smartphone," and in this instance, "documentation is the experience, the comments and likes are the discussion. You didn't end up going out, but everyone saw your outfit on Instagram: you got what you wanted in the first place" (Jordan et al. 83).

Qualifying his response to *DIS* with an assortment of hesitant "maybe," "may," and "might," Castets states, "Maybe the selfie is the antidote: it will slow you down" (Jordan et al. 83). He continues:

It's not necessarily one or the other. People may have a really deep, meaningful engagement with an artwork and then take ten *#artselfies*. It might be a trigger for art engagement because I'm sure there are some people out there who only go to the museum so that they could do an *#artselfie*. Did anyone tell you they actually only went in there to do an *#artselfie*? (Jordan et al. 83)

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A more decisive take on the interaction between art and the viewer is found in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. A classic of world literature, it was first published in 1869 when theatre was the leading source of entertainment and of important life lessons. This is certainly the case for one of the novel's principal characters, Natasha Rostova, whose visit to the Opera House in Moscow radically alters the course of her life. Tolstoy dismisses the performance within the span of just a couple of paragraphs:

The stage consisted of smooth planks in the center, with some painted cardboard representing trees at the sides, and a canvas stretched over boards in the back. Girls in red bodices and white petticoats sat in the middle of the stage. [...] They were all singing. When they had finished their song the girl in white advanced to the prompter's box, and a man with stout legs encased in silk tights, with a plume and dagger, began singing and waving his arms about. (678)

To Natasha, the show seemed "blatantly false and unnatural," and she "felt alternatively ashamed for the actors and amused by them" (Tolstoy 678). She was more captivated by the auditorium, where another, much more exciting show was taking place:

She kept glancing in turn at the rows of pomaded heads in the parterre, and at the women in their low-cut gowns in the boxes, and especially at Ellen, who, looking positively undressed, sat with a placid smile, not taking her eyes from the stage and basking in the bright light that flooded the theatre and the warm air heated by the crowd. (Tolstoy 678)

Natasha "gradually began to slip into a state of intoxication she had not experienced in a long time" (Tolstoy 679). The turning point came when she observed the late arrival of the "extraordinary handsome" Anatol Kuragin. "Although the performance was in progress," Kuragin first dropped by his sister Countess Ellen Bezukova's box, and along the way acknowledged Natasha seated in the neighbouring box: "Mais

Charmante!” (Tolstoy 679). He then “proceeded down to his seat in the front row,” where having greeted his notorious friend Dolokhov, he “rested his foot against the orchestra screen” (Tolstoy 679).

In the second act, the stage had “cardboard monuments” and a “round hole in the backdrop” representing a moon (Tolstoy 681). Natasha was equally disengaged from the show. Every time she glanced at the parterre, she saw Anatol Kuragin “with an arm flung over the back of his chair, staring at her” (Tolstoy 681). She “was pleased to see that he was so captivated by her and it did not occur to her that there could be anything wrong in it” (Tolstoy 681). By the end of the show, when everyone rose up to applaud, she felt at one with the glittering crowd: “She looked about with pleasure, smiling joyfully” (Tolstoy 682).

- In Tolstoy’s novel, the real show takes place in the auditorium. Described as “blatantly false and inadequate,” the performance is a mere “thumbnail” at best. But Tolstoy is equally disdainful of the auditorium with its “positively undressed”
- 32** Countess Ellen Bezukhova, and the self-absorbed Anatol Kuragin. As Tolstoy sees it, the Opera’s corrupt environment could only lead to dire consequences, or, as in Natasha’s case, a scandalous fall from grace. Following her visit to the Opera, Natasha’s “state of intoxication” persists. She embarks on a wild affair with Anatol Kuragin, and eventually breaks her engagement with the noble Prince Andrey Bolkonsky. Her affair with Anatol ends in a complete fiasco as well.

Tolstoy’s vision of theatre as a place that must deliver enlightenment and an educational experience, rather than mere entertainment, might have informed the look of the Soviet-era Theatre Square in Moscow. This landmark square was free of any commercial presence, and instead, its sole focus was to show off its three theatres, above all the celebrated Bolshoi Theatre. Under the Soviets, the Bolshoi’s façade acquired the Soviet coat of arms placed directly above the classical Apollo statue. The neighbouring Maly Theatre was upgraded as well, in this case with a statue of the nineteenth-century dramatist Alexander Ostrovsky, whom the Bolsheviks favoured for “his critical depiction of life in Russia’s provinces” (qtd. in Siemens, *Theatre in Passing* 80). The TSUM department store, the only indication of the square’s commercial culture, maintained a subdued presence. Today the TSUM store still preserves a rather quiet presence where it faces Theatre Square. However, the store’s opposite entrance on Petrovka Street, a busy shopping area, now features large ads and videos for high-end global fashion brands. Back on Theatre Square, the Bolshoi still remains the jewel of the crown. The post-Soviet reconstruction of the square’s historical garden added a constellation of new strategically placed benches that provide an unobstructed view of the Bolshoi.

In contrast to Theatre Square, New York’s Times Square offers a wild collage of theatre and commercial ads and billboards. The New Amsterdam Theatre, Broadway’s oldest venue, is no exception: its *Aladdin* ads must compete with a myriad of billboards by, among others, Sephora, Subway, and Aldo. The New Amsterdam itself also makes swift business selling a wide range of souvenirs related to its shows,

past and present. Thoroughly reconstructed by the Disney Corporation, the theatre reopened with *The Lion King* (1997), "the highest grossing musical of all time" ("New Amsterdam"). *Aladdin*, running since 2014, Disney's third production on this stage, is now "one of Broadway's biggest blockbusters" ("New Amsterdam"). In the spirit of Times Square and its "collision montage," as Sergey Eisenstein would put it, *Aladdin* opens with a direct address to the audience. Delivered by the Genie, it provides an entertaining preface to this old tale from *One Thousand and One Nights*. This improvisational prologue also contains some references to contemporary commercial culture. At the start of his speech, the Genie reaches in his pocket to produce a souvenir Statue of Liberty. He apologizes for this "mistake" and then quickly displays a souvenir magical lantern, which is available for sale in the theatre's lobby.

Like theatre, a museum, or an art gallery space—especially with the arrival of the #artselfie—can also be seen as a compromised environment, where contradictory forces collide and battle for dominance. In his introduction to the #Artselfie volume, Marvin Jordan writes:

What is historically unique in the #artselfie is that it heralds the decentralized, disruptive power of the Internet infiltrating the institutionally guarded walls of the art world. As a visual industry, the art world [...] increasingly uses *Instagram* as a marketing tool and space for self-promotion—this in spite of the hypocritical prohibitions set against photography within art spaces. (57)

Jordan argues that the #artselfie is "qualitatively a new form, unique unto itself" (59). Radically different from either the self-portrait, or even the selfie, the #artselfie's interest resides "in circulation, not just representation" (59). "Like a new breed of value," Jordan concludes, "[the #artselfie] transforms social and cultural capital into the quintessential asset of an economy in which art and branding are increasingly indistinguishable" (59).

Martin Parr's set of photographs *Playing to the Gallery*, commissioned by *Vogue* and shot at MOMA and the Whitney Museum of American Art, is representative of this "increasingly indistinguishable" boundary between art and branding. Prefacing Parr's images, *Vogue* announces: "In museums crowded with modern masterpieces, knife-pleated skirts—paired with colorful patterned blouses and blazers and finished with pop-inspired boots—do their own dance with form and function" (142). *Vogue*'s captions accompanying Parr's photographs further highlight the relationship between art and various fashion brands. One caption reads: "Whether you're transfixed by a canvas (in this case Picasso's *Girl before a Mirror*) or marching to the sound of your own audio tour, a minidress layered over a matching skirt tap into both the earthly and ethereal" (Parr and Harrington 140). Parr's image to which this caption refers sends a less straightforward message. In addition to the model Trentini clad in Salvatore Ferragamo and absorbed by the aforementioned audio tour, Parr depicts a quirky supporting cast of three anonymous women wearing unidentified fashions. Is this group *mise-en-scène* meant to highlight Ferragamo's fashion? Does it represent a "slice of life" at an art museum? With its walls lined with Picasso, can a

museum such as MOMA deliver a “slice of life”?

Parr’s spread with Andy Warhol’s *Triple Elvis (Ferus Type)* and *Silver Marlon* features an extra as well, this time a security guard. Another security guard, along with an extra playing a museum visitor, appear in the image, in which art by Constantin Brancusi provides an elevated setting for models dressed in Derek Lam 10 Crosby, Prada, Cloé, Sakai, and Marni. The lead model is photographing Brancusi, or perhaps taking a selfie or an #artselfie; Parr leaves it to the viewer to decide. Another Warhol, this time his *Brillo Boxes*, makes an appearance in a shot depicting a model conversing with Stephen Shore, a prominent American photographer, who met Warhol as a teenager and frequented his legendary Factory studio. In addition to his native United States, where he produced his celebrated books of photographs *Uncommon Places* (1982) and *American Surfaces* (1999), Shore also photographed many diverse destinations from Canada to the West Bank. Like Parr, he occasionally photographs fashion for such publications as *Elle* and *Bottega Veneta*.

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I love doing shoots where you place things in often surreal circumstances, which is a great way of making pictures and solving problems. I mean photography is about solving a problem to do with the image. So I like the challenge of doing that, especially in commercial photography. (Bajac 68)

Another advantage of working for fashion magazines, Parr points out, is that “It’s the only way now to get a decent spread of pictures: you can do a fashion story” (Bajac 68). Parr names other “non-fashion” photographers, including William Klein, who worked for *Vogue* to gain means for his experimental documentary photography and films. Klein is perhaps best known for his provocative photobook *Life Is Good and Good for You in New York* (1956), which “rewrote many of the rules of the medium” (Golden 134). Klein’s fashion photographs, according to Reuel Golden, still feature his “trademarks such as blur, close up and dramatic use of flash” (136). Working for fashion magazines, Parr still remains true to himself. In his fashion images, Sandra S. Phillips argues, Parr’s “underlining subject is still the human effects of globalized corporate culture” (Parr 15). According to Phillips, Parr relates this subject “with splendid humour, exuberance, and wonder, but it is also imbued with regret” (Parr 15).

Some of the images included in the #Artselfie volume appear reminiscent of Parr’s “splendid humour” directed at “the human effects of globalized corporate culture.” For example, an image signed @imjustlisaax33 and shot at the MET is captioned as follows: “Yess [sic] I have stooped to that level... Selfie with the sphinx! #selfie #artselfie #sphinx #themet #mybestfriend #ihaveproblems” (16). There is humour as well in the #artselfie authored by @norauls, who poses with Edward Munch’s *The Scream*. The caption reads: “I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream #edwardmuch #moma #nyc #artselfie” (Jordan et al.). The author mimes the painting

with her hands covering her ears. This photograph is representative of many other similarly playful performative *#artselfies* shot with, among others, Picasso, Matisse, or the all-time favourite, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. One of the images with da Vinci's masterpiece, signed @ivysux, is captioned: "*#artselfie* with my girl Mona at *#selfiebration* today @amo_studios" (Jordan et al. 83).

Simon Castets wonders whether there are some "recurring patterns in the choice of works, the type of artworks" (Jordan et al. 85). *DIS Magazine* replies:

We talked a lot about [...] the idea of photogenic artwork, and artists making art that's more photogenic. The consideration of photography and its effects on the artist—we're positive Jeff Koons had this in mind for the installation of his major 2014 exhibition [Whitney Museum, New York], where the public is allowed to take pictures. (Jordan et al. 85)

DIS further points out that their inquiry into "museums' policies about photography" produced inconsistent results:

We looked into museums' policies about photography and wondered why—in half of the museums in New York, you can't take pictures, and in the other half you can—and then there are those like The New Museum in which you could take photos in the Camille Henrot show, but you could not take a video at that show. (Jordan et al. 85)

The Brooklyn Museum, *DIS* adds, "is really supportive of photography in the museum, essentially as a marketing tool" (Jordan et al. 85).

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Yue Minjun, *A-maze-ing Laughter*. Morton Park, Vancouver, 2014. Photo by the author.

In *How to Visit an Art Museum: Tips For a Truly Rewarding Visit*, Johan Idema also comments on museums' policies regarding photography, but he finds ways to turn the situation to the viewer's advantage. Idema begins with this all-too-familiar *mise-en-scène*:

You position your friend, who is in the process of adopting a similar facial expression, next to the work. As you frame the shot, a guard steps forward, raising his voice: "No Photos!" The gallery startles. Somewhat upset and embarrassed, you apologize and leave the room. (Idema ch. 17)

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Yue Minjun, *A-maze-ing Laughter*. Morton Park, Vancouver, 2014. Photo by the author.

"Has this ever happened to you?" Idema asks. "It occurs many times a day in art museums world-wide" (Idema). He points out that museums' restrictive policies are rather ironic, especially "when you realize that numerous artists, including Andy Warhol and Gerard Richter, make no issue of modelling their work after the photographs of others" (Idema). Taking pictures at museums, Idema argues, is "a way of connecting to and participating in the art, as it unleashes our excitement and involvement" (Idema). He suggests that museums should encourage, rather than restrict this practice, and consider offering art photography classes, or organizing "a contest for the best artwork photography" (Idema). Idema's own advice to photographers is to capture "your experience" of art, rather than picturing the art itself:

Why not try to include something of yourself or your co-visitors? Portrait the back silhouette of your girlfriend, pondering in front of her favourite painting. Catch a striking

similarity between your son's face and a Picasso portrait. Stage a fictional conversation between a Ron Mueck sculpture and your friend. Artists came up with the art, now you get creative with taking its picture. (Idema)

In *Theatre in Passing: A Moscow Photo-Diary*, I cite Michel de Certeau's distinction between two "pedestrian figures": "the voyeur" and "the walker" (De Certeau 93). The former observes the city from the panoramic perspective, and "disentangle[s] himself from the murky intertwining daily behaviours" (De Certeau 93). By contrast, the walkers live "down below," and they navigate "the thicks and thins of an 'urban text' they write without being able to read it" (De Certeau 93). The walkers' advantage is that they are able to circumvent the city's "official geography" in favour of their personal, subjective itinerary. Idema encourages museum viewers to take this more proactive and meaningful approach: to circumvent the museum's "official geography" and prescribed modes of conduct, be a "walker" and not a "voyeur."

With theatre, the situation is radically different. Breaking the fourth wall separating the stage and the auditorium could lead to dire consequences, as exemplified by Prager's film *La Grande Sortie*. Upon breaking this invisible fourth wall and meeting the eyes of spectators, Prager's central protagonist is overcome by anxiety and can no longer follow her routine. The show ends abruptly with the dancer disappearing from the stage—her *grande sortie*. In the New Amsterdam's production of *Aladdin*, the interaction between the cast and the audience is limited to the show's flamboyant opening. Once the show proper gets underway, the stage and the audience remain firmly separated. No photography is allowed either because, for among other reasons, flash lights might startle the actors and again break that all-important fourth wall. Tolstoy, too, is highly critical of Anatol Kuragin, who, although the "performance was in progress," makes a detour to visit his sister Countess Ellen Bezukova's box, and to acknowledge Natasha Rostova in the neighbouring box (679). Following this, he walks to "his seat in the front row," where he entirely breaks the divide between the stage and the auditorium when he rests "his foot against the orchestra screen" (679).

Anton Chekhov has also addressed the perils of breaking the fourth wall. In my *Theatre in Passing 2: Searching for New Amsterdam*, I discuss Chekhov's play *The Seagull* (1898), and in particular Konstantin Treplev's failed attempt to stage his show at his actress mother Irina Arkadina's estate. Treplev is confident that an outdoor production offers a number of advantages. Among other things, he intends to start his show "just as the moon is rising" (Chekhov). Although his wish for the moonlit stage comes true, the show ends abruptly soon after it begins, due to the spectators' continual comments interrupting the leading actress Nina Zarechnaya's opening monologue:

ARKADINA: It reeks of sulphur. Is that really necessary?

TREPLEV: Yes.

ARKADINA [*laughs*]: Yes, it's a stage effect.

TREPLEV: Mama!

NINA: He is bored without humanity...

POLINA ANDREEVNA: [*To Dorn*] You have taken off your hat. Put it on or you're going to catch a cold.

ARKADINA: The doctor here has taken his hat to the devil, the father of eternal matter.

TREPLEV: [*having flared up, in a loud voice*] The play is over and done with! Enough! Curtain! (Chekhov)

While it is less formal than the indoor theatre, a show staged in a garden still requires spectators to observe that invisible division between the stage and the auditorium. It remains unclear who the author parodies more: the spectators, or the director and his play. It can be either of the two parties, or both at once. In contrast to Tolstoy, who makes it abundantly clear what side he is on, Chekhov "leaves the debate on open-air theatre unresolved" (Siemens, *Theatre in Passing* 295).

38 In a chapter entitled "Not Just a Graveyard for Art," Idema points out that "to most people an art museum is no more than a collection of objects in a distinctive work of architecture. And that's quite a limited, materialistic view" (Idema). He explains:

An art museum can be a great place to meet a friend and have a meaningful conversation about life, induced by what's on display. An art museum can be the site where you go after a funeral to process your grief. You can visit an art museum to just enjoy the peace or to get rid of your stress. And, who knows? You might even run into your future spouse at the museum. (Idema)

Chekhov appears to hold a similar view as it applies to theatre. His well-known short story "The Lady with the Dog" (1899) includes a chapter set in a provincial theatre in the town of S., where Gurov arrives in hope to encounter Anna Sergeyevna. The two of them met at a resort in Yalta, the Muscovite Gurov never imagining that their fleeting summer romance would occupy his thoughts for more than a month post their separation. However, now "real winter had come, and everything was still clear in his memory as though he has parted with Anna Sergeyevna only the day before" (Chekhov and Garnett). He takes a trip to S., where he attends a premiere of *Geisha*: "'It's quite possible she may go to the first performance,' he thought" (Chekhov and Garnett).

He notices Anna in the third row, but, unlike Anatol Kuragin in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Gurov waits until the intermission to address her. Anna is startled:

She got up and went quickly to the door; he followed her, and both walked senselessly along passages, and up and down stairs, and figures in legal, scholastic, and civil service uniforms, all wearing badges, flittered before their eyes. They caught glimpses of ladies, of fur coats on pegs [...].

On the narrow, gloomy staircase over which was written "To the Amphitheatre," she stopped.

"How you have frightened me!" she said, breathing hard, still pale and overwhelmed. (Chekhov and Garnett)

In fear that her husband might discover her indiscretion, she pleads with Gurov to go away, and promises: "I will come and see you in Moscow" (Chekhov and Garnett).

Following this encounter, Anna begins to visit Gurov in Moscow, once every two or three months. Unlike Tolstoy, Chekhov does not judge his characters, nor does he punish them. The story's conclusion is set at the Hotel Slavyansky Bazaar in Moscow, where the two protagonists attempt yet again to find a solution to their predicament:

Then they spent a long while taking counsel together, talked of how to avoid the necessity for secrecy, for deception, for living in different towns and not seeing each other for long at a time. [...]. And it seemed as though in a little while the solution would be found, and then a new and splendid life would begin; and it was clear to both of them that they had still a long, long road before them, and that the most complicated and difficult part of it was just beginning. (Chekhov and Garnett)

Echoing Idema's discussion of an art museum, Chekhov's narrative suggests that, like a museum, a theatre can be "a place to meet a friend and have a meaningful conversation about life," or, in Chekhov's case, a meeting that promises "a meaningful conversation" following their key encounter at the provincial theatre. The production itself receives a fleeting mention. Readers learn only the show's title *Geisha*, and they are asked to contemplate the significance of this on their own. Chekhov's story urges the viewer to acknowledge what is hidden beyond the surface.

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In the chapter "Selfies Avant La Lettre," Idema writes: "Once you come across a truly terrific portrait, you'll notice how it makes you forget that face but remember the drama, doubts, hopes and dreams that you experience in your own life" (Idema). He quotes Oscar Wilde: "Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not the sitter" (Idema). In view of this, the *#artselfie* might have a distinct advantage over the selfie, beyond Coupland's tongue-in-cheek observation. As noted earlier, Coupland points out that the *#artselfie* "solves a lot of problems"; all you need is simply "Crop and apply a hashtag and suddenly you don't feel like an ant any more" (13). However, as Idema argues, the *#artselfie* also inspires the photographer to "remember the drama, doubts, hopes, and dreams that you experience in your own life." When applied to the *#artselfie*, Oscar Wilde's quotation could read: Every *#artselfie* when taken with feeling is a portrait of the photographer, and not the art.

The debate on the pros and cons of the *#artselfie* and its legions of practitioners remains open. *DIS Magazine's* ambiguous take on the *#artselfie* is representative of this. According to *DIS*, the *#artselfie* "devalues the work of art [...]," and it makes it appear merely as "a beautiful backdrop" (Jordan et al. 71), but it could also "turn out to be valuable—when you're taking time with your selfie and then you start realizing: wow, look at that piece" (Jordan et al. 81). My own experience taking pictures of viewers interacting with art at museums and galleries in Canada and beyond has taught me not to jump to conclusions; to each his own. However, more often than not I find that viewers rarely select a random "backdrop" for their *mises-en-scène*. There is always a story attached to their chosen art, or a promise of a story. Sometimes you target a particular work of art, and sometimes it is a work of art you stumble upon that supplies a story a day or even months later.

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