This chapter concentrates on the imagistic style of Eliot’s poems to reveal that Baudrillard’s view of reality had already been poetically expressed at the beginning of this century. Other than focusing on the similarities between postmodern theory and Eliot’s poetry, I also take up the issue of art’s moral responsibility towards social reality. In other words, the analysis is directed at the power of the images as expressed in forms of art, and the manner of their interpretation within a socio-cultural matrix.

Art’s moral value appears to be quite suspect in such a reading and part of its fundamentally aporetic character is revealed, which lies in persistently distracting us from the problem, precisely in the act of directing us to it. Aporia derives from the Greek word meaning ‘unpassable path,’ a sense that fully lives up to its later paradoxical development. In Derrida’s hands, it represents the nearest one can get to a label or conceptual cover-term for the effects of difference and the logic of deviant figuration. What deconstruction persistently reveals is an ultimate passé of thought engendered by a rhetoric that always insinuates its own textual workings into the truth claims of
Theorists of the postmodern like Baudrillard declare that "art has today completely penetrated reality," and that "the aestheticization of the world is complete."¹ In other words, the aesthetic project which saw its beginnings with modernist poets such as Stevens and Eliot, amongst others, increasingly became imagistic, thereby aestheticising "reality". Their poetry, much like the contemporary art movements, became increasingly abstract as they experimented with stylistic ways to perceive and project the reality of any given situation. In the present postmodernist context, Baudrillard is convinced that reality is in danger of losing its "true meaning" as the borders between art and non-art, or fiction and reality disappear and our world becomes increasingly governed by images.

In his immensely influential article, "The Precession of Simulacra" Baudrillard has argued that mass media has neutralized reality for us, and it has done so in stages: first reflecting, then masking reality, and then masking the absence of reality, and finally bearing no relation to reality at all. This is simulacrum, the final destruction of meaning.³ The idea that meaning is lost, is however, debatable. It is not for the first time that there has been an assault on the mind through images. At the beginning of the century, majority of the artists explored and innovated techniques to not only present the visible reality but also the workings of the inner recesses of the mind. The new areas of discourse, such as the psycho-analytical theories of Freud, Jung and Adler lent impetus to such creative endeavors. Meaning in modern art was
perceived to be lost even then. It was the “collective unconscious” of the human imagination which comprehended meaning out of the ostensible meaninglessness and the madness of modern art. At this juncture, it is worthwhile to consider Eliot’s view on obscurity in modern poetics:

We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. 4

The “great variety and complexity” has definitely increased in this age of rapid technological advancements; to the extent that the surrealist images appear quite banal and are no longer confined to the elitist echelons of modernist poetics. Such images appear regularly in multi-media projections; in print, and electronic media. It is the mind that creates, as well as, breaks borders between art and the actual world.

It was poets like Eliot and Stevens who were to large extent responsible for aestheticising human experience by drawing out certain selective elements from the chaos of human experience and structuring these elements into a certain ordered pattern. This is one of the reasons why it is convenient to thematize the aesthetic style in their poetics as they seemingly use style as one of the ordering devices that distances experience sufficiently
from life to restrain our tendency to react towards the experience as though it were a real-life one.

While reading modernist verses such as those of Eliot and Stevens from a postmodernist perspective which focuses on the stylistic techniques that structure an aestheticized reality, it is important to bear in mind the central debate in contemporary cultural theory regarding the role of aesthetics and the legitimacy of high art. According to Alex Callinicos the polemics of aestheticism involving ironic distance from the world "which was so important [a] feature of the great works of Modernism has become routinized, even trivialized, as it becomes a way of negotiating a still unreconciled reality which one no longer believes can be changed." In my view, however, the role of aesthetics is not so much in changing the reality of a given context. Rather, aesthetics holds a mirror to the changing attitudes towards the social reality.

One encounters aporias in the application of a moral critique on images in a liberated cultural environment. What standards of critique (if at all there can be a 'standard' critique), is to be applied to images, poetic or otherwise, in an age of information technology, where information is imagistically available, "globally", via the print media or electronic technology, as the Internet. Now one may wonder at this point, that how does all of the above connect with Eliot’s poems? The connection I find in modern poetry as Eliot’s, Baudrillard’s theory, and the Internet, is the fact that they all deal with an imagistic reality. The Internet is the one that presents the problematics of
the image which for Baudrillard is really not as problematic an issue as it was for Eliot. It is the Internet that has explored the realm of imagination and made it public by giving it a valid space within the mental realm. Advanced technology has now made it possible to “download” the freely-floating images in cyberspace. While it is relatively easier to exercise some kind of control over the actual reality by banning certain works of art as in paintings, books, films and even the physical presence of artist, the real dilemma is faced when it comes to managing the “visual reality” on the Internet. The way I view it, is that the perception of the world as a fragmented image was a cause of great concern and anguish at the beginning of this century. However, by the end of the century, this perception is an attitude of acceptance as

[we live everywhere already in an “esthetic” hallucination of reality. The old slogan “truth is stranger than fiction,” that still corresponded to the surrealist phase of this estheticization of life, is obsolete. There is no more fiction than life could possibly confront, even victoriously - it is reality itself that disappears utterly in the game of reality - radical disenchantment, the cool and cybernetic phase following the hot stage of fantasy.  

Baudrillard’s view that life itself has been depleted of reality, and what we confront is the “game of reality” holds true when we attempt a critical analysis on Eliot’s poems, which reveals various levels of “reality” of interpretations - each of which may be pertinently valid. For instance, using the postmodernist theory of deconstruction and applying it to the poems as a critical tool can reveal the unspoken or the unformulated proposition of a text literally. By
showing the gaps and the supplements, the subtle self-contradictions, the text can be shown to be saying something other than what it appear to be saying.\(^7\) In fact, what deconstruction persistently reveals is an ultimate passé of thought which subtly subverts the conscious intentions of the writer. Deconstruction as a critical tool, however, does not merely involve a play with language for that would be trivializing the issue of multiple interpretations to a text. By dealing with a text from a multiple perspective, deconstruction brings to prominence the relationship of an author of a text - poet, painter, sculptor, architect, historian or musician - with his or her perception of a given reality, and the manner of interrogating the value systems of the social reality. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida writes: “Reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the author, between what he commands and what he does not command of the schemata of the language that he uses.”\(^8\) Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak comments on this:

> The deconstructive reader exposes the grammatological structure of the text by locating the moment in the text which harbours the unbalancing of the equation, the sleight of hand at the limit of a text which cannot be dismissed as a contradiction.\(^9\)

Art to that degree, can stimulate critical awareness and exposure to the prejudices of a poet such as Eliot. His misogynist, misanthropist, anti-Semitic, fascist attitude forms the sub-texts to his works which can be retrieved by following the aporias somewhat extremely, somewhat irreverently. The question which follows is that, can art be morally and socially threatening
when we have revealed the sub-texts and exposed the prejudices of a writer, poet or artist? Are we to regard the "thematization" of these prejudices as a serious blemish on the poems or regard it simply as part of the experience of reading Eliot?

In my view, images in modernist works attempt to be, as far as possible, self-consciously neutral. In its attempts to represent reality as closely as possible, modern poetics is not foundationalist and is open to multiple interpretations. It is the critique on modernist works that is more of a decisive factor in determining the effect of art on its society. The moral and social worth of a work of art, therefore, depends on the context in which that work is read. More than the work of art, it is the sub-textual readings through the critical act, that govern its moral and social worth. In other words, art can prove to be a social and moral threat only when the critical act "reveals" it to be so. However, it would be a fallacy to assume that works of art, the images that they project, exist in isolation. The imagistic reality in poetry or painting definitely have a bearing on the social context that they interact with. Thus, at one level experimental works have always been perceived to be anarchic as they threaten to displace the existing reality by the suggestion through the projected images in the arts, that they may be a different way to perceive the actual reality. The different way commands as much deference as the prevailing means of perception to reality. On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that the social reality keeps changing, so that, what is perceived to be
morally threatening in one context, may be acceptable in another context, or at a different point of time. The paradoxical nature of modernist verse like Eliot's, is such, that it borrows its paradoxes from the reality it attempts to express. Social reality to that extent is aestheticised when it lends itself to pluralistic interpretations. Therefore, aesthetic works are not a threat to the social reality, unless the sub-textual readings reveal it to be so.

Eliot's characters consciously operate in just such an aesthetically, neutral framework. The discomfort of many of Eliot's protagonists such as Prufrock or the character in 'Portrait of a Lady' may be attributed to the fact that they can read into the sub-text of the society they exist in, and are acutely aware of its shortcomings. Shusterman reads 'Portrait of a Lady,' to reveal part of its fundamentally aporetic character by deconstructing the poem from the aesthetic point of view, to demonstrate Eliot's complex views on art's value by identifying the poet narrator to the poet himself. Shusterman focuses on the moral paradox of art, where the "motivating theme" of his reading is:

[T]he tension between two views on art's moral worth: the romantic idea of art as a moral educator which awakens and deepens our human sympathies and concern for others versus the contrary doctrine that art morally corrupts, breeding affectation, misdirected feeling, and elitism. Through the course of the poem Eliot struggles and vacillates between both views and ultimately emerges... with what seems to be a very qualified vindication of art which matches that given in his prose theorizing. The idea is that art is morally valuable only through criticism of its moral limitations and dangers. And this idea is ingenuously demonstrated and expressed only through our critical
reflection of those limitations in the poem itself as written by the young narrator-poet.\textsuperscript{12}

Such a reading is from the point of view of an inquiry of art and aesthetics' relevance to the social reality. Shusterman identifies this perspective towards art and its social role with Eliot's viewpoint, as he identifies the poet-narrator with the young Eliot who wrote the poem at the age of 23.

There may be several interpretations to one poem depending on the point of view of the readers. Reading from an aesthetic point of view, the interpretation of the phrase, "his expression in a glass," may be seen as the metaphor for catching an image in a mirror. This is precisely the oldest and most transparent metaphor for art and its mimesis. The metaphoric suggestion is that a poetic image by critically representing a real action can overturn a hardened man's self-possession. This metaphor is further repeated in 'A Game of Chess', in the first few opening lines which describes the scene:

\begin{quote}
... where the glass

Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines

From which a golden Cupidon peeped out.
\end{quote}

\textit{(C P & P, 64)}

In the above lines the suggestion is that it is art that holds a mirror to life. Depravity in society can only be criticized by its representation in works of art. Poetic images can help raise such moral and ethical issues in society simply by representing them, and such criticism is a necessary step toward ethical
and social improvement: “Aesthetic education is possible only if it involves criticism; art edifies only when its mirror images are not merely produced or consumed but when they are critically grasped and appropriated.”\(^{13}\)

We can recover multiple meanings or sub-texts by following the aporias in one poem. From the various readings of Eliot’s poems it appears that the sub-text which is revealed at the conclusion of a deconstructionist exercise does not just “expose forgotten and dormant sediments of meaning which have accumulated and settled into the text’s fabric;”\(^ {14}\) but also forms another text which masks the concerns of the deconstructionist at work. Thus criticism becomes a never-ending exercise, and as ambiguous and open-ended as the art to which it attempts to clarify in philosophical, moral and social terms. No doubt, the sub-text is secondary and largely derivative which is the status of criticism. However, the significance of the sub-texts cannot be ignored as we give multiple interpretations to a text. It is this sort of a reading, which, in the postmodernist context as Edward Said has argued, has made us realize that all art is discourse-specific. In other words, it may be said that art is to some degree “worldly”, even when it appears to deny such connection.\(^ {15}\) Furthermore, such a proposition does lead to a vision of interconnectedness as the boundaries between art and non art, or fiction and reality are eliminated: “[I]lluminating itself, the artwork simultaneously casts light on the workings of aesthetic conceptualization and on art’s sociological condition.”\(^ {16}\)
A postmodern perspective on Eliot’s poems also takes into consideration the context in which the poems are read. For instance, the increasing number of urban aestheticised images presented in Eliot’s early poems, may at one time, be said to be Euro-centric. Reading the poems in an urban, postmodernist context today, we may question the culture-specificity of those very images as they become part of a federated culture zone. The images and the sensations expressed in poems such as ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, ‘Preludes’, ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’, ‘Portrait of a Lady’ are a largely urban phenomenon, which could be a city in any part of the world. It need not necessarily be a “foreign” city as “foreigness” now, is just a state of mind. The original flavour of another country associated with an alien feeling leading to a sense of crisis, has today restructured itself with the changing face of the postmodernist Indian socio-cultural reality - fusing the foreign with the indigenous.

Today, we can celebrate the present even as we carry the past within us. We leave it to the modernist attitude to dwell upon the crises as Eliot did at the beginning of the century. So, was he an American poet in England or an English man who was a legal alien in Great Britain? Or, was he just a postmodernist “voyager”, as he himself succinctly puts it in these poignant lines from ‘Four Quartets’:

Fare forward.
O voyagers, O seamen,
You who come to port, and you whose bodies
Will suffer the trial and the judgment of the sea,
Or whatever event, this is your real destination.'
So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna
On the field of battle.

Not fare well,
But fare forward, voyagers. (C P & P, 188)

The "real destination" has been celebrated in the postmodern context
as the indigenous is fused with the foreign. The reality like Eliot's poetry
appears to us through fused images which, while on one hand, finds us on
the heights of an experimental, adventurous environment, on the other hand,
paradoxically leads us to plunge into the depths of great despair and
anguish. From this point of view, it becomes all the more easier to understand
modernist despair in the context of postmodern India which speaks the same
language of urban culture - a mixture of celebration and despair. How are we
to cope with the changing face of the social-urban postmodern Indian reality
which also to a large extent is being monopolized by mass media.

What is the reality behind the "Unreal City" and what is it that has died
which causes the poet to lament?

I had not thought death had undone so many,
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (C P & P, 62)
Is the poet lamenting the loss of “true reality” in the above lines, and what sort of a corpse is that which will bloom? Maybe, the poet is hopeful that true reality will surface forth but he is not too sure. It is the “Dog . . . that’s friend to men,” which will dig up the corpse, but Eliot appears to be paranoid about it as he wants to keep the “Dog” away from the corpse. Now consider a postmodernist perspective on these lines:

“You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
O keep the Dog far hence, that’s friend to men,
Or with his nails he’ll dig it up again!
You! Hypocrite lecteur! - mon semblable, - mon frère!”

(CP & P, 62-3)

The person who was with the poet “in the ships at Mylae,” could be any person from any part of the world. Together they have “planted” a “corpse” in the garden. What sort of a corpse is that which may be planted? Is it the corpse of reality which has died. Now, if the “Dog” in this poem refers to the mass media, then, Eliot has focused on the ambivalent and the moral role of the media in society today which purports to be “friend to men.” There is no doubt that mass media is definitely “friend to men,” but it should maintain a distance from the “corpse” as “with his nails he’ll dig it up again” (The
emphasis is mine to stress that it is not the first time that the dog has performed such an action), and in doing so will distort the corpse or reality. And the poet invidiously directs his venom at the “Dog” in the last line. Such an interpretation is not all that far-fetched when we consider the ambivalent role of the mass-media who was a friend to Princess Diana - it made her and betrayed her, and continues to dig up her corpse in the form of numerous biographies and movies that will be made on her life. This somewhat "universal" (thanks to the media) postmodernist Baudrillardian concern regarding the “true” nature of reality finds expression in Eliot's poetry in the form of images which give him a brief glimpse of “reality”. Do these images reflect a true reality or not will remain an eternal ambivalent question as is typical of modernist verse.

Thus Eliot's poems may be read as a quest for that “true reality” where all he seems to encounter are images of the reality he seeks and attempts to capture a glimpse of that reality through his verse - from the surrealistic to mythological as in some images of ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’.

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)

brought in upon a platter,

I am no prophet - and here's no great matter;

..................

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves

Combing the white hair of the waves of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea

By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown

Till human voices wake us and we drown.  (C P & P, 15, 16-17)

Sometimes reality comes in “fragments” - in the form of abstract images:

And I must borrow every changing shape

To find expression . . . dance, dance

Like a dancing bear,

Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape.  (C P & P, 21)

Or, in brief inexplicable images interspersed with “foreign” words:

Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,

Your arms full, and your wet, I could not

Speak, and my eyes failed. I was neither

Living nor dead, and I knew nothing. Looking into the heart of light, the

silence.

Oed' und leer das Meer.  (C P & P, 62)

These and other fragments sustain the poet and keep him going. There are

lines from several world texts which penetrate the poet’s consciousness and

at one level may be perceived as mere gibberish or a glimpse into the idea of

a “true reality”. Consider these lines from the last section of The Waste Land

“What the Thunder said”:
I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s’ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon - O swallow swallow
Les Prince d’Aquitaine a la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then lle fit you. Hieronymo’s mad againe.
Shantih shantih shantih (C P & P, 74-5)

A sense of “foreigness” is conveyed by the above lines. The poet however appears to have happily accepted this ‘foreign invasion’ and in fact even talks about “shoring” up fragments of it against his “ruin”.

Eliot experimented and made use of the “fragments” of images, quotes and the stylistic techniques available in his immediate environment, and incorporated these into his poetry. The images in Eliot’s poems still continue to raise questions regarding the moral and ethical relationship of art and the society in which it exists. Like one of his poetic characters - the Prufrockian Lazarus - Eliot too, with the publication of his notebook Inventions of the March Hare, has “come from the dead, / Come back to tell you all” (C P & P, 16). Suffice it is to say at this point of my argument, is that the postmodernist
age, which has witnessed a *fatwa* being passed on a literary work, is also in a way responsible for the change in literary criticism which in a way reminds us to hesitate before employing political or religious standards as a device for the analysis and appreciation of poetry, despite the fact that poetry in inextricably linked with politics and religion.

Which is why Eliot's theory was always complex, reflecting the complexities and contradictions of the phenomenon it grasped. According to Menand, "he seemed to feel to be the one man who could think eschatologically while everyone around him was thinking merely biologically." It is easy to see now why his critical corpus is often censured as a welter of inconsistency. On the issue of inconsistency of Eliot's theory Louis Menand notes:

> The great mistake in trying to make sense of Eliot is the assumption that he had a very consistent idea of what he was doing. The mistake is easy to fall into because of the sense of authority Eliot's writing has always conveyed. It was an extremely precocious authority: by the time he was thirty two, he had written three of the most influential essays in twentieth-century literary criticism - "Hamlet and His Problems," "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and "The Metaphysical Poets." But a knack for assurance is readily exploited, and Eliot sometimes used his capacity for sounding official as a mask for judgments that were genuinely ad hoc.18

In the manner of reality being consistently inconsistent, so it is with Eliot's views. The more arresting feature of Eliot's views lies not so much in their inconsistency but in the manner that they anticipate the postmodernist
concerns that are expressed in his prose works, as well as, his verse. Shusterman points out this feature in Eliot's works: “The moral critique of art and the aesthetic was voiced before postmodernism was conceived, let alone baptized; and it is shared by non-Marxians. We find it deeply embedded and powerfully expressed in the thought and verse of no less a high modernist and political conservative than T. S. Eliot.” In his reading of ‘The Portrait of a Lady,’ he demonstrates that how Eliot’s “complex views of art’s value” are expressed in his verse. But before that Shusterman focuses on Eliot’s stance on art’s moral critique:

Eliot, it is important to note, thought that art was most dangerous when appreciated simply as art, when, for example literature is read “purely for pleasure.” He therefore attacked the idea of “pure literary appreciation” as a dangerous chimerical “abstraction,” and insisted that the criticism of literature go beyond the narrow literary to include ideological critique, for example, criticism from a definite and theological point of view. Eliot constantly advocated a two-stage theory of art appreciation whose first stage involves a sympathetic, tentative acceptance of the work and its world-view and whose second stage involves a conscious ideological critique of that world. There is, then, no one answer to the question of art’s value or disvalue. Depending on how successfully both stages are performed, art can be an educating liberator or an enthralling deceiver. Eliot’s theory was always complex, reflecting the complexities and contradictions of the phenomena it grasped, which is why his critical corpus is often mistakenly censured as a welter of inconsistency.

The complexity of Eliot’s works is also accentuated by the cross-purpose of his verse and prose works. Eliot makes clear distinctions between a work of
art and critical activity. In the "Function of Criticism" the poet-critic declares that:

I do not deny that art may be affirmed to serve ends beyond itself; but art is not required to be aware of these ends, and indeed performs its functions, whatever that may be, according to various theories of value, much better by indifference to them. Criticism, on the other hand, must always profess an end in view, which, roughly speaking, appears to be the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste.  

Eliot's poems like much works of modern art, do not appear to ascribe to any ethical or moral point of view. In his prose works however, the poet as a critic has a moral, didactic opinion on almost all things related to creative arts. Eliot ascribes to the "Impersonal theory of poetry", and is of the view that: "Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry." In Eliot's poems, therefore, there is "a continual extinction of personality", as the poet consciously attempts to eliminate his point of view in the presentation of images. Cinematic images replace the "poetic voice" in Eliot's early poems. We experience the twentieth century modern world as a series of unedited, kaleidoscopic images as viewed through the lens of a camera, or a rapid shifting of images much in the manner of surfing the Net, or rapidly changing the various channels on a television set. Though the sensation is similar, yet there is a difference in the manner of perceiving the images in poetry and the images on a screen. Rapidly changing channels on a screen is an impersonal act, which does not involve the personality of the
viewer. However, if the viewer were to selectively extract certain types of images and present it as a collage on screen or canvas, the images in a different context that emerge out of an interaction with its creator cannot be perceived to be "impersonal". Thus, there can never be a complete "extinction of personality" in a work of art, and more so in Eliot's poetry, where the personality of the poet, his views, and concerns come across unconsciously in the images that he chooses to focus on. The poet or painter cannot be said to be "indifferent" to the social status of a work of art. Selective juxtaposition of images, in a canvas or a poem, brings into question the value systems of a society, or highlights certain issues that also reflect the artist's concerns towards the general well being of the society. Richard Shusterman has observed the emergence of "an intriguing and increasingly salient current in contemporary Anglo-American moral philosophy (and culture) towards the aestheticization of the ethical. The idea here . . . is that aesthetic considerations are or should be crucial and ultimately perhaps be paramount in determining how we choose to lead our lives and how we assess what a good life is." A postmodernist critical tool, such as, deconstruction reveals much of the poet's moral and ethical views which form the sub-text to the poems. Also, it is rather difficult to rule out the personal element either in poetry or critical acts.

Eliot and his contemporaries, both in literary and the visual art, may well be the "gurus" of the experiments taking in all parts of the world. The
question of art's moral critique once again arises from the artistic images and their impact on a "social-reality." Images have become all pervasive, and it is difficult to ignore their challenge to the real in our postmodern culture. New issues have been raised regarding the impact of the images on our society, as the images are no longer perceived to be innocently neutral. Postmodernist theories reveal the sub-text of an imagistic, stylized reality. The possibility of bringing the world together through images is no longer a poetic or a philosophical meditation. Today, we can see it happening around us with the rapid advancements in technology that is difficult to keep pace with. Obscurity is a familiar experience in a postmodernist context, and is encountered frequently with the growing interaction between the humans and the impersonal machines. However, in the contemporary context of the late nineties, experience the obscure is no longer a disturbing phenomenon as it was in the early part of this century. In my view, it is the rapid advancements in technology, that is to a large extent responsible for our acceptance of the "structured" view of reality as it is imagistically packaged and presented. It is the absence of anxiety in encountering such a "reality" that makes modernism distinct from postmodernism.

Thus, it becomes increasingly clear that the postmodernist movement is really an extension of modernism, where the ability of art to shock has become conventionalized. Despite that, creative artists will always find innovative ways to structure the reality. Also, such experiments and
innovations may not necessarily be threatening if understood within the context it takes place. I feel that such experiments are to be viewed as tools which structure our socio-political and even economic reality. Technology which has become an inseparable part of urban postmodernist "culture", presents similar problematics in the postmodernist context, that modern poetry presented in the beginning of the twentieth century; both present multiple perspective to reality and imply that reality cannot be taken for granted. The aesthetic project started by modern poetics to accord equal space to the artist, poet, painter, musician, historian, present and the past, appears complete within the context of the Internet, as all of these, and more, exist as free-floating phenomenon. I am of the view that the viewing of any "text" of out of its context can certainly distort its aesthetic validity and this holds true for all creative productions. The aporia encountered in the understanding of an imagistic representation is that though such representations attempt to break down borders between art and actuality, new borders are erected in the critical appreciation of such endeavors. Such artistic expressions can be perceived to be either profane or sublime depending on several factors such as the age, attitude and the social context of the viewer. Works of art, from this point of view, are thus interpreted within a context.

It is in this manner then that poets as Eliot and Stevens impart meaning to inane and ambiguous sounds such as, “Da, Da, Da” (C P & P, 74) and
“tink and tank and tunk-a-tunk-tunk” (CPWS, 59) respectively, within the context of their poetry. Read out of context such lines appear to be mere gibberish. Such act and sounds have a valid function only within the context they are aesthetically placed by the imagination and also the manner in which it is perceived by the audiences. For instance in 1915, Marcel Duchamp hung a snow shovel in a gallery in New York. “As an artist”, Duchamp told an interviewer in 1916, “I consider that shovel the most beautiful object I have ever seen.” Louis Menand views Duchamp’s snow shovel as the messenger of a dark irony, and one that Eliot was more disposed to appreciate. In a society in which “art” has become a term of disputed authority, its use for aesthetic effect will have consequences riddled with ambiguity beyond the artist’s control, and this is just the society that ready-mades and, to the extent that they are expressions of a programmatic hostility to the poetical, even Imagist poems are harbingers of. For just as the snow shovel takes on the reputation of art when it appears in a gallery, so art begins to take on the reputation of the shovel - and what exactly is the tradition to which a snow shovel now belongs?26

Denis Donoghue refers to more or less the same thing when he writes in “The Promiscuous Cool of Postmodernism” that: “The art of modernism is not supposed to adorn the ordinary world but to enforce an adversary way of being present among commonly degraded objects.”27 It is this perception which lead Eliot in December 1919, to write to his mother of his determination to begin the “long poem I have had on my mind for a very long time.”28 The long poem that Eliot was referring to was obviously The Waste Land. Eliot
planned to exploit the theory of art based on the value of a cultural tradition, and turns to "the composition of a poem in which culture figures as an agent of the most doubtful reliability." Culture figures in Postmodernist creative works as well but

does not recognize the present moment as critical; it regards it as merely *en passant* to a future about which there is no merit in worrying. . . . But the decisive mark of postmodernism is its cool acceptance of the belatedness of experience. There is no longing as in modernism, to wipe the slate clean or to keep it safe for the inscription of one's chosen few images. Postmodernism alludes without disgust, to images already man-made: they are quotations from quotations. No art desires to reach out for spontaneity or an original relation to the world. The typical mode of postmodernism is the book of photographs, a collection of images reproduced by technological procedures from an "original" image not indeed original and for which one does not yearn.

However, what Donoghue has failed to observe in his essay is the postmodernist aporia, which is, that artistic endeavors which attempts to eliminates boundaries by combining the kitsch with High Art, erect new boundaries in the appreciation of such art.

The profane and the sublime meet in artistic works depending on our perspective to it. In a similar manner, perhaps, we may use the same critical yardstick to respond to Eliot's recently published poems *Inventions of the March Hare*. The poems come from a leather-bound 1910 notebook called *Inventions of a March Hare*. It includes "dirty doodles" he wrote for university
friends and a 29 line missing section of Prufrock known as the pervigilium, or night ritual. Also included are four appendices that Eliot tore out of the notebook, including scatological jottings intended for his more broad-minded friends. One involves a risqué encounter between a man and a woman. Regarding the inclusion of such verses Ricks gives a “combination of the following considerations”:

On balance, it was judged right to include the ribald verses, despite Eliot’s having excised their leaves. . . . The editor is aware that such scabrous exhuberences may lend themselves to either the wrong kind or the wrong amount of attention. . . . The excised leaves cannot be simply set aside, since on recto or verso they supply missing lines of the poem proper, and even one whole poem: that the ribald verses constitute part of the story of the poet’s transition from the Laforguean velleities of 1917 to the Corbieresque bluntness, such as Sweeney Erect, of 1920. . . . and finally as Mrs. Eliot has made clear, nothing of Eliot’s is to be suppressed or censored.32

The ribald verses and the censored stanza are most certainly profane and yet fascinating, in a perverse sort of a way, in the manner that they have been brought out from the cold vaults and placed within the context of the vibrating, living present. In my view, the poems present as ambiguous an image from the past as Marc Quinn’s self-portrait sculpted out of frozen human blood is in the present context.33 Except in the case of Eliot it was the profanity of his words that were frozen, and we choose now to thaw out those words to reveal or confirm yet another facet of the poet.
The censored stanza of the Love Song, originally called "Prufrock Among the Women", and the ribald verses present the same problematics as the images on the Internet, and the question still remains: Are we to direct our moral ire on the images in the poem or decry the creator for his misogynistic point-of-view in this particular image from "Prufrock Pervigilium"?34

And when the evening woke and stared into its blindness.

I hear the children whispering in corners

Where women took the air standing in entries -

Women spilling out of their corsets, stood in entries.

Where the draughty gas-light flickered

And the oil cloth curled up stairs.

Are the images of the city in Eliot's early poems an urban "reality" or is it the poet's perception as he discovers "objective co-relatives" in the cityscape to objectify his personal anguish? Are we to indict him for this aesthetic act, or venerate him for making acceptable the "art of shocking" in the present postmodernist context? And after this "overwhelming question", "should I have the right to smile?"
NOTES


6 Baudrillard 147-8.

7 Feminist critics, especially, have deconstructed modernist literary works to reveal the “linguistic misogyny” pervasive in the works of Eliot and other modernist writers such as Faulkner, Joyce and Lawrence. “Linguistic misogyny” is a term used by Gilbert and Gurber to describe the manner in which women’s talk is consistently treated as gossip, hysteria, and irrelevancy in the works of the modernist writers including Eliot. They claimed that all these poets and writers attacked “such creative or intellectual women, and they were often attempted to do so specifically by castigating what they defined as the incoherence or destructiveness of female language.” Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gurber. *No Man’s Land: The Place of Women the Writer in the Twentieth Century* (London: Yale Univ. Press, 1988): 236. In an article titled “Misogyny, Misanthropy, Modernism: T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, Jaidev and Singh deconstruct one of Eliot’s poem to reveal his attitude and ideology which they declare to be the sub-text of Modernism: “So that if the poem [‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’] is taken to be an early paradigm of High Modernism in Europe, its misogyny and misanthropy fit modernistic Narcissism, elitism, self-reflexivity...” Jaidev and


9 ‘Translator’s Preface” in *Of Grammatology*, lxix.


11 A context also refers to a certain socio-cultural environment. Jaidev and Singh's view regarding the context in which the poetry of T. S. Eliot is to be approached is - that once a deconstructionist reveals the concealed “attitude and ideology” in a text, it “needs to be approached with certain amount of caution, especially in the Third World.” Jaidev and Pankaj K. Singh, “Misogyny, Misanthropy, Modernism: T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,’” *On Literature* (1988) 86.


13 Ibid., 109.


Representing reality through images is not a particularly new phenomenon. However, what cannot be ignored is the experimentation that is taking place in all corners of the world - from the multi-million Charles Saatchi collection labelled *Sensation* at the Royal Academy in London to the postmodernist SAHMAT exhibition “A Gift for India” in Delhi - which took place at almost exactly the same time this year (around September-October ‘97) as well as a two-week long international artists’ workshop which took place a month or so later, called *Khoj* in Modinagar, Uttar Pradesh. The common feature in the exhibitions and workshop is the expression of the free choice of the artists through a rhetorically daring discourse, and an intuitive awareness of the material reality to arouse its audience of its complacency to a reality that cannot be taken for granted. S. Kalidas reports on *Sensation* and Akshay Mukul on the SAHMAT exhibition. Both these reports appear in *Agenda*, a supplement to *The Sunday Pioneer*, Oct. 5, 1997: 1. The *Khoj* exhibition has been reported by Madhu Jain in *India Today*, November 24, 1997: 90-1.

25 Quoted in Arturo Schwartz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Abrams, n.d.) 456. The piece is called “En avance du bras casse”, it was the first of Duchamp’s ready-mades, the most famous of which is the urinal, *Fountain* (1917).


29 Menand 74.

30 Donoghue 37.


32 Ibid., xvi.

33 The self-portrait by Marc Quinn was one of the exhibits in the *Sensation* exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. The other exhibits included a pickled shark by Damien Hirst, mutilated shop window dummies by Dinos and Jake Chapman, and a portrait of child killer Myra Hindley by Marcus Harvey.

34 Ibid., 43.