When Ralph Ellison arrived in New York during the summer of 1936, he focused on two passions: music and sculpture. He hoped to supplement his studies in music at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute with connections to musicians and composers, and at the same time to pursue his interest in visual art. As chance would have it, the day after his arrival Ellison became acquainted with Langston Hughes, who introduced him to the world of Harlem artists. With the help of Robert Savion Pious, Ellison met sculptor Richmond Barthé, with whom he had corresponded briefly after viewing Barthé's masks.[1] The respected artist accepted Ellison as his first apprentice, and in August 1936 Ellison wrote to Hughes describing his progress as well as his assessment of his instructor:

> I've done two heads and have started my first torso. After seeing the work of several of our so-called sculptors, I quite agree with you about Barthé. Not only does his work excel theirs in anatomical truthfulness, but in artistic feeling as well; I think I have been objective in this matter because I waited to study with the person who could give me the most regardless of the opinion of the Negro press.[2]

Ellison admired Barthé's style of integrating African themes with classical forms in his bronze sculptures, but African American critics disparaged the sculptor's work as too conservative and reliant on Western aesthetics.[3] Ellison, whose musical training in Oklahoma had embraced such artistic integration, identified with Barthé's aesthetic

notions.[4] The sculptor's declaration that he did not consider his work a commentary on race relations, although he did believe African Americans could "better portray inner feelings of Negro people," resonated deeply with Ellison's budding creative sensibility.[5] The artistic inclination that led Ellison to Barthé points to a fundamental aspect of his creative perspective that spawned the novel *Invisible Man* (1952). My essay demonstrates that examining Ellison's interest in visual art recovers a critical tool for analyzing his protagonist's journey from idealizing a simple, realistic notion of identity to appreciating a more complicated, abstract definition of African American humanity. In particular, the novel's manipulation of visual art theory and plastic art objects—pieces of visual art notable for their multidimensional presence and malleability, such as framed pictures, sculptures, and handled artifacts—plays a crucial role in this transformation. By focusing on the deployment of these objects and the theories embedded in their representation, I clarify Ellison's dedication to and advocacy for producing an African American literary aesthetic capable of unveiling black American interiority.

Although Ellison's hands-on work with Barthé was brief,[6] he remained involved in the visual arts scene. When he traveled to New York from Alabama, the literary Harlem Renaissance waned amid the leanness of the Depression, but the black visual arts scene bloomed fully. Art historian Richard Powell notes that the late 1930s and early 1940s marked a kind of "renascence [*sic*] in Negro art," and although most of the artists were not from Harlem, the major artists converged in the city.[7] The period marked a moment of experimentation and transition as black artists gained a reputation for their portrayal of the crucial relationship between folk experience and modern existence in African American life. From 1935 to 1945, no fewer than ten major art exhibitions devoted exclusively to the work of black artists opened throughout the country, receiving critical attention. Black artists also began experimenting with abstraction and collage, illustrating black consciousness and rebelling against the social realist genre dominating African American visual and literary art. One such artist, painter Romare Bearden, became a good friend of Ellison's in the 1930s. In "Romie," Ellison discovered a peer equally devoted to creating a multifaceted picture of African American existence. Building on his training with Barthé, Ellison found Bearden's plastic portrayals of African American identity refreshing in their rejection of stereotype and ideal-

ization. Additionally, he and Bearden shared a devotion to the blues and jazz, art forms that successfully combine folk culture and modern experience.[8]

In his essay "The Art of Romare Bearden," Ellison describes Bearden's collages as "eloquent of the sharp breaks, leaps in consciousness, distortions, paradoxes, reversals, telescoping of time, and surreal blending of styles, values, hopes, and dreams which characterize much of Negro American history" (*CE*, 693). Ellison also extols Bearden for his ability to "reveal a world long hidden by clichés of sociology and rendered cloudy by the distortions of newsprint and the false continuity imposed upon our conception of Negro life by television and much documentary photography" (*CE*, 690). Bearden's dedication to moving beyond realistic portrayals of African American life agreed with Ellison, who "chided visual artists committed to social protest."[9] Yet in 1941 he had responded to Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices* (1941), a photographic documentary of black life, in strikingly different terms: "After reading [*12 Million Black Voices*] and experiencing the pictures, the concrete images, I was convinced that we people of emotion shall land the . . . destructive-creative blows in the struggle. And we shall do it with books like this!"[10] Ellison valued the intensity of Wright's work, even calling *12 Million Black Voices* "lyrical," but as he grappled with portraying African American consciousness in prose, he sought to adopt a literary aesthetic that would complicate the sociologically determined images that documentary photography and protest-realist writing often reified (*CE*, 670).

Ellison's shifting assessment of his peer's visual work exposes the evolution of his literary philosophy. Notwithstanding his eventual reservations concerning Wright's naturalist style, Ellison's authorial impulse was motivated by Wright's example and encouragement.[11] In fact, Hughes connected Ellison to Wright in the summer of 1937. Although Wright had not yet published *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938) or *Native Son* (1940)—texts that would make him famous—Ellison had perused his work in *New Masses* and respected his technique (*CE*, 660). Wright was consumed with the philosophical, political, and aesthetic issues related to writing African American literature, and in the widely read and intense Ellison he found a kindred spirit. Ellison soon concluded that their shared commitment to revitalizing African American literature moved them beyond the realm of mere friendship to the status of "brothers."[12] The two exchanged long letters as Ellison

wrestled with whether he should commit to writing as a profession. In 1945 he confessed to Wright:

> I have considered the possibility that I may not be a novelist my-self. . . . Anyway, it isn't the prose, per se, that worries me; it's the form, the learning how to organize my material in order to take the maximum advantage of those psychological and emotional currents within myself and in the reader which endows [*sic*] prose with meaning; and which, in the writer, releases that upsurge of emotion which jells with conceptions and makes prose magical.[13]

Ellison's deliberation over the prose form best suited to his purposes hints toward his growing disenchantment with naturalist-realist meth-ods like Wright's. He had breathlessly read the manuscript of *Native Son* as Wright typed it into being (*CE*, 73), but in the years leading up to his composition of *Invisible Man*, he embraced a more modernist aesthetic. Wright in turn questioned Ellison's potential as a writer. He reflected in his journal that Ellison "writes because he is a Negro; he really wanted to be a sculpture [*sic*], but he found he could not say what was hotly in him to say with stone and marble."[14] In actuality, Ellison was formulating his metaphor of invisibility, a philosophical idea indebted both to Wright and to his own interest in visual art.

"Richard Wright's Blues (1945)," Ellison's essay on *Black Boy* (1945), announces the fundamentals of his aesthetic approach for explaining African American life with the resistance to sociology and realism he applauds in Bearden's work. The essay hints at why Ellison's visual art philosophy—a belief that characters' confrontations with the produc-tion, display, and interpretation of plastic art reveal their conscious-ness—became significant to his literary technique. In his review, he applies a music-based critical apparatus to Wright's autobiography, dis-playing his early penchant for exploiting various art forms to explain character complexity. The ambitious nature of his analysis also illus-trates his sense of the importance of personal narrative as a genre in African American literature. Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes that as early as 1760, blacks began narrating and writing autobiographies in an effort to create "in words, a portrait of a human being" and to com-bat the derogatory images prevalent in American visual art forms.[15] Yet this quest to present exceptionality was often at odds with repre-senting the larger African American experience in generative terms. To characterize black life in an idiom capturing its challenges as well

as its resiliency, Ellison labels Wright's history a "blues." He defines the blues as "an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically" and concludes that Wright's personal history is undeniably a "Negro blues" (*CE*, 129). Wright praised his friend's shrewd critique and urged Ellison to consider devoting himself solely to literary criticism. Ellison, however, discovered that his essay elucidated his ideas about depicting African American existence in fiction. He committed himself to a literary aesthetic combining several artistic registers to produce an image of blackness freed from realist strictures.[16]

Invisible Man in manuscript shows Ellison coming to terms with the portrait he aimed to create. As he secluded himself on a Vermont farm to cultivate his novel, he observed in a letter to Wright that "[t]he cubists, or at least the great cubists such as Picasso, worked through the phase of abstraction only to return to natural objects and events—although they learned through their explorations to present an essence of the real world, the plastic essences of people of human figures."[17] By "plastic essences" he indicates the malleability he sought to capture in his presentation of African American experience. He found himself both working through and discovering the value of "abstraction" in his own work, and his manuscript charts his journey. His seven-year road of composition produced an original manuscript numbering over eight hundred pages.[18] Countless outlines, elaborate notes, and numerous scenes excised from the published text document the genesis of the novel. The drafts and typescripts also attest to Ellison's meticulous revision practices. For example, twelve folders are titled "Brotherhood," and several others include pages pertinent to these scenes. Some of these folders enclose two hundred pages of typed manuscript, including scraps of paper with pencil-scrawled sentences transferred to the published text. Studied in conjunction with his collection of newspaper clippings, art exhibit programs, and various other articles, the manuscript unveils Ellison's composition process.

Ellison's final revisions focus on the prologue and epilogue. In reworking these sections, he deftly navigates issues of objectification by replacing realistic examinations of art with a kind of formal modernist packaging of his text.[19] Within this frame he chronicles his protagonist's journey from naive reader of visual images to critical visual observer. Ellison constructs a relationship between nar-

ration and visual culture that redefines traditional perspectives on African American identity as static reality and instead seeks "plastic essences." Indeed, the term "invisible" is itself calculated to challenge narrowly conceived images of black humanity. Through close examination of the novel, amplified by manuscript drafts of numerous scenes, the first three sections of my essay examine the inability of the protagonist, referred to only as "Invisible Man," to read visually constructed meaning. The final section puts an extraordinary draft episode in conversation with the published conclusion to refine the significance of Invisible Man's hard-earned socioracial literacy. The essay concludes by demonstrating how attention to Ellison's interest in visual art reveals the parallel road he travels with his protagonist as both develop writing styles that divulge African American interiority.

Reading Traditional Portraits

Ellison enlists traditional portraiture to trace Invisible Man's quest for power. He suggests that such portrayals fail to account for the complexity of humanity, and by extension, the protagonist's obsession with emulating such figures displays his shallow understanding of modern existence. As Ellison revised his text, he had to decide how heavily to wield this critique of the representational reliability of visual art. He admired authors such as Henry James, known for connecting a character's ability to interpret objects of art to a maturing consciousness, but he questioned the efficacy of James's broader aesthetic for depicting African American individuality. Nevertheless, he clearly shared the sense that traditional portraits, trading on the Grand Manner in their commitment to conveying a sitter's authority, attractiveness, and historical importance, offer rich opportunities for spotlighting the U.S. fascination with crafting powerful appearances. The attendant refusal of such images to acknowledge the difficulties of formulating an American identity heightens the danger for individuals like Invisible Man who naively emulate such likenesses.

The published version of *Invisible Man* designates certain characters as "men of power," and more often than not, these men appear in portraits and redefine interiors as rooms of display (137). Robert Stepto first labels spaces in the novel as portrait galleries and museums. He contextualizes Ellison's portraits within a larger historical trajectory and imagines him spectacularly building on earlier liter-

ary portraiture strategies. Stepto claims that the portraits in *Invisible Man* display Ellison's fundamental suspicion of "simple dichotomies" and instead function to "enlarge a fresh narrative space."[20] This claim helpfully positions my approach, though my reading marries a discussion of plastic art with a contemplation of the portraits and artifacts populating the novel in order to understand how these items contribute to Ellison's development of his protagonist.

Ellison was undeniably interested in the theoretical underpinnings of exhibition spaces. By transforming ordinary rooms into these heavily charged places, he acknowledged the growing importance of "high" visual art culture in the early 1950s. Boston's Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts, the earliest African American museum, appeared in 1950 as a testament to the growing belief that in order to present black U.S. history accurately, African Americans must take charge of institutions responsible for the task.[21] In conjunction with the growing number of national magazines such as *Our World*, *Ebony*, *Sepia*, and *Flash*, marketed to black readers and based on the work of African American photojournalists, black museums in the United States countered disparaging images of blacks in popular culture while teaching their constituents the importance of reading, comprehending, and producing positive images of African American life.[22] Ellison's attention to portraits and visual artifact collections reveals his awareness of the power inherent in modes and institutions of display as well as the need to understand principles of visual consumption. Yet for Ellison these spaces were not only charged because of institutional histories but also because of the visual means of representation they celebrated. His text probes the line between portraiture's visual and historical reliability for black America: to what extent can the visual convey the particularities of racial blackness?

The picture of Invisible Man's grandfather represents the first power portrait in the novel, and it demonstrates the inscrutability of such images. After the battle royal, the protagonist recalls, "I stood beneath his photograph . . . and smiled triumphantly into his stolid black peasant's face" (33). His confrontation with his grandfather's portrait vividly dramatizes his psychological confusion. Invisible Man wonders whether his speech of accommodation represents a success or marks him as a traitor. His face-to-face meeting with the wall-mounted portrait gives space to his internal quandary. In a manuscript draft, the grandfather reappears in the form of "an old post-card photograph" that

falls from a stack of Invisible Man's college books and "lays staring at [him] from the bed."[23] Ellison observes photographic history in choosing this visual format. Following the *carte de visite* and the cabinet card, the photo postcard appeared around the turn of the century, and its general availability distinguished it as the form making photographs widely accessible.[24] Ellison's deletion of this scene suggests he preferred presenting the grandfather in the visual form most clearly indicating a position of power rather than accessibility. In the published text, the grandfather appears solely in the guise of a wall portrait.

Invisible Man's college experiences expand the imposing power of portraiture by introducing museum culture. When Bledsoe summons him to his office for disciplinary action, the protagonist notes the "framed portrait photographs and relief plaques of presidents and industrialists, men of power—fixed like trophies or heraldic emblems upon the walls" (137). His office symbolizes the first museum in the novel and draws upon principles of these institutions. Museums embody three forms of symbolic space that Sheldon Annis terms "cognitive space," "social space," and "dream space."[25] In other words, museum visitors interpret objects, exchange individual and communal memories, and respond personally to exhibits that induce fantasizing. Invisible Man, lacking the necessary knowledge to participate fully in museum culture, never simultaneously experiences the three spaces Annis identifies. In Bledsoe's office, he remains virtually blind to the rules of the exhibition space.

While the grandfather's portrait becomes an occasion for Invisible Man's self-doubt, the portraits he encounters in Dr. Bledsoe's office at first elicit no such uncertainty. He determines that the pictures and plaques have been transformed into "trophies or heraldic emblems" by their placement on the wall (137). While this discovery allows him to classify the pictured individuals as "men of power," he cannot grasp the ordering principle that explains their presence in Bledsoe's office. Ellison's construction of the collection in the office echoes the collection's function in the museum. As Tony Bennett argues, with respect to the formation of museums, the collection manifests an invisible abstraction, the perception of which acts to distinguish the gazer who knows from the gazer who does not. The protagonist, as he stands in Bledsoe's office, is clearly the unknowing gazer. Blind to complicated social codes ordering interactions between black and white people, he naturally fails to perceive the principles determining the construction of Bledsoe's museum. He cannot see through the collected pieces

to recognize that they reify Bledsoe's rhetoric of accommodation and hypocrisy. This invisible philosophy explains the visible collection, and the protagonist's inability to penetrate the surface meaning highlights not only his powerlessness but also the unreliability of visual depictions of sociohistorical experience. For viewers lacking proper interpretive tools, formal images neither accurately represent African American existence nor facilitate the critical comprehension of the world that structures it.[26]

While he intuits some degree of the "cognitive space" of the museum in Bledsoe's office, it is not until his arrival in New York that he begins to understand the museum as a "social space." Upon entering Emerson's office, the protagonist determines that it is "like a museum" (180). He transforms Emerson's office into a "social space" when he allows the displayed objects to revive memories of his college museum, the only traditional museum in the novel. Looking at the different objects, he muses, "There was nothing like this at the college museum." The artifacts in the school museum include slave relics like "a set of ankle-irons . . . an ugly ebony African god . . . and a leather whip" (181). Their representation of a past too close to admire leaves Invisible Man unable to fathom the kind of artistic value Ellison later assigns such art objects in his discussion of LeRoi Jones's *Blues People* (1963). Criticizing Jones's failure to recognize the depth of expression slave musicians divulge through their art, Ellison insists slavery "was *not* . . . a state of absolute repression" denying artistic productivity (*CE*, 284). The protagonist, unable to envisage the worth of African American art, misses the irony the college collection unintentionally conveys by displaying objects of U.S. brutality beside examples of African artistry. Instead, he remains dedicated to converting himself into a traditional figure of power like those he contemplates in the office of Mr. Bates, the first Wall Street trustee he visits. There he admires pictures of quintessential U.S. power in "three portraits of dignified old gentlemen in winged collars who looked down from their frames with an assurance and arrogance" (167). Bates's gallery reinvigorates Invisible Man's reformative ambition while Emerson's relics complicate his goal by recalling a racial history he misreads. His endorsement of traditional portraits of power and rejection of indigenous artifacts illustrates his rejection of the African American past as well as the truth of U.S. history.

After merely visiting the spaces of powerful men, Invisible Man finally obtains an office of his own. With a portrait of Frederick Doug-

lass adorning his wall, he imagines he possesses a fuller understanding of visual images, and his office becomes a kind of museum "dream space." He ruminates over "how magical it was that [Douglass] had talked his way from slavery to a government ministry" and imagines that "something of the kind is happening to" him (381). He places Douglass in the same company as the other portraits representing ideas he cannot follow, but he envisions himself filling a similar frame. The portrait also recalls the complicated self-imaging Douglass practiced. In addition to writing three autobiographies that established an early standard for African American writing, Douglass constructed his identity in countless daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and paintings displayed throughout the world. Gates concludes that Douglass's "public, reproducible image" allowed African Americans "to reconstruct" their public faces and, to a large extent, set the stage for Washington's New Negro project.[27] Ellison's presentation of Douglass as a traditional portrait connects him to a thorny legacy shared with the New Negro and showcases the ex-slave's attempts to establish himself as a visual representative of black America.[28]

Both initiatives reinforce Ellison's larger point regarding framed pictures on museum walls. He hints at the ideas they represent and questions both the truth of their doctrines and the ability of average Americans to dissect ideas in visual packaging. By interrogating ideologies ranging from Booker T. Washington's notions of African American education,[29] to corporate America's terms for success, to Douglass's manipulation of his role as a visual symbol of black achievement, Ellison finds cracks in black and white images of accomplishment. Through the flat materiality of the power portraits and the complicated spaces housing them, he suggests that facile presentations of complex philosophies must be dismantled and examined before one can formulate a critical subjective frame for the world. To guide his protagonist to this realization, Ellison charts a path riddled with visual images whose representations of race and social power force Invisible Man to reassess his internalized concepts of individual success.

Gender, Race, and Shared Frames of Objectification

Starting with his famous battle royal scene, Ellison expands and complicates his protagonist's interaction with plastic imaging by linking the visual objectification of white women and black men. Critics of

Invisible Man regularly question the absence of significant female characters in the text.[30] Drafts of the manuscript, however, reveal Ellison's early intentions of constructing scenes around more developed women. Different versions show Invisible Man engaging in a sexual relationship with a black woman at Mary's house, joining the Brotherhood to pursue a white woman in the organization, experiencing intimacies with Emma (Brother Jack's mistress) and consistently thinking of his sexual appeal.[31] In contrast, the finished novel contains only ambiguous love scenes with white women. Though editors undoubtedly insisted on excising many of these scenes because of their sexually explicit nature (Ellison jokes in a letter to Albert Murray that he had to remove the "sour cream in the vagina" part because "it was too ripe for 'em"),[32] a larger logic seems to order his revisions. While the drafts dramatize the stereotype of black men's desire for white women, the finished text stresses the social parallel between white women and black men. Ellison's persistent imaging of both groups introduces the traditional paradigm of the gaze and hints at the danger of accepting racial objectification.

The implications of scenes such as the battle royal emerge most forcefully in the context of Ellison's broader appeal to visual culture. Shelly Eversley begins with a similar contention in analyzing the role of women in the text. Her shrewd readings focus on Ellison's use of light, which she notes is integral to producing photographic images, in scenes featuring women as visual artifacts.[33] While I agree with Eversley's conclusion that these scenes pave the way for the protagonist's realization that invisibility extends beyond black men, I also probe the larger significance of his visually inspired knowledge. The powerful white men at the smoker form a circular frame around the dancer, dramatizing their authority over her and the boys. After showcasing the stripper's failure to control her frame, Ellison frames and reframes the boys to symbolize the portraits white men systematically create of black masculinity. The portable fighting ring, replacing the white male faces "ringed around" the blonde, represents a metaphorical frame in which the blindfolded boys cannot see themselves, a foreshadowing of Invisible Man's first speech for the Brotherhood (19).[34] Maurice Wallace illustrates how the racial gaze requires such framing to fetishize the black male body. Designating the practice as "spectragraphia," a "chronic syndrome of inscripted misrepresentation" that "implies imperfect—indeed, illusory—cultural vision," Wallace concludes that

white racialists' "spectragraphic gaze . . . cannot see . . . their own self-serving blindness."[35] The problem for the protagonist, however, is that he accepts, even endorses, the spectragraphic gaze under which he labors.

Ellison's focus on the canvas of boxing rings provides an inventive background for Invisible Man's portraits.[36] Even when he sees his own blood "glistening and soaking into the soiled gray world of the canvas," the boxing ring floor substituting for a painting canvas, Invisible Man fails to understand the portrait the men around him create (26). In addition to sharing the same term as the painting's material surface, the boxing canvas supplies a focal point for a picture, and it, too, absorbs the color of its subject. That its colors derive from the blood, sweat, and dirt of fighters only intensifies the aptness of the comparison. Like a painting canvas, the boxing ring surface demarcates an off-limits space for viewers: they can observe but should not touch. But at the battle royal, the white men play the roles of spectator and artist. They create the picture on the fight canvas, so they retain rights to violate its space. Ellison underscores this point with the additional framing device of the electrical rug. When the carpet replaces the portable ring, the protagonist wonders whether "he will stand on the rug to deliver [his] speech" (26). He yearns to be framed by the white men, but he fails to understand that the men who choose the frame also control the picture it surrounds. Moreover, the physical violence unleashed in both spaces illuminates the disjuncture between the fixed quality of portraiture and the volatile nature of race relations. The protagonist's failed attempt to pass for a picture of African American success and progress animates the irony of this scene.

Invisible Man's interaction with Mr. Norton provides him an additional opportunity to fill a frame a white woman occupies before him. Once again, he misses the implications of his circumstances when the trustee confesses that his philanthropic motivation issues from his devotion to his dead daughter, whose image he carries around in the form of a miniature. Primarily created as tokens of mourning, these diminutive portraits popularized in the mid-eighteenth-century United States commemorated marriages, births, and a general growth of affection for children. Unlike traditional portraits that facilitate "face-to-face" meetings, miniatures add touch to the interaction, lending an erotic dimension to the images that often made children, in Susan Stewart's formulation, the "object of an adult gaze."[37] Most scholars

attribute such depravity specifically to men who, unlike women who displayed their miniatures on bracelets or necklaces, concealed these tokens in vest pockets. Miniatures also distinguish themselves from traditional portraits in that they have a reverse side: on the back intricate designs woven with the hair of the pictured person transform him or her into a wearable "fetish."[38] The history of the diminutive portrait fleshes out the implications of Norton's relationship with his daughter as well as his habit of collecting individuals to expand his collection of curiosities.[39] Moreover, his framed miniature recalls the framing at the battle royal, a point Ellison makes in his notes as he contemplates using the "same symbolism as battle royal" to show that "incest is the ultimate expression of monopoly."[40] Once again a powerful white man frames and possesses a beautiful white woman whom the protagonist is forced to gaze upon and, in this instance, touch.

In these early scenes Invisible Man fails to connect the framing of white women with his own visual objectification, but his awareness grows as he deals with the Brotherhood. After his first speech on the "Woman Question," he goes home with a mysterious woman. Her apartment represents another museum; upon entering the living room he observes "a life-sized painting of a nude, a pink Renoir. Other canvases were hung here and there, and the spacious walls seemed to flash alive with warm, pure color" (411). By designating the painting a Renoir nude, Ellison introduces Renoir's belief that depictions of the female nude show women in a natural, less inhibited state than modern dress imposes. The natural settings of the paintings, reflected in the models' skin tones, celebrate women's earthy natures, but Renoir's classical touches trap them in a traditional heritage of art that objectifies the female body.[41] Like the Renoir nude, the mystery woman is clearly an object bought for her husband's museum. In an earlier draft, Ellison makes this point more clearly. Upon entering the room, the protagonist notes, "I suddenly saw a life-sized painting of a pink nude looking out languid-eyed from a dull gold frame. It seemed alive."[42] Here, the detail of a particular artist is removed in favor of emphasizing the connection between the painting and the woman. The protagonist in the published version does not understand that in an attempt to alter her status, the woman seeks to assume the role of collector and add him to her collection.

This intent becomes strikingly clear when Invisible Man enters her bedroom. The mirrors reflect images that invoke the impressionist

technique of painting scenes that change from moment to moment. Facing each other, the two mirrors create instant portraits. Invisible Man notes that the mirrors toss their "images back and forth, back and forth, furiously multiplying the place and circumstance" (416). This repetition signifies the long tradition of black male sexual exploitation at the hands of white women, but more emphatically, it underscores the significance of framed bodies. When the woman's robe reveals her nakedness, Invisible Man describes her body as if she is the "life-sized" Renoir painting hanging on the wall: "I went breathless at the petite and generously curved nude, framed delicate and firm in the glass" (416). In a preliminary draft Ellison stresses this point by changing his initial verb, "revealed," to "framed."[43] Indeed, the mirrors become frames arresting their images, connecting while juxtaposing their objectifications.

   Notwithstanding the numerous incidents linking Invisible Man to white women, it is not until Sybil, the Brotherhood wife he seduces to gain information about the organization, unequivocally requests that he enter the world of performance that he suspects the full extent of his objectification. He does not, however, comprehend the relationship between the role white women ask him to assume and the similarity in their statuses. Although he acknowledges that Sybil's ideas of him spring from Hollywood stereotypes and popular myths, he only partially grasps her astute acknowledgment of their mutual subjugation: "[Y]ou're not like other men. We're kind of alike" (520). Thus, while Invisible Man concedes that white women see him as a "domesticated rapist . . . with a convenient verbal push-button arrangement for the ladies' pleasure," he is unable to extend his reasoning to decipher the attitude of the Brotherhood men (521). Like the white women who have no interest in his words, the white Brothers use him as a visual example of their inclusiveness. As Jack bluntly states, "You were not hired to think" (469). In truth, he is hired to embody a talking picture within the enervating confines of the Brotherhood frame.

Complex Harlem Images: Grasping More than Meets the Eye

As Ellison stages Invisible Man's framing by various groups, his protagonist reflects on metaphorical portraits both created by and imposed on the Harlem population. In like fashion, Ellison nurtured his own growing interest in photography, and specifically portrai-

ture, staring at Harlem dwellers from behind his camera lens.[44] Yet even as he fixed Harlem with his increasingly sophisticated cameras, the composition of his photography as well as his writing exposes an eagerness to emphasize the mutability of African American life, its unremitting resistance to static imaging. The eviction scene in *Invisible Man* concretizes the protagonist's struggle to appreciate the ever-evolving nature of black identity. Stumbling over the household objects strewn across the snow and listening to the grumbling of the crowd, he muses, "Now I recognized a self-consciousness about them, as though they, we, were ashamed to witness the eviction, as though we were all unwilling intruders upon some shameful event; and thus we were careful not to touch or stare too hard at the effects that lined the curb; for we were witnesses of what we did not wish to see" (270). With an awakened sense of cultural pride, he identifies the crowd's, as well as his own, inner response to the outer spectacle. His detection of the collective desire not "to see" announces the crowd's realization that the artifacts littering the snow constitute a forced exhibition of private effects. The jumbled items represent the old couple's knotty life history,[45] their complicated insides pushed outside by the evicting agent, a symbol of white power and injustice. Invisible Man's intense response highlights his incipient status as a reader of visual images: "I turned and stared again at the jumble, no longer looking at what was before my eyes, but inwardly-outwardly, around a corner into the dark, far-away-and-long-ago, not so much my own memory as of remembered words, of linked verbal echoes, images, heard even when not listening at home" (273). He stands on the precipice of realizing a fully formed consciousness that successfully detects personal and communal meaning taking shape through the visual spectacle.

Ellison's careful register of the items displayed in the street includes a number of pictures. Beginning with a "portrait of the old couple when young," the protagonist proceeds to identify "a faded tintype of Abraham Lincoln," an "image of a Hollywood star," a "white man in black-face," and "a yellowing newspaper portrait of a huge black man with the caption: MARCUS GARVEY DEPORTED" (271–72). These visual images, jumbled together with a melee of objects, create a collage defined by invisible connections linking the items. In fact, the household articles embody the definition of collage: they form a single image on a shared plane in which their juxtaposition and varying texture interact to achieve an artistic result. The collage chronicles the

old couple's life and emblematizes the shared and convoluted history of black Americans. As such, it recalls Ellison's remarks regarding Bearden's collages. Like Bearden's art, the eviction collage uncovers the complexity and incongruity of African American experience.[46] In contrast to traditional portrayals of blackness, it enables images of African American pride, family and cultural history, and political activism to mingle with images of black self-exploitation and white racism. The evicted man and woman embody the reality Bearden's collages convey, but they lack the corresponding control over how to frame themselves. To rescue the exhibition of their lives from exploitative chaos and transform it into a collection of African American strength, the protagonist haphazardly asserts control by leading the crowd in dismantling the collage and returning it to the couple's home. Despite his bold actions, he only subconsciously senses the power of the household objects: they represent the vital incongruities characterizing African American life as well as the need to understand the potential strength in a paradoxical past.

The "*veil that threaten*[s] *to lift*" as Invisible Man contemplates the eviction is firmly resecured by his decision to join the Brotherhood (273). As the leader of the Brotherhood's Harlem district, the protagonist organizes a placard campaign that trumpets racial diversity with "a color photograph of bright skin texture and smooth contrast" (385). His determination to picture the goal of his Brotherhood work establishes his return to a conventional visual mode of countering racism. In Ellison's manuscript this episode is more explicit in its purpose, and the placard picture includes the protagonist's face. After the placards are posted all over Harlem, they mysteriously begin to disappear. Invisible Man explains his own reaction thoughtfully:

> I was used to seeing Negroes caricatured, and had long identified myself with such things. . . . Aunt Jamima, Shoe Shoe Sam, the Cream of Wheat Man and the Ham What Am Man were familiar along with the attitudes that went with them, but this was something new. God, the things that happened to paper and cardboard. What would happen to my image now?[47]

The inclusion of his own face on the poster makes the theft of the placards personally disturbing, and he imagines someone has launched a direct assault on his effort to redefine U.S. race relations. His reflection on the African American image in popular culture reveals the

larger battle he subconsciously wages as well as his desire to escape a legacy of visual derogation. Ironically, in this draft version, it turns out that the people of Harlem are stealing the placards from public spaces and transferring them to the privacy of their homes. When Invisible Man visits African American Brotherhood members, he sees the poster displayed between "family portraits in cheap ornamental folders." Instead of an assault on his attempt to reimage race relations, the stolen placards disclose the success of the protagonist's plan. Black men and women view the photograph as a hopeful picture of their future, and they display it among their personal portraits. One couple informs the protagonist, "Folks we know are crazy about that picture. I know at least four of my friends got them on their walls. Hester Cook and Lizzie Sanders even had their's [*sic*] framed."[48] For Harlem dwellers, the rainbow poster visually combats racist images of their present lives with a realistic image of racial harmony.

Still, the Brotherhood's ultimate betrayal of the Harlem community, closely modeled after Ellison's evolving view of the Communist Party, highlights the danger of placing too much confidence in such shallow images.[49] Ellison drives this point home in the published novel where the poster features Tod Clifton, the "very black" Brother with "chiseled, marble-like features sometimes found on statues in northern museums," who ends up peddling Sambo dolls, the ultimate image of black degradation (363). Kimberly Lamm argues that Clifton's character exemplifies Ellison's dedication to producing art that challenges "image repertoires" that black males "have been historically constituted within."[50] She concludes that like Bearden's photomontages, Clifton "complicates rigid definitions of race, masculinity, and activism" enforced by institutions like the Brotherhood.[51] This assertion not only connects Bearden's and Ellison's aesthetic concerns, but pushed further, it begins to acknowledge the importance of interpreting visually laden performances and objects.

In early drafts, Clifton attempts to convince Invisible Man of the Brotherhood's duplicitous relationship to the black community by relating his personal odyssey in the organization. He admits that he married a white woman in the Brotherhood, but when he realized that he and his wife would always be viewed as symbols, he bought a sunlamp to make her "a plain, un-symbolic human being" and to rescue himself from the role of "nigger bait."[52] The Sambo doll scene that replaces Clifton's divulgence denies Invisible Man access to the

youth leader's decision process. Instead, Clifton forces the protagonist to interpret his actions and the visual object that represents his renouncement. Invisible Man has previously noted moments when the youth leader's "eyes were turned inward," and upon finding Clifton peddling the dolls, he observes, "[H]is eyes looked past me deliberately not seeing" (367, 432). He must reconcile his detection of Clifton's introspective vision with the young man's purposeful outward blindness; his "not seeing" eyes redirect the protagonist's gaze to the Sambo doll and its frantic dance. When Invisible Man spits on the doll, a visual confirmation of the stereotypical image he fears society affixes to him, a fat man makes the connection and laughs boisterously, "pointing from [the protagonist] to the doll" (433). His failure to escape the image replicates his violent effort to dispose of Mary's Sambo bank and mocks his attempts to subvert complicated pictures of black humanity.

Only Clifton's death prods Invisible Man to question the reliability of narrowly defined visual appearances. After witnessing the shooting, he gazes upon three African American boys in full zoot suit apparel and recalls the words of his college professor: "You're like one of these African sculptures, distorted in the interest of design."[53] With newfound curiosity, he wonders, "what design and whose?" (440). The boys share the extreme position of the Sambo doll, projecting an image that defies historical containment or scientific explanation in an effort to control the terms of their identity. Their existence forces Invisible Man to reassess the accuracy of Brotherhood ideology, and as he delivers Clifton's eulogy, he gains a new perspective on the Harlem residents: "And as I took one last look I saw not a crowd but the set faces of individual men and women" (459). His ability to see individuals composing the mass signals his growing perception of African American consciousness, and when the Brothers attack his actions, he holds his ground with newfound confidence. To their insistence that Clifton was a traitor, he responds, "He was a man and a Negro; a man and a brother; a man and a traitor, as you say; then he was a dead man, and alive or dead he was jam-full of contradictions" (467). Invisible Man no longer feels compelled to fit Clifton into a flat, uncomplicated frame; instead, he recognizes the fundamental contradictions at the center of his friend's character and determines that his paradoxical actions are not damning but enlivening. Like the Harlem community, he sees Clifton's humanity in his contradictions and declares to Jack, "[T]he

political consciousness of Harlem is exactly a thing I know something about" (471). The visual spectacle of the Sambo doll facilitates his comprehension of African American interior life, a consciousness too rich in its historical experience to be confined to the Brotherhood frame.

Shattered Pictures and Ascendant Words

As Ellison hammered out his manuscript, his inclination to connect the modern visual art surrounding him to significant scenes assumed varying forms. He saved copies of contemporary paintings like Eldzier Cortor's *Room No. 5* (1948) in personal folders dedicated to cataloging visual art. In the same way that Cortor's depiction of a sculptural naked woman reflected in a bureau mirror evokes the novel's bedroom scene between the sensual Brotherhood woman and Invisible Man, the tenor of other paintings Ellison cataloged reverberates with key moments in his text. In the manuscript drafts, directly before Invisible Man witnesses Clifton's death, he enters a bookstore where a white Brother fails to recognize him. Describing the space, he notes, "Paintings flashed upon the walls, Gauguin's. . . . A phrase, 'the anonymity of the mass' whirled up in my brain. The crowd . . . cancelled you out. We, he and I, wore the lenses of Brotherhood. We were not blind like the crowd, I thought."[54] In a different version, Invisible Man observes, "Bright reproductions flashed from the walls, Gauguin's, Dufy's, Leger's."[55] Invisible Man's identification of the artwork defining the space in which he begins to suspect Brotherhood hypocrisy frankly advocates learning to read visual art as a means of becoming more discerning interpreters of social reality. Each of the artists he names depends heavily on the use of vivid color to represent interiority and draws on artistic movements such as expressionism and cubism. Moving forward from the documentary-style photographs Ellison extols in Wright's *12 Million Black Voices*, the visual forms he admired in the late 1940s produce introspective pictures through a range of artistic innovations, often subtle in meaning. Ellison's manuscript revisions reflect a similar shift in his deployment of visual art. In place of repeated references to particular artists or overt invocations of painterly styles and movements, individual scenes simply bear traces of visual art schools and artists while demanding that readers decipher the implications.

Early manuscript drafts show Ellison depending heavily and clum-

sily on modern art theory to portray his protagonist's consciousness. Leroy, a former boarder at Mary's house who is drowned at sea, becomes a kind of intellectual guide for the protagonist. When Invisible Man arrives at Mary's, the boarders have just learned of Leroy's death, and he instantly views the dead young man as a competitor. Mary allows him to live in Leroy's room, where he peruses the dead sailor's journal.[56] As Invisible Man grapples with the young man's politically radical ideas, he tries to "visualize Leroy," who despite the journal passages remains "vague, formless." His desire to see a picture of Leroy promises to be fulfilled when a fellow sailor delivers a portrait of Leroy to Mary. As Treadwell, Leroy's white friend, unwraps the portrait, Mary exclaims, "'Lawd, I never had no painted picture of nobody before.'" When the portrait is revealed, Invisible Man responds intensely: "I was filled with a sense of repulsion as the baroque geometrical forms of the painting met my eyes, and outraged, for it was more like the plan of a man than a portrait, a plan for a blown assembly chart or disintegration." Treadwell explains that the painter was a "cubist" who "felt that by breaking up the details of Leroy's figure and rearranging them . . . he would give a stronger impression of Leroy's personality." Invisible Man, confused by the portrayal, admits, "I was annoyed with my own ignorance of painting. I felt that although I disliked the portrait I should have understood it." Later, as Mary prepares to hang the portrait of "the willfully dismembered Leroy," another boarder notices a sketch on the back of the painting that presents a traditional drawing of Leroy's face. Mary decides, however, to display the fractured picture since that is how Leroy "wanted to be remembered."[57] Her fidelity to displaying Leroy in the manner he desires celebrates the interpretive capacity of the black folk mind. Upon hearing Treadwell's explanation of cubism, Mary willingly revises her attachment to realistic imaging and accepts a radically abstract one.

By the time of his death, Leroy no longer believes that traditional portraiture captures the essence of his being. In turning to cubism, a style that flattens images onto the canvas in order to show different sides simultaneously from different angles, the sailor asserts his multifaceted identity. Ellison was enamored with this revolutionary style, which gave rise to a reassessment of the interaction between form and space, and he considered its implications in his letters, interviews, and essays.[58] He admired Picasso, the painter critics credit with infusing portraiture with a psychological depth not achieved

by traditional portrayals. Ellison describes Picasso as "the greatest wrestler with forms and techniques" because he "never abandoned the . . . symbolic forms of Spanish art . . . that allow the artist to speak of complex experiences and to annihilate time with simple lines and curves." He proceeds to aver that Picasso's method allows "the viewer an orientation, both emotional and associative, which goes so deep that a total culture may resound in a simple rhythm, an image" (*CE*, 213–14). Ellison believed that the success of black writers depended on a similar approach, and through Leroy's abstract portrait, he forthrightly exploits cubist philosophy.

Yet the published text omits Leroy's portrait and, as such, manifests Ellison's maturing style.[59] He continued to regard abstract visual art highly, but he developed a more writerly sense of its place in his fiction. Similar to Picasso in his dependence on elemental symbols in Spanish and African culture, Ellison relies chiefly on black folklore and music to depict his protagonist's complicated consciousness. The numerous portraits and visually constructed scenes woven throughout the narrative compose a kind of collage that ultimately rejects any parallel to a direct visual representation. We see Invisible Man solely through the lens of his evolving view of the visual objects, voices, and music surrounding him; in turn, he comes to esteem his individuality only as he learns to reject uncomplicated portrait styles that repudiate a chaotic picture of humanity. By becoming a savvy reader of visual images, Invisible Man embraces his individuality as well as his relation to the founding principles of his country. He no longer seeks to craft a surface, fixed representation of himself or consents to being objectified visually; instead, he admits he has "been trying to look through" himself to assess his place in society (572). As he concludes that the American democratic ideal, in its unperverted form, insists on the inclusion of his mind in its portrait, he acknowledges that his "attempt to write" down his experiences facilitates his comprehension of his identity (575).

Ellison's intimation that his protagonist prepares to write by becoming a sophisticated reader of plastic art objects elucidates his view regarding the relationship between visual culture and the role of U.S. fiction more broadly. Considering the literary representations of African Americans that writers like John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway proffered (when they included them at all), Ellison laments that "it is unfortunate for the Negro that the most power-

ful formulations of modern American fictional words have been so slanted against him that when he approaches for a glimpse of himself he discovers an image drained of humanity" (*CE*, 81–82). Ellison's incorporation of visual art theory reveals his artistic attempt to rectify this problem and points to his admiration of the abstract art philosophies engaged by contemporary black visual artists. Nevertheless, his invisible portrait ultimately acknowledges his partiality for portrayals of American blackness not dependent on or dedicated to an emphasis on outer appearance. His insistence that his protagonist learn to analyze the visually structured society around him only to represent himself through writing about his past points to Ellison's belief regarding the work of the novel. He explains that

> the novel seeks to communicate a vision of experience. Therefore, whatever else it achieves artistically, it is basically a form of communication. When successful in communicating its vision of experience, that magic thing occurs between the world of the novel and the reader—indeed, between reader and reader in their mutual solitude—which we know as communion . . . and it achieves universality, if at all, through accumulating images of reality and arranging them in patterns of universal significance. (*CE*, 696)

By presenting Invisible Man's tortured journey to self-knowledge, Ellison imagines himself contributing another stroke to a complex, ever-evolving American portrait that cannot be contained by any singular frame. His words disclose the ongoing conversation he imagines between his work and his readers, communication empowering his image of black America to escape stasis and simplicity.

The completion of the prologue and epilogue brought Ellison full circle to his early contemplation of creating prose as magical in meaning as in form. Invisible Man unequivocally declares his invisibility as the result of a state of mind rather than a physical predicament, thereby beginning and ending by directing his audience beyond his outward appearance. Yet his explanation is by no means simple. The cyclical reasoning he engages casts a wide net of reproach, which Ellison outlines in his working notes. He explains "[i]nvisibility" as springing from both white America's prejudice and the "great formlessness of Negro life wherein all values are in flux."[60] Ultimately, Invisible Man celebrates African American cultural variability as vigorous and vibrant so long as he comprehends it. In composing his novel, Ellison

travels a similar trajectory. As he switches lines from the prologue to the epilogue and back again, he seems less focused on using the frame to free his narrative of contradiction than on making Invisible Man's discoveries meaningful. The framing sections turn the text into a kind of verbal portrait.

In the years following the publication of the novel, Ellison remained wary of projects aiming to provide a visual equivalent for his text. After a spread on *Invisible Man* photographed by his friend Gordon Parks appeared in *Life* magazine, Ellison writes to Wright, "Being a photographer and a writer, you will appreciate the tremendous difficulty of translating such intensified and heightened prose images into those of photography. At best, the essay turned out to be an excellent ad."[61] He eventually acquiesced to allowing Franklin Library to publish two illustrated versions of the novel, but found the results disappointing.[62] To the several propositions for turning his book into a movie, he steadfastly refused. He wrote to one hopeful producer, "I deeply regret to inform you that my novel, *Invisible Man* is not available for adaptation and never has been." He continues, "I have been consistent in my refusal because I prefer that the book rest on its merits as a novel to be read rather than transposed into a form for which it was not written." A proposition that the novel be adapted into a Marvel comic also met with rejection.[63] In each of these instances, Ellison seems wary of contributing to a concrete picture of blackness. Instead of seeking propitious visual depictions of blackness, he devotes his novel to portraying interior truth. This mature consciousness demonstrates the malleability he associates with the power of the word.

Celebration of this power became a refrain in the lectures and essays he presented for the remainder of his life. Although he had become increasingly active in the world of visual culture by the 1960s—amassing an impressive collection of African art, helping found public television, and, in the 1970s, sitting on museum boards—Ellison grew more invested in the supremacy of the novel as a means for understanding U.S. culture. He insisted that only the word could capture the complexity of American identity. This complexity consisted of the tension arising from the collision of the country's written ideals, as outlined in the founding documents, and the historical and contemporary experiences molding the national consciousness. Invisible Man's very invisibility, a state he embraces after rejecting all forms of visual representation as too restrictive to convey his interiority, demands

a concentration on his words, his mental sense of self. His memoir constitutes the ultimate abstract portrait through its power to transform the reality of his experiences into a comprehensive picture of his humanity. For Ellison, only words, controlled through the process of countless revisions, hold the capacity for such a feat.

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Notes

I am grateful to my former advisers at Yale University for responses to early versions of this essay and to my colleagues at the University of Iowa for more recent readings. I offer special thanks to Horace Porter, Naomi Greyser, Adam Bradley, Sara Blair, Karin Roffman, and Michael Hill.

1   Arnold Rampersad, *Ralph Ellison: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 83.
2   Ralph Ellison to Langston Hughes, 24 August 1936, Box 54, Folder "Correspondence," 1936–1964, Langston Hughes Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Ralph Ellison's letters and manuscript are quoted with the permission of his literary executor, John Callahan, and the Ellison Estate and Trust.
3   Although Alain Locke and James Porter praised Barthé's formal skill, many African Americans disagreed with white critics who applauded Barthé's classical celebration of the male nude. Black critics accused him of "perpetuating damaging stereotypes" and objectifying "black people for personal gain." See Margaret Vendryes, "Casting Feral Benga: A Biography of Richmond Barthé's Signature Work," *Anyone Can Fly Foundation*, www.anyonecanflyfoundation.org/library/Vendryes_on_Barthe_essay .html; and *Barthé: A Life in Sculpture* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2008), 101.
4   Lawrence Jackson thoroughly examines Ellison's early musical training in *Ralph Ellison: Emergence of Genius* (New York: Wiley, 2002), 54–82.
5   Ibid., 140.
6   Margaret Vendryes recounts that "Ellison's apprenticeship under Barthé was tumultuous and short-lived"; see "The Lives of Richmond Barthé" in *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*, ed. Delroy Constantine-Simms (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2001), 274–87. Ellison recalls, "I came up [to New York] during my junior year hoping to work and learn a little about sculpture. And although I did study a bit, . . . after a while I blundered into writing" (*The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John Callahan [New York: Modern Library, 1995], 72). Further references to Ellison's essays are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically as *CE*.

7   Richard Powell, *Black Art and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 51, 52.

8   Horace A. Porter provocatively examines Ellison's friendship with Bearden in *Jazz Country: Ralph Ellison in America* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2001). Kimberly Lamm also considers the connection between Ellison's and Bearden's work in "Visuality and Black Masculinity in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Romare Bearden's Photomontages," *Callaloo* 26 (July 2003): 813–35.

9   Porter, *Jazz Country*, 57.

10   Ralph Ellison to Richard Wright, 3 November 1941, Box 97, Folder 1314, Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Library. All material from these papers comes from this box and folder, hereafter cited as *RWP*.

11   Ellison often denied Wright's impact on his fiction, but the influence is unquestionable. Essays such as Michael Fabre's "From *Native Son* to *Invisible Man*: Some Notes on Ralph Ellison's Evolution in the 1950s" and Joseph Skerrett's "The Wright Interpretation: Ralph Ellison and the Anxiety of Influence" convincingly illustrate Wright's bearing on Ellison's artistry. For both essays, see Kimberly Benston, ed., *Speaking for You: The Vision of Ralph Ellison* (Washington, D.C.: Howard Univ. Press, 1987), 199–216, 217–30.

12   Ellison to Wright, 3 November 1941, *RWP*.

13   Ellison to Wright, 5 August 1945, *RWP*.

14   Jackson, *Emergence*, 308.

15   Henry Louis Gates Jr., "The Face and Voice of Blackness," in *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art, 1710–1940* (San Francisco, Calif.: Bedford Arts, 1990), xxx.

16   Jazz is the register Ellison depends upon most heavily, and he expounds on its integral place in his creative philosophy in essays such as "Living with Music" (*CE*, 227–36). For further critical discussion of jazz in Ellison's work, see Porter, *Jazz Country*; Berndt Ostendorf, "Ralph Waldo Ellison: Anthropology, Modernism, and Jazz," in *New Essays on "Invisible Man"* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), 95–119; Kevin Bell, "The Embrace of Entropy: Ralph Ellison and the Freedom Principle of Jazz Invisible," *boundary 2* 30 (July 2003): 21–45; and Timothy Spaulding, "Embracing the Chaos in Narrative Form: The Bebop Aesthetic and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*," *Callaloo* 27 (April 2004): 481–501.

17   Ellison to Wright, 8 August 1945, *RWP*.

18   For an overview of the *Invisible Man* manuscript, see Michael Hill and Lena Hill, *Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man": A Reference Guide* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2008), 39–53.

19   Ellison's attention to "packaging" extended beyond narrative to the material book itself. The cover of the first edition of *Invisible Man* recalls *Memento*, a painting Ellison discovered at an exhibition he visited in 1947 (artist unknown). See Box 180, "Art, Catalogs" Folder 3, Ralph Ellison

Papers, Library of Congress; further references to this collection will be cited as *REP*. In his introduction to *Invisible Man*, Ellison describes doing "free-lance photography (including book-jacket portraits of Francis Steegmuller and Mary McCarthy)." See Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1980), x; further references to *Invisible Man* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

20 Robert Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1991), 177.

21 Spencer Crew helpfully reviews the history of black museums in "African Americans, History and Museums: Preserving African American History in the Public Arena," in *Making Histories in Museums*, ed. Gaynor Kavanagh (London: Leicester Univ. Press, 1996), 80–91.

22 Deborah Willis charts the rise of black photography in the 1940s in *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present* (New York: Norton, 2000).

23 Box 144, "Chapel" Folder, *REP*.

24 This photographic history comes from Peter Palmquist's lecture, "The Material Culture of American Photography," Beinecke Master Class, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 5 May 2001.

25 Sheldon Annis, "Making Histories, Making Memories," *Making Histories in Museums*, ed. Gaynor Kavanagh (London: Leicester Univ. Press, 1996), 1–14.

26 For these formulations, I am indebted to Tony Bennett's discussion of museum culture in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995).

27 Henry Louis Gates Jr., "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black," *Representations* 24 (October 1988): 129.

28 John Stauffer details Douglass's belief in the redemptive power of photography for fighting slavery and racism. See *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism*, ed. Timothy McCarthy and John Stauffer (New York: New Press, 2006), 235–67.

29 Ellison takes direct aim at Washington's ideology through the protagonist's contemplation of the Founder's statue. His memory of the "bronze statue of the college Founder" with "his hands outstretched in the breathtaking gesture of lifting a veil" represents the only truly ekphrastic moment in the novel by evoking the Booker T. Washington Monument on Tuskegee's campus (36). It emphasizes Ellison's dependence on visual art to probe racial philosophies.

30 For further consideration of women in the novel, see Claudia Tate, "Notes on the Invisible Women in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" in Benston, *Speaking for You*, 163–72; Carolyn Sylvander, "Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Female Stereotypes," *Negro American Literature Forum* 9 (October 1975): 77–79; and Mary Rohrberger, "'Ball the Jack': Surreality, Sexuality, and the Role of Women in *Invisible Man*," in *Approaches to Teach-*

ing Ellison's "Invisible Man", ed. Susan Resneck Parr and Pancho Savery (New York: Modern Language Association, 1989), 124–32.

31   The most substantial relationships documented in the drafts occur between Invisible Man and a black woman, Cleo, and a white woman, Louise. See Box 142, "At Mary's" Folder and Box 143, "Brotherhood" Folder, *REP*.

32   Ralph Ellison to Albert Murray, 8 January 1952, in *Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray*, ed. Albert Murray and John F. Callahan (New York: Vintage, 2000), 25.

33   See Shelly Eversley, "Female Iconography in *Invisible Man*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Ellison* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 172–87.

34   This metaphorical framing evokes Ernest Hemingway's double framing of the bull and Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). The arena, as well as a group of dancing boys, frames the bull, and later, also frames Brett. The framing symbolizes the shared status of the bull and Brett, spectacles to be admired and feared. Ellison's respect for Hemingway, along with his blatant allusions to *The Sun Also Rises*, suggests his familiarity with Hemingway's modernist technique of relating ideas through double metaphorical frames.

35   Maurice O. Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men's Literature and Culture, 1775–1995* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2002), 30–31.

36   Invisible Man similarly stands on a "soiled canvas" to deliver his maiden Brotherhood speech in the arena (340). Earlier drafts reveal Ellison selecting this language over his initial description of the flooring as a "flag-draped platform" (Box 143, "Brotherhood, Arena Speech" Folder, *REP*).

37   Susan Stewart, "The Eidos in the Hand" (lecture, Andrew Carnduff Ritchie Lecture Series, Yale Art Gallery, New Haven, 15 Dec 2000).

38   See Robin Jaffee Frank, *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 10.

39   Stepto astutely comments on this picture but designates it a "cameo" (*From Behind the Veil*, 181). My designating it as a miniature acknowledges Ellison's attention to distinct forms of portraiture and their sociohistorical significance.

40   Box 144, "Campus" Folder 2, *REP*.

41   For these formulations I am indebted to Tamar Garb's discussion of Renoir in *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 147.

42   Box 146, "Red Robe" Folder, *REP*.

43   Ibid.

44   Rampersad notes Ellison's expert work in photography with a specific "emphasis on portraiture" (*A Biography*, 241). For a comprehensive,

richly nuanced discussion of Ellison and photography, see Sara Blair's superb chapter in *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007), 112–59.

45 Marc Conner's keen analysis of the text's investment in material objects draws a similar conclusion about the eviction scene and expounds upon the significance of memory and history. See "The Litany of Things: Sacrament and History in *Invisible Man*" in *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to "Invisible Man"* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2004), 171–92.

46 Ellison also appeals to the concept of collage to describe the multifaceted nature of U.S. existence. At Bearden's funeral, Ellison claimed, "[W]e are a *collage of a nation*, a nation that is ever shifting about and grousing as we seek to achieve the promised design of democracy" (*CE*, xvii).

47 Box 143, "Brotherhood" Folder 3, *REP*.

48 Box 144, "Hattie and Julius Franklin" Folder, *REP*.

49 In "Ambivalent Man: Ellison's Rejection of Communism," *African American Review* 34 (January 2000): 621–37, Jesse Wolfe examines Ellison's relationship to communism and its deployment in *Invisible Man*. Barbara Foley insightfully suggests that the manuscript reveals Ellison's complex attitude toward communism; see "From Communism to Brotherhood: The Drafts of *Invisible Man*," in *Left of the Color Line: Race, Radicalism, and Twentieth-Century Literature of the United States*, ed. Bill V. Mullen and James Smethurst (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003).

50 Lamm, "Visuality and Black Masculinity," 818.

51 Ibid., 825.

52 Box 142, "Brotherhood" Folder, *REP*.

53 The manuscript includes a long scene crafted around these remembered words. Following his browbeating by Bledsoe, the protagonist visits Woodridge, a brilliant young professor rumored to be homosexual. He finds Woodridge drunk in his apartment decorated with "prints of modern paintings which [the protagonist] could not understand" (Ellison pencils above the typescript to describe the paintings as "a maze of wonderful colors and meaningless forms.") A different version notes, "Prints of abstract paintings puzzled me from the walls." Woodridge points to "a chest on one end of which there stood a nude male torso and on the other an ugly primitive African statue," and he tells the protagonist, "Relax like the white boy there. You live like the other all the time. . . . Forced into extreme positions. Distorted in the interest of design." In keeping with the general philosophy of his revisions, Ellison excludes this museum episode, which features a character verbally challenging Invisible Man to reassess his projected image (Box 144, "Chapel" Folder 4; and Box 146, "Woodridge" Folder 16, *REP*). Roderick Ferguson provocatively considers the unpublished Woodridge scenes at length; see *Aberrations in*

Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2004), 54–81.

54   Box 143, "Brotherhood" Folder 3, *REP*.

55   Box 143, "Brotherhood" Folder 5, *REP*.

56   Leroy's journal entries offer highly intellectual, radical analyses of race relations. Jackson notes that the deletion of Leroy's writings removed the "international political consciousness" from the novel and left Ellison "more vulnerable" to criticism from the Left (*Emergence*, 427).

57   Box 142, "At Mary's" Folder, *REP*.

58   Elizabeth Yukins considers the relationship between Ellison's interest in cubism and his writing in "An 'Artful Juxtaposition on the Page': Memory, Perception, and Cubist Technique in Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth*," *PMLA* 119 (October 2004): 1247–63.

59   This major revision was also encouraged by a reader whose initials are "HF," likely Harry Ford of Knopf: "Careful reading leads me to feel quite strongly that Leroy's diary should be dropped entirely. Prolix, didactic and inimical to the narrative—a crutch for the narrator which never entirely works. . . . It seems to me that either Leroy has to be introduced as a *character* (if it is really necessary to project his highly sophisticated viewpoint) or eliminated entirely. I would prefer the latter." See Box 151, Folder 6, *REP*.

60   Box 151, Folder 6, *REP*.

61   Ellison to Wright, 21 January 1953, *RWP*.

62   See letter from Fanny Ellison to John Groth, 23 October 1979, Box 154, Folder 4, *REP*.

63   Box 153, Folder 4, *REP*; Box 154, Folder 7, *REP*.