Domestic Space and Social Ritual



Mary Cassatt, *The Tea*, about 1880.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Whole painting.

What freedom does this room offer, and what expectations might come with it?

Begin with one relationship: the red table and wall, the foreground service, or the raised cup. Explain an effect before naming a social meaning.

A formal choice can support a reading of constraint while leaving the women's wishes unknown.

1 POLLOCK: DIFFERENCE AND LACK

"Difference, however, does not of necessity involve restriction or lack. That would be to reinscribe the patriarchal construction of woman."

Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity" (1988), author-abridged reprint in *The Expanding Discourse*, p.261.

Pollock examines unequal social access and different positions of looking. She challenges treating women's art as a deficient version of men's. **Reinscribe** means repeat or reinforce; **patriarchal** refers to men's social authority.

Check: Does she deny restriction, or question an explanation based only on lack?
Test: What does Cassatt's compression achieve?

2 VEBLEN: LEISURE AND REPUTATION

"But the middle-class wife still carries on the business of vicarious leisure, for the good name of the household and its master."

Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), chapter 4, "Conspicuous Consumption."

Veblen argues that apparent leisure can display a household's standing and involve effort. **Vicarious** means on behalf of another. His model does not establish either woman's marital status, wishes or obligations.

Check: Whose reputation does this leisure serve?
Test: Could a comfortable social visit also carry an obligation?

ASK, LISTEN, FOLLOW UP

Locate: Which edge, overlap or repeated color makes the space shallow?
Explain: How does that choice affect our access to the women?
Test: Could the same detail support another reading? What remains unknown?

Ask your partner one question. Listen, then ask a follow-up using something in the answer. Swap roles. For example: "You said the table traps them. Does it restrict the women, or our approach as viewers?"

Return to your claim: support or revise it with **two visual details and one limit**. If you retain it, explain why. Carry forward: **How do familiar objects teach us how to behave?**