

The background of the cover is a painting of a cityscape, likely Paris, featuring a bridge with arches over a river. There are boats on the water and buildings in the background under a cloudy sky. The style is impressionistic with visible brushstrokes.

**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS  
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

**VOLUME TWO**

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand  
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

With contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen,  
Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House,  
Simon Kelly, Richard Kendall, Kathleen M. Morris, Leslie Hill Paisley,  
Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,  
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a fairly coarse-weave linen (12 threads/cm), which was wax-resin lined in 1977 to a linen of similar weight. During treatment, the original five-member pine stretcher was replaced with a redwood four-member ICA spring-corner design. There are wandering age cracks throughout the paint and ground layers. Traction cracks, scattered throughout, are especially noticeable in the blue pigment of the table cover and the upper left background. The alizarin red glaze color is fractured, as if it contains a resinous binder. During the 1977 cleaning, some solvent sensitivity was noted in the reds and greens, and small pockets of the earlier varnish remain in impasto recesses and on the green leaves. The surface has a matte sheen due to a very thin layer of synthetic varnish.

The ground is a two-layered structure, with an artist application over a thin gray commercially applied layer, which barely covers the canvas threads. The very white upper layer was applied with a palette knife. No underdrawing was detected, although the thick paint may hide a paint sketch. The paste-consistency strokes are vigorously applied in multiple passes, creating a very thick paint buildup, four to five layers deep in many areas. The use of both wet-into-wet and wet-over-dry suggests that more than one sitting was used to complete the image. Undiluted reds and greens are layered with white, with almost no true blending except the accidental swirling together of adjacent strokes.

1. Rivière 1921, p. 81: “Cela me repose la cervelle de peindre des fleurs. Je n’y apporte pas la même tension d’esprit que lorsque je suis en face d’un modèle. Quand je peins des fleurs, je pose de tons, j’essaye des valeurs hardiment, sans souci de perdre une toile.”

2. Larousse 1866–90, vol. 12, p. 1093: “Elle est par excellence une plante d’ornement pour les jardins; elle y produit un effet admirable par ses touffes d’un vert gai, par ses belles corolles blanches, roses ou d’un rouge cramoisi. Ses nombreuses et magnifiques variétés sont un des triomphes de l’horticulture.”

3. See Tübingen 1996 p. 171, no. 44.

4. W 625, 627.

## 275 | A Box at the Theater (At the Concert) 1880

Oil on canvas, 99.4 x 80.7 cm

Upper left: Renoir. 80.; center left: Renoir.

1955-594

*A Box at the Theater* is the last of Renoir’s sequence of ambitious canvases of theater boxes, a sequence that began with *La Loge* (The Courtauld Gallery, London), exhibited in the first Impressionist group show in 1874.<sup>1</sup> *A Box at the Theater* was bought by Paul Durand-Ruel from his fellow dealer and close associate Dubourg in November 1880; Dubourg had presumably bought it directly from Renoir. It was first exhibited in the seventh Impressionist group show in March 1882, and remained with the Durand-Ruel company until it was sold to Sterling Clark in 1928.

This seemingly simple story conceals the complexity of the picture’s origins. According to Durand-Ruel’s son Joseph, the canvas was initially a portrait of the daughters of Edmond Turquet, then Under-Secretary of State for Fine Arts, but Turquet apparently disliked the canvas and rejected it.<sup>2</sup> This account is complicated by the infrared and X-ray photographic evidence provided by the picture itself (fig. 275.1); in its original state, the canvas included a male figure in the upper right corner, seen in profile and leaning toward the figure on the left. This may well have been an image of Turquet himself. As can be seen from Lucien Sergent’s drawing of the Turquet family of about 1876 (fig. 275.2), showing Edmond accompanied by three female figures, Turquet indeed seems to have had two daughters, who would, by 1880, have been the same age as the girls in Renoir’s canvas.

On this account, it would have been after Turquet’s rejection of the canvas that Renoir reworked it and sold it as a genre painting. Something similar happened to Renoir’s first portrait of Madame Léon Clapisson of 1882 (private collection); in this case, after it was rejected by the sitter, Renoir reworked it as a genre painting, making the face less specific in its features, and executed a second, more sober and conventional portrait.<sup>3</sup> In the present instance, the changes were more dramatic. He removed the male figure seen in the X-ray and completely reworked the background. The X-ray shows softly and freely brushed forms across the top left corner of the picture, above and to the left of the head of the left figure, in the area that now shows a pilaster and a hanging curtain; based on this evidence, it is very possible that the painting repre-





Fig. 275.1. X-radiograph of *A Box at the Theater*

sented a domestic interior in its original state, not a theater. Moreover, the X-ray shows extensive dried brushwork beneath the right figure that ignores her position and seems to relate to the deleted figure of the man; it seems possible that this female figure was wholly added, together with the bouquet she holds, and that the canvas originally showed only a man and a woman. Beyond this, Renoir presumably reworked the left figure to ensure that she was no longer recognizable; she was originally wearing full evening dress, as now, but reworking around her head suggests that her hair was very different or that she was wearing some sort of headdress.

The male figure seen in the X-ray appears to be clean-shaven or only lightly bearded, whereas surviving images of Turquet show him with a full beard. Moreover, as Colin Bailey has pointed out, there is no evidence that Turquet had personal contact with Renoir in these years; he seems not to have been a member of the Charpentier circle, source of many of Renoir's portrait commissions.<sup>4</sup> In the light of present evidence, the accuracy of Joseph Durand-Ruel's story about the painting must remain in doubt.

A further complexity arises from the various titles by which the present picture has been known. Durand-Ruel purchased it in 1880 as *Une Loge au théâtre*; when it appeared at the 1882 group show, however, it was titled *Une Loge à l'Opéra*. At subsequent exhibitions, it has appeared as *Au théâtre*, or simply as *La Loge*, giving rise on occasion to confusion with the Courtauld canvas. The picture itself does not clarify this issue; the women are holding a musical score, but the setting is clearly not the Paris Opéra, since the pilaster in the background bears no relationship to the

lavish neo-Baroque décor of the Opéra Garnier. Hence its original title is preferred here.

As the picture now stands, there is a clear differentiation between the two figures, in terms of dress and body language. The older figure on the left wears a full evening gown, and looks confidently out into the viewer's space, holding a music score in her gloved right hand; the younger girl on the right is seen in profile, wearing a simpler white dress, looking downward as if in shyness or modesty, and evidently not engaging with the wider space of the theater interior. The sense of her enclosure, in contrast to her companion's expansiveness, is emphasized by the large bouquet of flowers on her lap and also by the somewhat uncomfortable proximity of her profile to her companion's elbow. There is no communication between the two figures, who seem to be occupying different worlds.

Despite Turquet's reported rejection of the canvas, it bears the stamp of its origins, in its relatively conventional tonality and, in parts, careful finish. The primary effect of the picture is that it is composed of blacks, whites, and mellow reds. Although soft blues appear in the predominantly white zones in the foreground,



Fig. 275.2. Lucien-Pierre Sergent (French, 1849–1904), *The Family of Edmond Turquet*, c. 1876. Graphite on paper, 22.8 x 20.7 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris (RF40443-recto)



the painting, taken as a whole, emphatically rejects the atmospheric blue-dominated palette that had characterized Renoir's work over the previous five years. This cannot simply be attributed to the fact that the canvas represents an indoor setting seen in artificial light, since *At the Theatre* of c. 1876 (The National Gallery, London) has a strongly blue tonality.

The relatively subdued and conventional tonality of *A Box at the Theater* is reminiscent of Renoir's *Portrait of Madame Georges Charpentier and Her Children* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), the fashionable group portrait that had won him success at the Salon in 1879, and it is possible that initially he hoped that the present canvas could prove an effective follow-up at the Salon. Instead, and perhaps because Turquet rejected the picture, the interior scene that he sent to the Salon in 1880 was *Sleeping Girl* (cat. 276).

The strong tonal contrasts also give *A Box at the Theater* a clear articulation that the earlier *At the Theatre* lacks. The oppositions between the dark hues of the woman's dress and the girl's hair and the light zones are very emphatic, although soft-colored nuances appear in the dress and especially in the long swathe of hair that frames the right side of the composition, which is enlivened by soft blues and purples. Subtle color modulations are introduced into the flesh painting, but far less assertively than in his recent work. The comparative finesse of the treatment of the faces and the woman's dress can be contrasted with the broadly brushed area across the foreground. Here, the boundaries between the music score, the girl's dress, and the wrapping of the bouquet are quite unclear.

Since, unlike the Courtauld *La Loge*, the canvas does not include the front edge of the box, we must assume that our own position is inside the box in the company of the two women. Although the image does not establish a legible sense of space within the box in which we can imagine the two figures and ourselves to be seated, our apparent position within the box serves to defuse the issues about viewing and being viewed that *La Loge* had raised; we receive the gaze of the woman in black as part of her own social group.

Opinions were markedly divided when the canvas was exhibited in 1882. Significantly, none of them raised the questions of social class and morality that had preoccupied the reviewers of *La Loge* in 1874;<sup>5</sup> rather, their focus was primarily on questions of technique. Armand Sallanches reiterated familiar criticisms in describing as "crudely drawn" this scene "where two elegant women converse about everything

except what is taking place on the stage."<sup>6</sup> By contrast, Émile Hennequin commented, "He is the only [impressionist] who seems to me to paint accurately the colors he sees. His *Box at the Opera* contains a young girl in black whose eyes and smile are deliciously lively." He did, though, recommend Renoir to concentrate on figure painting rather than landscape.<sup>7</sup> Paul Leroi made this contrast explicit: "The good people who, on seeing *A Box at the Opera*, think that he is beginning to see sense, will fall into complete despair [on seeing his views of Venice]."<sup>8</sup> The same contrast, between the incoherence of the Venice views (which included *Grand Canal, Venice* [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]) and the present canvas, was developed at some length by Louis Leroy: "Strangely, the same Renoir exhibits a *Box at the Opera* which would not too greatly displease the philistines. The sweet little faces of the two young girls, their attire, and the color of the ensemble have bourgeois qualities that Impressionism execrates. He should not continue along this path. He would soon quietly start showing signs of common sense, which would be devastating for the official critics of the sect."<sup>9</sup> JH

**PROVENANCE** [Dubourg, Paris, sold to Durand-Ruel, 30 Nov. 1880, as *Une loge au théâtre*];<sup>10</sup> [Durand-Ruel, Paris, from 1880]; [Durand-Ruel, New York, until 1928, consigned to Holston]; [William H. Holston Galleries, New York, sold to Clark, 28 May 1928]; Robert Sterling Clark (1928–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Paris 1882, no. 139, as *Une loge à l'Opéra*; possibly Paris 1883a, no. 45, as *La Loge*, owned by Durand-Ruel; Possibly Boston 1883, French section, no. 161, as *A Box at the Theater*; possibly New York 1886, no. 188, as *A Box at the Opera*; possibly Paris 1892b, no. 91, as *La Loge*, lent by [Joseph]. D[urand-Ruel?].; Paris 1900b, no. 59, as *Au Théâtre*; Paris 1904b, Salle Renoir, no. 13, as *La loge*; probably Berlin 1904–5, no. 60; London 1905a, no. 224, as *At the Theatre—In the Box*, lent by Durand-Ruel; London 1905b, p. 34, ill., as *At the Theatre—In the Box*; Munich 1912, no. 6, as *Dans la loge*; Berlin 1912, no. 6; Paris 1912a, no. 179, as *Dans la Loge*; Paris 1925b, no. 67, ill., as *Au Théâtre*, lent by Durand-Ruel; New York 1928a, no. 17, as *Le Concert*, lent anonymously; Paris 1933a, no. 53, pl. xxxiv, as *Au Concert (Dans la loge)*; Williamstown 1956b, no. 162, pl. 27; New York 1967, no. 32; Chicago 1973, no. 30, ill.; London–Paris–Boston 1985–86, pp. 90, 218–19, no. 51, ill., as *A Box at the Opera (known as Dans la loge)* (French ed., pp. 172–73, no. 50, ill.) (exhibited in Boston only); Boston–New York 1991, pp. 109, 112–13, 185, no. 104, ill., as *A Box at the Opera*; South Hadley–Williamstown–New York 1994, pp. 72–75, no. 10, ill. (exhibited in Williamstown only); Williamstown 1996–97, pp. 11–12, 14,

23, 30–32, ill.; Atlanta 2002, no cat.; Montgomery and others 2005–7, no cat.; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, pp. 252–53, fig. 187; London 2008, pp. 36–38, 84–85, no. 11, ill.; Madrid 2010–11, pp. 26, 77–80, no. 14, ill.

**REFERENCES** Chesneau 1882; Charry 1882, p. 3; Katow 1882, p. 2; Flor 1882, p. 2; Hennequin 1882, p. 155; Lecomte 1892, ill. (print after the painting); Leroi 1882, p. 98; Leroy 1882, p. 2; Sallanches 1882, p. 1; Muther 1893–94, p. 636, ill. (print after the painting); Muther 1895–96, vol. 2, p. 749, ill. (print after the painting) (rev. ed., vol. 3, p. 130, ill.); *L'illustration* 1904, p. 265; Roger-Marx 1904, ill. opp. p. 460, as *La Loge*; Lecomte 1907, p. 250, ill.; Pica 1908, p. 87, ill.; Alexandre 1912a, p. v, no. 3, ill. (installation view of Paris 1912a), as *Dans la loge*; Borgmeyer 1913, pp. 389, 397, ill., as *Dans la loge*; Vollard 1918, vol. 1, p. 84, no. 333, ill.; Vollard 1920, not listed in French ed. (English ed., p. 240); Geffroy 1920, p. 160, ill., as *Dans la loge*; Alexandre 1920, p. 7, ill., as *Dans la loge*; Rivière 1921, p. 69, ill., as *Dans la loge*; Fosca 1923, pl. 23 (English ed., pl. 16, as *Dans la loge [Inside the Box]*); Coquiote 1925, p. 226; George 1925, pp. 272, 275, ill. as *Au Théâtre*; *Art News* 1928, pp. 1–2, ill.; *New York Herald Tribune* 1928, p. 10, ill.; Cortisoz 1928, pp. 20, 22, ill.; Besson 1929, pl. 10, as *Dans la loge*; Meier-Graefe 1929, p. 127, no. 126, ill.; Guenne 1933, p. 278, ill.; Barnes and de Mazia 1935, p. 451, no. 100; Roger-Marx 1937, p. 73, ill.; Cortisoz n.d., p. 9, ill.; Terrasse 1941, pl. 16; Florisoone 1942, pl. 86; Drucker 1944, pp. 185, 203, pl. 64; Görlich 1945, pl. 9; Huth 1946, pp. 229n6, 239n22; Zahar 1948, pl. 14; Comstock 1957, pp. 65–66, ill.; *Emporium* 1959, p. 81, ill.; Daulte 1960b, pp. 27, 31, ill.; Hermann 1961, p. 99, pl. 72; Ramsey 1962, pp. 764, 802, pl. 284; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 104, ill.; Gimpel 1963, p. 181 (English ed., p. 157); Wilenski 1963, p. 338; Ashbery 1967, p. 45, ill.; Polley 1967, p. 30, ill. (in reverse); Tominaga 1969, p. 122, pl. 30; Hamilton 1970, p. 98, pl. 14; Daulte 1971, no. 329, ill., as *Au Concert ou Dans la loge*; Fezzi 1972, pp. 106–7, no. 401, ill., and pl. 46 (French ed., pp. 104–5, no. 383, ill., and pl. 46); Faison 1973, p. 574, fig. 4; Pach 1973, p. 52, ill. under no. 22; Rewald 1974, p. 16, ill. (installation view of London 1905); Spaeth 1975, p. 27; Callen 1978, p. 71, fig. 51; Waller 1978, pp. 56–57, fig. 4; White 1984, pp. 95, 99, 133, 163, ill.; Brooke 1985–86, p. 143, ill.; Washington–San Francisco 1986, pp. 377, 379, 394–95, ill.; Keller 1987, p. 165, pl. 64; Wadley 1987, p. 281, ill.; Herbert 1988, p. 100, fig. 100; Lucie-Smith 1989, p. 2, ill.; Monneret 1989, p. 153, no. 9, ill.; Koch-Hillebrecht 1992, p. 57; Berson 1996, vol. 1, pp. 377, 384–85, 388, 393, 399, 401–2, 412, vol. 2, pp. 210, 229, no. vii–139, ill., as *Une loge à l'Opéra*; Jeromack 1996, pp. 82, 84; Kern et al. 1996, pp. 96–97, ill.; Wilkin 1996, p. 49; Banu 1997, pp. 89–90, 157, ill.; Ivinski 1997, pp. 532–33, ill.; Ottawa–Chicago–Fort Worth 1997–98, pp. 18, 186, 309n12; Garb 1998, pp. 155–56, fig. 105; Rist 1999, p. 79, ill.; Néret 2001, p. 144, ill.; Treviso 2002–3, p. 140, ill.; Allen 2004, p. 169, ill.; House 2004, p. 195, pl. 170, as *A Box at the Opera*; Cahill 2005, p. 62, ill.; Dauberville and Dauberville 2007–10, vol. 1, pp. 295–96,

no. 252, ill.; Bailey 2008, pp. 342–43; Distel 2009, pp. 186, fig. 173, as *Une loge à l'Opéra*.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a very fine weave canvas (28 threads/cm), glue-lined to a coarser fabric (16 x 19 threads/cm). The replaced seven-member stretcher and lining probably date to the 1938 treatment of Henri Helfer. Small blister-shaped distortions from the lining process can be seen in the dark red curtain above the right figure's head and in the center. A few traction cracks can be seen in the red curtain under the proper right arm of the left figure and in the black hair of the right figure, as well as in the pentimento of the painted-out man in the upper right quadrant. Scattered age cracks are visible in the white passages, and a few old losses are still evident in the lower left corner. The highest, more isolated impastos are slightly flattened at their top surfaces. In 1980, the painting was cleaned of yellow varnish and overpaint. In ultraviolet light, patches of thinned older varnish remain visible on the lower signature, the black dress, the red curtain, and the dark hair of the right figure. The surface has a soft luster with several slightly shinier areas where old resin remains, and there are small matte areas in the black dress. New inpainting partially re-disguises the pentimento of the man, and can be seen in a few spots in the hair of the right figure and along a long crack through the chest of the left figure.

The visible ground is a grayish white color, and the artist may have applied an upper ground over a commercial layer. No underdrawing was found, although there may be a blue paint sketch for the figures. Infrared reflectography reveals the fully painted figure of a man in evening dress in the upper right, which was painted out by the artist. The X-radiograph also shows numerous changes to all the figures. This reworking might also explain the two signatures. The paint is applied in a variety of styles, from smooth feathered scumbles over the paste consistency flesh tones, to bold, more pronounced brushwork on the costumes, and especially the roses. The orange paint at the left, next to the red seat, was once blue. The long dark hair of the younger girl and the black coat and hair of the man also contain much blue pigment. In some areas of the man this blue is oozing up through cracks, as if it had been painted over before the paint had really set. Although much of the surface was painted wet-into-wet, some details were applied after lower paint had set. The earlier signature located in the upper left, with the date 1880, was painted in blue paint, which was partially obscured when the background was altered and the column reworked. The solvent sensitivity of the lower signature may suggest that it was not applied by the artist.

1. On *La Loge* and the position of this sequence in Renoir's career, see London 2008.
2. Gimpel 1963, p. 181, recording a conversation with Paul Durand-Ruel in 1920; according to François Daulte, the two figures represent Turquet's wife and daughter, rather

than, as Durand-Ruel stated, his two daughters (Daulte 1971, no. 329). It should be noted that Turquet's wife, Octavie, died on 23 May 1881, a fact that may have had an effect on Renoir's picture, though it was in Durand-Ruel's hands by that time. See Elsen 2003, pp. 60–63, for more on Turquet and his wife.

3. See Duret 1924, pp. 70–71; London–Paris–Boston 1985–86, p. 238.
4. Bailey 2008, p. 342.
5. On these reviews, see London 2008, p. 31.
6. Sallanches 1882, p. 1; translation from London 2008, p. 37.
7. Hennequin 1882, p. 155; translation from London 2008, p. 37.
8. Leroi 1882, p. 98; translation from London 2008, p. 37.
9. Leroy 1882, p. 2; translation from London 2008, p. 38.
10. Durand-Ruel Archives, Paris, "Journal 1880," 30 Nov. 1880. See also London–Paris–Boston 1985–86, p. 219, and Ottawa–Chicago–Fort Worth 1997–98, p. 49n164.

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**276 | Sleeping Girl** 1880

Oil on canvas, 120.3 x 92 cm  
 Lower right: Renoir. 80.  
 1955.598

*Sleeping Girl* was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1880 with the title *Jeune fille endormie*, together with the still larger canvas *Mussel Fishers at Berneval* (The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia). Renoir had returned to the Salon in 1878, and had won considerable attention and success there in 1879 with *Portrait of Madame Georges Charpentier and Her Children* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). His two exhibits in 1880, however, attracted little attention. Émile Zola in his review of the exhibition praised Renoir's decision to exhibit once again at the Salon, but noted that his paintings were hung in very unfavorable positions: "His two canvases . . . have been hung in the circular gallery that runs around the garden, and the harsh daylight, the reflected sunlight, do great harm to the pictures, still more so because the painter's palette already deliberately fuses all the colors of the prism into a range of hues that is sometimes very delicate."<sup>1</sup> Zola's true praise, though, was reserved for artists such as Jules Bastien-Lepage rather than Renoir and Monet, who had, he felt, failed to live up to their promise. In the only other traced review that discussed Renoir's canvases, Maurice du Seigneur

described them as "the last word in grotesque" and "so bad that to be silent about them would have seemed like cowardice."<sup>2</sup>

Zola only agreed to review the show at the request of Paul Cézanne, who forwarded to him a letter that Renoir and Monet had written to the Minister of Fine Arts, protesting the hanging conditions at the Salon.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Renoir drew up a set of recommendations for a total reform of the Salon, which were published during the exhibition in an article by their friend Eugène Murer. The key point of Renoir's proposals was that Salon submissions should be subdivided according to their style and subject matter, and that each group should be judged by a separate jury sympathetic to that type of painting.<sup>4</sup>

*Sleeping Girl* was seen to better advantage two years later, in 1882, in the seventh Impressionist group exhibition, thanks to the dealer Durand-Ruel; Renoir's work was included in this show against his wishes,<sup>5</sup> and all the Renoirs on view seem to have come from Durand-Ruel's stock.<sup>6</sup> Even here, though, the press took little notice of it; beyond some critics' general praise for Renoir's work, the only specific verbal response to this canvas was in a review by Henry Robert, who described it as "a very beautiful study of flesh."<sup>7</sup>

Renoir's friend Georges Rivière recorded an account of the genesis of the canvas. The model was Angèle, a young girl from Montmartre noted for her irregular lifestyle and her many lovers. She fascinated Renoir with her colorful slang and implausible storytelling; often she arrived to model after an exhausting night, and Renoir's painting, we are told, depicts one of these occasions.<sup>8</sup>

This story, however, obscures the fact that the painting treats a well-established theme in genre painting: the female model caught at a moment when she is no longer posing. We may see the model before she begins to pose or as she relaxes between poses, often naked or partly naked, as in Édouard Dantan's *A Corner of the Studio* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), shown at the same Salon as Renoir's canvas, or at a moment when she has ceased to pose, whether through becoming distracted or, as here, falling asleep. In all these scenarios, by ceasing to pose, the model has moved from the artistic to the human sphere, and the position of the artist and viewer has shifted from the aesthetic to the voyeuristic. This is accentuated in Renoir's canvas by the fact that the implied original pose (of which no representation exists) would have depicted her shift correctly adjusted, rather than