THE AESTHETICS OF URBAN PRECARITY

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ABSTRACT

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Art historian Hal Foster points out that "Precarity has come to figure in sociological discourse, where it is used to describe the situation of a vast number of laborers in neo-liberal capitalism whose employment… is anything but guaranteed. This 'precariat' is seen as a product of the post-Fordist economy," historically rooting precarity in the emergence of late-stage capitalism's ever more unstable labor economy and the concomitant problems of poverty, displacement, and contingency. Yet Foster also admits, that despite our present sense of "emergency," "precarity might be more the rule" and stability the exception, acknowledging that Modernist art too was marked by an overriding sense of chaos. In doing so, he casts precarity not as a novel condition but as a continuing phenomenon whose traumatic consequences undeniably mark and shape twentieth-century literature and art. Following Foster's implications, this dissertation traces the emergence of precarity as an aesthetic sensibility that emerges with the earliest moments of consumer culture's entrenchment with urban life and sociability. Responding to capitalism's increasing ability to ratify the terms of personhood through regimes of bodily control, spatial regimentation, and visual policing, the artists examined in this project turn to precarity as an aesthetic rubric that resists these processes of reification. Pursuing methodologies of contingency, temporariness, and obsolescence, their projects—spanning from American Dada to post-war assemblage—thematically represent and formally recreate the instabilities of those who occupy subject positions made vulnerable by capitalism. Ultimately, I argue that a fuller aesthetic history of precarity enriches our understanding of modernism by seeking to understand

formal innovation as an imperfect and compensatory struggle for representation against the overwhelming processes of deindividuation multiply reinforced by capitalism's entrenchment into American society. This aesthetic history too provides a series of models of resistance capable of enlivening our current conversations regarding art's ability to counterbalance the intersecting frameworks of dehumanization that characterize the present moment.

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A study in four portraits. 1921: Fully engrossed in his phase of Dada experimentation, Man Ray began work on a collaborative experimental film with Marcel Duchamp, entitled "The Baroness Shaves her Pubic Hair." The descriptive title was, perhaps, a bit misleading since the film did not actually feature the "Baroness" Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven shaving herself, but rather as the object of a barber's careful attention. According to Man Ray's own recollections in his autobiography, Self Portrait, "I shot a sequence of myself as a barber shaving the pubic hairs of a nude model, a sequence which was also ruined in the process of developing and never saw the light" (263). This latter detail explains why the only remainder of the film exists in the form of a still attached to a letter Man Ray sent to his friend and colleague, Tristan Tzara. Preceding the body of the letter, the still, a portrait of the Baroness, newly shaved and splay-legged, forms the letter "A" of "Amerique" in a poem that reads:

"Merdelamerdelamermerdelamermerdelamermerdelamer … de l'a A merique!"

("Performance Poem 2"). Man Ray's letter subsequently laments to Tzara: "Dada cannot live in New York. All New York is Dada and will not tolerate a rival" ("Performance Poem 2"). The identity of the model and whatever role she might've played in the project proved as forgettable and disposable as the damaged film. Instead, the only hint of her work was co-opted, cut, and pasted into a letter that objectified Loringhoven, both by transforming her body into typography while also taking clear pleasure in the grotesqueness of her flesh as a manifestation of the "shit of America."

1932: Nella Larsen stands before Carl Van Vechten's camera (Van Vechten Portrait of Nella Larsen). The image features Larsen's face in profile set against a post-impressionist style

painting of a home interior; her face casts a shadow against the painting's depiction of an elaborately patterned armchair. Deeper in the painting's background, leaves of snake plant are visible; a basket of carefully arranged fruit decorates the counter beyond. Behind the painting, along the right-hand side of the photograph, traces of the detailed geometric wallpaper remind us of the visual layering at play: Larsen stands against a painting, hung carefully on the wall of an interior space. Without this subtle reminder, we might easily forget that Larsen herself is not a part of the painting. According to Larsen biographer, George Hutchinson, Larsen first became friends with Van Vechten in 1925, introduced to him via mutual friends and acquaintances in Harlem's literary and artistic circles (In Search of Nella Larsen 192). Despite Larsen's apparently warm feelings towards Van Vechten—she dedicated in novel Quicksand to him in homage to their friendship—Hutchinson acknowledges that the racial politics of a friendship between an ambitious, biracial woman writer of the Harlem Renaissance and a white voyeur of African American culture proved challenging for Larsen's reputation and standing within the black community: "Larsen ultimately suffered for her relationship with him because it was seen as improper or promiscuous for a black woman to be seen with a white man" (In Search of Nella Larsen 192). Indeed, the photograph seems to whisper hints of Van Vechten's aesthetic mercenarism. Is the painting a warm and flattering photo of a friend or does it subtly undermine the humanity of its subject by insisting on her kinship with an object of décor?

1967: A renegade, retrospective portrait of poet Gwendolyn Brooks—a small portion of a much larger mural—appears on the side of an abandoned building located in a rundown area of Chicago, "targeted for urban renewal" (Chicago's Wall of Respect inspired neighborhood murals across U.S."). A project initiated by the Black Arts group OBAC, the "Wall of Respect" paid homage to African American history through depictions of its "heroes," black people recognized,

according to OBAC, for "honestly reflect[ing] the beauty of black life and genius in his or her style," "not forget[ing] his black brothers and sisters who are less fortunate," and "do[ing] what he does in such an outstanding manner that he or she cannot be imitated or replaced" (OBAC 166). Each panel included the faces of figures associated with different fields: jazz, rhythm, and blues, literature, sports, theater, statesmanship, and religion. Alongside W.E.B. DuBois, Ronald Fair, Leroi Jones, John O. Killens, and Lerone Bennett, Gwendolyn Brooks is honored for the "sensitivity and celebration of black lifestyles" characteristic of her depictions of Bronzeville in the years surrounding the Second World War (OBAC 167). Her somber, disembodied face hovered against a black background rendered in quick, uneven brush strokes. Below, the black brushstrokes give way to a white background featuring an excerpt from LeRoi Jones's (later known as Amiri Baraka) poem/manifesto for the Black Arts Movement, "SOS": "Calling all black people/ Calling all black people, man woman child/ Wherever you are, calling you, urgent, come in/ Black People, come in, wherever you are, urgent, calling you, calling all black people/ calling all black people, come in, black people, come on in" retrospectively claiming Brooks's work as a progenitor of the movement (Baraka "SOS"). Metonymic of art's fraught relationship to African American representation, the subsequent fate of the mural—destroyed in a suspicious fire in 1971—underscores the necessity of seeking and establishing narratives of black heritage and success outside the spaces and purview of institutional approval.

1933: After encountering Mina Loy at the Julian Levy Gallery in 1932, Joseph Cornell began a close friendship with modernism's aging darling, leading him to begin work commemorating her image in one of his infamous boxes (Cornell, Box with Man Ray Photograph of Mina Loy). According to Carolyn Burke, sometime after 1933 Joseph Cornell "made a box for Mina as Julian [Levy] first knew her, in Paris: using one of Man Ray's

photographs, which shows her gazing enigmatically at the camera while holding a gloved hand to her chin, Cornell had recessed the image beneath a layer of glass shards" (407). At the time of the box's construction, the Man Ray photo was at least a decade old (likely taken in the 1920s) showcasing the fashionable socialite who'd charmed avant-garde salons, championed the image of the so-called New Woman, and inspired the brushes and pens of modernism's masterminds rather than the aged recluse Loy was slowly becoming in her advanced years. Though the box memorializes Loy's past image, commemorated by one of the twentieth century's most important photographers, the broken glass also gestures to a sense of decay that challengers the viewer's ability to easily view or visually consume Loy's glamorous image. Despite the fond relationship between the two, Cornell's box packages and preserves Loy as he wishes to remember her—registering her degradation in ways that nostalgically mourn the woman that once was while neatly packaging her into box, foreclosing the necessity of confronting her (at the time of box's construction) extant but aged flesh.

Together, these portraits provide a history in twentieth-century visual vocabularies including American Dada, the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts movement, and finally the beginnings of postwar assemblage. They also gesture to the centrality of each pictured artist to the cultivation of these specific visual vocabularies as intellectual contributors whose work was often eclipsed by the narratives ascribed to them by other artists. Thus, these portraits gesture to the myriad of ways each artist experienced not only a sense of social precarity, but also experienced the vulnerability of her aesthetic legacy. These biographical details that provide a provocative prologue to the thematic and, by extension, methodological concerns with instability that animate each woman's work. The purpose of this project, then, is to begin tracing precarity's emergence over the course of the twentieth-century, with particular attention to the way artists

adapt this sensibility as a means of registering concern for the dehumanizing consequences of wide scale economic and social change; as a strategy for representing those subject positions made multiply unstable by the entrenchment of urban capitalism and its variety of accompanying institutional supports, including, sometimes, the institution of art itself; and as the basis for aesthetic methodologies based on contingency, change, temporariness, and obsolesce. In keeping with this aim, each of the artists examined here draw from a sense of their own experiences of lived experiences of precarity at the intersection of socioeconomic status, gender, and race. Poor, racialized amidst the nativist ethos of pre-WWI America, German immigrant Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven adapted Dadaist methodologies to her viscerally confrontational performances and elusive poetic representations of the sensorium to counter the entwined and entrenched bourgeois and capitalist standards for comportment; Nella Larsen's Quicksand erodes fantasies that equate seeing with knowing, using visual aesthetics as a model for her slippery descriptions of skin, fashion and decorum that emphasize the mercurial, mutable, and fundamentally unreliable nature of surfaces and their power to allow individuals to subvert unwanted systems of classification and positions of fixity; Gwendolyn Brooks' coming of age stories Annie Allen and Maud Martha employ modernist-inspired methodologies of juxtaposition to expose the racially exclusionary politics of mid-century aesthetic and design discourse, before turning to more vernacular forms to juxtaposition, suggesting that black humanity must be ratified on its own terms; finally, Mina Loy's early poetic attempts to materially recreate socially-mandated forms of silence for outsiders give way to the more ambitious projects of her late-career Bowery assemblages that depict bum's flesh in trash collected from neighborhood rubbish bins, implicitly critiquing social elision of inanimate and human forms of detritus. Yet the aesthetic project of each is equally limned by its limited capacity for lasting political activism or intervention. The Baroness's

embrace of bodily impermanence implicitly rendered her art vulnerable to temporality and to her own mortality. Even while Larsen's novel articulated the conceptual importance of elusive surfaces, her focus on individualism implicitly rejected forms of collective political action; even her protagonist, in the end, remains unable to escape the oppressive fixity of her brown skin and femininity. Brooks offers montages of black life as validating antidotes to collages of consumerism, but also recognizes the important scalar differences between small, fleeting, and individual acts of willfully seeing beauty in black communities and the dominant discourses and practices of art that continue to enforce the exclusion of African Americans. Loy's assemblage projects too, in their planned obsolescence, exist today mostly as photographs evacuated of the same shock produced by the materiality of trash made flesh.

Precarity in Retrospect

To begin sketching out an "aesthetics of urban precarity" it is first necessary to unpack the historical meaning of the term "precarity" (as well as its grammatical cognates: precariousness and, more recently, precariat) and its changing significance, particularly over the course of the twentieth century. What does and has it meant to be precarious, to live precariously, and how have these conditions shaped political and creative activity? How can precarity provide a framework for interpreting and linking the thematic and methodological interventions of artists past and present? And, with respect to the artists explored at the opening of this introduction, what insights can be gained by using precarity as a lens for reading modernism?

Early uses of the term "precarity" were primarily legal and described the condition of tenants, as Lauren Berlant outlines in Cruel Optimism: "Precarity is a condition of dependency… precarious describes the situation wherein your tenancy on your land is in someone else's hands"

(192). Berlant's history lesson thus underscores that precarity is a term that charts imbalanced economic relationships, acknowledging the consequences and conditions of risk that dog individuals without the means of securing the broad range of social privileges property ownership accords. Moreover, in turning to the history of the term, we become aware of precarity, paradoxically, as a historically stable state; its contemporary manifestations are not entirely new, but rather represent the transformation and intensification of earlier historical processes wherein uneven economic opportunity corresponds to the lived, physical, everyday experience of risk.

More recently, theorizations of precarity have become more urgent as scholars and social theorists have increasingly grasped for terms to describe the unique, widespread, and multiplying forms of instability that have emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century. Art historian Hal Foster neatly summarizes one, common understanding of precarity as pertaining to unstable labor conditions: "Precarity has come to figure in sociological discourse, where it is used to describe the situation of a vast number of laborers in neoliberal capitalism whose employment (let alone healthcare, insurance, and pension) is anything but guaranteed. This "precariat" is seen as a product of the post-Fordist economy" (Foster 28). Yet Foster also admits that "historically, precarity might be more the rule, and the Fordist promise of relative job security and union protection the exception" (28). Stripped of the surety of wages or benefits, laborers experience work as contingent and unpredictable; such a condition is inevitably accompanied by a financial vulnerability that opens up a series of other risks that stem from workers' inability to establish a sense of social worth either through their identification with their forms of employment or through practices of spending.

Indeed, the expansion and complexification of neoliberal capitalism has broadened the applicability of "precarity" to include the many ways that individuals are dispossessed by uneven economic opportunity and development. David Harvey's description of the processes that undergird neoliberal capitalism are suggestive of a range of possible contemporary applications for "precarity" that extend beyond the plight of individual workers. Neoliberal capitalism, Harvey contends, is characterized by "dispossession" wherein wealth is redistributed from the masses to the upper-class; he identifies four main aspects of this: first, privatization that involves transferring assets from the public to private companies; second, financialization where deregulation allows corporations to be financially successful through credit and stock manipulation; third, management and manipulation of crisis that allows the U.S. to force other countries into bankruptcy before "bailing" those countries out through structural reorganizations which always benefit the US; and finally, state redistributions where the privatization of services leads to the dispossession of the poor (44-50). Harvey's descriptions here thus conjure a much wider understanding of the forms of dependency than the tenant/landlord relationship outlined by Berlant. In the years since WWII, corporations have been able to determine the rules that govern their own operation, and they've used this latitude to reinforce their necessity to the everyday lives of average American citizens; the masses have become dependent not only on the services largely or sometimes exclusively provided by corporations but also on the broader and indispensable institutional structures upheld by corporate health. Privatization proves particularly destabilizing for the poor whose lives are made doubly unsure by the removal and/or reorganization of services on which they rely. Finally, Harvey's remarks also underscore the extent to which this economic instability has become a defining feature of twentieth-century geopolitical relations wherein restructuring of other nations' finances—and here we might also

add the strategic withdrawal of investment, aid, as well as the threat of economic sanctions—serves to benefit and maintain the hegemony of the U.S. (and other powerful, Western nations). We have only to turn on the television to see the lived consequences and very human cost of these large and seemingly abstract transactions as refugees stream to the U.S. southern border to escape conditions of crippling poverty in Central America produced, in part, by deep cuts in U.S. aid to the region.

Judith Butler's consideration of precarity, formulated in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, implicitly take up the last of Harvey's criterion of neoliberal dispossession, exploring not just the consequences of dependency produced by American geopolitics abroad but also by the circumscription of free speech, domestically. In her book Precarious Life, Butler argues that the right (or lack thereof) to speak constitutes a fundamental mechanism through which humanity is acknowledged or denied; as such, censorship plays a critical role in eroding the personhood of society's marginalized and invisible agents, its illegal immigrants or prisoners, who are denied the right to participate in the domain of public speech and cannot therefore "appear as viable actors" (Precarious Life xvii). Butler's subsequent book, Frames of War, builds on the ideas of Precarious Life by exploring forms of state violence and state-sponsored violence targeting specific, vulnerable populations who, in turn, lack recourse to contest the terms of their persecution; instead they are dependent upon and must appeal to the very institutional bodies responsible for the violence they've experienced:

> Precarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. Such populations are at a heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure

> to violence without protection. Precarity also characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized precariousness for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence who often have no other option than to appeal to the very state from which they need protection either at the hands of the State or in the absence of State protection from other perpetrators of aggression. (Frames of War 25-6)

Precarity for Butler is defined by a condition of dependence, albeit one more abstract and convoluted that the straightforwardly transactional and exploitative relationship between landlord and renter, or even between employer and contingent worker. Instead of dependency on a landlord, the contemporary precariat instead must seek refuge and legal protection from governments that have, either implicitly or explicitly, supported initiatives, legislation, practices of privatization and consolidation, that have led to the failure of "economic and social networks" that would've otherwise protected, sheltered, or ameliorated the burdens of certain populations. To be precarious in our current moment, in Butler's mind, is to not only lack stable labor but is to lack the agency or means of ratifying one's own humanity.

Given the precarious ethos of our current moment and its apparent omnipresence and startling visibility both domestically—where recent strikes by the gig workers of Instacart, Uber, and Lyft, highlight the untenable conditions of contingent labor, and legal injunctions prevent former felons from exercising their right to political speech by attaching burdensome financial prerequisites—as well as globally—where individuals, including former U.S. citizens suspected of terrorism are disowned by their government without due process and huge swaths of the global population are denied the right to individually apply for immigration visas simply because they come from Muslim-majority nations—we might ask, as Sarah Charalambides does, "How do we turn the normalization of precarity into a basis for collective action?" ("Precarity as

Activism"). Further, what possibilities for political change, if any, does a label of precarity, with its widespread applicability but also startling generality, offer? What might pragmatic mechanisms of resistance look like?

Charlalambides offers one possibility, characterizing precarity as ideological and affective invitation to unite those with shared and overlapping conditions of instability, while at the same time recognizing the importance of those forms of instability that are unique or represent areas of experiential overlap with different subgroups existing under the umbrella of "precarity":

> By means of personal and affective encounters with people that share the same condition, we can gather and act together, without necessitating a clear collective identity. It is through the articulation of a variety of lived singularities that the common question of the precarious can be addressed. Because a singularity never exists alone and independently, it always refers to a multiplicity of mutually interrelated singularities. Most importantly, a singularity is itself constituted by multiplicity. ("Precarity as Activism")

For Butler, the political purchase of a term like precarity comes from its ability to frame the social processes that determine what constitutes a life worth recognizing, hearing, grieving and, conversely, how these same social processes strip lives of meaning or significance and in doing so, rationalize the moral acceptability of violence, torture, and war (Precarious Life xx-xxi). To understand the social construction of the human and inhuman and to recapture the ability to feel empathy for people who've been assigned to this latter category is, according to Butler in and of itself an act of resistance. Like Charalambides, Butler also understands precarity as the impetus for loose, coalition building with the capacity to radically renovate democratic politics:

> Precarity cuts across identity categories as well as multicultural maps, thus forming the basis for an alliance focused on opposition to state violence and its capacity to produce, exploit, and distribute precarity for the purposes of profit and territorial defense. Such an alliance would not require agreement on all questions of desire or belief or self-identification. It would be a movement sheltering certain kinds of ongoing antagonisms among its participants, valuing such persistent and animating differences as the sign and substance of a radical democratic politics. (Frames of War 32).

Through these two descriptions, it becomes clear that as a basis or header for political activism, precarity is in some ways underwritten by the same fragility that marks the lived conditions of precarity. And while both Butler and Charalambides embrace these qualities necessary to unsettling the neat systems of classification that prevent groups from uniting in common struggle, precarity as political action is also inherently messy and fractured, without a single sustained or uniting purpose, raising questions about its ability to galvanize real or lasting change.

Unsurprisingly, then, any attempt to codify an aesthetics of precarity is marked by similar challenges, grappling with how to describe and link a range of disparate projects with political interventions that are at once universal and temporally and geographically specific in their responses to conditions of vulnerability. Moreover, the power of these projects to exert change from within the systems that produced them also remains unclear. How can art can be both produced by and dissent against the forms of precarity that have produced it? Can meaningful collective, political action arise from art forms only loosely tied to one another? What lasting impact can this kind of aesthetic offer when it remains so thoroughly entrenched in ideas of

temporariness, obsolescence, and instability? Working towards a definition of "lateral aesthetics," based on Berlant's conception of "lateral agency," Elizabeth Adan and Benjamin Bateman nicely summarize the fraught nature of precarious art:

> Taking lateral agency both as an agency of what has been termed the precariat, meaning peoples who lack the opportunity and energy to move onward and upward within normative horizons of capitalist ambition and neoliberal self-valuation, and as an agency that is itself precarious… we ask, what options are available for artistic projects that attempt to intervene in, or imagine their way through, the forces that have given rise to these attritions in labor and life? (107).

Their answer to this question is fittingly evasive: "while such practices do not always or necessarily formulate lasting alternatives… they insert—or better, insinuate—into their conditions and surroundings pauses that, no matter how subtle, deflationary, or provisional, call forth different, and at times quite radical, capacities of and for existence" (Adan and Bateman 109). Similarly, Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider attempt, with similar irresolution, to understand precarity as a theme for performance art, parsing the unique role of body and affect in performance art as possible sites for contesting neoliberal commodification: "How do we pay attention to precarity—economic precarity, neoliberal precarity—through a close reading of the performing body? At one time, claims for resistance to commodity capitalism were addressed through the idea that performance does not offer an object for sale. What of the performing body in an economy where the laboring body, and its production of affect, is the new commodity du jour?" (6). Pointing to movements like "Occupy Wallstreet," Ridout and Schneider question whether such public performances and gatherings offer mechanisms of meaningful dissent. Finally, Jennifer Lawn understands precarity as a thematic of art, arguing that textual depictions

of precarity allow marginalized populations to develop a sense of their "co-vulnerability" and in so doing develop greater political awareness (1026). Importantly, these meditations establish that an aesthetics of precarity often occurs in two different registers: a thematic one that reflects the multiple forms of instability—economic, social, physical, political—produced by capitalism's aggressive expansion across the globe and the twentieth century and a formal one that attempts to reproduce or mirror this sense of contingency. Foster's analysis of Thomas Hirschhorn's 1990s assemblage artwork, for example, offers us one salient example of precarity as both theme and set of formal guidelines, as he explores Hirschhorn's attempt to "manifest, even to exacerbate" a sense of heightened insecurity" by employing "odds and ends left on the street to be picked up by others" (Foster 28). Further, these overviews of precarity and creative activity also suggest that an aesthetics of precarity is marked by modes of representation that are only partial and compensatory, that bring about agency that is limited or fleeting.

While these recent analyses of aesthetic precarity offer rationale for how contemporary creative projects might apprehend or critique capitalism's role in a complex and cascading effect on forms of social marginalization, their underlying emphasis of a dialogic relationship between form and content as well as the range of overarching issues that preoccupy an aesthetics of precarity—the circumscription of humanity, the objectification and commodification of the body under capitalist labor systems, and concern for art's capacity to both contest and be complicit in these processes—suggest the possibilities of historically extending the scope of investigating aesthetic precarity beyond the emergence of neoliberalism, before the death knell of the Fordist economy. If instead we take up Angela Mitropoulos's argument that "Precarity is and has always been the standard experience of work in capitalism… The experience of regular, full-time, long-term employment which characterised the most visible, mediated aspects of Fordism is an

exception in capitalist history" we are presented with an opportunity to understand the specific ways that creativity and precarity co-emerge over the course of the twentieth-century in ways that anticipate the more recent forms of aesthetic precarity ("Precari-Us?"). Mitropoulos' remarks explicitly assert Fordist stability to be both "visible" and "mediated," implicitly acknowledging that less visible and carefully censored examples of instability inevitably existed alongside these. Foster alludes to one example of this in his linkage between historical and contemporary avant-gardes: "Modernist movements like Dada were marked by the chaos of world war… our own present is also one of emergency" (28). Here Foster not only characterizes a state of "emergency" as a continuous and defining sensibility of the twentieth century, but also suggests that precarity, in part, owes its ideological and methodological roots to early, anti-capitalist avant-garde movements. Adan and Bateman similarly recognize an implicit connection between the Berlant's formulation of lateral agency and the strategies of historical avant-gardes: "With the language of interruption, Berlant's discussions of lateral agency recall certain accounts of the radical critical and political effects of avant-garde practices in modernism" (108).

Modernist artists were deeply invested in exposing, countering, and reflecting issues of precarity, even if they did not name it as such. The twentieth-century and modernism witnessed the emergence of a consumer society that drew clear connections between personhood and purchasing power; initiated large-scale movement and migration that began to sever people from the surety of place; and contributed to the rise of a the metropolis and accompanying social anxieties that manifested in new regimes of bodily policing and spatial control. The anti-capitalist rhetoric and disruptive methodologies of the avant-garde provide one vector linking modernist to contemporary aesthetics of precarity. Modernism's frequent conceptual framing of creative activity as inherently resistant to capitalist imperatives for productive and regulated

labor offers another important avenue for parsing art's relationship to positions of social marginalization and its ability to authentically advance the goals of the disenfranchised. While, on the one hand, modernist writers and thinkers often conceived of the artist as a member of the precariat precisely because of his tendency to eschew measurable labor, these understandings were also marked by romanticism of the outcast and a slippery elision between the self-selected outsider and people forced into peripheral positions. Mitropoulos's analysis of Puccini's La Bohème (1896) offers one salient example of this iteration of the artist's appropriative relationship to the precariat: "A bunch of guys (a poet, philosopher, artist and musician) suffer for their art in their garret. But it is the character of Mimi the seamstress who talks of fripperies rather than art who furnishes Puccini and our creative heroes with the final tragedy with which to exalt art as suffering through opera" ("Precari-Us?"). The romanticized suffering Mitropoulos identifies in the male protagonists of the opera, casts the artist as one whose labor and social status is indeed unstable within an economy that defines work in terms of productivity and profit; nevertheless, Mitropoulos also underscores that the artist's "suffering" and indeed his craft is propped up by vicariously experiencing and aesthetically representing the suffering of another (notably female) individual whose situation is unquestionably more precarious than his own.

Such a dynamic is also present in Walter Benjamin's now-indispensable analysis of Baudelaire's ragpicker as a metaphor for the role of the modern, urban poet:

> The ragpicker is the most provocative figure of human misery. "Ragtag" in a double sense: clothed in rags and occupied with rags. Here we have a man whose job it is to pick up the day's rubbish in the capital. He collects and catalogues everything that the great city has cast off, everything it has lost, and discarded, and broken. He goes through the archives of debauchery, and the jumbled array of

> refuse. He makes a selection, an intelligent choice; like a miser hoarding treasure, he collects the garbage that become objects of utility… Baudelaire recognizes himself in the figure of the ragman. (Benjamin 349-350)

The ragpicker and artist alike operate at the edges of an emerging consumer society, laboring not through official channels but through the unofficial economies. Benjamin's reading of the ragpicker/ragman emphasizes that the artist must be willing to pick through offal and detritus to discover beauty in the city's seedy crevices. The artist must also be willing to see the city from the perspective of those who live at society's margins, people whose humanity is disregarded, who are treated no better than the material castoffs contained in the garbage bin. Moreover, this methodology, Benjamin insinuates, perhaps can only arise when the artist/critic on some level identifies with his materials, who feels keenly the parallel treatment of people and objects as detritus. Yet at its core, Benjamin's prescription for artistic activity remains a performance, a perspective that the poet dons and removes at will. As such, these modernist formulations of the artist provide an important means for understanding the emergence of an aesthetics of precarity self-consciously distinct from particular strains of modernist aesthetic activity that heedlessly collapse the romanticized suffering of artist with the plight of capitalism's human discards and byproducts. More broadly, we might see these exploitative frameworks as constitutive of aesthetic precarity's tendency to embrace methodologies of contingency, temporariness, and incompleteness as an expression of suspicion towards aesthetic institutions. The lens of precarity, retroactively applied to the context of visual and literary modernism, therefore allows us to historicize the emergence of precarity, to provide a fuller and more continuous aesthetic narrative of instability as a thematic and formal rubric for artistic activity, and to understand the rise of a creative ethos limned by an awareness of its own limited agency.

Modernist Precarity

While not a comprehensive overview of aesthetic precarity, modernist or otherwise, the artists and projects considered here provide a glimpse into precarity as a loose, organizing framework linking projects produced in a variety of historically distinct moments of capitalism's twentieth-century evolution spanning the years before WWI to the decade after WWII, and from American urban contexts strikingly illustrative and metonymic of these changes. As a whole, the project stitches together a series of modernist narratives including urban histories detailing the structural and social consequences of capitalism's emergence and expansion, including a cultural saturation with conceptions of the Taylorized body and the generalization of these to standards of bodily comportment and domestic decor; the articulation of modernist visual vocabularies for representing and apprehending the urban poor and the deep imbrication of these with practices of policing; and finally, of anti-capitalist potentialities of methodologies that integrate or conceptually draw from plastic, performative, and assemblage-based media as a counterbalance to twentieth-century capitalist and bourgeois-driven overinvestments in visuality.

The story of the modern city's growth and change is, fundamentally, also the story of capitalism's entrenchment into the fabric of modern spatial organization and social relations, its power to define the parameters of personhood, and, particularly in America, its role in defining the behaviors of urban citizenship. At the outset of the twentieth-century, large urban centers stood on the precipice of change, in part owing to the consolidating of the city as an economic center, as Georg Simmel describes in his essay, "The Metropolis and Mental Life." While Simmel lauds the changefulness and stimulation of the city, he also fears both its capacity to breed apathy and monotony and its threat to the sacredness of individual identity and interiority. Simmel characterizes the zeitgeist of both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a

"resistance of the individual to being leveled, swallowed up in the social-technological mechanism" (12). People of the modern metropolis, by contrast, are reduced to responding to exterior stimuli working, undifferentiated (or super specialized) jobs that undermine the individual significance and interacting with objects and architectures that foster a sense of sameness rather than catering to personal taste (17). Moreover, the design and spatial organization of the city, particularly in state-sponsored buildings, visually reinforce this overarching sense of sameness (19). Importantly, Simmel's analysis of the modern metropolis identifies the disempowerment of the individual with the loss of meaningful labor and the accompanying renovation of the urban environment to replicate the factory's ethos of uniformity. His descriptions thus also allow us to see the ways in which capitalism underwrites both embodied and spatial experiences of the city.

Simmel's fears, would prove especially prescient, anticipating the invention and popularization of Taylorist and Fordist systems of labor management. The Taylorized, laboring body was one distilled to a series of efficient movements in service of increased productivity and by extension, profit, as Anson Rabinbach summarizes: "Taylor was convinced that his system would eliminate the source of workers' discontentment and industrial conflict, that individualism, sobriety, and competition would replace collectivism, dissolute behavior… More narrowly conceived, the Taylor system was concerned with determining the most efficient method of accomplishing each task in the labor process" (239). Taylorism promoted a view of bodies as cogs in machines—interchangeable and replaceable—despite Taylor's claim that new method of management would place greater emphasis on the individual. As such, the ideal body became synonymous consistency and control while unruly bodies were cast as problems to be solved. Eventually, this idea that eventually spread far beyond the walls of the factory and into

popular imagination, ubiquitously infusing discourses of the body with notions of efficiency and control.

One consequence of Taylorism's cultural saturation was that its central tenets came to represent not only the ideal, working body but also infused notions of normative, urban, bodily comportment. The language of Taylorism, whether deployed implicitly or explicitly, established a broader sense of those bodies that should be valued and made visible in urban spaces—those entitled to a sense of belonging—and those whose bodies rendered them incompatible with these dominant narratives of the city. Providing fresh and focused bodily rhetoric for longstanding bourgeois values of "rationality, utility, and progress," the Taylorist bodily ideal also created a convenient rubric for its obverse—a body out of step with modernity. Bodies that failed to conform to standards of efficiency were pathologized, feminized, and even criminalized. As Michael Trask points out, one form of divergence from this ideal body was the restless hobo. Untethered from official labor economies, unbound by obligations of conventional domestic arrangements, and attracted to purposeless movement, the hobo became regarded "unsettling, disruptive, and defiant" of the call for purpose driven bodies and movements, giving rise to the notion of the bum as a seeker of non-normative forms of pleasure, including queer desire (3). The bum then underscores that class represented an important determinant of the ideal urban body as well as participation in official labor economies. Anthony Vidler's analysis of the era's phobia's underscores this idea, suggesting that accident victims and workers were especially prone to developing disorders, the consequence of which was becoming part of the incurable masses of "vagabonds" (33). The problem of the body out of synch might also be medicalized, diagnosed with "hysteria, neurasthenia, even constipation and eye-strain" (Armstrong 3). These diagnoses signaled the sense that such bodies displayed in excess irrational fears and emotions

or, conversely that they failed to internally function with the same efficiency was the factory machinery they were meant to resemble. Often these issues, particularly those associated with the body's excesses, were gendered: "Repeatedly, we see a flow of energies—often conceived of as excessive, wasteful, unearned—which is coded as 'feminine,' opposed to driplines coded as 'masculine' (Armstrong 9). Finally, excessiveness also became associated with racialized bodies; as James Smethurst outlines, the "the figuration of the black subject, especially the black male subject" understood people of color in terms of "the embodiment of unrepressed desire and primal urges… a natural, instinctual being" (17). The idealized urban body, in other words was orderly, white, male, and in adherence with bourgeois sensibilities.

The cultural integration of Taylorist discourses also held important consequences for built environments. Urban planning, architecture, and design increasingly imagined the ways that structures and décor could complement and extend the wish for controlled bodies. Urban planning adapted Taylor's ideas of the body to suit its goals of crowd control, prioritizing streamlined movement, efficient traffic flow and, more darkly, separation and containment of unsavory areas of the city (and by extension, their unsavory residents) from the idealized and streamlined modernity being enacted in urban cores and financial centers. Architecture and interior design also adopted the terms of Taylorist utilitarianism, using the design of physical structures and furnishings to aid in the goal of curbing the bodily excesses of its inhabitants. The architectural writings of Le Corbusier provide an instructive example of these impulses. With his famous maxim, "A House is a machine for living in," Corbusier distilled a dream for architecture to be imitative of modern technology (Corbusier 4). Further, his descriptions of ideal, modern dwelling emphasize not only the importance of its mass reproducibility but also of the removal of "useless and disparate objects," as well as the simplification and reduction of the space itself

(Corbusier 18, 114). Living spaces, he contents, should be simplified to their most austere forms. Amelia Jones contends that architects like Corbusier "supported" Taylorist and Fordist systems by envisioning architectural practice as controlling space and using aesthetics to manage "irrational impulses" (14-6). Corbusier and others extended this utilitarian impulse to the façade of the building as well, understanding ornamentation and decoration as forms of excessiveness that modern urban architecture should avoid at all costs. For Corbusier and others of his mindset, the dwelling was capable of both manipulating the body, encouraging it to emulate the machine-like qualities of its container and of representing and extending the body. A machine-like dwelling communicated the streamlined modernity that could be expected of its inhabitant's body and behaviors. Bodies and architectures, in other words, worked in dialogue with one another.

However, just as the idealized body gave rise to its ideological obverse, the discourses of architecture and design configured their own antagonists. According to Anne Anlin Cheng, "For these innovators of modern architecture, the ideal of architectural purity—defined as specifically the liberation from 'primitive' and 'feminine' inclinations—is inextricably bound to the twin ideals of culture and civilization" (25). Cheng's remarks emphasize that the same types of qualities demonized in the human body were also eschewed in strains of modern design, which subtly inculcated the same forms of racism, sexism, and classism. Pragmatically speaking, many urban areas were marked not by triumphant architectural homages to an idealized modernity and instead showcased an infrastructure unprepared to handle ballooning populations and visualized the enduring presence of the nineteenth century in the form of the tenement building. As Sara Blair writes, occupants of these structures and neighborhoods were viewed as "insufficient to the very modernity their energies were catalyzing" (Blair 47). Their dirty, crowded and outdated

dwellings served as proof of this fact; the spaces occupied by these bodies were described in ways that elided and collapsed flesh and architecture. Ultimately, regimes of spatial control evident in both the aesthetic aspirations of new building projects and condemnations of the old structures upheld Taylorist treatments of the body by sustaining a fantasy about architecture's role in extending bodily control.

Taylorism's entrenchment into modern urban life provides vital clues for the beginnings of precarity, linking economic discourses to frameworks for reading the body, its behaviors, and the treatment of personal space as an extension of the physical body. The heavy-handed management of the body encouraged by Taylorism and its entwinement with bourgeois ideals established terms for personhood that were entirely inaccessible for many urban occupants. Further, with Taylorism's focus on management came intensified forms of scrutiny and policing of bodies and of the spaces metonymic of their bodies. A defining feature of the precarious subject in modernism, these histories begin to suggest, is possession of body—marked by class, race, or femininity—that renders an individual vulnerable to the strategies of containment and policing. Similarly, to be a precarious subject is to experience bodily policing not only as a regulation of flesh but as the regulation of space and spatial comportment in service of preserving a wish for a modern metropolis, unburdened by reminders of its uneven successes or its dark economic underbelly.

Towards a Precarious Aesthetic

The terms of this modern, precarious subjectivity are also those that dictate the themes and methodologies of the precarious aesthetic that emerges during this era. Each artist and project examined in this dissertation foregrounds a non-normative body in order to critique the Taylorist values that either overtly or subtly support its dismissal and circumscription. In both

her performances and poetry, Loringhoven foregrounds her body's foreignness as well as its eroticism, overtly contradicting the bourgeois standards of decorum demanding control and rigid obfuscation of women's sexuality; Larsen's novel features a biracial protagonist whose fashion and comportment are rigidly critiqued by the similarly Puritanical edicts of the black bourgeois who, in the name of racial uplift, insist on pushing an image of staid femininity that combats stereotypes of African Americans as unruly and oversexualized; Brooks's female protagonists yearn to possess the products featured in home décor magazines, participating in a fantasy wherein stylish home interiors contest the racism that paints Chicago's Bronzeville residents as dirty, malodorous, and cluttered; finally, Mina Loy's investigations of various kinds of "outsiders" shows that bodies are made vulnerable both through visual policing and through the denial of language to articulate the conditions of their marginalization. Thus as each of these artists articulates a type of non-normative body, implicitly, critiquing the social construction of the normative body, they also attend to disciplinary practices that I refer to as "policing" a term that yokes together the state-sponsored, legal methods of control—like the edicts that aim to prevent Loy's Bowery neighbors from sleeping in the street—with the banal but equally powerful social pressures that operate in conjunction with the legal system—like the bourgeois management of feminine fashion, which creates narrow parameters for the self-expression of both Larsen's protagonist, Helga Crane, as well as the alliance of "good" character with "good" taste in furnishings and décor which exert pressure on the African American women of Brooks's poems and prose.

As such, each of these projects is intensely aware of sight and vision as integral to practices of policing. Sight aids the identification and management of unruly bodies, but it is also the sense through which artifacts of popular and commercial culture establish and proliferate the

norms against which those unruly bodies are defined. By critiquing policing—be it legal or social—a precarious aesthetic thus also critiques the visual tools that support these practices of surveillance, indicting a problematic ideological equation between sight and knowledge. Traces of this endeavor are present in several different registers. Each of these projects engages with contemporary visual artifacts—studio portraiture, subway posters, magazine advertisements, periodical debates on the parameters for the art of racial uplift—in order to articulate the presence of a normative body, against which other bodies are defined and othered. Formally, then, these artists' approaches are marked by intent to undermine the assumptions and forms of knowledge acquired through vision. Further, these artists share an attention to performance as a critical method for undermining the strict forms of visual control pinioning vulnerable bodies, as well as the spaces they occupy. Showcasing the manipulability of skin, fashion, décor, and decorum, a precarious aesthetic undercuts ideals of normativity by revealing their constructedness and by revealing sight as a problematic tool for gathering authentic knowledge. While sometimes these efforts are playful—like the Baroness' purposeful violation of bourgeois norms for studio portraiture—some, like Larsen's Quicksand are pessimistic, acknowledging the limitations of knowledge acquired through vision, of its tendency to fix and reiterate existing preconceptions, while also recognizing the impossibility of escaping such vision's omnipotence.

Finally, binding together concerns—the creation of a normative body, the role of legal and social policing in maintaining a narrow understanding of the normative body, and visuality's troubling collusion with these processes—a precarious aesthetic is one that seeks to formally produce a sense of instability or impermanence. This methodology at once attempts to capture the social and economic instability of marginalized subject positions but also attempts to undermine the fixity enforced through regimes of visual policing and control. The nature of this

unstable aesthetic varies; Loringhoven most explicitly calls up the impermanence and elusiveness not only with her Dada-inspired performances but also through her attempts to recreate the sensory experience of the urban landscape by reproducing snippets of sound and fragments of product slogans; Larsen more subtly employs the language of sculpture and visual art throughout her narratives, focusing on the slipperiness of surfaces; Brooks relies on methodologies of juxtaposition inspired by modernist collage to assert that the beauty of black life must be captured in fleeting moments of humanity rather than through the false promises of consumer citizenship; and finally, Loy showcases the most extreme version of impermanence by creating large-scale assemblages of the Bowery bums from trash, doomed to rot and fade like the bodies of her subjects. Like the broader concept of precarity through which I'm framing my reading of these artists, the methods and subjects here are incredibly varied as are the degree to which they instill a sense of hope that their projects of instability offer salient means of changing the mechanisms of policing they critique. All, however, share a sense that art's political intervention can only ever be partial, compensatory, and unsatisfying.

Attempting to trace this common thread across the twentieth century, this dissertation follows the multimedia approach of its artists, constructing a specifically American history of precarity through its visual artifacts. I do this work both by engaging primary sources in order to provide a more robust understanding of the particular forms and mechanisms of policing that characterize each artist's milieu, but also by engaging pertinent aesthetic histories of visuality that situate each precarious aesthetic in relation to contemporary movements. Moreover, by drawing from various discourses of artistic visuality, we begin to see that a precarious aesthetic is often marked by an ambivalence towards or suspicion of artistic institutions—even avant-

garde ones—that promise liberation but often paradoxically intone the same norms and employ the same policing practices of the institutions they claim to critique and eschew.

The chapters are laid out chronologically in service to this project's historicizing goals; the texts fall within modernism's conventional parameters of 1900 to 1950. Further, the chapters are also arranged to highlight the traffic of ideas between two cities central to the development of American capitalism and illustrative of its impact on the urban environments: New York, the home of Wall Street and fashion-forward jewel of the East coast and its younger, industrial, midwestern sibling, Chicago. The first chapter places us in the seedy and bohemian Greenwich Village, located on the fringes of a city beginning to simultaneously embrace consumer culture and modernization in the form of improved urban planning and technologies of mobility like the subway. The heroine of Larsen's Quicksand travels through both Chicago and Harlem, illustrating first Chicago's blatant racism that enforces African American joblessness and later, the insularity of Harlem's elite; while one city seems to present economic foreclosure and the other possibility, Helga Crane comes to discover that money comes with an ideal of racial uplift that proves equally limiting in the imagined possibilities for black women's self-expression. Brooks's work returns us to Chicago, where the enforced racial insularity of the Bronzeville neighborhood is more fully fleshed out bringing into sharper relief the tension between working-class black Midwesterners the Harlem elite described by Larsen. Finally, Loy returns us to the Bowery neighborhood of New York at midcentury, a city marked by postwar nationalism and a much more pronounced intolerance for the kinds of seediness that characterized Loringhoven's experience and representation of the city.

Chapter one begins by examining the work of American Dada pioneer, "The Baroness" Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, an artist renowned for her use of the "readymade" in her

sculpture, poetry, and performance art. In method, Loringhoven's work literalizes Benjamin's ragpicker metaphor, picking through garbage cans to locate objects for her assemblages and costumes, recording the fleeting snippets of language overheard in an apartment building or witnessed on a subway billboard, and recombining these elements to poke fun at the absurdities of capitalism. Biographically, Loringhoven experienced a good deal of the intersecting forms of social marginalization ascribed to the "precariat" by Butler and others; she was a German immigrant, racialized, profiled, and persecuted in the years before and during WWI; she rarely could afford a stable housing situation on her meager salary as a poet and artist's model; she often found herself in prison for vagrancy or for stealing necessities she could not otherwise afford. As a performance artist, Loringhoven's precarious aesthetic is one deeply concerned with the role of the body as a site of performative confrontation but also one of great vulnerability—to the privations of capitalism but also to the ravages of time that erode any art that springs from flesh. Examining Loringhoven's deployment of the body inside the studio, the apartment building, and the subway car, the chapter follows the multiple registers through which she used her eccentric and excessive body (and its accompanying sensorium) to satirize bourgeois norms and their entwinement with the rapid expansion of American consumer culture. In each setting and through each sensory experience, Loringhoven insists on valuing the unproductive and the messy, rejecting the compulsion to utilitarianism but also consciously tying the legacy of her artwork to the impermanence of her flesh.

The second chapter moves to consideration of Nella Larsen's novel, Quicksand, an important artifact of the Harlem Renaissance. Extending the previous chapter's concern for the body, I focus here on Ann Anlin Cheng's conceptual frameworks of surface and depth as a lens for reading the Harlem Renaissance's dominant discourses of racial uplift and as they are

categorically rejected by Larsen's novel. Guided by notions of consumer agency and bourgeois respectability many leading thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance, including W.E.B. Du Bois, insisted on representations of blackness dressed in fastidiously tailored garments and carefully managed decorum in order to rewrite the terms through which non-white bodies were read. Quicksand, however, remains unconvinced by any project that reaffirms, even through revision, a clear causal relationship between seeing surface and apprehending an individual's character or depth. This becomes apparent over the course of Helga's story, where attention to fashion, manners, and skin repeatedly underscore vision as a form of intra-communal policing that replicates the structures of white supremacy but, more importantly, attempts to fix Helga to specific looks and therefore identities foreclosing the fluidity, freedom and individualism she craves. Ultimately, Larsen's novel embraces a precarious aesthetic of the elusive surface, reflected and refracted, implicitly positing that precarious subject positions cannot be solved or offset by an aesthetics of stable vision for to do so is simply to repeat the visual terms that dictated that precarity in the first place.

Returning to Chicago, chapter three focuses on the poetry and prose of Gwendolyn Brooks, an author not often considered in discussions of modernism. From within her home in Bronzeville, Brooks dedicated herself to creating sensitive and dignified portraits of black, urban life combatting racial caricatures and stereotypes. Through this section, I trace Brooks's use of juxtaposition, placing the narratives promoted in design magazines and through décor exhibitions against those depict the everyday realities of poor, black women. Her characters crave rooms filled with beautiful objects and name brand cereals, seeing these trappings as symbolic of the respectability they seek and tools for asserting their departure from the stereotypes ascribed to black people and black homes. Yet their financial realities do not enable this kind of purchasing

power and they are forced to reckon with the fact that their consumerism cannot convey the personhood they desire. Through this strategy, Brooks critiques not only the failed promises of consumerism to confirm and convey the humanity of her characters, she also indicts modern art for its complicity in casting markers of respectability in terms of whiteness, thereby maintaining the precarity of black women.

Ending in the Bowery neighborhood of New York, the fourth and final chapter examines the poetry and prose of Mina Loy. Though often represented in modernist narratives as a salon darling, Loy's later life was marked by isolation and privation. As Nazism spread across Europe, Loy was forced to permanently relocate to New York City. Selecting an apartment in the Bowery, Loy moved into one of the most infamous skid rows in the nation where transient laborers and homeless people crowded door jambs and sleepily spread across sidewalks. Holding this career endpoint in mind, I analyze the evolution of Loy's conceptualization and formal representation of "outside" or marginal figures, beginning with the typographic experiments of Loy's Futurist-inspired poetry. Through sizing as well as the manipulation of poetic space, Loy reveals a growing interest in materiality's role in conveying linguistic modes of exclusion and in temporarily recreating those forms of exclusion. Moving to a consideration of Loy's brief narrative flirtation with the photographic languages of documentary and surrealism, I analyze two short stories that depict encounters with the Parisian homeless. Through Loy's narrator we come to understand the reductive potentialities that images share with language—namely their tendency to silence the precarious subject, reaffirming the urgency of Loy's search for a methodology rooted in recreating the conditions of the outsider. Her ideas come to fruition in the Bowery projects where the slow degradation of her trash-picked assemblage artworks act in

dialogue with her poetry, at once indicting capitalism through its own biroducts and relinquishing her aesthetic authority to permanently affix a narrative to the precariat.

Together, these chapters place visual art in conversation with literature, in order to offer a multi-faceted perspective of the types of precarious subjects created by and sustained through urban policing, consumerism, and modernist aesthetics. Their exceedingly different iterations of aesthetic precarity suggest the range of formal methodologies used to wrest some degree of agency an authority for those often denied the right to speak. Finally, these works provide vital clues to the aesthetic future of precarity; underscoring their interventions as temporary, compensatory, or incomplete, these projects anticipate the continued need for the renewal of their aesthetic impulses.

CHAPTER 1 Unruly Forms: The Reordering of Bodily Threat in the Visual and Textual Poetics of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven

In a 1915 article for The New York Times entitled, "Refugee Baroness Poses as Model," "The Baroness" Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven is introduced to the newspaper's readership as a sympathetic figure, victimized by politically and financially unfortunate circumstances. In the article, Loringhoven describes her struggle to support herself after her husband's abandonment and her continued efforts to find her own artistic fulfillment. Casting herself as an intellectual and aesthetic refugee fleeing Germany's oppressive regime, Loringhoven's responses cannily appeal to Americans' rising hostility towards the empire while also shrewdly tapping into a romanticization of the fallen European aristocrat. Despite their undercurrent of melodrama and almost-humorous embellishment, Loringhoven's comments nevertheless provide important insight into the challenges facing an eccentric, foreign, unmarried, woman-artist working at the outset of the first World War: "Why do I pose?" she asks rhetorically, "The answer is so very simple. I was penniless… I have been making my own living since last summer and working very hard… I who have never worked find that this being independent is so interesting" ("Refugee Baroness"). Later, Loringhoven adds,

> But here is a trouble. I long always for self-expression. I paint pictures, but they do not sell as yet. They perhaps never will. As I stand in my place on the model throne I feel within me the rhythm of life. I would have dance, but one must have lessons. So that is why I have gone now to the German Consul General to ask that I receive some allowance because my husband is prisoner in the hands of the

> enemy. Do you not see that my earnings, although they do support me do not permit that I should go further in my self-expression? ("Refugee Baroness").[1]

The truth was that Loringhoven had not been born into the aristocracy as her comments allowed readers to believe; rather, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven née Plöz had been employed since the age of 20 when she left her family home in Swinemünde for Berlin—first as a photographic model and then as a chorus girl. Further, only one of Loringhoven's four marriages ever equated to financial security—her first to Richard Schmitz, a wealthy sculptor, who indulged Loringhoven's every whim but who could not maintain her romantic or sexual interest (Gammel 88). Her subsequent unions introduced more risk than stability. The end of her second marriage to architect August Endell was hastened by Endell's "enormous financial strain"; though she followed her third husband Felix Paul Greve (later known as Canadian writer Frederick Paul Grove) to America, he abandoned her in Kentucky before publishing Fanny Essler, a novel whose titular character was inspired by Loringhoven; her fourth and final husband, Leopold Baron von Freytag-Loringhoven returned home to Germany shortly after their marriage, leaving

[1] It's likely that the Baroness indeed encountered migrants with more pressing claims to refugee status, given the fact that she occupied studios in Harlem, Lincoln Square, and Greenwich Village. Harlem, at the beginning of the twentieth-century was the newly-minted center of black life in New York and it attracted large numbers of migrants from the Southern United States as well as immigrants from the West Indies (Gill 178). The Lincoln Square neighborhood, at the beginning of the twentieth-century, contained San Juan Hill, another area of concentration for the city's African American population; like Harlem, the area attracted migrants from the South as well as immigrants from Caribbean nations; the neighborhood was also bordered to the South by Hell's Kitchen, an enclave for recent Irish immigrants (Sacks 6). Later waves of immigration would bring large numbers of Puerto Ricans to the area (Zipp 164). John Strausbaugh stresses that although the Village has long held a reputation "as a place for artists and Bohemians was well enough established" by the turn of the century, these artists actually composed only a small portion of the population. They lived in the midst of "the moneyed WASPs who hunt on in the North Village… the Irish West Village, the Italian South Village, and the black Village" (58, 61). Her writings, however, are mostly silent on the issue on the status of immigrants or refugees, with the exception of her explicit anti-Semitism (*Bodysweats* 21).

Loringhoven with only the title "Baroness," which would become her preferred moniker (Gammell 118).[2]

Still, Loringhoven's remarks importantly underscore some of the most important thematic threads of her life and artwork. First, and most pragmatically, her interview showcases the financial strain of working as an artist. While the trope of the "starving artist" had been dominant since Romanticism, Loringhoven's comments, in part, undercut the idealization of this bohemian lifestyle. Bluntly referring to her "penniless" circumstances, the Baroness removes the artist from a space of fantasy and firmly resituates her within New York's economy where art and craft must either be commodified and monetized or must become a cost paid by wages of another labor. Indeed, throughout her career, the Baroness was often forced to confront the pragmatic need for funds; in her written appeals to friends and acquaintances Loringhoven speaks vividly about the physical effects of privation while stubbornly insisting on her poverty as a badge of artistic honor. In a 1927 missive to Peggy Guggenheim, Loringhoven elegantly reflects: "hope is blood money/ What money buys not—blood must/ Money energy saves nerve expense" ("Hope is Bloodmoney" 2-4). To Berenice Abbott, Loringhoven's request was less subtle: "you like to spend money only on yourself—you are close fisted except when it is bothersome to be so—and would include your discomfort," indicting Abbott for allowing the Baroness to live in deplorable conditions while Abbott's artistic success allowed her to enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle (Loringhoven "Letter to Berenice Abbott"). [3]

2 For a specific timeline of these relationships see Irene Gammel's *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity, a Cultural Biography.*

3 The Baroness's anger in these pieces might also have stemmed from her sense that Abbott "owed" the Baroness for her role in inspiring Abbott's portrait of the Baroness. This exploitative dynamic was present in many of Loringhoven's collaborations including those with Martin Schomburg, who until recently was given credit for the Baroness's sculpture *God* and Man Ray whose biographical accounts reduce Loringhoven from filmic collaborator to an unnamed "model." According to Man Ray's own recollections in his autobiography, *Self Portrait*, "I shot a sequence of myself as a barber shaving the pubic hairs of a nude model, a sequence which was also ruined in the

In the article, Loringhoven also stresses the unique position of the woman-artist who perpetually grapples with the desire to create rather than be subsumed to another's process of creation. And while the Baroness here (and at many other points throughout her life) clearly derives pleasure from becoming art, she also clearly differentiates this process from her own chosen endeavors, characterizing modeling as a means to an end. Finally, Loringhoven's descriptions of her body—caught between an innate desire for kineticism and a professional obligation to stillness—offer an important contrast between the active, physical engagement that characterizes Loringhoven's ideal forms of self-expression with the passive modes of participation available to a woman of her meager finances. The body, as the Baroness characterizes it, is bound by its vulnerability to basic needs and therefore to its inevitable participation in an economy that selectively rewards labor yet its movement becomes paired with a fantasy about performing tasks considered unproductive or unnecessary.

Even as Loringhoven appealed to the sympathies of middle- and upper-class newspaper readership to ameliorate the pragmatic, bodily needs that impeded her ability to pursue creative activity, she ideologically embraced transgressive bodily displays that unseated the values of modesty and decorum held by many of these readers. In her essay "A Modest Woman," Loringhoven's vehemently defends James Joyce's Ulysses, touting the creative value of "vulgarity" as a means of celebrating the messy physicality of bodies that bourgeois decency seeks to repress. Throughout the piece, the Baroness makes clear her rejection of bourgeois

process of developing and never saw the light" (263). This latter detail explains why the only remainder of the film exists in the form of a still attached to a 1921 letter Man Ray sent to his friend and colleague, Tristan Tzara. She inspired and catalyzed the art of others, who rarely acknowledged her role in the creative process. Linda Lappin's article, "Dada Queen of the Bad Boys' Club: Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven" notes that although many artists admitted fascination with Loringhoven's dedication to wedding art to everyday life, their interest was often self-serving or outright exploitative rather than collaborative: "[the Baroness's friends] rarely photographed her art-to-wear costumes, and it would seem that few of her artist friends considered them worthy of recording" (Lappin 310).

ideals of comportment and she applauds the aesthetic deployment of bodies as a means of productively prodding a range of middle-class anxieties. The title of Loringhoven's essay mockingly takes its name from a letter reprinted in the Little Review's "Reader Critic" section that took particular issue with Joyce's frank depiction of bodily functions. In the original letter, Helen Bishop Dennis writes:

> The mistake you people make is in thinking that we "prudes" who don't like Joyce are concerned with morals. Morality has nothing to do with it… I do not think we need to apologize for this delicacy and lack of vulgarity, even to your superior beings. There is a certain form of mental unbalance—about the lowest form that takes delight in concentration on the "natural functions. All attendants in insane asylums are familiar with it. (Dennis "The Modest Woman")

Dennis wants to differentiate between "modesty" and "morality," however her language does more to collapse and confuse these terms than to separate them. In rhetoric steeped in connotations of classism, Dennis refers to the Joyce's descriptions of bodily functions as "vulgar," and the purview of the "mentally imbalanced," Dennis reveals her expectation that art meet bourgeois standards of respectability. Moreover, her dismissal of Joyce's interest in bodily functions also pathologizes and criminalizes aesthetic interest in the body's intimate workings and byproducts, revealing a similar expectation of a hygienic artform, neatly separated from the messiness of everyday life.

The Baroness's response succinctly rejects the entwined ideologies of gender, class, and decorum bound up in Dennis's notions of propriety.[4] Loringhoven begins:

[4] It's worth mentioning here that Loringhoven was often mocking these same conventions in her own work published in the *Little Review* alongside the installations of Joyce's *Ulysses* ("Harpsichords Metallic Howl" 256).

> Artists are aristocrats. Artists who call themselves artists—not aristocrats—are plain working people, mixing up art with craft in vulgar untrained brain… If I can eat, I can eliminate—it is logic—it is why I eat! My machinery is built that way. Yours also—though you do not like to think of—mention it—because you are not aristocrat. Your skirts are too long—out of "modesty," not decoration—when you lift them you do not do it elegantly—proudly. (Loringhoven "A Modest Woman")

Picking up on Dennis's mocking reference to Joyce supporters as "superior beings," the Baroness opens her essay by imagining that class hierarchies signify aesthetic understanding rather than economic power; in Loringhoven's formulation a working person with a "vulgar" and "untrained brain" can still be an intellectual "aristocrat" by virtue of superior aesthetic understanding and through their separation from bourgeois phobias, though they would never themselves seek that title. The Baroness is similarly skeptical of the gender ideologies that accompany Dennis's plea for modesty, poking fun at the bodily shame that accompanies "respectable" middle-class femininity. Later in the essay, the Baroness broadens the scope of her critique, casting Dennis's letter as metonymic of the many problems she sees with American attitudes towards bodies: "America's comfort: -- sanitation—outside machinery—has made America forget its own machinery—body!" (Loringhoven "A Modest Woman").

These two conceptions of the body—one rooted in vulnerability and one rooted in the display of the race, gender, and class-marked flesh as an ideological rejection of bourgeois norms—work in dialogue with one another in the Baroness's work. Borrowing from Dada, Loringhoven's aesthetic of precarity is one that relies on arrangements of messiness and disorder to disrupt the careful forms of ordering that undergird both bourgeois and capitalist treatments of urban bodies. Taking aim at technologies that penetrate concentric spheres of urban life,

Loringhoven employs visual and rhetorical confusion to expose the anxious bodily politics inherent to the narratives promoted through photography, radio, and the advertisements of mass transit. As we will see, the Baroness's unsettling juxtaposition of photographic frameworks for viewing bourgeois subjects, impoverished urban subjects, and artists at work expose the narrow, economy-driven methods for viewing and interpreting bodies but also set a precedent for her subsequent aesthetic treatments of the human form as a threat. Extending the messy and threatening physicality of her studio images, Loringhoven's depictions of apartment noise foreground sound as an extension of bourgeois bodily policing; recording the nonsense and noise, the aural detritus of the apartment's residents, however, Loringhoven rejects a system of linguistic productivity tied not only to class-anxiety but to capitalist imperatives as well. Finally, her fragmented remix of advertising slogans seen from the window of a whizzing subway car draws attention to consumer culture's relocation forms of bourgeois bodily policing into the public sphere, yoking notions of hygiene, decorum, and shame to the emerging practices of urban citizenship dictated by private corporations thereby ensuring dependence on corporate products and services. Together, these projects tell a story about the overlaid forms of bodily discipline and social anxiety that penetrate private, semi-private, and public spheres of urban life, lurking beneath cool and misleadingly rational veneers. United by disruptive and disordered juxtapositions, they collectively enact the precarious balance of being targeted by omnipotent voices of urban policing while attempting to proudly reassert body's physicality as a means of recapturing a messy humanity denied by bourgeois morality and by the rhetoric of consumer culture. Finally, if the experience of the precarious urban subject is best understood through the tenuous relationship between a desire for unruliness and an imperative for orderliness,

Lorginghoven's projects also suggest that this precariousness extends to the body of her work itself—doomed to mimic the trajectory of the flesh and blood medium that animates it.

Bodily Exposure: Rearranging Photographic Narratives

Often cast as the pioneer of a uniquely American strand of Dada, Loringhoven indeed incorporated the group's anti-capitalist attitudes as well as some its visual and poetic methodologies. Active during and in the immediate aftermath of WWI, founders and practitioners of Dada shared a sense of the moral bankruptcy of the "'logic' of nineteenth-century rationalism" (Waldman 100). As Amelia Jones notes, Dadaists identified a damning link between the rationalizing imperatives of the nineteenth century and the forces of capitalism: industrial models of Fordism and Taylorism attempted to control and discipline workers' bodies such that waste was curtailed, productivity augmented, and profit maximized (14). Matei Calinescu asserts "anti-elitism, antiauthoritarianism, gratuitousness, anarchy, and, finally nihilism are clearly implied in the Dadaist doctrine" (143). As such, Dada artists like the Baroness expressed a suspicion of an emerging consumer culture, the bourgeois lifestyles dependent on its proliferation, as well as attitudes of perpetually unmet desire, thoughtless purchasing, and planned obsolescence encouraged by an advertising industry designed to expand capitalism's reach. Turning to "transient," "ordinary" and "cheap" objects, often drawn from flyers, Dadaists recombined words and images into visual and textual collages of jarring and absurd disruptions that rejected capitalism's modes of self-replication (Waldman 112, 100). Loringhoven embraced Dada's interest in found objects and words. She employed materials lifted from rubbish bins for sculptures and as performance props; she poetically recorded the impressions of New York's sonic and visual refuse through snippets of language and sounds gleaned from the urban din and fragmented descriptions of advertising posters. Similarly,

Loringhoven's stringent attention to issues of arrangement—of her body in space, of her words on the page—suggest the influence of Dadaist visual strategies of juxtaposition. The Baroness often employed these methodologies to sharply critique the absurdity of bourgeois culture and, by extension, the capitalist system to which it was beholden.

At the same time, the Baroness distinguished herself from many of her Dadaist colleagues by devoting significantly more attention to the body, pushing to the extreme Dada's interest in performance by adapting Dada's methodologies to the canvas of her own flesh. As with much of Dada visual collage, the movement's performances were orchestrated to elicit shock from its audiences. These performances were sometimes called "manifestations," an appellation which both bespeaks an affectation of chance and a disavowal of traditional dramatic terminology. According to Stanton Garner, these manifestations "fragmented the space of traditional performance through the staging of multiple activities in discordant juxtapositions" (503). Poetry and performance sometimes collided in the form of live readings; the Dadaist "simultaneist poem," created by Marcel Janco, Richard Huelsenbeck, Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp, and Hugo Ball, included a range of unpleasant noises including coughing, whistling, and grunting ("Harpsichords Metallic Howl" 259). Sophie Taeuber-Arp incorporated Dadaist methodologies of juxtaposition and disjuncture into her dance costume designs and choreography. Nell Andrews describes the costumes as "richly colored in an abrupt mix of matte and metallic materials of blue, white, and brown, perhaps also scarlet, silver, and gold" complete with masks that illustrated the "movement's interest in primitivist forms" (Andrews 14). The remaining photographs of these dances, Andrews suggests, show that figures moved jarringly and erratically with "disjointed articulation and gesturing arms" (Andrews 14). These examples of Dada performance, of harnessing liveness to heighten the effects of their juxtapositions,

grating noises, and alienating movements, share with the Baroness's work a pleasure in the excessive and blatantly anti-utilitarian nature of their creative productions; they are distinguished from the Baroness's work in their impersonality. With insistent self-referentiality, Loringhoven foregrounds her own form, her own sensory experiences, to more intimately and shockingly stage the intersection of capitalism's consequences and the possibilities it enables for creative critique.

The distinctiveness of Loringhoven's more lively interpretation of Dada marks many contemporary accounts of her work. In unpublished manuscripts, the Baroness's would-be biographer, Djuna Barnes, describes the Baroness as one of the "terrors of the district which cuts below Minette Lane and above Eighteenth Street to the west. Wearing the lip of a burnished coal scuttle for a helmet strapped to her head with scarlet belt which buckled under chin, Christmas tree balls of yellow and red for ear rings, tea strainers about her neck, a short, yellow skirt, and over the precision of her breasts a single length of black lace" (Barnes). Barnes's recollections characterize Loringhoven as something of a magpie but also stress Loringhoven's confrontational physicality as a central component of the Baroness's aesthetic intervention. The Christmas tree ornaments became remarkable because they dangle from human earlobes rather than evergreen boughs. The delicate femininity of the lace appears unsettling precisely because it unashamedly announces the taboo exposure of the Baroness's breasts. Similarly, Little Review editor Jane Heap's assertion that "Baroness as the only one living anywhere who dresses Dada, loves Dada, lives Dada" attaches a heightened sense of authenticity to Loringhoven's aesthetic practice that stems from her willingness to engage Dada's ideas on the canvas of her flesh (Heap "Dada"). Claude McKay praised the artistry of Loringhoven's body in language marked by fascination with her lurid ostentatiousness: "The delirious verses of the Baroness titillated me

even as did her crazy personality. She was a constant visitor to see me, always gaudily accoutered in rainbow raiment, festooned with barbaric beads and spangles and bangles, and toting along her inevitable poodle in a gilded harness" (McKay 85). Simultaneously fascinated and revolted by Loringhoven, William Carlos Williams summarized his attitudes in an intensely detailed slur, describing her apartment as "The most unspeakable filthy tenement in the city. Romantically, mystically dirty, of grimy walls, dark gaslit halls and narrow stairs. It smelt of black water closets, one to a floor, with low gasflame always burning and torn newspapers trodden in the wet. Waves of stench thickened on each landing as one moved up" matching the "reek" that "stood out purple from her body" (Williams qtd. in Jones 8). Like Loringhoven's supporters, Williams' remarks stress the shocking nature of her body, here to convey its grotesque kinship with a deteriorating apartment building. Her physicality activates in Williams a series of overlaid phobias: of the unhygienic dirt that characterizes the living conditions of immigrants and working-class people, of a private encounter with a body fully exposed in all its untidy and erotic functioning, and finally, the mere suggestion that creative practice might occur within such a milieu. Williams's remarks importantly allude to the various ways that her body and, by extension, the irrevocably connected body of her work, were rendered vulnerable to physical violence, derision, and dismissal. [5]

Today, little tangible evidence remains of the performances described in these accounts. Only through a small number of artifacts and photographs can we partially reconstruct the

[5] Predictably, William Carlos Williams had a hand in violently policing the Baroness; annoyed by her overt sexual advances, he apparently trained for months so that he could be ready to physically strike her when they next met. His hopes came to fruition when he encountered her and delivered a punch that floored the Baroness just before he had her hauled away to prison for harassment (Williams 169). This was only one of many confrontations between the Baroness and the American legal system. In 1917 she was incarcerated in Connecticut as a spy (*Baroness Elsa* 212). She was rumored to have been arrested for indecent exposure, walking around town in only a Mexican blanket, and she routinely spent time in New York's' jails for stealing from its many department stores (*Baroness Elsa* 197).

performative impulses that motivated so many colorful contemporary accounts of her work and signified a radical kinetic renovation of Dada's methodologies. Through these pieces, however, we begin to see the elements of performance, physicality, liveness, and movement thematically routed through much of her writing and poetry. It is also through these performance artifacts that we begin to understand the Baroness's use of her own body as a site of confrontation, drawing on Dada's penchant for artifice and juxtaposition in order to confront bourgeois notions of propriety and capitalism's concomitant readiness to codify these desires into readily accessible commodities. One of the few enduring examples of the Baroness's elaborate, trash-picked costumes, Limbswish (1918) consists of a metal spring and a curtain tassel, now mounted on a wooden block for display purposes, though originally the object was worn at the Baroness's hip (Gammel 188). Limbswish shares with the Baroness's other sculptures an attentiveness to the body and the joy of prosthetic replacement. Her sculpture God (1917), for instance, teasingly replaces male anatomy with plumbing implements; her Portrait of Marcel Duchamp (c. 1920) playfully chips away at the cult of personality surrounding artists by suggesting that a fanciful construction of wires and feathers might equally stand in for the artist himself (Baroness Elsa 218, 13). Limbswish, however, is the only "sculpture" originally intended as an adornment. As the title suggests, the tassel and metal would presumably "swish" both physically and aurally in concert with the Baroness's moving body. In its original, performative context, the object thus drew attention to the active body at a time when the products offered up in advertisements, particularly for women, aimed to rigorously control and downplay any trace of the body's natural functions.

The body's liveness takes on a similarly confrontational function in the carefully arranged poses for three images snapped by International New Photography in 1915. The

images—rather tantalizingly titled “Performance Poem 3” in Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo’s edited collection of the Baroness's work—showcase Loringhoven inside her studio space, at once illustrating the overlap between art and the habits of everyday life as well as the Baroness's tendency to reconfigure seemingly private terrain—the space of the apartment as well as her figure—into an artistic canvas. Moreover, the playful artifice at stake in each of the images acknowledges and violates a range of bourgeois expectations governing photographic portraits of women as well as the rules for photographically representing artists at work in their studios. Gammel surmises that these photographs capture one of the Baroness's early New York living spaces, a studio in the Lincoln Arcade Building, rented for around $40 per month (Baroness Elsa 170).[6] While we can’t confirm Gammel’s suspicion, the studio’s potential location within the broader geographic context of the Lincoln Square neighborhood—an area characterized by its concentration of African Americans, including migrants newly arrived from the rural south, its violent clashes between residents and Irish gangs who lived in nearby Hell’s Kitchen, and its growing reputation as one of the city’s worst slums—helps us to imagine the daily sights that may have intensified the Baroness's feelings of instability and heightened her awareness to the populations excluded from New York’s growing consumer culture.

In the background of the first image, the Baroness's body is centered, stretching across nearly the entire width of the image (“Performance Poem 3”). Behind her, piles of rumpled clothing lie atop two suitcases. Blankets and sheets thinly veil large furniture in a flimsy and half-hearted attempt to achieve some kind of uniform background, paradoxically drawing more attention to these bulky pieces. Taken from a wider angle, the second image captures more of the

[6] Coincidentally, Gammel’s biography of the Baroness notes, Marcel Duchamp also held a studio at this address from fall 1915 until 1916 and this was likely the time where the two began their friendship and artistic collaboration (*Baroness Elsa* 170).

Baroness's studio (“Performance Poem 3”). The covered furniture, suitcases, and balled-up clothing remain visible. More furniture comes into view at the left side of the frame including an ottoman and a dining chair. High above the door, perches an empty birdcage. In the foreground, the Baroness's posture has shifted; she takes up less space but stands proudly as her gaze confronts the camera. In both images, the Baroness's costume consists of a pair of striped knickers, two mismatched lace-up ballet flats, an aviator's cap topped with a comically large feather, and a bodice that appears to have been stitched together using a combination of striped and geometric-patterned fabrics. Gammel summarizes the significance of the costume’s juxtapositions: the Baroness “poses in an aviator hat, its masculinity (and reference to war) undercut with a feminine feather (also alluding to her identity as a writer)… the geometrical effects of the pose and costume are at odds with the mature smiling face of the woman posing, just as the historical allusion to the horrendous international war is at odds with the privacy of her studio…” (Baroness Elsa 9). Gammel also notes that the studio surroundings look “makeshift” in order to suggest that “creative élan arises in the midst of chaos” (Baroness Elsa 168). A third image in the series, taken as a part of the same shoot but not included in Gammel and Zelazo’s “Performance Poem,” showcases the Baroness dressed in a third, more feminine costume of airy drapery and a delicate tiara (Baroness Elsa 170). Perched atop the floral ottoman, Loringhoven’s posture is slightly bent, as if she has been caught in a moment of exposure and has just moved to cover her body with the robes. Her gaze, correspondingly, is more downcast. Costume, posture, and eye-contact here all contrast sharply with the bold and confrontational nature of the other two studio images heightening our awareness to the act of being photographed as a performance for the Baroness, undermining fantasies of photographic authenticity.

The objects assembled in the room work like a stage set, weaving together a series of entwined narratives of instability around the touchstone of Loringhoven's body. The covered pieces of furniture and rumpled piles of clothes underscore the sense of crowding-- the activities of art and everyday living co-exist in exceedingly cramped quarters. At the same time, the suitcases suggest the impermanence of the apartment, perhaps alluding to a generalized sense of displacement experienced by immigrants and migrants like the Baroness, or perhaps the suitcases more pointedly reference Loringhoven's consistent yet often unsuccessful struggle to maintain a permanent residence. The subtle avian linkage between Loringhoven's feather and the empty birdcage hint at a sense of entrapment. Though the images of the room betray none of the filthiness that William Carlos Williams ascribed to the Baroness and her living spaces, the room's Spartan appearance certainly reinforces her poverty.[7] Visually positioned alongside materials—objects in circulation, objects from the trash, objects soon to be discarded—Loringhoven's form also subtly suggests that the body too takes on the qualities of an object as something that possesses transient value but something that can also be discarded.[8] Like the careful self-fashioning seen in the New York Times profile of the Baroness, however, these images are unapologetic in their artifice, and intensely aware of their role in packaging the photographic subject for consumption. Loringhoven's stare reminds us that our viewership—and her awareness of that viewership bluntly recognizes the transaction taking place. Like the

[7] As Gammel and Zelazo's appendix point out, these images were captured in December of 1915 just a few days after a *New York Times* article appeared on the Baroness's costume art and just a few days before the *New York Times* ran another article titled, "Refugee Baroness Poses as Model." With the Baroness's cooperation, both pieces romanticized Loringhoven's tortured commitment to her art, a commitment that outstripped the needs for financial stability and material comfort (*Body Sweats* 351).

[8] Gammel and Zelazo observe that the Baroness's work is characterized by an awareness of the significance of the body: "The city for the Baroness evolves out of her bodily penetration of its surfaces. It is both a bastion of promise and a wasteland of demise… the city highlights its inherent contradiction, as the Baroness both consumes and is consumed by the metropolis" (*Body Sweats* 98).

unflinching and confrontational stare of Édouard Manet's Olympia (1865), the Baroness's gaze here acknowledges the viewer, collapsing the distance and imaginatively drawing us into the room with her. We are also momentarily faced with the possibility of occupying that space, of moving amongst the rumpled clothes and wardrobes as a matter of habit. We are allowed to blur the lines between viewing and creating art, but the Baroness insists that we must also become aware of our voyeurism.

The significance of the Baroness's formal borrowing from Dada's methods of performance—including a concern for arrangement and juxtaposition shared with Dadaist collages—becomes clearer when we situate "Performance Poem 3" alongside other forms of photographic portraiture of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century. Since the mid-1800s, portraiture had been developing a clear visual vocabulary for both class and gender. As Suren Lalvani notes, the depiction of a disciplined body was vital to individual Victorian portraits of the middle-class; the controlled appearance of head and hands, especially, drew inspiration from practices of physiognomy and strove to draw a sharp contrast with the apparent naturalism of the poor (as shown, for example, in the work of Jacob Riis), the criminal, and the insane (52, 66). The bourgeois subjects of portraiture do not stare confrontationally into the camera's lens, rather "The head-on stare… should be read in contrast to the cultivated asymmetries of aristocratic pose, for pose is a function of leisure while frontality confirms the complete lack of it" (Lalvani 66). Family portraits reproduced these postures while also visually reiterating the gendered divisions that characterized the normative Victorian family; in these family arrangements "the male's body conducts itself with public authority": while woman is cast as a "private" "dutiful support" (Lalvani 63). Such an image of masculine authority and feminine submissiveness is clearly satirized through Loringhoven's fluid gender performance. Further, Loringhoven also

rejects the supposed naturalism of a confrontational gaze for as her posture suggests, any such assumption is radically undercut by the explicit staging of the images.

Loringhoven's studio photographs also nod to the conventions for representing the artist at work in his studio. Just as photography began intervening to shape and package bourgeois identity, the same technology also assisted in cultivating artistic identities through the proliferation of artists' portraits and images of artists at work in their studios. These kinds of photographs, like the ones of middle-class families, offered carefully packaged fantasies that catered to a growing demand for "authentic" depictions of artist-celebrities that also ironically reinforced Romantic-era ideals of the artist as an isolated genius. As Caroline Jones outlines, the studio was imagined as a space of masculine retreat separate from public spaces governed by the frenetic patterns of commerce and labor, as well as from the feminine intrusions of the domestic sphere. Images from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—paintings and increasingly photographs and films—reinforce the ideal of the heroic individual artist in his studio. These images offered "documentation" of the artist in his studio to a public curious about this separate world; from the outset they were characterized by equal measures of romance and realism (11). The public demand for these studio images responded to growing market for the circulation of celebrity images in the mid- and late-nineteenth century. Photographers like Felix Nadar, who visually recorded some of the most important artistic personalities of his day including George Sand, Alexander Dumas, Victor Hugo, and Sarah Bernhardt, promised an eager public that carefully staged poses could reveal to viewers the intimate character of the photographic subject (Baldwin 42). Images of the artist in his studio became especially prevalent in America at the dawn of the twentieth century both because the romance of heroic artistry streamlined nicely with American ideals of rugged individualism but also because urban growth, more than ever

before, threatened to invade the sacred territory of the studio, granting the impression to artists and gawkers alike that the artist's way of life was increasingly endangered by modernity (C. Jones 7, 8).

The images of Loringhoven's studio demonstrate keen awareness of these dominant forms of image-construction, the modes of reading they invite, and their status as commodities that "sell" carefully arranged narratives about their subjects. Adapting Dadaist collage strategy to the surface of the body and the medium of photography, the Baroness juxtaposes these related forms of bourgeois image-construction with the "blunt frontality" and careless naturalism typically reserved for poor, criminal, and insane subjects in order to heighten viewers' awareness to the artifice and fantasy that underwrite photography, including photographs of artists. She confronts the camera but she also demurs; her body is purposefully arranged but invites as much emphasis on raw physicality as it does the rational control of head and hand; her gender, sometimes androgynous and sometimes hyperfeminine, is easily exchanged with the removal of a costume; her explicit acknowledgement of being looked at prevents viewers from unselfconsciously examine her as a specimen of urban poverty. The artist's body, as well as her packaged images, the Baroness reminds us, are always imbricated in rather than separated from economic structures. A fantasy of the artist's isolation, after all, is one that implicitly, if anxiously, reinscribes the necessity of capitalism as an essential antagonist, a binarism the Baroness rejects.

As an introduction to the Baroness aesthetic of precarity, then, the artifacts of the Baroness's performances showcase the importance of the literal body to her artistic interventions which draw on and satirize norms of bourgeois bodily display by adapting Dadaist visual strategies of collage and juxtaposition into the field of photographic arrangement. The strength of

the Baroness's interventions in these photographs stems from her efforts to point out the artifice as she undercuts the fantasy of authenticity attached to photographs—whether it be the photographs of bourgeois families or of artists at work in their studios. The body is central to this—in the photographs we've examined it remains elusive, changeful, costumed. Even as she offers up her body as a corrective, however, the Baroness also reveals the precarity inherent to such transgression. The photographs bespeak an economic hardship that translates into a series of overlaid vulnerabilities—her body's physical vulnerability to hunger and eviction; the more abstract social vulnerability inherent in allowing the visual presentation of her body and environment to bespeak her poverty and working-class status, risking the regimes of visual control that mandate she be controlled either through dismissal or sanitization in order to manage the threat she represents to white, middle-class stability and respectability; and finally her work's vulnerability to obsolesce as art without a clear market, without a clear pathway to commodification, an art irrevocably bound to the mortal body of its creator. Thus these studio images help to flesh out one dimension of the Baroness's precarious aesthetic, formally creating forms of instability that mimic the thematic instability routed through Loringhoven's depictions of the body's confrontational power, on the one hand and on the other, its exposure and the necessary coexistence of these to truly radical art.

Aural Clutter: Juxtaposing Noise and Productive Sound

The body's material importance in the studio images helps direct us to a second and related prong of Loringhoven's precarious aesthetic similarly rooted in the body through representations of its sensorium. Throughout her career, Loringhoven repeatedly experimented with so-called sound poetry, a technique favored by many other Dada artists. In part, sound poetry allowed the Baroness to capture her experiences as a non-native English speaker, who

easily slipped between speaking and hearing her adopted and native languages. Blending German into English, poems like “Klink-Hratzvenga (Deathwail)” replicate the aural experiences of sliding from and into two different languages.[9] Perhaps more importantly, sound offered to Loringhoven a clear pathway between the body and the written word. Because sounds are created by the body, their inclusion in the Baroness’s work reiterate her commitment to foregrounding the body’s physicality. To create and apprehend sound are physical processes; the palate is arranged, and air moves in order to create an emission; sound waves literally touch and vibrate the human ear in order to create impressions. While the Baroness likely wasn’t aware of the mechanics of aural production, she also no doubt sensed that calling up sound involved forcefully asserting the body’s role, not just as a subject for creative processes, but in and of itself a vital medium through which artistry was filtered. Loringhoven’s embrace of sound eschewed a practice of downplaying or scrubbing away the body in writing, framing her body as the mechanism of creative production while also forcing her readers to imaginatively engage their own bodies in order to grasp her work.

Several of the Baroness's avant-garde contemporaries were keenly aware of the tensions between noise and sound and sought to stage confrontations between the two in musical compositions and performances; the Baroness's understanding of noise and sound may well have emerged from cross-pollination with the ideas of these artists, including Marcel Duchamp and George Antheil—both of whom the Baroness knew personally—as well as Antonin Artaud, connected to the Baroness through a shared network of friends and collaborators and through the

[9] Gammel and Zelazo argue that this poem as well as “Herzlücke is Nick Verpo,” another of the Baroness’s sound poems, demonstrate the importance of corporeality to the Baroness’s written work: “Based on sonic concatenation, her sound poems convey the processual making and unmaking of corporeality, yielding provisional insight not simply into her own integrative aesthetics, but into one of the most complex and little understood poetic genres” (“Harpsichords Metallic Howl” 259).

shared inheritances of Dada.[10] Though often ignored in discussions of Duchamp's oeuvre, he worked to produce radio programs that shared with his visual artwork an interest in "found objects," and reproducibility. He experimented with the line between monotonously, repetitive sounds—like the turning of a bike wheel—and music (Adcock 114). Both Artaud and Duchamp offered examples of how to repurpose the sonic vulnerability wrought by the intrusiveness of radio, forcing listeners to encounter the discomfiting underbelly of modern sound—sounds eradicated from the sanitized world of popular radio programming. In George Antheil, composer to Fernand Léger's Ballet Mecanique (1924), Loringhoven identified a more explicit corollary for her own work. His musical compositions utilized traditional melodies but also employed a cacophonic, percussive use of the piano that borrowed from jazz and recalled the industrial noise of machines, disrupting notions of music as orderly and cohesive. The Baroness and Antheil were friends until the two experienced a falling out.[11] Though she chastised him privately for his vanity and pomposity, her poetic "portrait" of Antheil makes clear her admiration for his artistry: "Blast thine very slick head—I love it—trim polopony… Clash—crash sounding asunder jiggling sun—fragment jazz twirrlin / awhizz—rainbow crystalkaleidoscope intermingling-- / sharp-hitting—noiseflicking swish / Pleasure wheel of hail stinging brilliancy. Assembling anew shape recreated to importance of elevated form…" ("George Antheil"). Much like sections of

[10] Christopher Schiff's article "Banging on the Windowpane" articulates a distinctly Surrealist notion of sound as a part of theatrical production but acknowledges the crossover between the Surrealist goal of using sound to force an audience out of "passivity" and into "clear, active awareness of its own reality" (150). Dadaists used sound not to shock audiences but to combat audience passivity through frustration and aggression (Schiff 151). As a one-time Surrealist, Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, therefore, owes at least some of its configuration of techniques derived from Dada. Artaud's most famous compositions came to be known as the Theater of Cruelty. Artaud's jarring poetry, critiquing a range of societal ills, was interspersed with bodily noises of pain and discomfort—including groans, screams, and cries in order to critique society.

[11] According to an angry letter penned by the Baroness, Antheil ordered the Baroness to leave his Paris studio (Letter to George Antheil).

"Caught in Greenwich Village," the Baroness's onomatopoetic rendering of Antheil's compositions plays with the blending of sound into language and vice-versa.

This framework for encountering the Baroness's sound poetry intensifies in her experiments hybridizing sound poetry and performance, as is the case in her piece "Caught in Greenwich Village," which at once employs the kind of nonsensical emissions of her more radical sound poetry while also employing the conventions of dramatic writing. The piece is organized into three different "moments" or times of day inside the apartment building. Dialogue is divided, sometimes between characters but more often between distinctive voices. "Caught" opens with a conversation between a "Starved Lady Neighbor, "an "Illustrator Youth Neighbor" but later introduces "Raucous Female Voice," a "Peach Melba Voice" a "high-pitched male voice," a "suave host voice," a "hoarse compromise whisper," and a chorus. "Raucous," "high pitched," "low pitched," and "hoarse" all conjure rather unpleasant aural impressions. More appealingly, the synesthetic titling of the "the peach-melba" voice recalls both the sweetness of the dessert as well as the operatic talent of its namesake, singer Nellie Melba. The descriptions of these voices characterize the apartment building as a collage of aurality while also underscoring that neighborly interaction in this space is rooted much more firmly in the sounds of people than in their looks or identities.

Like the studio photographs, "Caught in Greenwich Village" is a piece that configures the body and its emissions as sites of confrontational power but also intense vulnerability. Furthering the Baroness's critique of bourgeois ideals of the carefully managed body, the play explores the ways in which these same mechanisms of bodily control are refitted into the rhetoric of urban noise pollution and abatement, revealing a desire not only to control the threat of lower- and working-class flesh but indeed to erase even the most intangible traces of these bodies.

Throughout the poem/play, the Baroness invokes these forms of policing while also drawing attention to the ways that these forms of policing work to reinforce the patterns of social behavior and organization demanded by capitalism. At the same time, Loringhoven also offers up the body as a site of resistance, extending the unruliness of the body seen in her studio images into the realm of the apartment soundscape. She celebrates the messiness of sounds—the inadvertent and uncontrollable sounds that bespeak the body's functionings; the unique co-existence of sound's physical connection to the body and its simultaneous detachment that allows it to skirt the essentializing notions of gender and identity that undergird bourgeois surveillance; and the important role that nonsensical sounds play in disrupting, even fleetingly, the smoothly-organized messaging of consumer society.

The hybrid play/poem explores the aural contours of a crowded Greenwich Village apartment building. Already from the poem's title, Loringhoven activates a range of associations with the Village that threaten the neat lives of New York's bourgeois values—the same types of values called into question by the Baroness's studio images. Greenwich Village had always been distinct from other areas of the city.[12] In the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries, it garnered a reputation for its unique population; a blend of artists, "bohemians," immigrants, and African Americans earning it a reputation for improper social and racial mixing as well as sexual promiscuity. As such, it became a site of simultaneous fascination and revulsion for many New Yorkers, who toured and tasted but quickly left behind the unsavory sights and lewd pleasures of

[12] According to *Greenwich Village: Culture and Counter Culture*, the district now known as Greenwich Village remained "remote" until a "series of virulent fever outbreaks that led evacuees to flee northward from the city core, swelling the Village's population fourfold between 1825 and 1840" (5).

the Village.[13] By the time the Baroness settled in the area this impulse was, more clearly than ever, poured into radical aesthetic activity, including the salon meetings in the home of Mable Dodge, the shocking Armory show in 1913, and the opening of the Little Review offices in 1917. Thus, already an area known for its inappropriate social intimacies at street level, Loringhoven intensifies this sense of impropriety by further exposing the intimacies that occur within a supposedly more private space.

Like the title, the piece's opening dialogue of invites us to consider the taboo intimacies that a dingy apartment building enables. The first "moment," takes place "morning in the hallway" and begins with a conversation regarding a shared bathroom, hot water, and a moment of male hygiene:

Morning in the hallway.

Starved Lady Studio Neighbor:

You may use the hot water— —

Illustrator Youth Neighbor:

Thanks—I'm going to shave———

ST.L.ST. N

How perfectly exciting! ("Caught in Greenwich Village")

That a "starving" studio-dweller and a youthful artist must share a bathroom suggests that this building offers inexpensive accommodations—low-cost rent in exchange for outdated facilities,

[13] The black village, or Little Africa, Strausbaugh point out, had a very specific impact on the neighborhood's reputation for promiscuity; "black-and-tans," saloons where blacks and whites mixed for "drinking, dancing, and sexual assignations" stroking the racial anxieties of many white New Yorkers (69).

and shabby living spaces that shelter but do not protect residents from routine intrusions, physical and sonic, into their privacy. Waste and upkeep are not sequestered but are made explicit through the body's inadvertent sonic emissions. Further, the fact that such an interaction happens between a man and a woman playfully riffs on the widespread fear of poverty's connection to promiscuity. The level of sharing between these two voices, the poem acknowledges, is almost certainly too intimate for bourgeois standards of propriety even if the result of that intimacy is laughably unerotic. This first exchange also, importantly, marks a moment of rare concreteness to this poem/play. As in conventional drama, there are distinct characters who, to a certain extent, are allotted specific identities. The setting, a hallway, is a place we can imagine two characters meeting and interacting. As "Caught" goes on, however, both settings and characters become increasingly unmoored; interactions between sounds become more central than the interactions between characters. Transitioning into the second "moment," the poem's dialogue is attached not to characters but to voices—raucous voices, hoarse voices, high-pitched voices. As such the dialogue becomes progressively more difficult to assemble according to the back-and-forth conversational framework that appears in the poem's first moment. Does the raucous female voice featured in the second moment, for example, belong to the starved lady studio neighbor or are we hearing the voice of a new neighbor? More challengingly, does the less-explicitly gendered, "peach melba" voice that responds belong to a woman or a man, the starved lady studio neighbor or the youth illustrator? The gendered sound of a voice becomes even further detached from our ability to attach that voice to a character when the "high-pitched male voice" identifies itself as "that high-strung Baroness," suggesting that a masculine voice may well belong to a female character or body, playfully exploring the notion of sound as irrevocably connected to the body but simultaneously freed from the gendered

ideals that govern the physical flesh. Such moments seem to undercut the revealing forms of physical intimacy explored in the first moment. The confusing nature of these voices—including their elusiveness and inability to firmly establish the gender-identity of the speakers—suggests that the apparent invitation to tenement voyeurism will be both satisfying and frustrating by equally revealing and obfuscating the lives of the apartment-dwellers.

In the poem's second "moment," lunchtime, the scene is described as a sonic atmosphere rather than a physical environment, opening with the italicized notation: "conversation emanates from the starved studio lady's door." We understand that we are hearing voices as they echo through the apartment building—snippets of clear conversation as well as nonsensical phrases that seem to be just out of range of clear hearing.

Lunch hour.

Conversation emanating from starved lady studio door.
(High Pitched Male Voice)
I'm that high strung spiritual Baroness—dear—soon's I'm through sousing Laura-dear's dishes—tinkle I mellow ukulele—dear—to adjust my aura—

(Raucous Female Voice)
Tinkle Laura— —

(Peach Melba Voice)
We Vibrate. ("Caught in Greenwich Village")

Besides "sousing" the dishes, the remainder of the words attributed to a "high-pitched male voice," rely on impressions of sound. "Tinkle," for instance may be an attempt to onomatopoetically capture the sounds of dishes lightly jostling against one another inside a full sink. The following words "Tinkle I mellow ukulele," rely on consonance, linking the words together via common sound rather than meaning refusing to provide clear guidance on whether these words record noises produced by the dishes (or some other inanimate object) or whether they capture the experience of hearing distant conversation just out of range of clear apprehension. Meaning, Loringhoven insists, must come from the sounds themselves and not from any ability to neatly fit them into a longed-for linguistic framework; her poem insists on textually valuing something typically dismissed as the aural equivalent of material detritus: noise. Douglas Kahn's definition of "noise" stresses its disruptive tendencies: "The existence of noise implies a mutable world through an unruly intrusion of another that attracts difference, heterogeneity, and productive confusion" (22). Kahn's characterization of noise as "generative" but also "intrusive" and "unruly," suggests that noises derive their disruptive potential precisely because they are "unproductive" aural phenomena released without necessarily being attached to a goal or objective. Seen through the lens of Kahn's definition, then, the "noises" in the poem provide a nonsensical contrast to the more "productive," goal-driven nature of the conversations featured elsewhere in "Caught." Part of what's at play here is the Baroness's clear channeling of Dada's interest in deploying the absurd and the illogical to poke fun at or undermine the systems of communication that support consumer culture; in celebrating aspects of the aural scenery typically dismissed as unimportant or unnecessary, the Baroness insists on valuing the devalued much in the same way that her photographs and sculptures foreground physical detritus. What

also begins to emerge at this point in the poem, however, is a keener interest in noise as an extension of the politics of the messy body into the realm of the aural messiness.

This becomes more apparent in the poem's third "moment," the scene is "evening" and "jazz music—voices—penetrating from illustrator youth door." Significantly, the mention of jazz again subtly prods the tension between "noise" and productive sound. According to Emily Thompson, early jazz was widely discounted by musicians and musical critics as noise: "At the foundation of debates of the musical and cultural value of jazz was an assumption of a fundamental dichotomy between music and noise. Music was legitimate sound and noise was not. Music was harmonious, regular, and orderly; noise was discordant, irregular, and disorderly" (Thompson 132). Thompson ties the debates over the worth of jazz to contemporary concerns over the rise of urban noise and its concomitant solution of noise abatement. As Thompson's investigation of sound shows, "noise pollution" and noise abatement became important objectives for twentieth-century urban reformers. In their quest to do away with deleterious noise, reformers were forced to distinguish noise from acceptable sounds and to weigh which noises were necessary evils to be suffered in the name of "progress" (120-1). The particular mission to eliminate only "unnecessary noises," "tapped into a larger cultural trend that was increasingly valorizing the principle of efficiency and its corollary, the elimination of all things unnecessary" (122). Noise, within this Taylorist cultural milieu, was imbued with a sense of the extraneous, and the uncontrollable. The labeling of jazz as "noise," provides an especially salient example of how racism undergirded the rhetoric of urban sound reformers and how Taylorism helped repackage and modernize the language of racism; calls for more stringent policing of sound simply refitted the rhetoric of noise to suit the classist and racist notions of excessiveness that had long positioned immigrants, non-white, lower-and working-class people as disorderly

and dirty (Thompson 124-15, 132). Thus, Loringhoven's mention of jazz immediately signals the building's rejection of the bourgeois differentiations of noise and sound—the setting notes explicitly identify jazz as music. Moreover, that two artistic types—the illustrator and possibly a fictionalization of the Baroness herself—are exposed to jazz asserts that creativity embraces, co-exists, and makes meaning from within venues of physical and sonic disorder. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the aural setting for this particular "moment" begins to more explicitly position the text's attention to sound—including the apartment's unintelligible murmurs, and everyday noises—as an overt rejection not only of bourgeois attitudes but also of the capitalist frameworks of productivity and progress that undergird them.

Indeed, as the "moment" continues, nonsensical sounds and exclamations are increasingly positioned in formal tension with other voices that penetrate the apartment building intoning disapproval and advocating for the more careful self-discipline of the residents. The "raucous female voice" and the "high-pitched male voice" again converse, this time accompanied by a "suave Host Voice," and "Hoarse Compromise Voice," "A Doleful Chorus," and a "Chorus Prim." Like the previous moment, this section refuses specifically to attribute voices to characters. Instead the dialogue exists only as a form of sound. The section is worth quoting in full here:

(Suave Host Voice)

Emotional economy—

(Raucous Female Voice)

Mass famine—

Cheap overproduction—

Two-in-one—all in nix mix up mess—

Back yard tincan clutter clatter-ratter—

(Hoarse Compromise Whisper)

You go too strong—hush!

You go too strong—

(Raucous Female Voice)

Push!

(Doleful Chorus)

No push!

(Raucous Female Voice)

Canopener!

(Chorus prim)

Impossible—dangerous—uncivilized

Untinned—natural—animal!

Don't let it in again. ("Caught in Greenwich Village")

A clear back-and-forth pattern emerges, pitting cautious and disciplinary voices against a more provocative voice that spews nonsense interspersed with names of mundane object shouted like obscenities. The "suave host voice" makes its first and only appearance with seductive promises

of “emotional economy.” The appearance of this voice, as well as the later appearance of a choral voice, are peculiar choices for this piece; the labeling of these voices seems to more explicitly draw attention to the elements of performance that more subtly mark other sections of “Caught.” The host affects a charming refinement, aware he is being overheard. Similarly, the hostile chorus voice appears to suddenly project into the apartment building a crowd synchronized in their repetition of the host’s invitation and in their anger towards the “raucous” voice. Intoning the Baroness's own indictments of consumer society, the “raucous female voice,” refuses to be seduced by the host’s invitations. The response, “Mass famine,” bluntly draws attention to the problems of starvation and privation that result from “cheap overproduction,” drawing attention to irony of corollary terms like production and productivity; as the “raucous voice” observes, commodities are manufactured in mass and yet large segments of the population lack basic necessities. The final line of the “raucous” voice’s diatribe--“backyard tincan clutter clatter-ratter”--at once draws attention to the physical waste produced by overproduction but also ties this material waste to the forms of aural waste called up throughout “Caught.” The sonic similarity between “clutter,” a word connoting physical detritus and “clatter,” a word signaling an unpleasant clanging, emphasize the ironic nature of urban aural policing. Here it’s not the bodies of apartment inhabitants, their aural emissions, or their musical preferences that require discipline. Instead, the byproducts of consumer culture are the source of excessive obnoxious noises targeted by abatement advocates. The chorus, doubling down on the host’s initial message, responds in kind, accusing the female voice of being “impossible, uncivilized, dangerous and untinned” suggesting that those who “push” against the messages of consumerist society must be considered less than human, bestial.

The sense of both host and chorus as somewhat out of place in "Caught"'s cast of voices, as well as their synchronized condemnation of the apartment's residents, configures these voices as intrusive. At the same time, the piece is marked throughout by an implicit awareness of the forms of judgement and policing that frame the bodies of inhabitants as unruly. The explicit intonation of these criticisms pushes us to consider how these hostile personas have entered the space of the apartment building. This question is perhaps best answered by turning to an investigation of the era's most important entertainment technologies: radio. Radio became especially popular in the 1920s; widely-enjoyed entertainment programs often featured charming hosts who used their voices to establish a rapport with listeners while also taking on an apparently directorial role in organizing and sometimes performing alongside featured acts.[14] However, even before radio programming became a mainstay of the American household, the technology emerged as a special marketing tool deployed by department stores looking for ways of drawing customers into their stores with promises of novelty. According to Noah Arceneaux, the popularization of radio can be traced to early advertising experiments conducted by large department stores, Wanamaker's; as early as 1914, Wanamaker's began broadcasting and experimenting with a strategy of "offering music at no charge to listeners; the company's profits would come from selling radio receivers" (Arceneaux 810).[15] A frequent department store

[14] According to Eric Barnouw's *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States Until 1933,* radio broadcasting did indeed take place before WWI; the broadcasts, however, were experimental and had limited range. During WWI, the technology was expanded to meet military communication needs. Only after WWI did radio become more widespread; Barnouw refers to the 1920s as the "golden age" of radio in the United States.

[15] Arceneaux goes on to assert that the Wanamaker stations were "clearly part of a larger retail effort and they were intended to generate revenue" (811). Later, the radio stations themselves became an incentive for the public to visit the Wanamaker's store, where they could see the radio stations in operation: "Department stores also used radio studios to entertain shoppers. An upper floor was the recommended spot, as this location was not only optimal for transmitting radio signals but it also forced curious shoppers to navigate several floors of merchandise in order to witness the spectacle" (Arceneaux 826).

shoplifter, the Baroness would almost certainly have encountered Wanamaker's radio stations and would have associated this technology with the promotional objectives of department stores. Commercial uses of radio provided a blueprint for the later commercialization of radio in the late-1920s when advertisements began to increasingly dominate the airwaves of publicly-available programming. Against this historical and technological backdrop, the sudden introduction of the host and choral voices in "Caught" might be understood as a parodic channeling of radio programming.[16] Here, the voice's insistence on "emotional economy" becomes more visible as a satire of advertising's tendency to galvanize purchasing through the manipulation of emotions. Similarly, the chorus takes on a more sinister cast, implying that behind the initial suave voice that implores purchasing, is a multitude of voices waiting to cajole and threaten those who refuse. Within the piece's broader scope, host and chorus become metonymic for the relationship between capitalism and bourgeois regulation; the suave voice of advertising makes enticements and the chorus of middle-class society ensures the replication of and investment in those messages, while technology allows these voices of scorn to invade spaces of reprieve.

Throughout Loringhoven's poem, meaningful language is indeed associated with the voices affiliated with radio's powers of advertising. Noises and nonsense, by contrast, are associated with the conversation between residents and the subtle sounds of everyday life, like washing the dishes. Noise, as an abstract form of detritus, the poem suggests, constitutes an important aspect of capturing the body's autonomy from the intersecting forces of bourgeois

[16] It is unlikely that the Baroness ever kept a radio in her studio, even once they became more freely available to the public in the 1920s; cost would have been prohibitive. Thus my interpretation here imagines the Baroness transposing into her own space a technology that was, at the time, almost exclusively used by commercial entities and the military. Not until after WWI did private use of radios become more widespread. Additionally, it's unlikely that the Baroness would've been able to afford a radio.

morality and consumerist imperatives that seek to streamline the urban soundscape to exclude the utterances of residents like those in the Greenwich Village apartment building. At the core of this poem is a sense that unproductive but nevertheless vital sounds of human life might be lost or overwritten by capitalism's insistence on productive and purposeful speech. As such, noise represents an important extension of the aesthetic of precarity seen in Loringhoven's sculpture and her photographs; here notions of vulnerability shift away from the physical body towards its traces, its aural products considered extraneous within the framework of efficient and objective-driven language. Formally including "noise" in her performance/poem, Loringhoven asserts its value and importance while also acknowledging its fragility and extension of the residents' vulnerability. Time bound and mundane, the utterances that characterize urban existence for the apartment-dwellers, like the bodies that produce them, are themselves precarious and in danger of erasure.

Solving Public Problems: Reordering Advertising Rhetoric

Within the space of the private studio, the Baroness traces the photographic discipline and packaging of bodies; in the semi-private space of the apartment she explores the tension between sounds and noises, productive utterances and so-called nonsense, ultimately showing how bodily policing extends into the abstract productions of the body, bending them to adhere to bourgeois standards that govern the physical body. Finally, in turning to the space of the city itself, we see the Baroness shift to consider messages of policing in expectations of public comportment. Examining the text of advertisements, the Baroness's observations of the broader urban environment register the didactic role that these publications play in adapting private bourgeois morality to the space of the subways car and, how these advertisements slyly align bourgeois bodily ideologies with the self-replicating aims of consumer culture and ultimately,

the elision of both with notions of citizenship, morality, participation and how people are taught to view their own bodies but also the way their bodies are meant to be comported in public.

In the series "Subjoyride" and "Sense into Nonsense 2. Subjoyride" the Baroness provides two collage-style poems that recombine the slogans and copy of the advertisements littering urban public space. The similar titling, form, and subject matter of these two pieces suggest that the Baroness had perhaps intended to write a series of poems on the experience of riding the subway. Built into the title of each is a hint to the paradoxes they contain; the act of riding the subway is a joy but is also fraught with overstimulation and confusion. Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo describe "Subjoyride" as a "high-energy walk through New York City" channeling "the city's unceasing motion and energy but also forc[ing] us to confront the underside of a burgeoning culture of consumerism. With objects, brand names, and landmarks colliding, the poem draws attention to its very construction" (Bodysweats 99). Fragmented product descriptions and brand slogans mimic the experience of reading while in caught in forward motion while at the same time collapsing advertising rhetoric into a cascade of language that demonstrates the nauseatingly similar message of contempt for the body built into their sales pitches. The Baroness highlights the mechanisms through which advertisements stoke displeasure with the body; offering solutions, correctives, and compensations through the products they hawk. Throughout the poem, the Baroness also gestures to the significant ways that consumer culture intersects with forms of bodily management; advertising here replaces the voice of bourgeois policing to teach and instill the importance of manners and decorum, a voice that Loringhoven reminds us is not neutral but rather has a vested interest in bending morality to turn a profit.

In the early 1900s, New York transit was not united into a single municipal system. Instead, privately owned companies managed short, tracks. As various private companies sought to expand their networks, it became necessary to use poster advertisements not only to teach passengers how to best make use of this new transportation technology but also to incline passengers to support legislative policies favorable to their businesses.[17] The Interborough Transit lines, constructed between 1900 and 1904 and operated by the Interborough Transit Company (IRT), was the true subway; the line opened to great fanfare in October of 1904 and "many regarded them as the last word in rapid transit technology and design" (Condit 517).[18] The tracks ran from "city hall in lower Manhattan up the East Square on the West Side, and then through the Upper West side to the Bronx" (Hood 315). The subway offered an experience vastly different from the above-ground rapid transit passengers were accustomed to; riders traversed the city without seeing it, were subjected to a dark and claustrophobic labyrinth, and experienced a greater sense of crowding" (Hood 316). Further, "when the pressure of ethnic, gender, and class differences were added to the claustrophobia of being below ground, the riding experience could be anxiety-provoking" (Hood 319).

In part to address these social anxieties and in part to perpetuate a positive view of the subway that would sustain the line's continued success and expansion, the IRT began to adorn interiors of their cars with posters designed to teach proper behaviors for riding the subway. Scholarly accounts of a parallel effort in the posters of the London Underground provide a useful framework for understanding the aims of these posters.[19] According to Teri Edelstein, the poster

[17] These lines were extremely lucrative: "Private managers were economical. They sought to make money by controlling costs and attracting as many riders as possible, something that has not been happening for generations. They built lines in the most profitable areas first and planned the less potentially profitable lines later" (Bresiger 52).
[18] Rapid Transit had been available in the form of above-ground railways since the late 1800s (Hood 312).

[19] It's also worth noting the important differences between American and British subway poster campaigns. The poster initiative in London was significantly more radical in its conceptualization as well as its visual presentation.

campaign, overseen by Frank Pick, aimed to "create a positive relationship between the underground and its passengers. But from the beginning, in addition to providing information, the campaigns goals included encouraging ridership to new destinations and on new lines and acquainting Londoners with the novelties and achievements of their transit system" ("Birth of the London Underground Posters"). Further, "Early posters... were a lure to the new subway system where destinations were clearly mapped" (Catlin). As the Art Institute of Chicago's 2019 exhibition "Everyone's Art Gallery: Posters of the London Underground" showcased, images advised riders on how to visit parks and zoos and when to take the subway to comfortably avoid rush hour traffic on the way to department stores. In an American context, these didactic posters similarly reinforced the economic goals of the private transit companies, while also reinforcing the interests of other profit-driven entities.

Both of Loringhoven's "Subjoyride" poems blend subway announcements with the language of advertisements, drawing attention to the crossover between the forms of bodily comportment demanded by each and to their similar persuasive appeals. In the first "Subjoyride installment Loringhoven records directives like "Safety controller handle—" "Getting on and off unlawful" "Rapid Transit" "Wake up your passengers" drawing attention to the behaviors demanded by subways passengers ("Subjoyride"). The directives demand compliance on grounds of "safety" and "lawfulness." In the second poem, italicized directions intoning the

Frank Pick purposefully sought out modernist artists to create the poster art, yoking new forms of image-making to new forms of seeing and apprehending the urban environment. Defending his choices, Pick wrote: "There is a conventional way of looking at things which it is hard to disturb. There is a protective habit in city dwellers of not looking at things at all which is fortunate otherwise they could hardly go on living in some cities. Posters come to disturb and destroy such habit or convention. To visit a picture show and to come out again into the streets ought to mean that for the moment at least the eye sees things anew, if there has been any value in the picture show. So it is with the poster." (Pick qtd in Pike 29). The creators of these posters, as well as Pick, recognized that "introducing their art into the posters that constituted such an important element in this heavily mediated environment might effect a radical change in the nature of life in the capital" (Ashford 6).

voice of a subway's conductor follow suite, manipulating the language of safety to dictate passenger conduct aboard the subway: "Caution!" "Don't rush/ Please!" "Sloping lines!" suggestive of the ways the subway literally shapes the physical comportment of its riders ("Sense into Nonsense 2. Subjoyride"). Elsewhere, other similarly brief imperatives appear, perhaps extending the directives of a subway conductor but perhaps also extending the directions of the advertisements themselves: "Be alert—/ Sanitary— / Clean" more explicitly tying the bodily demands of the subway to rituals of hygiene uncoincidentally promoted by the advertisements displayed alongside subway tracks and inside subway cars ("Sense into Nonsense 2. Subjoyride").

Subway posters of the time further reveal the explicit imbrication of bourgeois morality with a rapidly expanding network of urban capitalism. Specifically, they reveal a conflation of bourgeois morality with notions of urban citizenship invented and circulated by corporations, offering one example of the expansion of the forms of policing that preoccupy Loringhoven's meditation on the regulation of private and semi-private venues. Critically, early subway bulletins harness the anxiety of fear and discomfort about the congestion of cities, especially unwanted physical contact between crowded residents. This anxiety overlaps with that of "Caught" regarding the proximity of bodies and the intimate forms of sharing that take place within such close quarters. 1920s posters of the Elevated Express and the Subway Sun, two "publications" produced and displayed inside the cars of the private urban railway corporation, Interborough Rapid Transit Company, stoked fears about urban crowding and proximate bodies to encourage riders to make greater use of the railway, both to alleviate the need to contact with other urban-dwellers and to access suburban spaces where the problem of the masses was

alleviated.[20] Many of these posters reiterate proper behaviors for comporting oneself in public. A 1924 poster reminds riders that "Curtesy from All to All, passengers and employees alike, makes traveling so much more pleasant" (Interborough Rapid Transit Company, "Curtesy from All to All"). Accompanied by a cartoon image of a well-dressed woman, clad in heels, fashionable hat, and fur muff as a smiling conductor places a friendly hand on her shoulder, reminding us of the subtly reiterates the multiple behaviors woven into a term like "curtesy" including comportment in keeping with gender dynamics of the time as well as fashion that bespeaks respectability but also an investment in the looks promoted by consumer culture

Posters encouraged greater attention to individual responsibility for urban cleanliness but also reiterated myths about the physical filth resulting from so many bodies operating in close proximity to one another in urban spaces; the text from a May 1924 poster for instance, reads: "CLEAN-UP. This is a 'Municipal Good Housekeeping' movement worthy of everyone's help. If all avoid throwing papers, etc. in the streets, Subway and Elevated stations or entrances, everybody will benefit. These places can be kept neat only if all help." Equating urban cleanup with "municipal good housekeeping" demonstrates this advertisement's attempts to draw from the gendered rhetoric of middle-class housewifery and invite an extension of these norms into the space of the public sphere (Interborough Rapid Transit Company "Clean Up Week"). The strategic expansion of these norms into the public sphere is, of course, necessary to the company's reputation; though the project initially appears to be a city-wide effort, the text of the poster makes clear that the greatest "housekeeping" efforts should be concentrated on areas associated with the subway in an effort to cement the subway's affiliation with a physical

[20] The Baroness unquestionably saw and was aware of these publications. Her first of the "Subjoyride" poems, in fact, borrows a line commonly featured on *Subway Sun* posters: "Our men know their jobs," a slogan designed to convey the company's commitment to safety as well as passenger satisfaction.

cleanliness that bespeaks a secondary cleanliness: the ability to remove people from the squalor of congestion, spiriting them to open areas. A 1923 poster, featuring idyllic images of Prospect Park, sparsely populated by respectably dressed women (who might remind us of the cartoon image of "curtesy") and men strolling through meticulously organized gardens, proudly proclaims that L passengers can easily take the subway "from crowded rooms to open spaces in the city's beautiful parks" (Interborough Rapid Transit Company "From Crowded Rooms to Open Spaces"). Such images contrast sharply with other posters from the era like one from 1924, where images of swarms of cars and people characterize the urban landscape and text implores riders to "Help relieve traffic congestion by parking your car outside the crowded districts; then finish your trip by Open Air 'L' or Subway. QUICKER SAFER," not only appealing to riders' anxieties that the discomfort and dislike of congestion could actually be unsafe, but also casting the use of public transit as a kind of ethical imperative for invested citizens (Interborough Rapid Transit Company "Save New York's Streets"). Such messages of course, manipulatively cast citizenship to suit the needs of a profit-driven business looking to expand its ridership as well as its economic subsidies from the city itself. It's no accident that park spaces are populated by fashionably dressed, white middle-and-upper class people just like it's no accident that scenes of urban congestion show throngs of people, of unidentifiable race or class, indiscriminately mixing with one another.

The collapsing of the Interborough Expresses' self-serving advertisements with bourgeois standards of respectability and urban citizenship is especially apparent in the final advertisement we'll examine here, which reprints a quote from then-president Calvin Coolidge (Interborough Rapid Transit Company "A Word from President Coolidge"). The poster text reads: "A Word from President Coolidge… Get the children out of the alleys and off the streets into open places.

Teach them true sportsmanship, right living and the love of being square." Directly following, the company promises that "Any Interborough Line Will Take You to the Parks and Other Outing Spots." Like the posters of urban congestion and suburban leisure, Coolidge's rhetoric reveals several assumptions about the city: that the physical landscape of the city—its narrow dark alleys—present a threat to the physical health of children. That health can only be recovered by leaving the immediate urban environment, a movement the poster reminds us, is largely made possible through the subway system. Finally, Coolidge's language ties this physical movement to the development of good character; his words rest on the assumption that only through access to "open places" can children learn sportsmanship, "right" living, and "love of being square" thereby also alluding to the obverse assumption: that bodies physically threatened by the city are also at moral risk of the city's corruption, where they may not embrace the conventional code of ethics implied by "square-dom". In this way, the Interborough Rapid transit system configures itself as an antidote; only through purchasing ride tickets can urban dwellers be assured of their children's physical and therefore also, moral health. Finally, that this language comes from the president himself implicitly suggests an alliance between the aims of government and the aims of the subway company itself; by providing access to the spaces Coolidge prescribes, the subway characterizes itself as a fundamentally American institution, dedicating itself to the work of ethically molding the next generation of citizens. Of this rhetoric too, the Baroness's "Subjoyride" series seem intensely aware. The closing lines of her final ride remind readers that: "The guard will tell you/ Live happier in Leonia," a reference to the New Jersey suburb across the river from New York ("Sense into Nonsense 2. Subjoyride"). The guard's words, like Coolidge's, reiterate an alliance between pleasure and the suburbs, displeasure and the city; and also like the Interborough Rapid Transit system's use of Coolidge's speech in its own

advertising, the guard's encouragements ensure that riders who do choose suburban living will be beholden to the subway's mobility but also to exposure to the advertising billboards that rely on routes into the city.

These advertising posters provide a primer in the framework of bodily control inherently constructed by the space of the subway itself. Like other advertising of the time, the Interborough Rapid Transit system sought to create or heighten attention to "problems" as they suited the company's aims; stoking fears about urban cleanliness, both in the sense of trash and of the sense of congestion, encouraged riders to seek respite in the suburban spaces made available by purchasing additional, weekend subway tickets; casting the city as a physically and therefore morally deleterious space for children adds a greater air of urgency to securing additional ride fares. Finally, in specifically tying these fears to obligations of good citizenship the Interborough Transit Company nicely demonstrates the imbrication of capitalist values with American ones and the extent to which each rely on anxious narratives about urban bodies. The anxieties acknowledged by "Caught in Greenwich Village" in other words, take on a more subtle cast and an equally subtle promise—that corporations will take up the mantle of bourgeois policing of urban bodies while also providing them with the escape they crave for the price of a roundtrip ticket.

In turning to the text of the Baroness's first and much longer "Subjoyride" poem, then, the fragmented accounts of advertising slogans and product jingles must be seen as an extension of the process wherein corporations increasingly intone the rhetoric of bourgeois bodily discipline to fragment the body into a series of endlessly self-replicating problems. While such these advertisements lack the gravity of Subway Sun and Elevated Express Posters, they nevertheless harness similar fears. Especially because many of these advertisements promote

hygiene products, the advertisements not only teach passengers to fear the threat of other bodies but indeed to fear their own physicality.

"Subjoyride" opens with the boldly capitalized proclamation: "READY-TO WEAR—/AMERICAN SOUL POETRY. / (THE RIGHT KIND)" ("Subjoyride"). From the outset, the poem's speaker establishes a connection between the poetry and clothing, likening poetry to "ready-to wear" garments. On the one hand, the opening explicitly links the poem's formal characteristics to Dadaist "readymade" poetry. On the other, the opening treatment of poetry as cladding is also suggestive of Loringhoven's insistent centralizing of the body as an interface, as the primary mechanism for accessing, gathering, and assembling the sensory fragments of urban life. Poetry, as the opening metaphor of this poem would have us believe, rubs against the skin and rustles against its surfaces; the body becomes the canvas onto which these advertisements are inscribed, projected. Though the poem records the advertisements in a frenetic list that calls up a sense of visuality, the Baroness also reminds us that these visual and textual encounters have physical effects; the messages promoted through these posters are metaphorically worn on the body; the body bears the weight of obligation and perfection they demand. Moreover, that they are clothes meant to COVER the body also metaphorically gestures to the core aim of these commercial enterprises to hide the body even as they are structured by it.

Each stanza of the poem follows a similar format: advertisements and product promotion promise pleasure. Loringhoven's ordering of these ads throughout the poem invite readers to recognize how advertisements create an artificial problem to be solved only through the purchase of a given item but that, in the end, comically spawn a series of other problems to be solved by purchasing a variety of other commodities. The poem, however, also draws attention to the multiple and sometimes contradictory ways that ads approach the body, often offering more,

different products to solve issues initiated by some other purchased good, poking fun at the self-replicating logic of consumerism. The first stanza, for instance, begins intoning what seem to be the combined voices of advertisements and salesman: "It's popular—spitting Maillard's/ safety controller handle/ You like it!/ They actually kill Paris Garters/ dromedary fragrance" (“Subjoyride”). The first inkling of consumerism's self-propagating logic here is evident in the intonation of the logic of persuasion which bizarrely suggests that a product's popularity is rationale enough for purchasing. Customers should buy a product because it is popular and yet it is popular because consumers buy it. Further, the clear assertions--"you like it" rather than "you will like it"—allude to the authoritative directives buried beneath the surface of the ads’ overly cheery promises. The absurdity of the apparent sales pitch here is heightened by the bizarre kinship asserted between two entirely unrelated products: Maillard, a toasting process and the odor of Paris Garters, a popular brand of men's garters that, among other things, promised to prevent contact between skin and metal with the slogan, "No metal can touch you.” Later stanzas follow this same formula, offering an absurd logic of doing and undoing. The second stanza, for example, reads: Tootsie kisses Marshall’s /Kippered health affinity… Before your teeth full-o’/ Pep with 10 nuggets products / Lighted Chiclets wheels and Axels—carrying Royal Lux Kamel hands off… Get this straight—Wrigley’s… Nothing so Pepsodent—soothing – (“Subjoyride”). The beginning of the stanza offers a series of advertisements for candies—chiclets, tootsie rolls, as well as cigarettes—followed by the suggestion that dank breath requires also the purchase of mint chewing gum and refreshing toothpaste.

Throughout the “Subjoyride” poems, the Baroness’s recombinations of subway directives and advertising copy demonstrates the elision of public and private forms of bodily discipline and policing, expanding and repurposing bourgeois anxieties about unruly and unhygienic

crowing of urban bodies to suit the needs of self-serving corporations including that of the subway system itself. More troublingly, these poems also parse the rhetorical collapse of the language of advertising and the language of citizenship. Being a good urban citizen involves alleviating traffic and crowd congestion, which involves taking the subway thereby allowing the body to be governed by the rules of comportment and safety dictated by the transportation company; to follow these rules is also to "buy in" to the regimes of hygiene and cleanliness only achieved through purchasing products like Pepsodent and Vick's Vaporub. These poems, then reveal that the advertisements themselves but also their formal, spatial relationship with arteries of urban movement subject people to a relentless physical cycle that reinforces the logic of adhering to these bodily prescriptions, tying them not simply to morality but to the practice of city-building and indeed, nation-building.

In the end, the Baroness's precarious aesthetic is one that relies on messiness, disorder, and the revivification of various forms of literal and metaphorical trash to reject the value-systems embraced by the urban bourgeois and the culture of consumerism that they uphold, insisting that we be reminded of the self-serving politics that uphold these frameworks for reading the body. Consistently positioning disorder and detritus as alternatives to the carefully overly simplistic and silkily smooth formulations, Loringhoven's art offers a glimpse at the threat implicit in a body freed by an embrace of the inherent value of its imperfections and messy emissions, its rawness as publicly acceptable. At the same time, her work both formally and thematically gestures to the inherent risk in this attitude. To reject these attitudes towards the body is to be solidified as an urban threat and as an enemy to cultivation of an urban progress dependent upon capitalism. To embrace methodologies and materials of disorder, within dominant cultural system that demands unquestioned coherence with its obsessive tidiness is to

accept the risk to the body of work itself. Indeed, Loringhoven's life-long struggle against poverty, her untimely death alone in a run-down Parisian apartment, and the disappearance of her creative legacy within narratives of the avant-garde suggest a troubling foreclosure of the possibilities, the modes of empowerment activated through her physical, textual forms.

CHAPTER 2 Precarious Surfaces: The Optics of Skin, Fashion, and Decorum in Nella Larsen's Quicksand

On the last day of February 2018, Baltimore-based artist, Amy Sherald unveiled the official portrait of First Lady, Michelle Obama. Reception was mixed. According to Elle's June 2018 profile of Sherald, "Twitter exploded with criticism. People didn't think the portrait looked like the Michelle they knew. They didn't like the appearance of Obama's skin, rendered in Sherald's characteristically muted, grey-toned palette with luminous taupe undertones. They didn't appreciate that they couldn't make sense of Obama's expression, one that contained hints of both judgement and grace" (Kahn 108). Describing Sherald's aesthetic, Mattie Kahn notes that Sherald "envisions black skin in pale shades of charcoal and accents it with vivid clothes and accessories and is committed to reinterpretation" (108). Doreen St. Félix, similarly notes that "The gray skin in Michelle Obama's portrait feels at first like a loss, and then like a real gain," praising Sherald's accomplishment of "exclud[ing] the idea of color from race" (St. Félix).The range of reactions to the painting ultimately showcase a variety of disagreements about the core goals of portraiture, broadly, and more specifically, of portraiture's fraught relationship to representations of black skin, black femininity and black power: Should Obama's affect have been more transparent and accessible to the portrait's viewers? Should the woman in the painting have more clearly cohered with an image of the down-to-earth woman to whom many members of the public felt connected like a friend or neighbor? Should the painting have used more "realistic" paint colors for rendering skin rather than the consciously stylized greys and taupes? Should her bold, geometric clothing have been more in keeping with the conservative and understated fashion typical of a First Lady's portrait? In short, should the flattened surface of the

portrait, used to depict the overlaid coverings of skin-color, comportment, and fashion, done the work of retelling expected stories about the first lady, eschewing ambiguity in favor of reification?

The longing for realism evident in these critiques suggests that many wanted Sherald to produce a likeness of a woman whose real-life accomplishments were revolutionary and warranted representation with limited editorializing from the artist. Others, like St. Félix, endorsed Sherald's decision to use her palette to expose the visual constructs of race fostered by visual art and understood Sherald's practice of unsettling expectations of portraiture as appropriately mirroring Obama's life as a public figure unsettling a series of long-held narratives of American blackness. Indeed, much of Sherald's portrait is self-consciously reflective of Obama's aestheticized form, as well as the long history in which the portrait itself participates as an art object. Sherald's unique method of representing skin is just one dimension of this; Kahn notes that the dress also constitutes a vital part of Sherald's revisionary approach. Sherald dressed Obama "in a gown from the American brand Milly, the pattern evocative of both the painter Piet Mondrian and the quilts of beloved black women artisans of Gee's Bend, Alabama" (Kahn 108).[21] Sherald's blending of aesthetic references to modernism, through Piet Mondrian, a Dutch abstract artist associated with De Stijl, and to the history of African American women's handicrafts, through the famed fabric assemblages of the Gee's Bend quilts, reminds viewers of Obama's cultural inheritances but of Sherald's methodological inheritances as well, drawing

[21] Though the gown itself was specially designed for the occasion by Milly co-founder, Emily Smith, the brand is one that markets itself in both ready-made and couture markets; while many American women could not necessarily afford to purchase the latter, some could certainly afford to purchase a similar geometric-inspired dress from Milly's "ready to wear" line, ranging from 300 to 600 dollars per garment. Such a move uses fashion to subtly align Michelle Obama with processes of democratization—she wears something that, theoretically, many American women could also wear, an idea that Smith's descriptions of her fashion-design underscore: "I wanted to create a dress that reflected Mrs. Obama's personality—bold and confident, yet approachable and relatable" (Morrill).

connections between artforms that initially seem incredibly disparate.[22] In doing so, Sherald's portrait insistently situates African American women's textile arts alongside European modernist traditions, asserting these as an equivalent, contributors to contemporary American visual vocabularies and, in doing so, implicitly acknowledges the portrait's role not simply as a representation of Obama but as an object purposeful and self-reflexive in its artifice. The controversy surrounding Sherald's portrait showcases the continuing challenges of navigating portraiture as a black artist, representing a black subject, in a manner that both mobilizes aesthetics to affirm the dignity and achievement of African Americans while at the same time questioning modes of visually signifying race in art, and by extension society.

Sherald is certainly not the first artists to operate under these pressures or to negotiate these obligations, and her portrait of Michelle Obama provides a rich example of visual art's fraught relationship to race, as a site where tangled depictions of the surfaces of skin, cloth and comportment are collapsed onto the canvas in ways that can conceal or bespeak the ideological constructs that frame its modes of seeing and as a site that can unquestioningly recreate or critically acknowledge portraiture's dialogic relationship with the visual construction of race.

Sherald's painting of the first lady neatly demonstrates the power of visual art to put pressure on a desire for surfaces to be legible through a variety of existing frameworks for seeing gender, race, and respectability, and Sherald's own subtle references to her modernist aesthetic inheritances allude to her work as a continuation of the political impetus of this historical

[22] The Museum of Modern Art describes it as "A term describing the abstraction pioneered by the Dutch journal De Stijl (The Style), founded in 1917 by the painter and architect Theo van Doesburg. This international group of artists working in all mediums renounced naturalistic representation in favor of a stripped-down formal vocabulary principally consisting of straight lines, rectangular planes, and primary color. In a response to the devastation wreaked by World War I, de Stijl artists aimed to achieve a visual harmony in art that could provide a blueprint for restoring order and balance to everyday life" (de Stijl).

moment. The early twentieth century represented a particularly important moment in the proliferation and deployment of African American art as a means of revising dominant and corrosive narratives of blackness; images, especially, took on a newly important role amidst a culture beginning to incrementally embrace the African aesthetics appropriated in Cubist painting, increasingly steeped in the plethora of printed advertisements, and made progressively more anxious by the technological change threatening to topple long-held assumptions privileging vision as the sense most intimately tied with objectivity and the acquisition of knowledge. [23] Yet despite this latter trend, constructions of race continued to operate through a rubric of opticality, where surface—what could be seen with the naked eye—existed in direct relation to an individual's depth or essence—their identity, character, or morality. For most white Americans the sight of pigmented surfaces they perceived to be black, brown, or non-white, activated a range of dehumanizing assumptions of excessiveness, brutishness, and promiscuity. As Kimberly Roberts describes, mainstream narratives of blackness tended to dwell on sexuality: "The white American imagination and popular press construed black sexuality as depraved and lascivious" (Roberts 110). What most Americans did not "see" or recognize was that seeing was not constitutive of knowledge but rather evidence that knowledge, or perhaps more accurately internalized assumptions instead constructed the processes of seeing.

[23] When I reference "anxiety" here, I'm thinking of a variety of ways that concerns of the visual mark modern art, including the roles of both technology and surveillance. On the one hand, Sara Danius' *The Senses of Modernism* points out that new technologies, particularly the photograph and the telephone, increasingly challenged the equation of seeing and knowing (20). However, even as some understood technology as presenting a challenge to the primacy of visuality, the rise of surveillance and bodily policing also revealed a desperate desire to reassert the importance of sight. See Timothy Armstrong's *Modernism, Technology, and the Body* for more on the role of surveillance and control of the body. Race, I would argue, is perhaps the most salient iteration of this desperation. Even as technology hinted to the limits of visuality and visual perception, art (and other disciplines) revealed a variety of techniques for telegraphing the hyper-visuality of race (including the means described by Cheng) and therefore also the continued ability to police and discipline on the basis of opticality.

In her introduction to American Anatomies, Robin Weigman reiterates race as a visual phenomenon: "the production of the African subject as a non or subhuman, as an object and property," is made possible through "epistemologies attending vision and their logics of corporeal inscription" (Weigman 3-4). In the twentieth century, however, these epistemologies of vision became increasingly bound up with modernist artwork, as Ann Anlin Cheng points out in her book, Second Skin. Examining twentieth-century dance, fashion, architecture, and painting, Cheng traces the intersection of these issues through the notion of "surface," a term she uses to describe the meeting of a tangible exterior and the various methods artists themselves used and prescribed for seeing, interpreting, and understanding the more abstract significance of those exteriors; through her analyses, Cheng traces numerous iterations of the modernist fetishization of the "pure" unadorned surface as well as its obverse phobia of ornament excess, and decoration; the obsessive attempt to visually articulate relationships of exteriors with their interiors or essences; and fantasies about the beguiling deceptiveness of surface as disguise.[24] Further, Cheng argues that: "The discourse of the 'pure' modern surface thus produces a nexus of metonymic meanings- purity, cleanliness, simplicity, anonymity, masculinity, civilization, technology, intellectual abstractism—that are set off against notions of excessive adornment, inarticulate sensuality, femininity, backwardness" (Cheng 25) Importantly, these latter characteristics, in modernist art, are often those visually associated with or used to visually render non-European and non-White bodies (Cheng 25).[25] Weigman's and Cheng's analyses

[24] Although Cheng acknowledges that race is most often described as a visual phenomenon, she also suggests that obsessions with the modern surface—Josephine Baker's naked skin, the clean and unblemished façade of Adolf Loos' buildings, among others—also remind us that notions of pure surface relied on, or looked to conceptions of "black skin, not for disavowal but for articulation" and because of this, that modernist practices of seeing difference must be reoriented and that surface, may paradoxically, have more to do with complicated and layered coverings than with unadulterated exposure (Cheng 15).

[25] Cheng's first chapter of *Second Skin* lays out her case for considering the vital connections that exist between modernist conceptions of the "pure surface," race, and discourses of the "primitive."

thus remind us that socially learned protocols of seeing race play a key role in aesthetic representations of race and racialized bodies.

To this process, African American artists were uniquely attuned, recognizing the special role that art could play in reeducating white and black Americans alike by rewriting the internalized logics of viewing skin. According to Elizabeth Carroll "Many of the participants of the Harlem Renaissance believed there was much at stake in these acts of representation. They hoped that texts like The New Negro, which demonstrated the accomplishments of African Americans and reflected the changes occurring in their lives, would alter how readers understood African Americans, and that this new understanding, in turn, would help undermine the racism" (2). Cladding brown skin in the trappings of bourgeois fashion and decorum, many artists of the Harlem Renaissance embarked on a goal of establishing a new representation of blackness that would not only overwrite widely-circulated caricatures of African Americans but would also create a new interpretive framework for intuiting these surfaces as evidence of intellect, taste, and decency.

A novel obsessively concerned with notions of surface, Nella Larsen's Quicksand engages with and dissects the interconnectedness of surfaces including skin, the veneer of respectability, the cladding of fabric, and the pigment of paint. Quicksand follows the story of Helga Crane, a woman who comes of age in interwar America.[26] Helga begins the story as a teacher at Naxos, a prestigious black boarding school; feeling trapped and restricted by the repressive dress and conduct codes of the so-called "Naxos woman" who police women's

[26] Numerous scholars have noted the parallels between the plot of *Quicksand* and Larsen's own biography; like her protagonist, Larsen too identified as a biracial. Larsen's father was a descendent of African slaves brought to work in St. Thomas, then known as the Danish West Indies. Larsen's father immigrated to Chicago where he met her white, Danish mother. See these sources for further information on Larsen's life, see Arne Lunde and Anna Westerstahl Stenport's "Helga Crane's Copenhagen: Denmark, Colonialism, and Transnational Identity in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*."

femininity and sexuality in the name of racial uplift. Helga departs for Chicago, where she experiences the strict lines of segregation that mark out the city's landscape as well as her employment possibilities. Helga struggles to find work as well as her sense of self; poverty prevents her from purchasing the types of beautiful items she sees as integral to her individuation and her search for work demeans her by reminding her that she's reached beyond her station in securing educational credentials that make her unsuitable for "domestic" jobs. Eventually, Helga finds herself in the employ of Mrs. Hayes-Riordan, a woman who helps Helga settle into a comfortable life amongst the black bourgeois of Harlem. Before long, however, Helga again feels unsatisfied by her acquaintances' continued efforts to bend her towards their narrow ideals of respectability tied to racial uplift; she travels to stay with her mother's white, Danish relatives. In Denmark, Helga finds herself treated as a curiosity and, eventually a body onto which the Danish eagerly project and enact their exotic fantasies of African sexuality; after the jarring experience of having her image appropriated to fill the canvas of an ambitious painter, Helga returns to America. The novel ends with Helga's return to rural southern America, stripped of her fripperies so that she might "wear" her poverty as in homage to her husband's humble calling as a preacher.

Borrowing Cheng's vocabulary, this chapter describes precarity in terms of "surface." The story I want to tell here is one about the perilous relationship between racialized seeing and knowing; the easy elision of objectified bodies with aesthetic objects; and the intimacy of aesthetic skins with fleshly ones and political necessity of troubling the opticality of race. The chapter proceeds first by situating Larsen's novel within contemporary discourses of art and race. Sketching out the interconnectedness of racial uplift and black representation in art and literature shows the ways that surface—particularly those of skin, decorum, and fashion—become

associated with processes of political advancement for several dominant voices of the Harlem Renaissance including W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke. These thinkers, in other words, grappled with the question of how art might be used to solve the social precarity of African Americans. Despite the fact that many of the characters and historical personalities that appear in this chapter identify as members of the black middle class and intelligentsia, many of whom were/are economically comfortable, well-educated, well-traveled, and well-connected, Du Bois and Locke's writings and editorial curation remind us that the black middle-class sensed itself tottering between two divergent possibilities: zealously embrace the many markers of respectability or continue to be excluded from the full range of privileges and recognitions accorded to white American citizens.

I then explore the sculpture of two prominent, black, woman artists whose work Larsen encountered as she was beginning her career as a writer. Understanding the way these artists play in different ways with notions of surface, I argue, provides a visual model for contesting and complicating racist readings of surface without following the narrow and prescriptive formulations offered by figures like W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke and gestures to some of the methodologies that may have influenced Larsen's literary project. In the third section, I turn to the novel itself in order to explore Larsen's engagement with visual art, as well as her use descriptive language as a means of drawing attention to the processes of perceiving and understanding the overlaid surfaces of race, fashion, femininity, and sexuality. Throughout the novel, Helga is intensely aware of the narratives fixed to her light-colored skin, to her clothing preferences, and to her unusual and often aloof comportment as well as the extent to which these narratives work to mutually reinforce one another. Despite her attentiveness to this phenomena, Helga is not immune from employing the same types of frameworks for reading other characters

nor is she guiltless in manipulating the looks of her own surfaces—mainly through clothing and fashion—to purposefully activate particular interpretations of her identity and to "try on" the roles that each new geographic location and accompanying social milieu offers her. Nevertheless, Helga is perpetually forced to reckon with the stifling effects of others' attempts to simplify and distill Helga's character based on her appearance; she strains against the ways the methods of reading surface's relationship to depth or essence attempt to fix her to a single identity, denying her a sense of fluidity or change, yoking her monolithic narratives that deny her individuality. Together, my readings of Helga's experiences underscore that although the surface of non-white skin is intimately bound up to the social precarity of African Americans, this problem cannot be metonymically solved by embracing an aesthetically stable framework equating sight and knowledge; even a revision of this framework instead intensifies the precarity of African Americans by impressing narratives that deny the privilege and personhood of private identity and individual expression.

The Veneer of Respectability: Rewriting How Surface Speaks Black Character

In part, African Americans' investment in surface as a means of racial uplift taps into broader cultural sensibilities sweeping the black middle-class as it sought to establish its place within American society via consumer citizenship. As George Hutchinson notes in The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White, "The years from 1890 to 1916 witnessed the transformation of the American economy from the dominance of proprietary capitalism to the dominance of corporate capitalism… The economic shift had dramatic implications for cultural development" (8). In the 1920s and 30s, advertising practices increasingly insisted on the connection between individual agency, personal freedom and spending and this message was particularly compelling for African American consumers who had long been overlooked by advertising or dismissed as

poor consumers whose spending and tastes could never be cultivated according to the standards of the white middle class. Further, it became important for consumers to see themselves (or people like them) in advertisements as an indication that advertisers recognized this see that their "agency," that is, their status as imagined purchasers.[27] Inevitably, this process made "agency" visible and accessible to white customers, who saw themselves reflected in the pages of magazine and newspaper advertisements; in this way, middle-class African American understood capitalism's role in crafting the symbolic significance of visual representation both through the valuation of agency ascribed to the communities and individuals represented in advertising and through the commodities that, once acquired, promised to bring decency and dignity to their purchasers.[28] Capitalism offered a beautiful fantasy: clad in the right types of fashionable, modestly tailored clothes, black Americans could gesture to right kind of interior; the dream of seeing blackness grace the pages of advertisements in ways that resisted caricature was accompanied by the possibility that brown skin could become visibly associated with the right sort of quintessentially American behaviors. Looking respectable showed that middle-class African Americans had successfully mastered the art of purchasing the correct trappings to make visible, on the surface of their bodies, their adherence to the purchasing practices and bourgeois social mores considered acceptable to white society.[29]

[27] Suzannah Walker outlines the emergence of this ideology in her history of the African American beauty industry: "By the 1920s and 1930s, however… participation in American capitalism required consumption of mass-produced goods and, perhaps more important, recognition of this consumption by advertisers and marketing executives" (17-8).

[28] Walker observes: "For much of the twentieth century, white advertisers of products from foods and household products to televisions and cars, did not view African Americans as worthy of their attention…African American marketing experts insisted throughout these decades that black consumers were affluent enough, urban enough, and sophisticated enough to warrant attention from white advertisers" (14).

[29] It's worth mentioning that a focus on respectability had specific consequences for gender and class relations within African American communities. In the first place, middle-class notions of respectability were often propped up by an implicit degradation of lower- and working-class African Americans; according to Hazel Carby, middle-class African Americans led a contradictory existence; even as they understood themselves as innately tied to their

For many leading thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance, representations of African Americans—whether in literature, painting, sculpture, or the performing arts—offered a clear strategy for combatting racism; by circulating images of intellectual, middle-class African Americans, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke and others believed that artists possessed the potential to combat damaging stereotypes perpetuated by most popular media, particularly in their capacities as magazine editors. In his capacity as editor of The Crisis, a publication initially launched to support the objectives of the N.A.A.C.P., Du Bois prioritized visual and textual content that paid homage to African American achievement.[30] He also incorporated concerned for visuality into the formal construction of the magazine's pages, experimenting with strategies of juxtaposition and unusual usage of color. According to Carroll, The Crisis, [countered] its coverage of lynchings and violence against African Americans with features that highlight African Americans' achievements in business, education and politics, as well as their promise for future accomplishments. The most compelling images in The Crisis occur when these affirmations are juxtaposed with coverage of lynchings; the resulting composite texts demonstrate the success and potential of African Americans despite the racism and violence still directed against them, and they thus convincingly assert the need for dramatic change in the

blackness and remained committed to ideals of racial uplift, they "defined their social position by emphasizing their differentness from the lower class," to which they attributed the specific criticisms that white society tended to apply to all black people. Further, the idea of "respectability" was that was especially rigid and unforgiving for women; many middle-class black women attempted to distance themselves from the images of sexuality (and of rape) that had characterized black women under slavery by adhering to Victorian-era notions of propriety and respectability. Finally, at the intersection of class and gender, Carby notes that middle class women attempted "circumscribe the rights of young black working-class women and to transform their behavior on the grounds of nurturing the progress of the race as a whole" (746). Further, Carby asserts that this policing often served to reinforce existing class structures by insisting that working-class black women could only achieve respectability by stepping into jobs that removed the possibility of upward mobility: "Narratives of the transformation of the behavior of migrant working-class black women to conform to middle-class norms of acceptable sexual behavior while actually being confirmed in their subordinate, working-class status as female domestics" (747).

[30] According to Harris, *The Crisis* had a two-pronged mission": *"*first, it wants to aggregate information on African American achievements and circulate them to a national reading public so as to provide a counter history to racist mass culture, but it also wants to project a future where such work will not be necessary" (69).

treatment of African Americans. (15). For Donal Harris, one of the magazine's most radical aesthetic interventions involved the use of color in cover images; often covers often were totally black with white text: "They literalized the black artistic work required to create the magazine into a visually black page. In effect [Du Bois] turns the magazine page into a 'colored' material so that the racial and periodical forms correspond" (92).

Similarly, Alain Locke's 1925 anthology, The New Negro, which had grown out of his editorship of the infamous Harlem issue of Survey Graphic, featured poetry, essays, and short fiction alongside the visual art created by African American artists and art that depicted African American life in a positive light. For Carroll, "The format of this book as an anthology means it contains a cacophony of voices, and the book simultaneously asserts and undermines a simple definition of African American identity. Its complications and contradictions finally identify any construction of African American identity as only one possible interpretation… the complexities of the book allow for an assertion of collective identity that remains open ended and dynamic rather than locking its subjects into stasis" (Carroll 17). Locke included work by white, German-born illustrator, Winold Reiss and African American painter and illustrator, Aaron Douglas who had received his Bachelor of Arts at the University of Nebraska. The inclusion of both artists, one a white artist who sympathetically depicted Harlem's leading intellectuals and the other, a formally trained artist symbolized the careful and multifaceted curation of the collection according to its goals of racial uplift. As Miriam Thaggert notes, editors of the anthology were intensely aware of the intimacy between the visual and literary; readers simultaneously encountered works that defended African American dignity, intellect, and gentility alongside encountered images of black, middle-class respectability while the anthology itself reaffirmed these ideals by showcasing the remarkable aesthetic contributions of black artists (Thaggert 10).

Using this interplay, the editors and contributors hoped to teach a new protocol for associating the surface of brown skin with the varied and rich interiority of Harlem's intelligentsia.

Even as these editors and publications embraced innovative approaches to visual art and visual arrangement, they also remained deeply embedded in visual vocabularies of respectability that had begun in the reconstruction era.[31] In part, this was a concern absorbed from their readers. When, for instance, Du Bois included in The Crisis an image entitled "Woman of St. Lucia," a depiction of blackness that contrasted sharply with the magazine's more common depictions of black bourgeois activity, readers were outraged and flooded the magazine's mailbox with letters decrying the portrait's exotic and sensationalist approach to racialized femininity (Harris 82). Many interpreted the inclusion of the image as directly counter to the publication's objectives of racial uplift and humanization of black subjects. However, Du Bois writings make clear that he also grappled with internalized notions of how blackness would ideally be rendered in visual art. This was especially evident in a special issue of The Crisis, entitled "The Negro in Art: How Shall He be Portrayed." In advance of the issue's publication, Du Bois mailed out a now-famous survey inviting readers and well-known authors to share their opinions in the form of letters to be published within the issue. Du Bois's questions included:

1. When the artist, black or white, portrays Negro characters is he under any obligation or limitations as to the sort of character he will portray?
2. Can any author be criticized for painting the worst or the best characters of a group?

[31] Carroll discusses the emergence of this visual vocabulary in conjunction with the nineteenth-century emergence and popularization of photographic portraiture. Reading one of the most famous photographs of Sojourner Truth, Carroll points to reading glasses, a vase of flowers, and a pair of knitting needles as props that visually affirmed Truth's femininity and respectability (10).

3. Can publishers be criticized for refusing to handle novels that portray Negroes of education and accomplishment, on the ground that these characters are no different from white folk and therefore not interesting?
4. What are Negroes to do when they are continually painted at their worst and judged by the public as they are painted?
5. Does the situation of the educated Negro in America with its pathos, humiliation and tragedy call for artistic treatment at least as sincere and sympathetic as "Porgy" received?
6. Is not the continual portrayal of the sordid, foolish and criminal among Negroes convincing the world that this and this alone is really and essentially Negroid, and preventing white artists from knowing any other types and preventing black artists from daring to paint them?
7. Is there not a real danger that young colored writers will be tempted to follow the popular trend in portraying Negro characters in the underworld rather than seeking to paint the truth about themselves and their own social class? (Du Bois 219).

Du Bois's questions leave little doubt to his position; phrased more like assumptions than open-ended questions, inviting respondents to reiterate his own ideas though some refused to do so.[32] Further, though the issue was focused on literature, Thaggert emphasizes that Du Bois' rhetoric nevertheless reveals the influence of the visual arts: "The queries exposed the presence of the visual embedded in the literary with their frequent, ekphrastic allusion to 'painting' suggest,

32 Artists like H.L Mencken and Carl Van Vechten explicitly rejected Du Bois' prescriptions, instead offering a more expansive view on the role of the artist as well as the types of black characters an artist should present in their responses to Du Bois' questionnaire. Indicative of his often exploitative and condescending attitude towards black people, Van Vechten rather problematically insisted that the "squalor of Negro life… offer[s] a wealth of novel, exotic and picturesque material to the artist" (*Crisis* 219). Terser in his response, Mencken proclaimed that the "artists is under no obligations or limitations whatsoever. He should be free to depict things exactly as he sees them" (*Crisis* 219). Other artists like Langston Hughes and Claude McKay also dismissed Du Bois' suggestions by continuing to write about subject material that Du Bois saw as unsuitable and detrimental to the project of racial uplift.

figuratively, the literary imaging of blackness" (2). Fittingly, Du Bois championed literary "portraits" in fiction that carefully signaled that clean, modest, and well-dressed exteriors housed richer inner-lives and intellects; he was quick to criticize fiction featuring lower-class characters that seemed to epitomize the hedonistic and impulsive behavior stereotypically associated with black individuals and communities.[33]

Locke likewise implicitly reiterated these ideas in his careful curation of images included in The New Negro anthology, suggesting an equally anxious policing of body, dress, and manner. In Winold Reiss illustrations of Harlem's prominent thinkers and authors included in Locke's anthology, for example, all of the men (including Locke and Du Bois) are depicted wearing thoughtful expressions and neatly tailored suits rendered in clean, spare lines. The illustrations of women too feature guarded faces and modest necklines; the only hint of sexuality exists in the safe and sanitized representation of genteel motherhood. On the one hand, these portraits evidence the innovative visual strategies shepherded by Locke and Du Bois; each portrait uses full color and careful detail to depict the faces and hands of each subject while the bodies and clothing are more casually sketched in outlines lacking the fill and detail of the faces. Such a decision at once uses the eye-catching effect of color to underscore each person's skin. At the same time, the similar sketchy quality of bodies and clothing downplays their importance; further, the seriality of the images gives the impression that the faces could be exchanged and rearranged to a different body with little alteration of each portrait's overall impact. In doing so, Reiss seems to slyly undercut the narratives of respectability attached to the suit, a symbol of bourgeois respectability. The suit merely dresses the surface but conveys little about the

[33] Fittingly, Du Bois publicly criticized Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* as well as Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* because he felt that the portrayals of black character concretized rather than combated negative stereotypes about black Americans.

individual interior intellect or character of the portrait subjects; to glean this information, viewers must become consumers and readers of the art and writing produced by those that Reiss represents. Yet, Reiss' portraits also seem to reiterate Du Bois' ideas from the special issue of The Crisis; they are careful to eschew any of the traces of ornament or access that might undermine a staid image carefully constructed as a bulwark against depictions of African Americans as licentious, impulsive, or primal.[34]

Surfaces of cloth and skin, as well as the veneers of decorum and respectability, thus became a focal point for art intended to perform ambassadorial role in white communities and in a didactic one for black communities. And while some artists embraced this vision of art, some also strained under the yoke of obligation. Artists, like Nella Larsen, were not interested in reiterating blackness as a visual signifier at all but rather wished to unveil it as a problematic construction, to obliterate its utility as an ideological framework, rather than simply rewriting new rules for broken systems. Surfaces of skin and clothing for these artists were slippery, layered, exchangeable, reflective. In a word—untrustworthy. Vision, by extension, became equally treacherous—not a source of knowledge but a projection of the beholder's beliefs and preconceived notions. Visual aesthetics, in turn, offered a salient distillation of the entwined fallibility of each.

Sculptures Clad and Unclad: New Models of the Speaking Body

As a writer early in her career, Larsen's understanding of surface was unquestionably shaped by her own experiences as a biracial woman. Larsen, as George Hutchinson's biography indicates, strained the American hypodescension that forced her to sublimate her Danish heritage

[34] She goes on to suggest that for many black women of the early twentieth century: "focus on straight-laced manners and morals… can be interpreted as an act of political resistance in that women were asserting their right to define themselves outside the parameters of prevailing racist discourses" (110).

and deny her ties to white members of her nuclear family. After attending a prestigious boarding school, Larsen also became aware of the important surfaces of clothing and its intention to enrobe black female bodies in a protective layer of modesty and propriety.[35] Finally, when Larsen married into a family with strong personal and institutional ties to Harlem's elites, she became intensely aware that the surfaces of dress as well as her manner might betray the poor upbringing she attempted to obfuscate with stories of a childhood spent abroad in Denmark. Locke and Du Bois' notions of surface-level respectability helped and harmed Larsen in equal measure, sometimes allowing her to cultivate her desired persona and sometimes constraining the individualism and independence she craved.

Yet if her life experiences helped Larsen to understand that surfaces could activate dismissal, deceit, or desire, she witnessed the aesthetic concretization of these ideas in the art-exhibits she organized while working as a librarian at the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library.[36] After only several months of employment, Larsen was tasked with promoting a ground-breaking exhibition, showcasing African American contributions to the visual arts.[37] The exhibit opened in August of 1921. Larsen's "roles included sending cards advertising the

35 According to Hutchinson: "At Fisk, students were required to wear a navy-blue uniform. "Silk, satin and expensive trimmings were forbidden, and jewelry was discouraged" (*In Search of Nella Larsen* 54). Ultimately, Larsen was asked to leave the institution after she violated dress code rules (*In Search of Nella Larsen* 63).

36 Headed by the now-famous reformer, Ernestine Rose, the 135th street library served as an important site of contact not only between white and black communities but also between black communities with conflicting ideas about art, identity, and social uplift. As George Hutchinson points out: "The 135th Street Branch not only served as common ground between whites and blacks, English-speakers and Hispanics; it also functioned as a neutral space between diverse black social and political groups, whether radical socialists, Tuskegeeans, NAACP integrationists, or supporters of Marcus Garvey's back-to-Africa movement. Because no one group could dominate the library, it could serve as the intellectual crossroads of the community as well as a meeting point with white 'downtown'" (*In Search of Nella Larsen* 136). Rose hired Larsen as a library in order to further the library's outreach; Rose worried that without African American staff, the library would experience difficulty attracting many of Harlem's residents (*In Search of Nella Larsen* 136).

37 Art at the exhibition did not focus on "racial" subject matter nor did it focus on politics. Instead, it offered a collection of African pottery, basketry, cloth, blankets, and metalwork (Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen* 138).

exhibition, spreading the word, and working up lists of hostesses to guide people through the exhibition itself" (Hutchinson, In Search of Nella Larsen 137). This latter detail in particular—Larsen's role as an informal guide to the exhibition—suggests that she possessed intimate knowledge of the artworks on display. The popularity of the initial exhibit galvanized a second exhibit in March of the following year and Larsen once again found herself promoting and shepherding patrons through another exhibit of black contributions to the visual arts, this time featuring the artwork of a younger generation of African American artists. In the library's first exhibition Larsen encountered works produced by some of the most famous African American artists of the time, mostly from the generation preceding Larsen's own: including Henry O. Tanner, Meta Warrick Fuller, and May Howard Jackson (In Search of Nella Larsen 138). The library's second exhibit featured works from more contemporary artists, viewed as up-and-coming, including works produced by students enrolled in the National Academy of Design and in the school for Boston's Museum of Fine arts, both well-respected formal training programs traditionally reserved for white, male artists (In Search of Nella Larsen 531). Many of the artists included in these exhibitions shared an interest in using their work to transform perceptions of African Americans.

Larsen's involvement in Harlem's growing visual art movement suggests important points of cross-pollination with her fiction. In her book Portraits of the New Negro Woman, Cherene Sherrard-Johnson suggests that although the Harlem Renaissance has been viewed primarily as a literary movement, visual arts exerted a profound impact on many African American writers, including Nella Larsen who used "interartistic constructions that propose to represent identity" (3). Of particular import to Larsen personally and to Quicksand specifically, was visual art's role in fostering particular interpretations of mixed-race, "mulatta" women.

According the Sherrard-Johnson, "mulatta iconography" of the time characterized femininity either as romantic or transgressive by idealizing the purity of the mixed-race figure (Sherrard-Johnson notably uses the phrase "Madonna" to describe these idealized images of womanhood) or by othering and exoticizing her, using orientalist tropes as a means of explaining the twin problems of promiscuity and psychological instability in the woman who attempts to "pass" for white (16, 27).[38] The "iconography of the mulatta," however, also suggests the tantalizing possibility of undermining the surety of optically-determined whiteness:

> The term mulatta is and has been shorthand for varying degrees of racial mixing…the word may refer to those who pass inadvertently or infrequently as well as those for whom passing is the defining act but who also exhibit the classic identity conflicts of the 'tragic mulatta': a woman condemned by her mixed blood and unable to decide between two worlds. The passing performance tests visual and behavioral assumptions about visual modernity. (Sherrard-Johnson 12)

Sherrard-Johnson's analysis of the literary and visual trope of the "mulatta" thus suggest that the surface of skin can conceal and bely as easily as it can announce and proclaim. The figure of the "mulatta" alludes to the fact that a visual assessment of race is based on behaviors and expectations governing a given social setting. This, in turn, challenges whether or not it's possible to see race, whether race can exist as a viable or fixed form of visual categorization once stripped of its binaristic fantasy of pure white (and its obverse, blackness) and exposed as potentially performative.

[38] In her analysis of Larsen's *Quicksand*, Sherrard-Johnson contrasts two literary iterations of "mulatta iconography" – the "golden Madonna" and the "orientalist mulatta" (27). According the Sherrard-Jackson, the former figure is "is described in terms that borrow from portraits at the time that depicted light-skinned black women as Madonna-like, holy, and/or angelic" (27).

Two artists interested in deploying the figure of the ambiguously raced woman, sculptors Meta Warrick Fuller and May Howard Jackson, coincidentally showed their work in the first 135th Street library exhibition that Larsen helped organize. Both born in 1877, Warrick and Jackson represented an earlier generation of artists than the one to which Larsen belonged and, by the time of the library's exhibit, were well-established in their respective careers. In these figures, however, Larsen no doubt recognized not only overlapping political and aesthetic interests but the shared personal experience of fighting to pursue artistic education and employment in the face of racism and sexism that sought to deny them these opportunities at every turn.[39] Arna Alexander Bontemps and Jacqueline Fonvielle-Bontemps argue that both Fuller and Jackson "faced the same sorts of color-caste prejudices that tormented so many other near-white Black women in post-Reconstruction America" (19). Both women were widely recognized for their important revisions of the exaggerated stereotypes typical in many depictions of African Americans.[40] When representing African or African American subjects, Howard and Warrick aimed to depict humanity, intelligence, and dignity—Jackson though her

[39] After working their way through the Philadelphia Public School system, both Warrick and Fuller were accepted, in the 1890s, to the prestigious Industrial Art School. Both pursued further training; Howard became the first African American woman to attend the Pennsylvania Academy for Fine Arts; Warrick attended the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art as well as the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, before traveling abroad, where she studied at Ecole des Beaux Arts and met with Auguste Rodin (Benjamin 20-1). Lisa Farrington describes that for Jackson, in particular, a biracial heritage proved particularly painful: "For Jackson, the worst consequence of her white appearance was that, when mistaken for white, she was well treated; however, once her racial identity was ascertained, she was subjected to humiliating rebuffs. The Washington Society of Fine Arts, for instance, accepted her as a member until they became aware of her heritage, at which point her membership was revoked. Another occasion involved the National Academy of Design, which had included her bust of black author and intellectual Kelly Miller in their 1919 show but discouraged Jackson from participation in future exhibits. It would be a decade before the academy accepted another Jackson work" (129).

[40] Locke and Du Bois supported the careers of Warrick and Jackson in different ways. Du Bois advertised Howard Jackson's exhibits in *Crisis* magazine (see the July 1916 issue). He also issued an invitation to Warrick to create works to celebrate the one-hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation—works that would become some of the most important of her career including *Ethiopia Awakening*, *The Talking Skull*, and *The Emancipation Proclamation.* In his essay outlining breakthrough African American artists, Locke articulates the importance of both Warrick and Jackson (27-30).

impressive busts of contemporary black intelligentsia, including Jean Toomer and Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Warrick through her engagement with symbolism and allusion to African art history (Benjamin 21).

These priorities, for each artist, are perhaps best understood through an examination of their most famous pieces: Howard Jackson's Mulatto Mother and Child (1929) and Warrick's Ethiopia Awakening (1921), two sculptures that offer new mechanisms for representing and viewing the racialized female body. Howard Jackson's Mulatto Mother, like much of her other work, features the life-sized plaster bust of a mother's face; the mother's delicate eyebrows are carefully knit. Her eyes gaze downward at the face of the infant below her chin. Beneath her small nose, her lips are slightly pursed as if attempting to quiet her smiling baby. Her arms wrap the baby, possessively, protectively, and her long tresses create a textured blanket that encircles both. Beneath a head of curly hair that contrasts sharply to the silkiness of the mother's surrounding locks, the baby's mouth is captured in moment of tension, poised between a laugh and cry.

The mother-figure here tantalizingly suggests the possibilities of "passing" by subverting white investment in the "the purity of 'optic,' or visual whiteness" playing on the fact that whiteness "cannot perceive that the two may coexist in one body or in all bodies" (Sherrard-Johnson 13). While the woman's exterior does not invite easy categorization, the child's rendering, reliant on stereotypical phenotypical markers of blackness, denotes clearer heritage. The pair together thus underscores the inescapability of the mother's body and the undeniable role in that motherhood plays in more firmly concretizing the mother's racial heritage. On the one hand, we might see this as evidence of Howard-Jackson's participation in a common fantasy about passing; Sherrard-Johnson notes that many fantasies about "passing" were also

undergirded by the notions of a "fatal flaw" that would ultimately foreclose the possibilities of transgressing racial boundaries; most often, the mixed-race woman reveals herself through her sense of "alienation, confusion, and unease" (12). Indeed, it is motherhood that forecloses the possibility of this woman subverting the visual policing of race. Information not readily gleaned through a reading of the mother's skin, face, or body, eventually manifests via the birth of her child. At the same time, Jackson's sculpture also subtly manipulates the Christian iconography of Madonna and Child—a visual tradition drawn from a narrative one where an unwed mother's body also reveals her secrets. Drawing parallels between Mary and the "Mulatta Mother," Jackson situates the latter figure within a broader tradition that, to a certain extent, lauds the secrecy of women's bodies and their ability to bring to the surface that which is not initially visible. In doing so, Jackson reminds viewers that motherhood, like race, challenges (at least temporarily) what can be known or understood from an external vantage point.

Through a different set of representational strategies, Meta Warrick Fuller's sculpture, Ethiopia Awakening also represents a challenge to prevailing understandings and aesthetic treatments of race's legibility. As Renee Ater notes in her study of Fuller's work, "African Americans thought of her as the artist best able to represent their lives and aspirations, sought her out for several commissions… they believed she would fairly and convincingly portray black history and the black body" (35). Several commissions, notably the dioramas of racial uplift completed for the Jamestown exhibition in 1907 and the sculpture Emancipation (1913), created for the Emancipation Exhibition of 1913, established Fuller's reputation as a "race artist" committed to dignified representations of black life, form, and physiognomy (Ater 35). In 1921, James Weldon Johnson, at the behest of W.E.B. Du Bois, invited Fuller to contribute to "American's Making" Exposition, a fair dedicated to showcasing the immigrants' contributions

to America.[41] Following similar interests but experimenting with techniques that differed significantly from the Rodin-inspired modernity of her earlier figures, Fuller produced Ethiopia Awakening, a figure that symbolized the emancipation, both physical and mental:

> The finished sculpture was prominently situated in the African American pavilion as "a symbolic statue of the emancipation of the Negro Race"… in Ethiopia, Fuller used a shrouded female to suggest the awakening consciousness of a race. Adapting Egyptian form and the contemporary literary-religious traditions of "Ethiopianism," Fuller integrated the rich legacy of black culture and achievement and contemporary Pan-African ideals. (Ater 101)

Standing around a foot tall, that bronze statue features the single, full figure of a woman clad in a tightly woven skirt, smooth simple robes and an Egyptian-style headdress.[42] Her eyes gaze into the distance, as one delicate arm bends upward, hand resting above her art. The figure's expression, as well as her dress all gesture to the idea of awakening; while the bottom half of the woman's skirts, perhaps even wraps or bindings, suggest constraint, the more relaxed posture of the upper half of Ethiopia, coupled with movement suggested by the figure's arms give the impression that she has emerged from a kind of chrysalis. Though her eyes are heavy-lidded, as if with sleep, she stares forward, hopefully.

Ethiopia's importance lies in its insistence on connecting blackness to the proud lineage of Egyptian pharaohs, royalty, and nobility, rendering Ethiopia in visual terms distinct from the

[41] In this exposition, African Americans were treated as "honorary immigrants" and though such a designation overlooked the fact that African Americans were a much more entrenched group than many of the other, more recent immigrant groups showcased in the fair and also refused to acknowledge the unique and involuntary conditions of immigration for many African Americans, whose ancestors arrived as slaves.

[42] Ater points out that Fuller was likely influenced by a growing access to Egyptian and Nubian archeological findings; she characterizes Ethiopia's dress as reminiscent of ancient Egyptian funerary dress (104).

primitivist approaches evident in other modern, Western art.[43] Proud in her bearing, noble in her dress, Ethiopia does not call up the masks of tribal African culture. Deploying Ancient Egyptian iconography, within the context of the statue's venue—a fair showcasing the aesthetic contributions of immigrants, Fuller at once asserts African Americans' place within an artistic heritage denied to them within American culture and canonical histories of art that diverged markedly from the colonialist imaginings of African art as crude or untrained.

Equally important is Fuller's attention to the symbolic resonances of clothing and posture. Fuller's division of this figure into two halves—the bottom half constrained and bound by cloth, the top half animated and captured in a moment of motion—suggests that Fuller has captured Ethiopia in mid-transition, in a liminal moment where the parts of her body represent different stages of consciousness and awareness. The top half of the sculpture suggests that the legs might emerge from their cocoon to become animated like the arms above. As with Mulatta Mother and Child, Ethiopia Awakening suggests the possibility of change, suggests that sight only gives partial insight. Ethiopia hints that her surfaces—here especially of cloth—can hide, change, or be cast off. That surfaces, in other words, are impermanent

43 Here, I'm thinking particularly of both Picasso and Matisse. As Cheng points out, Picasso was "famous for his stylistic incorporation of African artifact and idiom," especially African masks; analyzing Picasso's recollections of encountering masks and African artifacts in a museum, Cheng also underscores Picasso's fraught relationship to the objects as he is both "taken" or captivated by them but also subscribes to primitivist notions that feminize and trivialize artifacts of colonized cultures (17). Similarly, Denise Murrell describes Matisse as "an inveterate museum browser" who "had likely encountered African sculptures at the Trocadéro museum." The influence of these sculptures can be noticed in Matisse's two versions of *The Young Sailor* (1906); after returning from a trip to Africa, Matisse altered the first version of the painting, replacing "naturalistically contoured facial features with a more rigidly abstract visage reminiscent of a mask" (Murrell). Fuller's method for calling upon an African aesthetic history, an explicit rejection of Cubism's primitivism, is important because it differentiates Fuller from subsequent generations of African Americans artists who would seize onto Cubism as a means of inserting African working into the dominant, Western, aesthetic canon. According the Patricia Hills: "Many African American artists of the mid to late twentieth century turned to cubist collage because it signified European modernism and it signified the authority of Picasso paying homage to Africa" (227).

Together, both Fuller and Howard Johnson offer two provocative understandings of the ways that the surfaces of sculpture can challenge or undercut the visual protocols for viewing race. Despite the fact that both women outwardly conformed to personal and aesthetic parameters of black bourgeois respectability, it's also apparent that both had begun to subtly challenge and negotiate these ideas in their artwork. And as Larsen guided visitors through the library exhibit, passing the work of both Fuller and Howard Jackson, we can imagine her seeing the carefully shaped busts, absorbing the painstakingly molded plaster and bronze, before recognizing that literature too could perform the same work of acknowledging the constructedness of race and of rewriting the significance of the layered and ideologically interconnected surfaces of pigment, femininity, and dress. Each sculpture saliently attests not to the fixed relationship between perceiving surface and understanding depth, essence, or stable identity of a represented figure, but to the idea of transition and change.

Fashioning Femininity: The Precarity of Fixed Visual Frameworks

Recognizing the extent to which Larsen herself was steeped in the artistic venues and conversations helps draw out the extent to which the language of visual art, particularly that of painting and sculpture, appear as a part of Quicksand's description of various surfaces and the protocols used to view those surfaces. At times, this language is employed in order to castigate art's participation in the equally oppressive practices of treating surface through the well-intentioned lens of racial advancement and through the dehumanizing objectification of orientalism and exoticization. At other points, however, Larsen also employs the language of visual art to demonstrate surface's slipperiness including its changeability and its more intimate relationship with secrecy rather than knowledge.

Larsen's disdain for the regulation of sexuality through fashion and the entwinement of both of these with discourses of racial uplift becomes apparent from the first pages of the novel. Feeling stifled by the regimented atmosphere and narrow prescriptions of feminine expression permitted by her boarding school employer, Helga recognizes an urgent need to end to her tenure as a Naxos teacher. Her decision prompts a long and bitter meditation on the woman metonymic of the institutional values Helga detests, the "Naxos women," respectable wives of fellow faculty members who surveil and police the community's female bodies. Attempting to eradicate the tiniest hint of individual fashion taste or behavioral independence, the Naxos women equate these characteristics with a vulgarity and promiscuity that must be rooted out in order to preserve the carefully ordered lives of the black bourgeois and their guiding vision of racial advancement:

> Turning from the window, [Helga's] gaze wandered contemptuously over the dull attire of the women workers. Drab colors, mostly navy blue, black, brown, unrelieved, save for a scrap of white or tan about the hands and necks. Fragments of speech made by the dean of women floated through her thoughts—"Bright colors are vulgar"—"Black, gray, brown, and navy blue are the most becoming colors for colored people"—"Dark-complected people shouldn't wear yellow, or green or red." – The dean was a woman from one of the "first families"—a great "race" woman…something intuitive, some unanalyzed driving spirit of loyalty to the inherent racial need for gorgeousness told her that bright colors were fitting and that dark-complexioned people should wear yellow, green, and red. Black brown, and grey were ruinous to them, actually destroyed the luminous tones lurking in their dusky skins. (Larsen 18)

The snippets of conversation that Helga recalls reinforce an intersectional policing of both gender and race. Helga's reading of these women speaks to Hazel Carby's assertion that "The need to police and discipline the behavior of black women in cities, however, was not only the premise of white agencies and institutions but also a perception of black institutions and organizations, and the black middle class" (Carby 741). Kimberly Roberts echoes this assessment in her own analysis of Quicksand: "Barely masked beneath the disapproval of the Naxos machine is a deep fear of female sexual expression" (Roberts 113). Importantly, Helga's assessment of the situation speaks to multiple interactions between the surfaces of skin, femininity, sexuality, and dress. First, the close repetition of the words "color" and "colored"—"becoming colors for colored people"—underscores the irony of cladding brown skin in understated earth tones. Under this rubric, brown fabric, it would seem, garners respect as it covers over the brown flesh beneath. Brown fabric can be exposed, brown skin cannot. Helga's contemptuous assessment of this fashion advice, however, also implies that there is congruity between the "respectable" drab exteriors of the woman's clothing and the dullness of their inner lives; their boring uniformity of thought is recreated in their uniformity of dress. Helga's impressions thus suggest that the Naxos women's approach to the surfaces of dress and decorum—their assumption of a correlation between what they deem to be vulgar exteriors with vulgar morals—unwittingly reveals more about their thoughtless hive mentality than it does their so-called respectability. Helga's contempt for the Naxos women thus also hints at her early suspicion towards discourses that reiterate and attempt to fix surface—her fashion—and the character of feminine respectability. To achieve admiration and respect certainly rank amongst Helga's prerogatives and yet to do so by acquiescing to ideological constructs that flatten,

reduce, and reject nuance and fluidity run contrary to Helga's need to individuation and opportunity for self-directed transformation.

Helga, by comparison, possesses "an inherent need for gorgeousness." Notably the colors considered "off-limits" by the Naxos women are those that fill Helga's apartment and the wardrobe she dons in private. Her embrace of colorful clothing corresponds with her belief that these shades more successfully compliment the "luminous tones lurking in their dusky skins." Helga's description of skin as "luminous" is significant for two reasons. In the first place, it explicitly rejects the notion that one can or should seek to downplay or cover over the appearance of skin. Instead, "luminous" suggests a kind of blinding brilliance, a dazzling almost blinding display of light that stands apart from its surroundings. Second, and more pressingly, Helga's use of the term also explicitly rejects the notion that skin should be described through the language of color. Instead, her comments understand skin in terms of light and reflection; even her use of the euphemism "dusky" plays on notions of waning light at day's end. Yellows, reds, and greens draw out, redirect natural "light" of pigment. Correspondingly, Helga's comparison of her preferred colors to those of the Naxos women also suggests that different colors differently affect the appearance of skin. The appearance of skin, in other words, can be changed and transformed by an outfit underscoring that Helga's aesthetic is undergirded by her belief in skin's mutability and a rejection of its reification.

As the novel goes on, Helga experiences different iterations of a Naxos-style policing in the other geographic and social contexts she occupies, including Chicago, Harlem, and the rural south. Helga's abandonment of Naxos, her move to Chicago, and her search for employment, however, awakens a brutal pragmatism that forces her to embrace the fashions she'd previously rejected. As she seeks work, subdued garb becomes an obligation for Helga. Preparing to visit

the employment agency, in desperate need of some income to fill her rapidly emptying coffers, Helga dresses in a manner that is markedly more subdued than the preferences Helga outlines in opposition to the Naxos' women's fashions. Preparing for her first visit to the employment agency, Helga dresses "herself carefully, in the plainest garments she possessed, a suit of fine blue twill faultlessly tailored, from whose left pocket peeped a gay kerchief, an unadorned, heavy silk blouse, a small, smart, fawn-colored hat, and slim, brown oxfords, and chose a brown umbrella" (Larsen 31). Harkening back to the drab fashions Helga detested in her days as a teacher, Helga's outfit and accessories communicate a simplicity and practicality that eschew any hints of sexuality or the behavioral excesses stereotypically associated with African Americans. Similarly, the description of the tailoring as "faultless" elides material description with moral indictment, revealing Helga's intense awareness that her clothing will be read as an indication of her work ethic. Notably adhering to the more subdued palette of the Naxos woman, Helga's bolder taste, however, cannot be totally hidden beneath her carefully constructed costume, represented by the "gay handkerchief" that seems to furtively "peep" from her pocket. Helga's inability to completely shed ornamentation that subtly speaks her protest, at least in part, can be ascribed to the sense of dehumanization she experiences while searching for a job. In Chicago, Helga becomes increasingly disheartened by the "stark neatness of her room" at the YWCA, a space that makes Helga feel the "smallness of her commercial value (Larsen 34, 35). Her fear and anxiety lead her to spend money, "too much money for a book and tapestry purse, things she wanted but did not need and certainly could not afford (Larsen 32). These objects, however, cannot form a bulwark against the uniform contempt to which all black women are subject. The "nondescript" women of the employment agency embarrass Helga first by ignoring her and then by dismissing her education. "Our work wouldn't do for you… Domestic mostly…"

they tell her, implicitly reminding Helga that society offers no role and indeed promises to punish women of color who dare to reach beyond the confines of menial labor (Larsen 33). Helga's adherence to the Naxos uniform, in other words, is ironically self-defeating, offering a subtle critique of the women's unquestioned confidence in the power of fashion to achieve racial uplift for as Helga finds, what's respectable within the confines of the black boarding school microcosm is viewed with contempt and derision in a wider urban context, robbing Helga of the dignity of work, eventually leading her to wonder if she'll be forced into prostitution to generate the funds she requires to live. Despite rigorous policing, the Naxos women have not, ultimately, managed to rewrite the ways in which the surface of race is read or apprehended. Instead, their insistence on sameness simply offers another uniform, albeit a different one, that simplifies black women to the sum of their visible exterior.

Later, when Helga moves to Harlem, she initially feels sure that this new place and social milieu will help her to escape the rigid policing she experienced in Naxos and Chicago; through her new friend, Anne Grey, Helga is introduced to Harlem's elite: "Their sophisticated cynical talk, their elaborate parties, the unobtrusive correctness of their clothes and homes, all appealed to her craving for smartness, enjoyment… her New York friends looked with contempt and scorn on Naxos and all its works. This gave Helga a pleasant sense of avengement" (Larsen 43). In Anne herself, Helga identifies all of the traits she particularly admires in this new social set. Anne's home of tasteful, cream-colored rooms is populated by

> Beds with long, tapering posts to which tremendous age lent dignity and interest, bonneted old highboys, tables that might be by Duncan Phyfe, rare spindle-legged chairs, and others whose ladder backs gracefully climbed the delicate wall panels. These historic things mingled harmoniously and comfortably with brass-bound

> Chinese tea-chests, luxurious deep chairs and davenports, tiny tables of gay color, a lacquered jade-green settee with gleaming black satin cushions, lustrous Eastern rugs, ancient copper, Japanese prints, some find etchings, a profusion of previous bic-a-brac, and endless shelves filled with books. (Larsen 44)

Helga's observations of Anne's home allude to the fact that furnishings, act as an extension of the aesthetic a person wears on the exterior of their body; as with Helga's Chicago suit, the furnishings are thus described with the language of morality—they are "correct," "graceful," and "harmonious." Moreover, possessions also conjure a sense of intellect and worldliness—Duncan Phyfe tables mingle with fabrics and furnishings of the East. This impression is reinforced by the presence of "endless shelves of books" which at once communicate that their owner has the desire, time, and leisure to engage in recreational reading. Accordingly, Helga describes Anne as a woman with the "face of a golden Madonna, grave and calm and sweet, with shining black hair and eyes. She carried herself as queens are reputed to bear themselves… Her manners were as agreeably soft as her own soft name. She possessed an impeccably fastidious taste in clothes… And she was interesting, an odd confusion of wit and intense earnestness" (Larsen 45). Helga's comparison of Anne to a Madonna suggests that Anne embodies for Helga a kind of perfect femininity where correctness and taste can exist without the necessity of drab, brown sameness. Helga's early impressions of her new setting thus reveal her hope that the constructions of surface/depth will more clearly align with her personal desires, modes of expression, and purchasing habits.

The longer Helga stays in Harlem, however, the more she comes to recognize the problems with Anne's ways of seeing and interpreting. In Anne, she recognizes a unique hypocrisy; despite her professed investment in racial uplift and her hatred for all things

associated with white culture, Helga gradually understands that Anne's aesthetic more subtly speaks an internalized racism and investment in the superiority of all things European:

> [Anne] hated white people with a deep and burning hatred… But she aped their clothes, their manners, and their gracious ways of living. While proclaiming the undiluted good of all things Negro, she yet disliked the songs, the dances, and the softly blurred speech of the race… Like the despised people of the white race, she preferred Pavlova to Florence Mills, John McCormack to Taylor Gordon, Walter Hampden to Paul Robeson. Theoretically, however, she stood for the immediate advancement of all things Negroid, and was in revolt against social inequality. (Larsen 49)

Through this lens, Anne's comportment, clothing, and home décor take on a different luster bespeaking Anne's ironic contemptuousness for African American cultural contributions; instead, her tastes implicitly position whiteness and Europeanness as the models upon which black respectability is built. Moreover, it becomes clear that Anne's sense of uprightness and respectability interacts with a puritanism equivalent to that of the Naxos women. Shortly before Helga's departure from Harlem, she contemplates what to wear, and ultimately settles on a dress she knows will be distasteful to Anne, which Helga describes as a "cobwebby black net touched with orange" (Larsen 56). Anne "had considered it too décolleté and too outré" and proclaimed to Helga: "There's not enough of it, and what there is gives you their air of something about to fly" (Larsen 56). Anne's critique of Helga's dress underscores her belief that fashion should be staid—as indicated by her rejection of the dress based on its excessiveness, her pronouncement that the dress simply attracts too much attention; moreover, her disgust for the dress's plunging neckline and her observation that the fabric fails to offer appropriate covering for Helga's body

emphasizes that fashion should also be guided by an attention to modesty. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Anne's joke that Helga's dress makes her look like she'll "fly" away, first insinuates that filmy fashion might be read as an indicator of flighty behavior but also that Anne values, above all, the communication of fixity and stability, a form of rigidity at odds with Helga's craving for fluidity and movement.

As Helga arrives at the party, Anne's remarks regarding another attendee suggest that her views on fashion and its promiscuous potentials are easily elided with her views on the surfaces of skin. As they enter the room, Helga notices a striking woman whom she describes as "pale, with a peculiar, almost deathlike pallor. The brilliantly red, softly curving mouth was somehow sorrowful. Her pitch-black eyes, a little aslant, were veiled by long, drooping lashes and surmounted by broad brows, which seemed like black smears. The short dark hair was brushed severely back from the wide forehead. The extreme décolleté of her simple apricot dress showed a skin of unusual color, a delicate, creamy hue, with golden tones" (Larsen 60). When Helga enquires about the woman, Anne bitterly identifies her as Audrey Denney, a detestable person who "inveigles" respectable black men, goes about with "white people who know she's colored," throws "parties for white and colored people together," and attends "white people's parties" (Larsen 60, 61). Ann proclaims deems this behavior "disgusting," "obscene," "treacherous," and "outrageous" (Larsen 61). Yet Helga immediately recognizes the similarity of their fashions; Audrey also has decided to sport the neckline Anne encouraged Helga to avoid for its connotations of promiscuity. This reading of Audrey's fashion is made apparent in the blatantly visual, sexualized language Anne uses to indict Audrey's behavior. Moreover, both Anne and Helga immediately understand that Audrey's movement between the two worlds of black Harlem and white New York is made possible by Audrey's light, near-white skin. Anne's vitriolic

condemnations of Audrey's promiscuity, in addition to clothing, thus target the surface of Audrey's skin as visual reinforcement of her interior, moral failings. Not only is this ironic, given Helga's observations regarding Anne's own tendencies to imitate white mannerisms and aesthetic preferences, it also exposes to Helga the inherent contradictions in Anne's ideological framework, which presumes that Audrey's morality can be seen through skin and fabric which in fact Helga senses that Anne's interpretations say more about her enviousness that anything else.

In the final American setting, which appears at the novel's end, Helga marries a pastor of a rural Southern church only to meet with new versions of policing of her femininity that seem, at first, to run counter to Anne Grey's, but in the end share unexpected similarities. Fresh in her enthusiasm for her new life and her new role as a religious beacon for the community, Helga assumes that she will use her authority as the preacher's wife to help to downtrodden female parishioners by encouraging them to wear "what she considered more appropriate clothing and inexpensive ways of improving their homes according to her ideas of beauty" (Larsen 119). Behind her back, the other women reject her suggestions and dismiss Helga as "uppity" (Larsen 119). After the birth of three children in rapid, succession, however, Helga has less time to worry about the other church women; overwhelmed, and overworked, Helga's home and her person begin to take on an "untidy" appearance, causing the church women to pity her but also to read Helga's exterior transformation as evidence of an interior change to do away with unnecessary trappings and vanities, committing herself fully to tasks the Lord has set out for her: caring for husband and children. Gradually "the women folk spoke more kindly and more affectionately of the preacher's Northern wife" (Larsen 126). Though Helga's initial interactions with the congregation reveal the extent to which she's internalized Anne's marriage of aesthetic taste to racial uplift, as well as Anne's contempt for working-class people of color economically unable

to “ape” expensive, European tastes, the women’s reaction to Helga too is telling. Their pronouncement of her as “uppity” not only indicts Helga for her biases but also insinuates their estimation that Helga is too focused on exterior appearances and frippery. Simplicity in both personal style and home décor more clearly communicates the priorities that should concern a preacher’s wife. While the women pity Helga’s untidy appearance, seeing it as another, albeit lesser, form of self-indulgence, it is a look that more clearly aligns the model of femininity they expect to see from the wife of the community’s religious pillar.

Through these American settings Larsen offers a critique of the visual frameworks that seek to contain and constrain black femininity. Particularly in the case of the Naxos women and Harlem’s black bourgeois, Helga comes to understand that the optics of feminine respectability are undergirded not only by an intense and repressive attitude towards women’s sexuality but also by classism and an internalized racism that paradoxically continues to uphold middle-class whiteness as the visual and behavioral model for correctness. And while Larsen indeed underscores the various ways that these attitudes towards fashion, skin, and decorum aim to remedy the social precarity of black Americans through the remanufacturing of image, she also suggests, through Helga, that these frameworks actually intensify this social precarity, replacing the old monolithic narratives with seemingly new ones equally inflexible and inhospitable to individuality and the privileges of unique personhood. More pressingly, as Anne Grey’s tastes and commentaries reveal, these modes of seeing and interpreting may not be new at all, but instead forms of internalized racism and classism ironically packaged in the language of racial uplift, that paradoxically, reaffirm the narratives of blackness that claim to unseat.

If, however, the novel’s American settings demonstrate problems with ways of seeing and interpreting racialized femininity within black communities, Helga’s experience living in

Denmark, socializing with the friends and acquaintances of her mother's white family, expose her to a very different set of problems with the ways the surface of her body is read and understood, not in terms of depth, essence, or substance, but as pure image to be manipulated and changed in order to enact the Danes' taste for exoticism and desire for primitivist fantasy. In Denmark, Helga is openly "gaped at," treated as a "peacock, a curio," (Larsen 74, 73). Initially, Helga embraces her relatives' pleas for her to dress in Eastern clothing, to wear ostentatious jewelry, and to act as the conversation piece at social gatherings. At one such gathering, Helga meets the mysterious and widely acclaimed painter, Axel Olsen. Upon seeing Helga, he immediately reacts with pleasure and approval, deciding at once that he must paint her portrait; Helga, only a passable speaker of Danish, understands only snatches of conversation between Olsen and her aunt: "She caught only words, phrases, here and there. 'Superb eyes … color … neck column … yellow … hair … alive … wonderful'" (Larsen 71). Formally, the numerous ellipses within the text both mark the language that is indiscernible to Helga and also draw attention to the connective tissue that seems absent from Olsen's descriptions. Olsen's remarks fracture Helga into a series of parts, colors, and impressions he enjoys through the visual consumption of her racialized body. Arne Lunde and Anna Stenport contend that, "His utterances of approval… not only anatomize Helga as an artist's model but also echo the words of a buyer pricing the value of a slave being sold at the auction block" underscoring the dehumanizing nature of this exchange (Lunde and Stenport 234). Axel's verbal portrait renders Helga in terms that commodify and objectify her even before he actually transforms her likeness into the more literal commodity of a painting. Pamela Barnett has described Olsen's disjointed verbal portrait of Helga as one that forces readers to recognize mental patterns that accompany image-construction. This is not, as Barnett argues, a passive process but rather an active one that

imbues meaning and significance: “A fragmented description is directed toward the perceptual processes of the viewer in a way that a holistic vision is not. This narrative choice draws attention to the production of an image” (Barnett 583). Olsen’s image is created through primitivist lens through which he views and understands brown skin and while he avoids the rigid policing of the Naxos women, his mode of understanding surface is equally problematic as it reduces Helga entirely to her exterior contours, seeing her as entirely composed of surface—entirely without depth.

Olsen’s intentions are made reaffirmed when he takes Helga and her aunt shopping in Copenhagen. Everything purchased for Helga:

> ...had been selected by Olsen and paid for by Aunt Katrina. Helga had only to wear them... there were batik dresses in which mingled indigo, orange, green, vermilion, and black; dresses of velvet and chiffon in screaming colors, blood-red, Sulphur-yellow, sea-green; and one black and white thing in striking combination. There was a black Manila shawl strewn with great scarlet and lemon flowers, a leopard-skin coat, a glittering opera cape. There were turban-like hats of metallic silks, feathers and furs, strange jewelry, enameled or set with odd semi-precious stones, a nauseous Eastern perfume, shoes with dangerously high heels. (Larsen 74)

In a marked contrast to the brown fashions of the Naxos women and the staid tastefulness of Anne Grey and her set, Olsen purposefully clads Helga in ostentatious fashions and materials that not only run counter to the considerably more understated and sedate clothing of Danish women, they also visually heighten Helga’s difference by adorning her body with objects that collapse and conflate objects, clothes, and regional styles into a single ostentatious, moving-

portrait of otherness. Even before Olsen goes on to actually paint Helga, he understands their relationship in almost entirely transactional terms, treating her as a living mannequin to be dressed, and transformed to suit his fantasies; he later voices this explicitly when he tells Helga that she has "the soul of a prostitute" (Larsen 87).

The problem of the way Olsen sees Helga becomes even more apparent when he actually creates the painting. Before revealing the portrait to Helga, Olsen says, "I think that my picture of you is, after all, the true Helga Crane" (Larsen 88). Olsen's remarks can be interpreted in three ways. First, Olsen believes that by capturing Helga's likeness on canvas, he's also captured her essence and by extension, all that can be known; what's true or real about Helga exists on the exterior of her body—a body stylized by Olsen himself. Second, and relatedly, Olsen might also be suggesting that the painting distills a more "real," authentic, or genuine version of the flesh and blood model, committing her permanently to canvas in her most ideal (in Olsen's view) form—a form that cannot be altered by the capriciousness of the flesh and blood woman. Finally, and most disturbingly, Olsen's comment may also suggest his belief that the painting—a literal object—might replace or adequately substitute for Helga herself—an equivalent commodity. Rather than a metonymic treatment of surfaces, Larsen here suggests the threat that Helga might be literally reduced to the surface of the canvas. Olsen's use of the term "picture" to describe the completed work—rather than "portrait," an artistic rendering of a person, or even "painting," a term that signals an affiliation with artifice—reinforces these ideas. Instead, his use of picture insists on a kind of completeness but may also tap into the language of photography, implying Olsen's belief in the fidelity and realism of his work.

Unsurprisingly, Helga's reaction to the portrait reveals her discomfort, particularly in the way it encourages viewers to look at her in the same way, with the same assumptions Olsen

projects onto the portrait: “The picture--- she had never quite… forgiven Olsen for the portrait. It wasn’t, she contended, herself at all but some disgusting sensual creature with her features… collectors, artists, and critics had been unanimous in their praise and it had hung on the line at an annual exhibition where it had attracted much flattering attention and many tempting offers (Larsen 89). When Helga looks at the painting, however, she concludes: “Bosh. Pure artistic bosh and conceit. Nothing else. Anyone with half an eye could see that it wasn’t at all, like her” (Larsen 89). Helga’s distaste for the portrait reveals a particular rejection of its vivid and defining sexuality, a distillation that Helga clearly understands as more complicated than the rendering Olsen has provided. Further, the narrator’s reference to the portrait’s reception—its receipt of “flattering attention” and “many tempting offers” uses a pronoun to subtly obfuscate whether “it” refers to Helga or the painting, suggesting that both are available for purchase. Such a move concretizes the threat present in Olsen’s earlier remarks at the party— his vision of Helga spread onto the canvas, reinforces protocols for viewing the black woman’s body as an object, as a commodity, and in doing so, reinforces the sense that Helga can be treated as such. Yet Helga’s attempts to dismiss the portrait also highlight her anxiety, her knowledge that “artistic conceit” plays a valuable role in constructing modes of seeing, especially modes of seeing racialized, feminine flesh. That “anyone with half an eye” should see clear differences between Helga and the portrait’s rendering of her, hints that expectations, assumptions, and fantasy, rather than the mechanics of the eye, actually construct processes of “seeing.”

Barnett characterizes this moment as one that points to portraiture not as objective or mimetic but rather as a form of recording the imbues the subject with the biases of the recorder. The portrait of Helga, in other words, records Olsen’s interpretation of Helga, an interpretation inflected by Olsen’s racism and sexual exoticization of Helga:

> By focusing on the elaborate process by which Helga, a black woman character, becomes an object of art, Larsen critiques a tradition of representation that purports to be mimetic but actually reproduces stereotypes of the black female. Larsen is particularly critical of the stereotype of the sexually voracious black woman. Realist aesthetic practices aim at a direct correlation between the object of representation and its rendering. Realist portraiture is impelled by principles of documentation; portraits are painted to serve as artifacts of a particular person's presence of physiognomy. But Larsen's novel disrupts such notions of direct documentation. Quicksand suggests that portraiture, both verbal and visual, also reflects the symbolic resonances assigned to the human body. (Barnett 577)

Barnett's insight helps us to see that Olsen's problem lies in his protocols of looking, with the dehumanizing and reductive ideologies that teach him that seeing skin allows him to see Helga's interior or, more problematically, teach him to see her skin as a sign that she entirely lacks the interiority he possesses.

Quicksand thus leaves us with a lingering distaste for the dehumanizing treatments of surface, both from the rigid perspectives of black bourgeois morality and through the flattening lens of European primitivism. Surface, the novel insists, cannot be a site of change so long as it is understood as rigid, reified, unchangeable, characteristics that inevitably enable and ease the application of ingrained, simplistic and overly reductive viewing protocols. Whatever hope Larsen associates with the revision of surface, thus appears in moments where the connection between vision and knowledge is temporarily severed. The metaphorical language of art thus attend not to the fixity of surface as Olsen's portraiture does, but to characteristics of refraction and reflection. In a moment of fleeting happiness, for instance, Helga steps onto Seventh Avenue

and notices the sun's "soft shining brightness on the buildings along its sides or on the gleaming bronze, gold, and copper faces of its promenaders" (Larsen 51). Helga describes the passing faces as reflective, identifiable through their similarities to sculptural material and gleaming modern buildings. Later, Helga again uses the metaphorical language of the mosaic to describe the patrons of a Harlem bar: "For the hundredth time she marveled at the gradations within this oppressed race of hers. A dozen shades slid by. There was sooty black, shiny black taupe, mahogany, bronze, copper…soon her interest in the moving mosaic waned" (Larsen 59-60). Here, Helga turns to similar, material language to describe the diverse appearances she observes around her. Critically, Helga's descriptions of the crowd reveal her resistance to projecting narratives onto the surfaces she sees; rather, by using the mosaic as a model for reading the bodies of the bar's patrons, she insists on preserving the individual difference of each part, even as it participates in a larger whole.

The most striking example of this tendency, however, appears in the novels' early descriptions of Helga, situated in her personal apartments at Naxos:

> Helga Crane sat alone in her room, which at that hour, eight in the morning, was in soft gloom. Only a single reading lamp, dimmed by a great black and red shade, made a pool of light on the blue Chinese carpet, on the bright covers of books which she had taken down from their long selves, on the white pages of the opened one selected, on the shining brass bowl, crowded with many-colored nasturtiums beside her on the low table, and on the oriental silk which covered the stool at her slim feet. It was a comfortable room, furnished with rare and intensely personal taste, flooded with Southern sun in the day but shadowy just then with the drawn curtains a single shaded light. (Larsen 1)

Together, the sumptuous textures, glistening surfaces, and numerous colors of Helga's possessions, produce a kaleidoscopic image of color and reflection. The dimness of the black and red lamp shade contrasts with the pooling blue light on the carpet. The metallic gleam of the "brass vase" differs markedly from the fabric sheen of the "oriental silk" stool. The "crowd" of "many-colored nasturtiums" further expands the room's imaged color palette, introducing the possibility of deep red, bright orange, marigold yellow, and intense fuchsia. The "bright colors" of the books in Helga's library introduce even more color and gesture to yet another surface that redistributes light throughout the room.

Helga's curation of bright, mirror-like objects and textiles, hints at Helga's clever use of props, staging, and visual play. The room, as the narrative reveals it, seems nearly inseparable from Helga, so much so that Helga's first appearance in the novel appears to describe her in the same terms used to describe all of the other paraphernalia within it:

> An observer would have thought her well fitted to that framing of light and shade. A slight girl of twenty-two years with narrow, sloping shoulders and delicate, but well-turned arms and legs… In vivid green and gold negligee and glistening brocaded mules, deep sunk into the big high-backed chair, against whose dark tapestry, her sharply cut face, with skin like yellow satin, was distinctly outlined... (Larsen 2)

The narrative goes on to describe the "pretty mouth," "sensuous lips," "good nose," "delicately chiseled ears" and her "curly blue-black hair… always straying in a little wayward, delightful way" (Larsen 2). Several scholars have described the narrator in these opening passages as "painterly" and indeed the specific diction of this phrase seems to invite us to imagine the scene as an instance of carefully-staged portraiture that anticipates the more explicit mentions of

portraiture that appear later in the novel.[44] The light perfectly highlights the surfaces of Helga's shoes and negligee as well as the "yellow satin of her skin." Helga's body, as well as her room, is cast as a set of interplaying surfaces. Her body is seamlessly integrated, rather than distinguished from, material objects. The identification of Helga's legs as "well-turned" suggests their shapeliness by drawing from the language of wood and metal working. The description of Helga's well-chiseled ears seems to draw from the vocabulary of sculpture.

While Helga's kindship with objects here may remind us of the dehumanizing language employed by Axel Olsen, it is also important to note that rather than reifying the surface of Helga's body, as Olsen's "picture" aims to do, these lush and textured descriptions perform the opposite function: the make Helga incredibly elusive. Her skin is fabric, her body a beautiful example of woodworking. At every opportunity, this opening description describes Helga through metaphor, as that which is covered over, as an exterior where light and shadow interplay. We are given coverings but are refused exposures and, in the end, this incredibly detailed portrait tells us only about Helga's various types of cladding. Her skin, form, and figure we understand only in the most vague and nebulous of terms: "pretty" and "good." In doing so, Larsen ultimately suggests that writing and showing what surfaces do rather than what they are or should be constitutes the greatest hope for disrupting the easy elision of vision and knowledge. These layered and elusive surfaces are thus in keeping with Helga's own repeated sense of her own depth, her interior as something that cannot be understood or verbalized, much less fit into a

[44] Ann Hostetler uses this passage to illustrate that "Larsen presents the narrator as painter in the verbal portrait that opens the novel, framing the subject of Helga Crane within a rarefied environment of carefully rendered and illuminated objects" (37). Of this same passage, Pamela E. Barnett observes: "Larsen's narrator positions Helga inside frames and strategically places her at the center of the settings in which she appears. The lighting focuses on Helga's features and catches the sheen of the fabrics she wears. The narrator paints Helga's image with meticulous attention to colors, shadows and shapes" (575).

tidy ideological framework. Larsen's engagement with the language of art thus suggests that although the portrait indeed possesses the potential to reduce and fix Helga entirely to a manipulated canvas that commodifies and objectifies both her person and image and denies her the right to interiority, visual art also possesses the potential to draw attention to the construction of images, the ideological processes that undergird practices of seeing. It provides a model for complicating or even blocking pathways of visual access and legibility that uphold the fantasy of seeing as a form of "knowledge." Finally, Larsen's novel hints at art's potential to disarticulate relationships between exterior appearance and depth by instead attending to the constructedness of surface as a technique that consciously obfuscates an unknowable, private depth.

In the end, Larsen's novel and its contemporary discourses of "surface" demonstrate the precarious positions of African Americans, whose skin made them the targets of visually based protocols for visual policing, and correspondingly victims of an accompanying epistemology of viewing that dismissed and dehumanized. Despite Du Bois' and others attempts to revise the surface in order to rewrite the terms under which black bodies were viewed and apprehended, Larsen's Quicksand suggests that one cannot fix a system that is, in its construction, fundamentally flawed. To rework such a framework merely signifies investment in new ideologies that attempt to force people into set roles, stripping them of their individuality and agency. The precarious political and social status of African Americans, Larsen contends, can only be solved by rejecting the racist and sexist ideological frameworks linking readings of surface to presumptions of depth. Instead, Larsen paradoxically suggests, the dangerous and dehumanizing precarity of surface can only be offset by embracing leaning into slippery, evasive, and protean nature of surface, where seeing is only a temporary impression rather than a form of knowing.

CHAPTER 3 You're Being So Good: Containment Strategies of Consumer Citizenship and Design Discourse in the Poetry and Prose of Gwendolyn Brooks

In Gwendolyn Brooks's "Two Dedications," a set of two poems invites readers to consider the receptions of two iconic Chicago artworks: the so-called Chicago Picasso, and the legendary mural that would come to be known as "The Wall of Respect." In the first poem, Brooks's speaker recounts the very-public 1967 unveiling of Picasso's large sculpture in Daley Plaza.[45] Though eventually accepted as an especially important piece in Chicago's public art collection, the sculpture's modern metallic aesthetic initially sparked controversy, eliciting heated discussion in many of Chicago's major news outlets even before its official debut (Grossman). For some Midwesterners, more accustomed to public monuments carved from granite and marble, the sculpture represented a gross violation of tradition (Grossman). For others, the sculpture's iconographic modernism aesthetically complemented an area of city integral to its carefully-crafted reputation as a center of sleek, international-style architecture.[46] The epigraph to the first of Brooks's poems in "Two Dedications," draws from one celebratory account of the sculpture's dedication, published in the Chicago Sun Times: "Mayor Daley tugged a white ribbon, loosening a blue percale wrap. A hearty cheer went up as the covering slipped off the big steel sculpture that looks at once like a bird and a woman" (Sun Times qtd. in Brooks "Two Dedications). The first lines of Brooks's poem extend the sense of pomp captured in the

[45] A gift to the "people of Chicago," Picasso refused to take payment for the model on which the final designs for the sculpture were based. The pieces of the full-size steel sculpture were cast by the United States Steel Corporation in Gary, Indiana. The pieces were shipped to Chicago, where they were fully assembled in Daley Plaza ahead of the public unveiling and dedication in August of 1967 ("Daley Center").

[46] The Daley Plaza is located in front of the Daley Center known in 1967 as the Chicago Civic Center. The Chicago Civic Center was designed by Jacques Brownson, a student of Mies van der Rohe and it was the first municipal building in Chicago built in the International Style ("History").

Sun Times article: “Seiji Ozawa leads the symphony. / The Major smiles. / And 50,000 See.” (Brooks “Two Dedications). The short syntax in these lines forces readers to linger on each detail—an accumulation of public actions that reinforce the visibility of the statue and those present to commemorate it—mayoral approval, a musical overture, the gathering of 50,000 Chicagoans. These lines also clarify the epigraph’s function. In a tone of breathless anticipation, the Sun Times journalist recounts the richness of the materials used to deepen the pleasure of the statue’s unveiling; the moment of exposure seems almost sensual as the covering “slips” away; and of course, the statue itself astonishes with its “big” scale and pleasurably perplexes with its simultaneous resemblance to woman and bird. Brooks’s recitation of these details, as well as her capitalization of “See” recognizes the variety of processes that converge to make artwork seen and the corresponding politics of visibility undergirding these. The public celebration of the Chicago Picasso inherently binds aesthetic concerns to civic ones, marrying images of high modernism to the rhetoric of urban progress and revivification referenced not only through the sculpture but also through its architectural backdrop: The International-style Chicago Civic Center. The vision of civic pride offered by the early lines of Brooks’s poem as well as the Sun Times narrative metonymically endorse a vision of civic pride that strives towards a tidy and streamlined visibility that pays homage to industrial manufacturing and production, a visibility that eschews the past and looks forward to the future.

Yet Brooks’s poem is not one that celebrates the Chicago Picasso nor does it endorse the politics of visibility implicitly endorsed by the sculpture’s construction; instead it meditates on those that choose not to cheer at the moment of unveiling and instead experience a sense of exclusion and alienation: “Does Man love art? Man visits Art, but squirms. / Art hurts. Art urges voyages—and it is easier to stay at home, / The nice beer is ready” (“Two Dedications”). The

speaker's diction suggests the discomfiture that capital "A" "Art" brings for those who do not want to voyage—physically or mentally—from the safety of home and the comfort of a favorite beverage. The poem goes on to explain: "We do not hug the Mona Lisa. / We / may touch or tolerate / an astounding fountain, or a horse-and-rider. / At most, another Lion. // Observe the tall cold of a Flower / which is as innocent and as guilty/ as meaningful and as meaningless as any / other flower in the western field" ("Two Dedications"). The Mona Lisa stands in for a tradition of Western art—one continued by public fountains, military statues, and noble animals and one that the subjects of the poem feel unwilling and unable to embrace. This idea is reinforced by the description of the Chicago Picasso as a "cold flower," simultaneously referencing the tactile sensation of encountering the statue's cool steel construction and the more metaphorically chilling sense that the sculpture lacks the warmth of connection for the people described by the speaker. Indeed, the poem's placement of "we," on its own line stands in for the isolation that the poem's subjects feel from these standard forms of urban artistic display, are "meaningless," to be "tolerated." By providing a counternarrative to the one featured in the Sun Times, the speaker implicitly raises questions of who benefits and who is marginalized by the aesthetic politics embodied by the Chicago Picasso.

The second poem in "Two Dedications" also records the scene of an artwork's unveiling, this time of a Southside mural, "The Wall of Respect," an installation with vision for the future rooted in excavation of the past. Depicting key contributors to African American political, social, and aesthetic legacy, the wall aimed to rewrite history according to the tenets of the Black Arts and Black Power Movements. According to Rebecca Zorach,

> The Wall's overall composition was an abstract one suggestive of collage. Unlike many murals, it was not composed of a sequence of historical vignettes, nor was it

> a unified representational field. Within this structure each painter worked in his or her own style on the Wall. None of them worked in the social realist narrative painting style that characterized most of the murals any of them might have seen… The Wall was not simply of static wall portraits. Many of the figures were represented in action—in the activities that reflected their areas of achievement—and in interaction with one another. (Zorach 20).

Brooks's epigraph from Ebony magazine is telling: "The side of a typical slum building on the corner of 43rd and Langley became a mural communicating black dignity" ("Two Dedications"). Through the speaker's quotation of Ebony, and through the explicit setting of the poem in Chicago's Southside, Brooks signals her interest in making visible the lives, neighborhoods, and artistic cravings of the city's African-American residents; the poem's understanding of the wall insists that art in this community must literally carve out the visibility of black humanity and dignity from a physical landscape; they must radically insist on rewriting the relationship between art and the urban space that immediately surrounds. Instead of remaining at home, the speaker and her neighbors "humbly come": "South of success and east of gloss and glass are / sandals; / flowercloth; / grave hoops of wood or gold, pendant / from black ears, brown ears, reddish brown and / ivory ears; / black boy-men" ("Two Dedications). The speaker here observes the tactile warmth and heterogeneity of the homespun textiles and the earth-toned colors that comprise the neighborhood. The scene at once offering a contrast to the cool industrial construction of the Chicago Picasso and its architectural surroundings; and to the unflagging tidiness of the dedication itself which transmutes a vision of streamlined aesthetics into a carefully-managed "celebration" that reduces human crowds to numbers and restricts engagement to "see[ing]." The speaker's detailed descriptions elide the beauty of the wall with

the beauty of black bodies and with the beauty of black communal gathering. Rather than being excluded from this artistic spectacle, the speaker asserts: "All / worship The Wall" ("Two Dedications"). The intimacy of the term "worship" implicitly suggests a greater emotional and spiritual connection between the residents and an artwork located within their community, one that represents their experiences and answers their need for black art and by extension, blackness to claim its own public space.

Brooks's bitter condemnation of the pomp surrounding the Chicago Picasso and her juxtaposed celebration of the "Wall of Respect," articulates an opposition between the types of art valorized by dominant, white society and the types of art that hold value for working-class black communities. These poems cast "Chicago Picasso" as metonymic of an alliance between mid-century design and architecture with the structural racism implicit in discourses of urban progress that require the marginalization or even eradication of artforms and populations that do not accord with this vision. The "Art," of mainstream society, Brooks asserts, cannot serve the artistic needs of the Southside community. Moreover, the celebration of mainstream "art" only serves to reinforce African Americans' physical exclusion and psychological alienation from public spaces and dominant cultural rituals.[47] Methodologically, "Two Dedications" reveals Brooks's reliance on juxtaposition, repurposing a favored method of avant-garde in order to critique dominant mid-century aesthetic discourses by drawing out their hostility to people of color. Through the comparison invited by the poems' side-by-side placement as well as their contrasting responses to their respective epigraphs, Brooks starkly reflects the disjuncture

[47] Here, Brooks seems to echo her friend and mentor, Langston Hughes, who articulated a more concrete antagonism between white definitions of art and the acknowledgement of black humanity; exploring the many cities and venues where the *work* of black artists was lauded but where the *artists themselves* were barred from entering, Hughes remarks: "Art rates higher than life or death in Texas. I reckon, which hardly makes sense. But I guess it is a point in favor for art" (Hughes "Art and the Heart").

between the seemingly optimistic promises of urban life and the failed reality of these in the everyday lives of black people who nevertheless continue to seek representation on their own terms.

In part, we might see these poems as illustrative of an oft-described "shift" in Brooks's writing, turning away from the integrationist impulses of her 1940s and 50s work towards the black autonomy that underscored the entwined politics of the Black Nationalist and Black Arts movements.[48] Cheryl Clark asserts that the poem is representative of "African Americans' rejection/sacrifice of the possibility of partnership in the American project" and their rejection of "the values of the (white) West" (Clark 2). Leslie Wheeler sees these and the other poems in the same collection, In the Mecca, as illustrative of Brooks's rhetorical shift from her earlier, more private forms of address to the public forms of address advocated by Amiri Baraka, a leader of the Black Arts movement.[49] Wheeler contrasts the "maternal rhetorical position" of Brooks's first volumes with the " more public, sermonic voice that resonates throughout her later poetry" (Wheeler 90).[50] Similarly, Karen Jackson Ford notes: "Her earlier poetry—with its eccentric diction and ornate structure—changed dramatically under the influence of the Black Aesthetic. While her poems retain their penchant for the world choice that is as precise as it is unusual, they abandon closed forms for free verse, register anger and outrage directly, employ colloquial

[48] In 1967, Brooks attended the Second Black Writers Conference in Nashville. There, she encountered leaders of the Black Arts Movement, like Amiri Baraka and Ron Milner and she began "moving away from the idea of black and white unity" towards "ideas of black nationhood and black revolution" (Sickels 39).

[49] Baraka famously articulated his position that art should speak directly to people, uniting them in common purpose in the poem, "SOS": Calling all black people/ Calling all black people, man woman child/ Wherever you are, calling you, urgent, come in/ Black People, come in, wherever you are, urgent, calling you, calling all black people/ calling all black people, come in, black people, come on in" (Baraka "SOS").

[50] The closing lines of Baraka's poem, "Black Art" insist: "We want a black poem. / And a / Black World. / Let the / world be a Black Poem / And Let All Black People Speak This Poem / Silently / or LOUD" (Baraka "Black Art").

language, strive for formal and thematic clarity as a political ideal, and reiterate the cultural program" (Ford 215). Indeed, shortly after the publication of these poems, Brooks's contribution to A Capsule Course in Black Poetry Writing, a manifesto-like publication co-authored with leaders of the Black Arts Movement, insists that "Black literature is literature BY blacks, ABOUT blacks, directed TO blacks. ESSENTIAL black literature is the distillation of black life. Black life is different from white life" suggests Brooks's renunciation of white culture, including its artistic institutions and legacies (3, 8).

My own reading of these poems, however, tends to accord more strongly with Katheryne Lindberg's observation that Brooks's later poetry is as much a thematic continuation of her earlier work as a reformation: "Long before Black Power declarations of racial self-definition, Brooks more than once subtly makes visible the assumptions that underwrite white control over the figurative power of white interaction" (Lindberg 287). Such a thematic is clearly at play in Brooks's juxtaposition of the ostentatious celebration of the Chicago Picasso and the more localized, humble, but nevertheless vibrant celebration of "The Wall of Respect." Brooks's juxtapositional methodology here is also is characteristic of her larger oeuvre, drawing inspiration from modernist and avant-garde forms of juxtaposition to showcase contrast between dominant narratives and subaltern ones, drawing power from the uncomfortable proximities. It's also apparent, however, that a secondary use of juxtaposition—to undermine the continuity of dominant narratives and to create literary collages highlighting the complexity of black urban life—also draws from a different, more vernacular approach akin to scrapbooking, where pieces and snippets are assembled to create alternative history, missing from or marginalized by dominant narratives.

Brooks's interrelated uses of juxtaposition are the subject of this chapter. As with Brooks's "Two Dedications," much of her earlier work employs juxtaposition to highlight the everyday lives of lower- and working-class black people made invisible by dominant aesthetic discourses. Also like "Two Dedications," modernist design figures as key antagonist for many of Brooks's characters; lured by the false promise that purchasing and "good design" offer the opportunity to access and participate in ensconced narratives of respectability, Brooks's ordinary heroes and heroines ultimately come to realize that these discourses simply represent one more form of exclusion. This is especially true for the protagonists of Brooks's coming-of-age stories: her epic poem, Annie Allen (1949) and her only novel, Maud Martha (1953). In each, the titular character grapples with the desire to establish her own worth through purchasing, possessions, and domestic decoration. Responding not only to the postwar vision of buying as an act of citizenship but also to the underlying racism and classicism of midcentury interior design, Brooks's texts contrast each woman's kitchenette setting with the dreams proffered by advertisements and magazines, emphasizing that aesthetic discourses of "good" design actually reiterate and uphold structural racism as well as classism, foreclosing décor as a viable pathway of uplift. Throughout each text, Brooks's uses juxtaposition to contrast glossy fantasy and harsh, grey reality for each protagonist, pressing us to recognize the community's dire need for a more relevant aesthetic discourse, authentically capable of intervening in black lives. The everyday realities of both Annie and Maud Martha underscore the precarious status of working-class black women's humanity; the dominant narratives of housewifery and design that appear to offer validation and hope remain for each, frustratingly out of reach. Brooks's critique of these counterproductive narratives thus gives way to a second critical use of juxtaposition in her work. In these same texts, Brooks also uses juxtaposition to disrupt monolithic and reductive narratives

of black life, employing montage-like scenes that showcase a complex cast of characters—both cruel and kind, contemptible and admirable, courageous and cowardly—that occupy Bronzeville. Like the crowd that walks to the "Wall of Respect," these scenes piece together lives to showcase variety and individuality as she reflects on the ways that dominant, particularly modernist-favored, poetic and literary traditions constrain and contain her attempts to elevate marginalized voices in the same way that dreams of well-designed rooms constrain and contain Annie and Maud. In doing so, Brooks considers how literary inheritance contributes to the precarious modes of representing black humanity as well as the extent to which these methodologies might be disrupted and refashioned to empower a community too long silenced, reduced, and ignored by art.

Lives in Contrast: Maxie, Annie, and the Failed Promises of Consumer Culture

Brooks's interest in juxtaposition, as well as her distinct usages of juxtaposition—one modernist-inspired, formally-experimental, and institutionally-embraced, the other, rooted in the inheritances of rural, southern, and feminine culture of collecting, roundly-criticized by white and elite black literary figures alike, and fraught with the risk of intellectual derision and dismissal—was typical of writers working between the end of the Harlem Renaissance and the rise of the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s and 70s. Like other artists of her time, Brooks's training was undeniably rooted in modernist poetics, but her work was also shaped by a series of historical developments that deepened racial rifts in urban communities, stoking many African Americans' sense of betrayal and disillusionment towards white institutions, including aesthetic ones.[51] The years following the stock market crash of 1929 brought African Americans no nearer

[51] Scholars frequently note that Brooks's poetic education was rooted in modernist poetry. While enrolled in Inez Cunningham's poetry class at the Southside Art Center, Brooks was exposed to the poetry of Yeats, Hughes, and Vachel Lindsay (Najar 315, 314). However if Brooks is ever labeled a modernist herself, the designation is frequently restricted to descriptions of the opaque and compressed writing employed in *Annie Allen*. According to

to achieving Du Bois's hopes for achieving social acceptance through art. As economic conditions worsened, white urbanites became more overtly hostile to both existing black residents and new arrivals of the Great Migration. Nowhere was this trend more apparent than in Chicago, Brooks's home city and the locus of the "Chicago Renaissance," a second flowering of African American literary production that drew from the modernist forms of the Harlem Renaissance while also rejecting its elitist and accommodationist politics. Between 1920 and 1930 Chicago's African American population increased by 113.7 percent; from 1930 until 1940, the city's black population increased by 18.7 percent (Kimble 15). This influx, as well as the worsening economic situation, led to tighter housing restrictions that sought to limit migrants' job and housing prospects, forcing them to seek housing located in already-overcrowded, primarily black neighborhoods like Bronzeville (Schlabach 5).[52] These areas, according to Elizabeth Schlabach, contained some of the city's "most dilapidated housing": "Unscrupulous landlords subdivided buildings into the tiniest possible apartments… Kitchenette apartments, as these units were called, were essentially old houses or larger apartments, long since abandoned by Chicago's wealthy whites, converted into multiple apartments, each installed with a communal restroom, small gas stove, and one small sink" (Schlabach 5, 95). J Bourgere's report "Housing in the Great Depression" from the era reinforces Schlabach's assertions:

Maria Mootry: Modernist poets "esteemed poetry that was difficult, allusive, and obscure. Significantly, Brooks's Pulitzer Prize-wining volume, *Annie Allen*, exhibits all of the characteristics associated with modernist aesthetics" (Mootry 2).

[52] In Richard Wright's essay "Aspects of the Black Belt," he points out that black neighborhoods emerged in proximity to vice-districts, places white Chicagoans saw as undesirable: "At the beginning of the migration many of the Negroes lived in a limited area on the South Side, principally between 22nd and 39th Streets, Wentworth Avenue and State Street. State Street was the main thoroughfare. Prior to the influx of the Negroes to the South Side many vacant houses were to be seen in this area. Because of its proximity to the old vice district this area had added undesirability to whites. The newcomers gladly took these houses. But, as the rate of influx increased, a scarcity of housing followed" (xxxii).

> The Chicago Housing Authority, investigating 140 kitchenette buildings, reported that seven six-flat buildings had been cut up to make 161 small apartments. Other buildings had yielded a proportionate number of smaller units. The survey disclosed that the kitchenette was commonly infested with vice and crime, not to mention rats, mice, roaches, and vermin. Proprietors had often violated laws requiring fire escapes and other health and safety measures. There were blocks where 90 percent of the buildings had been converted into such kitchenette apartments. Yet a survey of seventy-eight kitchenette families revealed that 44.9 percent were spending 31-50 percent of their income for rent. It further disclosed that these buildings were let out twice as fast as the conventional flat or apartment building. (Bougere 30).

Ultimately, the kitchenette apartment came to represent the impossible bind of many black urbanites: the presence of these housing restrictions elided the physical condition of dirty and decrepit living spaces with the morality of their inhabitants and in so doing rationalized the need to protect more desirable neighborhoods; yet without the freedom to leave these overcrowded and degrading areas, people were deprived of the opportunity to prove otherwise. Housing restrictions, in other words, become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, particularly for lower- and working-class African Americans.

The rise of Rooseveltian liberalism and the implementation of New Deal initiatives offered a temporary emotional reprieve, buoying African-Americans with the hope that they might harness the national zeitgeist to appeal for equal, democratic treatment.[53] The advent of the

[53] According to Lionel Kimble: "In a time dominated by the rhetoric of freedom and democracy, by the need to fully mobilize the wartime labor, and by the rhetoric of the New Deal liberalism articulated by the Roosevelt administration, African Americans during the Roosevelt era found themselves" in a good position to appeal to the consciences of white Americans (Kimble 2).

New Deal's Works Progress Administration (WPA) promised expanded possibilities for housing and employment via projects of urban revitalization; correspondingly, photographers dispatched to record the results of these projects in urban neighborhoods, including predominately black neighborhoods, offered opportunities for African-Americans to be captured running businesses, parenting, and going to church—activities that emphasized the overlap between the routines of black and white urbanites.[54] The Federal Writer's Project, an offshoot of the WPA, employed an unprecedented number of African-American artists and writers some of whom lent "their gazes and pens to their audiences, in a democratizing vein, letting them see the "normal" experience of the black common man" (Schlabach 49).[55] Yet even this slight uptick in visibility did little to substantially or lastingly transform the conditions in places like Bronzeville, leaving many feeling more bitter than ever, betrayed by the institutions in which they'd invested hope.[56]

This acrimony extended into the realm of aesthetics, trapping many artists between a desire to harness the range of possibilities associated with modernist juxtaposition—shock, disjuncture, divergence—and a heightened awareness of the racist inheritances woven into institutionalized aesthetics. James Smethurst's broad account of African American modernism

[54] "In 1941, photographers Russell Lee and Edwin Rosskam spend two weeks on Chicago's South Side, eventually producing more than a thousand documentary images. The photographers worked for a New Deal federal government agency, the Farm Security Administration (FSA), which supported a photography project to record and publicize conditions in rural areas and in town and cities that were the destinations of rural migration…The immediate purpose for making and circulating FSA pictures was to publicize and build support for President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs specifically combatting rural poverty and promoting the resettlement of citizens displaced by agricultural depression, drought, and technological advance during the Great Depression" (Strange xiv).

[55] Important Black writers employed in the Negro Affairs section of the Federal Writers' project included: Margaret Walker, Richard Wright, Willard Motley, Frank Yerby, Fenton Johnson, Arna Bontemps, Katherine Dunham, Ralph Ellison, Claude McKay, and Zora Neale Hurston (Strange xxix).

[56] The administration's mission to photograph the lives of urban residents, including African Americans proved to be particularly thorny. According to Maren Strange, many critics of the project concluded that the photographs failed to reorient stereotypes or humanize black people for white viewers and instead cast black people as "the passive objects of relief measures rather than active social agents" (Strange xv).

emphasizes that black writers, particularly those working during the "Chicago Renaissance of the 1940s and 50s, gravitated towards modernism's internationalist formalism," that "provided a counterpoint to Jim Crow color prejudice" of America's regional literatures even as they strove to find a place for the "folk" voice, a voice associated with the "authentic" black culture geographically rooted in the rural south (African American Roots of Modernism 14, The New Red Negro 8, 29).[57] Smethurst identifies Brooks as a particularly salient example of these competing impulses; labeling her work "neomodernist," Smethurst argues that her poetry blends the "folk" voice with a high modernist aesthetic (The New Red Negro 164).[58] In collage-form, Rachel Farebrother specifically emphasizes that juxtaposition allowed African American artists' to reflect on historical silences and representational gaps: "For African American artists and writers, collage form, with its odd tonal shifts and unsettling juxtapositions, could be shaped to communicate the discontinuities and ruptures of African American history" (14). During the "Chicago Renaissance" of the 1940s and 50s, a second flowering of African American literary output, many artists embraced the modernist formal strategies of the Harlem Renaissance while rejecting its elitist and accommodationist politics; they sought to methodologically recreate juxtapositions visible on the streets of Bronzeville: "Artists of the Chicago Black Renaissance

[58] Smethurst makes several important distinctions between writers of the 1930s and the 1940s, including their respective relationships to the aesthetics of "high" modernism; as his descriptions make clear, however, both rejection and embrace of modernism's aesthetic models, illustrate the significance of its influence. According to Smethurst, in the 1930s most African-American writers were not drawing from "high modernist" models (49). Instead, "the romantics and Pre-Raphaelite descendants remained more important formal models than Eliot" (50). Further, "African American poetry of the 1940s can be broadly divided into two tendencies, both of which are what might be termed neomodernist in form. By 'neomodernist' I mean poetry that utilizes more directly, and self—consciously, the formal resources of various currents of 'teens and twenties modernist art than had generally been the case in the 1930s. One of these tendencies draws on certain 'high' modernists, particularly Eliot and Stevens, and is sympathetic in form, if not spirit, to the strictures of the New Critics. The other is more closely related to the work of William Carlos Williams and to the more formally 'radical' Left art and literature of the 1920s and 1930s, whether the photomontage of the Heartfield, the film montage of Eisenstein, or the polyphonic poems of Rukeyser, Hughes, or Fearing" (*The New Red Negro* 50).

literally juxtapose the sacred with the profane, street hustlers with businessmen, prostitutes with ministers, merging real-life experiences with the imagination" (Schlabach 49). Such juxtapositions drew attention not only the diversity of black urban life but also mobilized contrast as a means of expressing disillusionment with the promises of racial equality that had drawn so many to come north during the Great Migration. Critical to each of these iterations of juxtaposition is the reworking of avant-gardist politics; juxtaposition here does not engage ideas of motion or flatness, does not employ incongruities to highlight capitalism's absurdities, does not harness shock to access the unconscious. Juxtaposition for many mid-century black artists was about drawing attention to what was missing: equality in both opportunity and narrative representation for African Americans.

At the heart of Brooks's long-poem, Annie Allen is a meditation on the productive tensions elicited by disparate forms of juxtaposition—their power to disrupt damaging narratives and to piece together more complex ones. Frequently cited as Brooks's most opaque poetry, Annie Allen helped Brooks to become the first African American woman to win a Pulitzer Prize—a mixed blessing for a writer in need of support but who also uneasily wore the mantle of white institutional approval. Numerous scholars have remarked on the poem's participation in modernist poetic modes and position the poem in tension with Brooks's stated populist politics as well as her broader oeuvre. [59] Exemplary of this position is Houston Baker who sees Annie

[59] Rita Dove and Marilyn Nelson note the challenging bind of African-American poets; early in the twentieth-century, many had to decide if they were addressing black audiences or white audiences and tailor their language accordingly. Few black poets tried to simultaneously address both black and white audiences (Dove and Nelson 143). "The Anniad" section of the poem, in particular, is often cast as Brooks's knowing decision to address a white audience in order to "prove herself as a poet. Yemisi Jimoh, for example, asserts: "In 'The Anniad' Brooks not only masters the dominant modernism she also employs mastery of form as she wears modernity's ventriloquist's mask… These strategies respond to the dominant culture's requirements that a black poet's voice must prove its worthiness by imitating an established modernist dominant model of art" (Jimoh 170). Similarly, Eve Shockley observes: "'The Anniand' can and should be read as a poem whose scope and form staked its claim to the status of legitimate epic, a poem which therefore held the potential to legitimize her as a poet in the eyes of the literary establishment, as she intended it to" (Shockley 27).

Allen as evidence that Brooks is "caught between two worlds": "Brooks writes tense, complex, rhythmic verse that contains the metaphysical complexities of John Donne and the word magic of Apollinaire, Eliot, and Pound" (21) Baker also, however, also acknowledges that Brooks retains "a sense of frustration with how to appeal to white readership without ignoring the readership of the very people she aimed to empower with her writing (Baker 21).

Divided into four sections, "The Childhood," The Anniad" and its Appendix, and "The Womanhood," the collection tells the story of its titular character as she navigates from girlhood to adolescence, young adulthood to single motherhood, and over the course of her life, Annie's encounters with a variety of important challenges facing black Chicagoans at midcentury: widespread poverty, racist housing practices and urban segregation, the oppressiveness of white beauty standards, and the unattainable fantasies of citizenship through shopping, social mobility through material acquisition. Particularly over the course of the poem's first section, "The Childhood," Brooks's poems juxtapose images of young Annie and her mother—two women who seem initially different and contemptuous of one another but who also remain inescapably bound by the same false hopes for redemption through capitalism. Though Annie is contemptuous of her mother's decisions to settle for material comforts, her own language, particularly against the backdrop of her mother's experience, highlights the ways Annie has simply refashioned her mother's ideals. In the end, Brooks's juxtaposition of both women serves to highlight a troubling truth: that both internalize midcentury narratives of social uplift through consumer citizenship, believing that their humanity will be ratified through name brands and

carefully showcased home goods. What they instead discover is that neither happiness nor humanity can be purchased within a transactional system as they've been led to imagine.

"The Childhood" section is composed of eleven poems which locate young Annie within the geographic and socioeconomic context of Bronzeville. The first poem in the section, "the birth in a narrow room," foregrounds Annie's modest beginnings and foreshadows her dissatisfaction with the financial limitations that will characterize her life. The poem's speaker opens: "weeps out of Western country something new. / Blurred and stupendous. Wanted and unplanned" ("birth in a narrow room"). Annie's birth is a subtle event; she "weeps" into the world, connoting both her gradual, quiet entrance, as well as the mixed emotions the birth elicits from her parents, who love Annie but also recognize the economic challenges that will accompany their new addition. The speaker alludes to these economic hardships later in the poem when she describes Annie: "Now weeks and years will go before she thinks / 'How pinchy is my room! How can I breathe! / I am not anything and I have got / Not anything, or anything to do'" ("birth in a narrow room"). The repetition of "anything" here emphasizes that though Annie is cherished, her childhood is also one of sacrifices and privation. Further, it collapses Annie's self-worth and perception of opportunity with her access (or lack thereof) to material things, anticipating the development of Annie's consumerist fantasies.

Materialist fantasies, it turns out, are something of an inherited trait for the Allen women; indeed, through an extended intermingling of poems about Annie's parents with poems about Annie herself, Brooks reveals that Annie's materialism irrevocably yokes her aspirations with those of her mother, Maxie. The second poem of "The Childhood" section, "Maxie Allen," describes Annie's mother as a deeply frustrated woman, resentful of her daughter's ingratitude and entitlement. Though it's clear that the family financially struggles, it's also clear that Maxie

views the family's present circumstances as an improvement on the circumstances of her own childhood: "Maxie Allen has taught her / Stipendiary little daughter / To thank her Lord and luck star" for "Her Quaker Oats and Cream of Wheat" ("Maxie Allen"). The combination of a faith-based ritual—thanking the lord—with the specific mentions of brand name cereals emphasizes the importance that Maxie attaches to these items, symbolic of purchasing power and (limited) upward mobility. Moreover, Maxie's understanding of Annie's relative privilege is set against Maxie's own self-reflexive acknowledgement of her marriage as transactional; she's resigned herself to a loveless union in exchange for the material comforts she craves. Maxie reveals this as she addresses Annie: "What do you guess I am? / You've lots of jacks and strawberry jam. / And you don't have to go to bed, I remark / With two dill pickles in the dark, / Nor prop what hardly calls you honey /And gives you only a little money" ("Maxie Allen"). Annie takes for granted foods and toys her mother sees as extravagant; she is given things to play with a food to fill her stomach every night. Annie's ability to do so largely rests on Maxie's willingness to "prop" up her husband who gives her "only a little money."

That Maxie has settled is further reinforced in the next poem, "the parents: people like our marriage Maxie and Andrew," where an omniscient narrator resignedly observes: "The people settled for chicken and shut the door. // But one by one / They got things done: / watch for the porches as you pass/ And prim low fencing pinching in the grass. // Pleasant custards sit behind / The White Venetian blind" ("the parents: people like our marriage Maxie and Andrew"). The speaker implies that the parents have given up hopes and aspirations in exchange for "pleasant custards," "prim fencing," and "chicken." The diction here underscores the banality of the items that Maxie and Andrew have accepted as the substance of their lives. The description of the fence "pinching" in the grass echoes the language used to describe the room of

Annie's birth, suggesting that the family has been unable to move beyond the close quarters of their initial "narrow room." The closed "Venetian blinds" suggest that Maxie and Andrew have stopped looking out into the world and have closed themselves off from its possibilities.

As Annie grows, she seeks to separate herself from her parents, especially her mother. The close arrangement of poems describing the desires of each woman, however, ironically reveals that Annie is animated and constrained by the very same materialist fantasies that she criticizes in her mother. In "Do Not be Afraid of No," Annie explicitly rejects her mother's willingness to "settle." Annie boldly declares her intention to say "no" to such a fate: "To say yes is to die / a lot of a little. The dead wear capably their wry // Enameled emblems… It is brave to be involved. / To be not fearful to be unresolved. // Her new wish was to smile / When answers took no airships, walked a while" ("Do Not be Afraid of No"). Annie embraces uncertainty, vowing to allow herself to be "unresolved" and to walk a while with her unanswered questions. Despite Annie's intentions, however, her ironic revision of Maxie's fantasies begins to emerge when she describes her expectations for a prospective romantic partner: "'Men there were and men there by / But never men so many / Chief enough to marry me,' / Though the proud late Annie. // 'Whom I raise my shades before / Must be gist and lacquer. / With melted opals for my milk, / Pearl-leaf for my cracker'" ("the ballad of late Annie"). The trappings of Maxie's life are hidden behind blinds while Annie imagines "lifting" the shades, a phrase that at once signals Annie's articulation of a metaphorical openness to the world that she believes differentiates her from her mother, as well as an early awareness of Annie's recognition of her sexuality as a commodity to be exchanged, a transactional awareness that actually reiterates Annie's similarity to Maxie. The sumptuous textures and references to rich materials in Annie's description signal that her romantic fantasy cannot be parsed from a materialist one. Annie envisions a life littered

with furnishings that signal her improvement over the "Cream of Wheat" and "Quaker Oats" for which Maxie has settled. While on the one hand, Annie's haughty assertions here can be read as evidence of her typical, youthful rejection of her parents' values, her statements ironically suggest that she simply improved upon her mother's fantasies. Annie's assertions signal that an expectation that her interior sense of self-worth will translate into worth of her possessions; Maxie's problem, in other words, was not that she exchanged herself for material comforts but rather her willingness to do so for such a low price.

In the final poem of section, "my own sweet good," Annie again describes a prospective lover in materialist terms—a "gold half-god" who gives "golden" and "gay" promises ("my own sweet good"). Annie's repeated attention to "gold," once again signals her tendency to describe things she views positively through the language of sumptuous materials. As a description for skin, "gold" alludes to the colorism that Annie has internalized, glamorizing lighter skin tones and imbuing them with a sense of happiness and possibility. Beyond establishing the materialist sensibilities that link Maxie and Annie, this passage also begins to more explicitly forecast the damaging nature of this ideological framework; these lines not only reveal that Annie's conception of happiness rely on financial resources she'll never possess, but also suggest Annie's troubling elision of luxurious décor preferences with her standards for human beauty. And for a woman described as "sweet and chocolate," this too represents an aspect of Annie's aesthetic dream that she'll never be able to capture ("The Anniad").

The final section of Annie Allen, "The Womanhood," more firmly concretizes the future forecasted in "The Childhood" section. Taking up Annie's story after her husband's desertion, these poems address Annie's economic instability, her struggle with single motherhood, and ultimately, her search to find small pleasures within a life marked by hardship. Notably, Annie's

shifting mindset in these poems suggests Annie's continued similarity with Maxie but also her continued refusal to entirely "shut the blinds" as her mother did. In "children of the poor," Annie's description of her impoverished circumstances echo those of her parents in "the birth in a narrow room." She admits to loving her children "whose soft softness softly makes a trap for us / and makes a curse. And makes a sugar of / the malocclusions, the inconditions of love" but also acknowledges the bittersweetness of parenthood where the power of motherly love is matched only by the incredible burden of obligation ("children of the poor"). Like Andrew and Maxie, Annie recognizes her poverty as an important barrier, saying "my hand is stuffed with mode, design, device. / But I lack access to my proper stone. / And plentitude of plan shall not suffice" ("children of the poor"). Even as Annie reflects on her lack of funds, her language also suggests that she hasn't fully shed her childhood dreams of gist and lacquer nor has she moved far beyond Maxie Allen's embrace of pleasant custards and venetian blinds. Annie's "hand" is metaphorically full with "mode, design, device": each word at once connotes Annie's plentitude of plans while also gesturing to material items. "Mode" alludes to fashion, "design" to the aesthetics of home and self, and "device," in its arcane usage suggests exterior looks. In other words, even in the face of a reckoning that conveys, in the bluntest of terms, Annie's financial inability to achieve her materialist fantasies, her wording continues to yoke her motherly hopes to acquisition of goods and trapping. Later in the same poem, Annie tells her children: "First fight. Then fiddle… To be deaf to the music and to beauty blind. / Win war. Rise bloody, maybe not too late / For having first to civilize a space /Wherein to play your violin with grace" ("children of the poor"). Annie imagines that by explicitly encouraging her children to fight, she will also prevent them from appreciating beauty and music, leaving her to question whether sacrifice justifies the gain. Nevertheless, she concludes that she must protect her children's rights

and her own rights not to fight but to be frivolous: “We both want joy of undeep and unabiding things / Like kicking over a chair or throwing blocks out of a window” (“II”).

The juxtaposition of Annie’s and Maxie’s characters illuminate the toxic and nearly inescapable pull of materialist fantasy steadily operating within Bronzeville, “The Womanhood” offers another layer of juxtaposition that sharpens Annie’s sense of betrayal associated with the failure of this fantasy; in white suburban neighborhoods neatly manicured lawns and even brilliant trash-bins convey the sense of happiness, stability, and respectability that Annie also once hoped to capture through beautiful furnishings. Through two poems, “Beverly Hills Chicago” and “I love those little booths at Benvenuti’s,” arranged side-by-side, Brooks offers a broader context for the racial inequalities underpinning Annie’s dreams. In “Beverly Hills,” the poem’s first-person speaker (presumably Annie), reflects on a drive through Bronzeville’s whiter and wealthier neighboring area. Everything seems better in Beverly Hills, where “These people walk to their golden gardens. / We say ourselves are fortunate to be driving by today // That we may look at them, in their gardens where ripeness rots. But not raggedly… When they flow sweetly into their houses / with softness and slowness touched by that everlasting gold, / We know what they go to. To tea” (“Beverly Hills Chicago”). Even the trash seems more beautiful: “The refuse is a neat brilliancy” (“Beverly Hills Chicago”). Beverly Hills, as Annie describes it, is a place of neatness and order; even rot and refuse are tidily controlled by bins and fences. Throughout the poem the speaker’s languid language—“soft,” “slow,” “sweet”—not only contrasts with the narrow “pinching” room of Annie’s childhood but also contrasts with the violent desperation that marks Annie’s tone in “children of the poor,” where she equates her children’s efforts to carve out their own spaces as a form of warfare. Notably here too is the reappearance of Annie’s focus on gold and her tendency to associate this term with luxurious

home décor and desirable forms of living. Of course, it's no accident that the white families of Beverly Hills are attributed with an "everlasting gold," strengthening the tie between the aesthetics Annie admires and the range of social and economic privileges attached to whiteness. Finally, the symbol of the garden itself—a tiny Edenic microcosm—gestures to the seedy underbelly of the scene presented. As Annie's children go hungry, Beverly Hills families cultivate food-bearing plants only to watch them die, a stunning indictment of the wasteful and profoundly insular worldview encouraged by adherence to the Beverly Hills aesthetic. Despite this, Annie is clear to renounce rancor: "Nobody is furious. / Nobody hates these people. We do not want them to have less. / But it is only natural that we should think we have not enough" ("Beverly Hills Chicago").

"I love those little booths at Benvenuti's," by contrast intones the voices of white voyeurs who travel to Bronzeville hoping to witness the titillating spectacle of black people behaving badly; their remarks reveal that the "good" aesthetic of Beverly Hills, coded as white, is propped up by cultivation of its ideological obverse of a bad" aesthetic of untidiness and excess, coded as non-white. They "get to Benvenuiti's. There are booths / To hide in while observing tropical truths /About this—dusky folk, so clamorous!/ So colorfully incorrect, / so amorous / so flatly brave! / Boothed in one can detect, / Dissect. // One knows and scarcely knows what to expect. // What antics, what lurching dirt" ("I love those little booths as Benvenuti's). The diction used to describe the black patrons observed at Benvenuti's emphasizes the exaggerated stereotypes of African Americans as loud and unkempt. Further, the white speakers conflate this excessiveness with "dirt." According to Dianne Harris, notions conflating untidiness and excess with race persisted throughout the post-war era, infusing aesthetic rhetoric: "Many nonwhite and lower-economic class Americans did not have equal access to home and personal sanitation in this

period, and the stereotype of the dirty nonwhite was pervasively held. To be white and middle-class was to be clean, clean, clean" (103). Harris's analysis reminds us what's at stake with both the obsessive tidiness witnessed in the gardens and garbage bins of Beverly Hills, as well as what's at stake as the white patrons of Benvenuti's examine the black patrons—both represent attempts to aesthetically articulate whiteness beyond the surface of skin.

The voyeurs of Brooks's poem, however, do not get the show they expect. Instead, they see only the banal image of families who "arrive, sit firmly down, / Eat their Express spaghetti, their T-bone steak /Handline their steel crockery with no clatter, / laugh punily, rise, go firmly out the door" ("I love those little booths at Benvenuti's"). Contrasting white expectations of salaciousness with the frustratingly boring image of families who "will not clown," Brooks utilizes juxtaposition within the poem to unseat racist assumptions (Brooks "I love those little booths at Benvenuti's"). She also, however, employs juxtaposition to underscore the power dynamics of looking; white people arrive in Bronzeville view with revulsion and contempt but also simultaneous attraction; their gazes are ones that objectify and dehumanize. Annie's gaze, as she examines the houses in Beverly Hills, however, is empathetic recognizing a shared humanity. Such a contrast implicitly raises the irony of figuring black people as inhuman. Finally, the tension between these two poems insistently remind us that outside a narrative about Annie Allen, there is a stronger and more pervasive cultural narrative that insists on a narrow understanding of blackness and black life.

Throughout Annie Allen, particularly in the "Childhood" and "Womanhood" sections of the poem, Brooks's juxtapositional methodology elucidates the systems of commodification in which both Maxie and Annie participate. Their bodies are exchanged for "pleasant custards" and "pearl-leaf," and their personal sense of value is dictated and hemmed by a desire for what they

see as luxury goods. Further, the juxtaposition of Annie and Maxie's materialism underscores the enduring legacy of consumerism as a means of ratifying the humanity and dignity of black women. The juxtaposition of these individual fantasies against later poems that subtly gesture to the racial ideologies that infuse the aesthetics of home décor, dress, and personal comportment, however, suggests that the impossibility of Annie (and Maxie's) aspirations lies not only with their economic limitations but also because of the inextricable linkage between good design, good taste, and whiteness.

"Equal to being equal": The Domestic Aesthetics of (In)Equality

Brooks's critique of materialist fantasies and of the racial underpinnings of exemplary décor become much more explicit and much more firmly focused on a specific indictment of mid-century modernism in Maud Martha, published in 1953. The prose version of Annie Allen, Brooks's novel Maud Martha likewise details the growth and maturation of a young woman who marries and moves into a Chicago kitchenette apartment, where she learns to navigate the impossible beauty standards for both her home and person, the challenges of motherhood, and the pain of an absent husband. The novel is composed of short chapters detailing the small but vital experiences that shape Maud Martha—her sister Helen's dainty loveliness and neatly arranged hair, the birth of her daughter, Paulette, and her husband's departure and return from the second world war. Throughout the novel, Brooks juxtaposes two disparate narratives—one, in which Maud Martha fully invests, where elegant and modern décor elevates and differentiates black families from racist stereotypes that insistently link dingy, cramped spaces to soiled character and another, more subtle narrative advanced by images of mid-century design where unornamented furniture, open spaces, and clean lines are always cast as correctives for the problems of untidiness and excess—qualities implicitly associated with a racialized other.

Specifically intoning the rhetoric of "good design," drawn from a series of exhibitions jointly organized by the Museum of Modern Art and Chicago's Merchandise Mart, Brooks showcases the mechanisms through which pronouncements of aesthetic value collapse into moral ones, which inevitably exclude and dismiss working-class black women like Maud Martha.[60]

The novel opens with Maud Martha's childhood; establishing her desire to see beauty where others see plainness, even as she struggles to find the terms to do so. In the first chapter, Brooks introduces Maud Martha as an imaginative child, gazing over the steps of her back porch:

> She would have liked a lotus, or China asters, or the Japanese Irish, or meadow lilies… But dandelions were what she chiefly saw. Yellow jewels for everyday studding the patched green dress if her back yard. She liked their demure prettiness second to their everydayness; for in the latter quality she thought she saw a picture of herself, and it was comforting to find that what was common could also be a flower. (Maud Martha 2)

Maud Martha's earliest observations establish her ability to not only find pleasure in the commonplace, but also in sights and objects typically dismissed as valueless—here a plant typically regarded as a weed. Further, that Maud sees dandelions as a "picture of herself" differentiates her source of self-validation from Annie's. She remains determined to take comfort in re-seeing what's already before her rather than reimagining it. Even as the narrative reveals a character invested in the fusion of everydayness and beauty, it's also clear that Maud's language for beauty and pleasure, like Annie's, draws from the commercialized language of luxurious

[60] The Merchandise Mart first opened in the 1930s. Owned by the Marshall Field's Company, the building was intended to serve as a place where local retailers could view and purchase goods for their stores. The building's design integrated elements of art deco, the warehouse, and the department store in order to architecturally reinforce its status as a site for modern commerce. The building changed hands and functions during the years surrounding the Great Depression. In 1945, Joseph Kennedy purchased the Merchandise Mart and restored it as a site for some of the region's most important trade shows ("The Merch Mart, Chicago: History and Future").

home décor and fashion. Her awareness of and preference for exotic flowers not commonly available in Chicago, suggest that Maud Martha's ideas of beauty have already been influenced by advertising. Similarly, Maud Martha's unlikely characterization of dandelions as "yellow jewels for everyday" suggests that even at a young age, Maud Martha's language for describing prettiness, attractiveness, or even appreciation borrows from expensive women's fashion.

By the time Maud Martha reaches her teenage years, her views contrast starkly with the whimsical delight of her childhood. Preparing for a date with a white boy from school, Maud Martha anxiously appraises her home, concerned that it might undermine her intention of "being equal to being equal":

> Nicked old upright piano. Sag-seat leather arm-chair. Three four straight chairs that had long ago given up the ghost of whatever shallow dignity they may have had in the beginning and looked completely disgusted with themselves and the Brown family. Mantel with scroll decorations that had usually seemed rather elegant but which since morning had become unspeakably vulgar, impossible. (Maud Martha 16)

The descriptions here emphasize age, use, and lack of style, and, more importantly, attach a moral judgment to these decorative qualities. The straight chairs are without "dignity and the mantle and scroll decorations seem "vulgar." Such descriptions bespeak Maud Martha's anxiety that the characteristics of the furnishings might equally extend to her family. Further, it's clear that Maud Martha views modern, new décor as a bulwark against the racist and classist stereotypes used to deride African American and outdated décor as a confirmation of these stereotypes: "Often it was said that colored people's houses necessarily had a certain heavy, unpleasant smell. Nonsense, that was. Vicious—and nonsense. But she raised every window.

Here was the theory of racial equality about to be put into practice, and she only hoped she would be equal to being equal" (Maud Martha 17). The house begins as something visually offensive to Maud Martha but quickly becomes potentially olfactorily offensive, a sense with the power to betray her family, evidencing dirtiness or uncleanliness. Thus, even as Maud Martha recognizes the baselessness of these assumptions, her behavior is also influenced by them. At the end of the chapter, Maud Martha imagines Charles entering the home "Recipient and benefactor. It's so good of you. You're being so good" solidifying Maud Martha's keen sense that the good design of her home directly reflects on her goodness as a person, particularly through the eyes of her white guest (Maud Martha 18). The interplay between the passages in this chapter thus reveals Maud Martha's growing conflation of beauty with newness, but also begins to demonstrate her burgeoning awareness of the strange role that this commercialized idea of beauty and especially, the beautiful home, plays in dictating ideals of comportment and in counteracting stereotypes of African Americans. Later, after a trip to the Regal Theater to see a black singer perform, Maud Martha again echoes this formulation of goodness: "What she wanted to donate to the world was a good Maud Martha. That was the offering, the bit of art, that could not come from any other. She would polish and hone that" (Maud Martha 22). Maud Martha's response to the performer is marked by a contempt for the ostentatiousness she associates with his act and with his status as a local celebrity, often featured in the gossip columns of The Defender. Like her assessments of her family home's "vulgar" ornaments, Maud Martha's critique of the performer reveals her anxiety towards anything that might be perceived as excessive. In response, she strives for the obverse: to refine, perfect, and simplify in order to be "good."

This idea intensifies as Maud Martha enters adulthood, and materialism more pointedly emerges to counteract racist stereotypes. Maud Martha's friend David McKemster, an ambitious young scholar, for instance, idealizes things that can be purchased, hoping that possessions will help him compensate for the "background" white college students effortlessly possess: "An apartment—well-furnished, containing a good bookcase, filled with good books in good bindings. He wanted a phonograph, and records. The symphonies. And Yehudi Menuhin. He wanted some good art. These things were not extras. They went to make up a good background" (Maud Martha 46). The repetition of "good" here and particularly its usage to describe "art" gestures to this as a monetary marker; McKemster wants these things not because they are provocative or pleasurable or even comforting but rather because he imagines them to be capable of communicating success, economic power, and the ability to achieve entry into elite cultural venues. That McKemster juxtaposes this with the image of a "mongrel" dog not only reinforces McKemster's obsession with "good," or perhaps more accurately, pure, background that he lacks, it also begins to gesture to the intimate connections between money, taste, and racial stratification. What is "good" for McKemster are the objects, practices and environments he associates with wealthy white Chicagoans, and he sketches its obverse in the racist terms he's inherited from dominant white culture, seeing the people of Bronzeville as "uninteresting," their homes as infuriating markers of inferiority and poor taste, where "the lights were dirty through dirty glass" (Maud Martha 45).

Maud Martha possesses her own versions of David McKemster's fantasies of good taste, obsessing over an idealized image of New York, cultivated in the pages of magazines and newspapers. Much like McKemster, Maud Martha's estimation of "good" taste is intimately bound up with purchasing power:

> Maud Martha loved it when her magazines said, "New York," described "good'" objects there, wonderful people there, recalled fine talk, the bristling or the creamy or the tactfully shimmering ways of life. They showed pictures of rooms with wood paneling, softly glowing, touched up by the compliment of a spot of auburn here, the low burn of a rare binding there. There were ferns in these rooms, and Chinese boxes; bits of dreamlike crystal; a taste of leather. In the advertisement pages, you say where you could buy six Italian plates for eleven hundred dollars … Her whole body became a hunger, she would pore over these pages. (Maud Martha 48)

Such a passage again echoes Annie Allen; Maud Martha's materialist desires are linked to her desire for an upward mobility that will elevate her beyond her parents but also recall Maud Martha's teenage tendency to entwine aesthetic newness with moral uprightness. People surrounded by beautiful objects are "wonderful," capable of fine talk; their objects manifest a life that shimmers both literally and metaphorically. More pressingly, Maud Martha's encounters with the products featured in magazine articles and advertisements explicitly reengage the language of "goodness" used throughout her childhood and adolescence, a term which at once connotes aesthetic taste accompanied by a staid comportment, both of which studiously avoid visual markers of racialized excessiveness. This language, not coincidentally, also overlaps with the language featured in the Museum of Modern Art's "Good Design" exhibition series, which ran between 1950 and 1955. Products were selected annually for two exhibitions: on at the Chicago Merchandise Mart and one at the museum itself.[61] Headlining designers featured in

[61] According to MoMA's press release for their 2009 retrospective of the museum's promotion of midcentury design, "MoMA promoted modern design starting in the 1930s, but it was in the decade following World War II that a discernible Good Design program matured… MoMA's famous Good Design exhibition series (1950-55), [was] the ultimate expression of its message. On the basis of "eye appeal, function, construction and price," furniture, textiles,

these exhibitions—Charles and Ray Eames, Alexander Girard—the items selected for inclusion, as well as the arrangement of the displays paid homage to Bauhaus and Internationalist styles, emphasizing clean lines, geometric forms, and clean unornamented surfaces.

Take for instance, the extant images from the 1950/1 exhibition. A display of available tableware is spread atop three, rectangular tables, arranged in a "u-shape," allowing visitors to easily move about the display and interact with the objects while also reiterating a motif of linearity and geometric repetition present in the careful pattern of the drinking glasses in the foreground, the square grid of serving dishes and placemats that line the other two tables, and the linearity called up by the meticulous placement of the cutlery, visible on the righthand side of the image. All human-made elements in the image, in other words, bespeak careful organization and control of space, tidiness, and clean lines. The only exception to this endeavor appears at the center of the tables: a group of ferns whose unruly foliage and undeniable naturalism draw a sharp contrast to the surrounding materials. This intrusive messiness, is, however, contained and managed by the surrounding furniture, revealing a subtle fantasy at play in these MoMA-endorsed paragons of good design: that the attraction to this type of décor lies in its ability to stage—and win—a confrontation with mess and excess, here represented in plant-form. Such a thematic is also at play in an image of a staged living room from the same exhibition. Again, plants serve to heighten via contrast the controlled forms and understated elegance of the chairs, rug, and console displayed throughout the room. Here, however, natural textures including the woven wall-art, the u-shaped wooden bowls displayed on top of the cabinet, and the rectangular basket also allude to an adaptation of more traditional or even folkloric artforms to suit the aims

and domestic products were selected annually for two installations at the Chicago Merchandise Mart and a culminate exhibition at MoMA" (Museum of Modern Art).

of midcentury design. Objects metonymically suggest an appropriate taming and aesthetically productive redirection of human rather than natural impulse.

What, then, can these images tell us about Maud Martha's conception of "good"—a term that messily entwines delineations of taste with pronouncements of individual character? To be begin, MoMA's exhibition history reminds us that "good" design implicitly also posits ideas about bad design, often figured as the primitive other. This idea is also evident in Maud Martha's narrations of the magazine pages where Chinese boxes are contained by the geometry of wood paneling, tamed by the understated cream hues. Kristina Wilson's analysis of Eames furniture designs for Hermann Miller emphasizes that the marketing of midcentury design developed a visual vocabulary that appealed to their target customer base of upper-class, white tastemakers. In so doing, Wilson argues, midcentury furniture designs implicitly attached race and class ideologies to their aesthetic. That midcentury furniture was intended to act as a bulwark against the messiness and untidiness that marked lower-class homes is especially evident in Wilson's readings of storage cabinets. Often associated with linear patterns and grids, these storage pieces were described with the language of rationality and efficiency; these cabinets were "designed to contain all of the random, miscellaneous detritus of everyday life; an interior outfitted with these pieces was an interior in which everything irregular had been hidden away, safely compartmentalized and transformed into a clean, neutral front" (Wilson 163-4). Such a piece would, by extension, allow its user to lead a correspondingly rational and efficient life by containing the distraction of clutter. Further, Wilson contends that whiteness also underwrites many of these designs not only because of the racial dynamics implicitly built into conceptions of class but also because of the "post-war global awareness," that became central to furniture staging where tableaus acknowledge the presence of non-Western others but also do so "through

the privilege, powerful eyes of a white Western collector: the 'others' in the world are firmly kept in a place subordinate to the rational, modern world" (Wilson 175). Specifically, Wilson notes the tendency for companies to "colonize" and "systematize" artifacts associated with otherness within the grid of the modern storage cabinet. The subtle racial politics of "good design" in other words, on the basis of both class and race, figure Maud Martha as a factor to be controlled and contained rather than as an active agent capable of exerting her own control. Beneath Maud Martha's idea of "goodness," thus is a self-defeating investment in an aesthetic the possesses only the veneer of democratization, an aesthetic that, in reality, reiterates the power hierarchies she seeks to escape.

Even as Maud Martha invests in these magazine-fueled fantasies, she gradually comes to recognize the disjuncture between her dreams and the reality mandated by her financial circumstances. This is evident when Maud Martha and her husband, Paul, move into a kitchenette apartment. Disappointed, Maud Martha mourns that the "Defender would never come here with cameras":

> Their home was on the third floor of a great gray stone building. The two rooms were small. The bedroom was furnished with a bed and dresser, old-fashioned, but in fair condition, and a faded occasional chair. In the kitchen were an oilcloth-covered table, two kitchen chairs, one folding chair, a cabinet base, a brown wooden icebox, and a three-burner gas stove. Only one of the burners worked, the housekeeper told them… The Defender would never come here with cameras. (Maud Martha 61)

The language used to describe the apartment: "fair," "faded," "old-fashioned," and "grey" stress its mediocrity as well as its indistinctness. This is not the backdrop of individual aesthetic taste

suited for the Defender's reports. Though pitched to a national African American readership, and therefore fundamentally different from the imagined client-base of Herman Miller or even from the target sales groups of the "Good Design" exhibitions, The Defender nevertheless promoted some of the same aesthetic ideals of taste, respectability, and upward mobility, particularly in the woman-focused "Fashions and Home Service" section. Established in 1949, this section of The Defender encouraged members and aspiring members of the black middle-and upper-class to integrate the latest fashions in food preparation, personal dress, and interior furnishings into their homes and social lives. Evidencing the continued brand of conservativism critiqued in Nella Larsen's Quicksand, articles advocated for a cautious and understated look and came to embrace the tenets of midcentury design in part because they complimented an already well-entrenched investment in visuality's connection with respectability and, therefore, racial uplift.

In the inaugural issue of the "Fashions and Home Service" section, an article on new dress collections, for example, idealizes the same clean lines and simple forms promoted in MoMA's "Good Design" tableaus. Modeling and Charm School director Gerry Masciana tells readers: "Your last year's clothes will not look outlandish but you will wish for the new basic slimness" (Masciana "Fall Fashions Unveiled for Defender Readers"). Masciana goes on to extoll the virtues of neatly belted suits, rising shoulder lines, and points and twists of fabric characterizing the new designs, echoing an interest in geometry's ability to tame, organize, and streamline women's natural forms. Similarly, in the 1951 advice column, designed Pauline Trigere offers the following caution to well-dressed women: "To me, a colorful wardrobe is a form of adventure, fascinating and absorbing but dangerous unless you are carefully prepared and expertly guided. A woman can be definitively lost if she lets her instinctive love of pretty colors lead her into a wilderness of mix-matches that neither mix nor match" ("Colorful

Wardrobes that Mix Match Keynote of Good Taste"). Trigere's language may remind us of Helga Crane's critiques of the understated fashion of the so-called Naxos women, as we explored in the previous chapter. The characterization of color as a "dangerous" "wilderness" of mix-match underscores not only the sense of risk associated with this fashion faux-pas but also hints that such mistakes undermine the wearer's status as a controlled and civilized person, exposing their "instinctive" primal delight in excess.

These same preferences are implicitly expressed through the types of décor selected for inclusion in the articles and photographs of the "Fashion and Home Service" section, including its coverage of the "Good Design" exhibitions. The coverage of the 1953 exhibition stresses the importance of simple design, construction from materials of mass-production, and sharp (but limited) color contrast ("Color and Simplicity Mark Good Design Selections"). An article on the 1954 exhibit promotes more of the same aesthetic in its description of chairs rendered in industrial materials and limited color palettes. More pressingly, its inclusion of "poll results" reporting on the favorite pieces of both "housewives" and "retail furniture buyers," implicitly reinforcing women's important role as tastemakers, ushering into their homes not only modern home furnishings but modern modes of thinking as well:

> Both groups liked a rattan bucket chair and an armchair with white plastic-coated wire and road frame and black upholstery. The homemakers also liked a walnut finish easy chair upholstered in hand painted linen, and knockdown triangle chair of oak with a duck sling seat, a leather sling dining chair with three chrome legs and a black enamel stretcher. The buyers put their stamp of approval on a plastic covered steel frame dining chair with arms; a side chair with a plastic shell and wire base, a sorrel finish easy chair with hand printed Iren and a side chair of

> black steel frame and white cord. Both groups also agreed on a black metal desk with chrome trim designed by Charles Eames and a travertine top cocktail table with chrome legs by Katavolos. ("Chairs in 'Good Design' Get Homemakers Vote").

Not until its article on the 1955 exhibition (almost two years after the publication of Maud Martha) did The Defender cautiously begin to embrace color noting that "Greyed or muted colors, natural or beige tones popular in the past seasons are less frequent while black and white or similar dark and light contrasts run a close second to brilliant primary colors" ("January 1955 'Good Design Show' Features Use of Much Warm Color").

The disjuncture between the kitchenette's appearance and the messages evident in publications like The Defender thus offends Maud Martha not only because it concretely manifests her inability to obtain the aesthetic markers of respectability she sees as necessary to her family socioeconomic and racial uplift but also because the tired furnishings silently indict Maud Martha for failing to fulfill her obligation to act as a "homemaker," a duty with both literary and metaphorical significance for all 1950s housewives and particular political urgency for black housewives. Finally, and more personally, these twin shortcomings lead Maud Martha to conclude that her life will never be endorsed or given explicit approval in the venues and social milieus she had hoped to enter; she understands that the kitchenette cannot stand a physical testament to her humanity, as evidence that she is "equal to being equal."

Despite this setback, however, Maud Martha quickly regains her sense of optimism, planning a series of incremental improvements to the dingy apartment:

> She would have the janitor move the bed and dresser out, tell Paul to buy a studio couch, a desk chest, a screen, a novelty chair, a white Venetian blind for the first

> room, and a green one for the kitchen… Perhaps they could even get a rug. A green one. And green drapes for the windows. Why, this might even turn out to be their dream apartment. It was small, but wonders could be wrought here. They could open up an account at the L. Fish Furniture Store, pay a little every month. In that way, they could have the essentials right away. Later, they could get a Frigidaire. (Maud Martha 61-2)

Maud Martha's plans for the apartment reveal her continued hope—despite all evidence to the contrary—that she might create a space worthy of The Defender. Replacing bed and dresser with studio couch and dark chest, she re-envisions the space as a display that neatly packs away and cover over the pragmatic activities of everyday life with a veneer of style and newness. Further, Maud Martha's desire for color, amidst the overwhelming greyness of the building, underscores her determination to visually articulate a sense of individuality with her furnishings and decor. Finally, that Maud Martha refers to these objects as "the essentials"—not an extravagance like the planned purchase of a name-brand refrigerator—illustrates the symbolic significance that she attaches to these elements of home décor; these are not simply ornaments but props that give life to Maud Martha's story of empowerment and achievement of her family's respectability through the efforts of her homemaking.

Here too, Maud Martha shows that her imagination has been shaped by the magazines, newspapers, and advertisements that she consumes. While The Defender typically pitched their homemaking articles to women with more money than Maud Martha, the paper also occasionally featured stories that appeared to appeal to readers on a more modest budget and a can-do attitude. A 1954 feature "The Home that DREAMS Built," exemplifies The Defender's (limited)

promotion of this "DIY" mentality. Accompanied by large photographs of luxurious home interiors, the article relays the story of the Bells:

> When the Bells—Luther, a carpenter and cabinet maker, and his wife Lillian, one of Chicago's well known cosmetologists and beauty shop owners—moved into their picturesque modern bungalow at 94th and Calumet Ave., they not only moved into a veritable dream of a house, but a home that dreams built. Lillian's dream? A place of her own where she could satisfy her love for the French provincial furnishings and trappings. Luther's? A little nest where his artistry as a carpenter would get the acid test. Their dreams came true. The Bell's home is a combination of charm and beauty in exquisite and elegant appointments and sturdy, yet eye-appealing carpentry. ("The Home That DREAMS Built").

In the images, Lillian's tasteful antiques accent the home's more modern feel, characterized by vertical blinds, wood paneling, and understated metallic accents. The final photograph included in the story features a well-quaffed, finely dressed Lillian Bell arranged intimately alongside her decorator as, the caption tells us, the pair "leaf through homes furnishing magazine" ("The House That DREAMS Built"). The rest of the same caption lists the furniture featured and where it can be locally purchased. What close examination of this story reveals, of course, is that The Defender's packaging of the Bell's story—as one of dreams and elbow grease—is a romance at best and an outright lie at worst. As the captions make clear, it's money not a determined spirit that has "built" the Bell's house.

Another 1954 feature, "You Can Add Novel Home Décor Note," offers a similarly unironic account of décor on a budget, insisting that "Dime store decorations can add a novel note to the simplest of home style ideas" promising to provide options affordable on every

budget ("You can Add Novel Home Décor Note"). Descriptions of the "novel" décor in action, however, again underscore the necessity of money, emphasizing the necessity of rich furnishings to offset any hint of kitsch: "The table was covered in a round white cloth that fell to the floor, with a deep green fringe sewn on around the bottom. The white chairs had bright red pads. And little bunches of fake strawberries from the dime store trimming counter were pinned at random over the sides of the tablecloth to repeat he red of the chair pads" (You Can Add Novel home Décor Note"). The Dime store strawberries serve to embellish and compliment the elegant tablecloth and accompanying chair pads; indeed, the scene could not be considered "novel" without these foundational pieces. Here again, The Defender's article promises to appeal to economizing readers but, in the end, reiterates that good décor rests not with keen eye or determined hand but in the size of one's pocketbook. These kinds of "DIY" stories not only provide context for Maud Martha's continued hope for the renovation of her kitchenette ; they also help to illuminate the important ways that a quintessentially American mythology, equating hard work and success, infuse the rhetoric of design and housewifery and, as a result, suggest another aspect of the moral condemnation that will befall Maud Martha should she fail to achieve her goals.

In the end, it is perhaps unsurprising then, that Maud Martha's hopes are again dashed not only because her financial circumstances render her décor plans unreachable but also because her status as a renter, she discovers, strips her of the right to cultivate a space of her own: "Maud Martha had lost interest in the place, because the janitor had said that the Owner would not allow the furniture to be disturbed. Tenants moved too often. It was not worth the owner's financial while to make changes or allow tenants to make them" (Maud Martha 62). The building owner sees Maud Martha not as a homemaker or a decorator, not as an active self-determining force,

but as a passive source of rent income. Maud Martha's inability to make changes to her own space thus obliquely draws attention to the precarity she experiences as a renter. The furniture possesses a greater claim on the space than do its inhabitants. The owner's remarks represent the final straw for Maud Martha not only because they effectively stymie her dreams but also because they provide outside validation of her greatest fear: that the failure of her décor plans directly reflects her inadequacy, her worthlessness.

Though Maud Martha does, eventually, find methods of self-fulfillment outside the prescriptions of magazines, her early life is characterized by a self-defeating belief in the promises of décor. Intoning the language of "good design" as well as The Defender's promotion of midcentury modernism, under the umbrella of the publication's vision of respectability, Maud Martha's story underscores the precarious status of working-class black women's value and validation. Available only to those with money but expected of those without, homemaking represented a particularly prescient fantasy for black women tasked with the impossible goal of establishing a beautiful home that fostered admirable comportment in its inhabitants who would, in turn, be recognized by the wider world as "equal to being equal." The reality, of course, was that women like Maud Martha invested in ideologies perpetually out of reach for more than just reasons of economy. Positioning itself as a mode of organizing and containing mess, clutter, and excess, midcentury modernist aesthetics rhetorically and visually allied these conceptual antagonists with the lower class and with the racial other. Thus a key aspect of Maud Martha's precarity, and the precarity of her real-life counterparts, comes not only from the exterior forces that shape and limn what's possible for her but also from the racist messaging she internalizes from her décor magazines which insists that her worth is contingent upon the possessions

arranged in her home and her success in leveraging these items to "prove" herself as something other than a stereotype.

Physical and Narrative Containers: Negotiating Space for Marginalized Voices

Targeting objectives of homemaking and the aesthetics of midcentury modernist design, Brooks reveals that the aesthetic narratives that shape her characters' domestic spaces have consequences that far exceed mere acquisition of material possessions. Indeed, as Annie Allen and Maud Martha demonstrate, dominant cultural narratives that dictate decoration of and comportment within physical containers, also "contain" characters emotionally and psychologically, limning the way each protagonist understands her self-value, belief in the possibility of upward mobility, and sense of what constitutes happiness. These texts, however, also broaden this critique to consider their own formal, aesthetic inheritances, interrogating the ways poetic, literary, and generic traditions, like the discourses of homemaking and midcentury design, shape or even marginalize the narrative voices they contain. In each of the key works we've been exploring, as well as Brooks's long poem, "In the Mecca," Brooks again employs juxtaposition to disrupt the tidiness of the modernist literary "containers" she's employed by formally and thematically injecting clutter, mess, and excess into her stories. In doing so, Brooks not only draws attention the mechanisms through which dominant literary modes have silenced and sidelined subaltern voices, but also underscores that disrupting and departing from these dominant narratives represents an important mechanism through which marginalized voices regain and reassert their humanity.

Brooks's revisionary impulse is complimented by her invocation of a juxtapositional methodology that, though cognizant of modernist and avant-garde strategies of disjuncture, draws more firmly from a different, vernacular iteration, rooted in the construction of alternative

narratives: the scrapbook. Jessica Helfand's definition of the scrapbook stresses the genre's importance as a vernacular visual form that processes major historical and social events:

> Scrapbooks represent… a world of makeshift means and primitive methods, of gestural madness and unruly visions, of piety and poetry and a million private plagiarisms. As author, editor, photographer, curator, and inevitable protagonist, the scrapbook maker engaged in what seems today, in retrospect, a comparatively crude exercise in graphic design. Combining pictures, words, and a wealth of personal ephemera, the resulting works represent amateur yet stunningly authoritative examples of a particular strain of visual autobiography, a genre rich in emotional, pictorial, and sensory detail. (Helfand xvii)

Further, Ellen Garvey's exploration of scrapbooks stresses that the genre held particular importance for African-Americans who constructed visual narratives that "filled in the gaps" left by dominant cultural narratives that either omitted or degraded blackness and black life (131).[62] Susan Tucker's analysis of 1920s-era teen scrapbooks echoes Garvey's assertions; examining one young woman's cut-and-paste record of her high school years, Tucker observes that the scrapbook manifests its owner's attempts to parse her ambivalent relationship to dominant culture: "The juxtaposition of images prescribed by a narrowly defined and dated white culture next to those chosen by Johnson [the scrapbook maker] presents an overt collection of a self centered in both dominant and minority cultures" (222). While Brooks's stories never explicitly

[62] According to Garvey, African American scrapbooks carried out four, interrelated projects: they "reserved evidence that black people… had been active agents of [history] and were capable, patriotic citizens," "asserted race pride showing the struggles and advancements of blacks as a group, documenting the achievements of black individuals," "compiled evidence of oppression and mistreatment of black people," and "offered those communities a historical record" by providing "access to records that were blockaded in segregated libraries and newspaper files" (131, 132).

announce their indebtedness to the practices of historical revision and social reflection inherent to African American scrapbooking traditions, its influence is woven throughout many of Brooks's texts, including her earliest collection of poetry, A Street in Bronzeville, originally conceived as a series of vignette-style poems about the occupants of each building along a city block, as well as her own autobiography written at the end of her career, Report from Part One, which pays homage to the importance of the scrap. Her chapter "African Fragment," for example, features a collection of short, piece-meal reflections on Brooks's journey to Africa and in the appendix section "Collage," featuring Brooks's short recollections and impressions of career-defining events, letters from highly-esteemed colleagues, mentors, and friends, punctuated by reflections on the political and social status of black people.

The most overt citation of the scrapbook's formal techniques appears in the middle-section of Annie Allen, "The Anniad" and its accompanying "Appendix," subtitled "leaves from a loose-leaf war diary." Formally contrasted with a quintessentially modernist poetic form, the epic, the loose-leaf war diary revises through the "scraps" which compile Annie's narrations of the same events described by the omniscient speaker of "The Anniad." Brooks's formal experimentation embraces a messiness that's ideologically at odds not only with the aesthetic of neat brilliance promoted by Annie's consumerist fantasies but also with the compact tidy modernist aesthetic aimed at careful control rather than messy exposure; in doing so, Brooks, alludes to the narratives that lies outside the ken of modernist poetic structures.

The particularly striking form of the "Appendix" is heightened via its contrast to the section that precedes it, "The Anniad," the title of which recalls the traditions of Virgil's Aeneid and Homer's Iliad as well as the modernist epics written this archaic form.[63] Even within this

63 Here I'm thinking of Eliot's *The Wasteland* as well as Joyce's *Ulysses*.

section, however, Brooks demonstrates command of this important poetic form even as she bends its conventions to suit the needs of her unconventional heroine. Generally, the genre represents the "formation of a society or a nation" (Jimoh 176). Yet Brooks instead uses the epic of "The Anniad" and indeed the entire collection of Annie Allen to develop her heroine, according to Eve Shockley: "The broad scope of the epic offered the room [Brooks] needed to develop an unconventional protagonist who would nonetheless be compelling to the poem's readers, while the genre's traditional function of representing a people's culture and mythology supported her concern with featuring particularly African American experiences" (28). Such an impulse is evident in the opening lines of "The Anniad" which manipulate the convention of invoking the muse: "Think of sweet and chocolate, / left to folly or to fate, / Whom the higher gods forgot / Whom the lower gods berate" signaling that Annie, unlike many other epic heroes, lacks divine aide (Brooks, "The Anniad"). The gods have forgotten her, or they have berated her. This bleak and early dismissal of divine intervention signals that this epic will speak truths that are neither divinely inspired nor divinely ordained; the epic will tell a story that initially seems beneath notice. And indeed, in the end, Shockley acknowledges that the nature of Annie's quest also diverges from the grandeur and glory typical of Annie's epic predecessors: her question is not straightforwardly triumphant and her "accomplishment," may simply be described as survival.[64]

The "Appendix," by contrast, offers just three poems spoken in and through Annie's voice—her first sustained address of the entire collection. Further, the subtitle for the section—

64 Shockley notes: Taking the form of an epic quest—though not a triumphant one. Considered as a quest to realize the illusory dreams that have made her girlhood feel less constricting… it could even be called disastrous as critics have notes. But if we consider it a quest to survive and resist the poisonous effects of racism and sexism on her life as a working-class black woman in mid-twentieth-century Chicago, we can recognize Annie's achievements, even as we suffer with her the disappointments and losses of her journey (29).

“pages from a loose-leaf war diary”— underscores its status as a collection of piecemeal additions or corrections to “The Anniad.” The poems in “The Appendix” formally extend the “scrap” thematic announced by the section’s subtitle, first by upending the linear chronology of “The Anniad” and second through the integration of vernacular and popular generic forms that undermine the epic’s formal conventions and strictures; the first poem quotes and responds to a newspaper headline—"thousands killed in action”; the second poem imitates the breathless romanticism of a diary entry penned by a young in girl in love; and the final poem features an almost-epistolary address to Annie’s mother, as Annie asks for advice on dealing with the wartime departure of her lover.

The first poem of the section importantly begins with a snippet—a fragment gleaned from a newspaper or some kind of news broadcast that provides updates on American casualties, “thousands killed—in action.” Its blunt forthrightness contrasts sharply with the opaque poeticism of “The Anniad,” abruptly re-grounding the poem in its historical and cultural milieu where the media’s intrusions represent an important aspect of everyday experience for women like Annie, who anxiously await news of their loved ones abroad. Additionally, this is the only poem in all of Annie Allen that explicitly uses second person: “You need the untranslatable ice to watch. / You need to loiter a little among the vague… You need the untranslatable ice to watch, / The purple and black to smell. // Before your horror can be sweet. / Or proper. / Before your grief is other than discreet” (“1. ‘thousands—killed in action’”). In the first place, the poem marks Annie’s reaction to news updates on the war’s casualties, noting the necessity of hardening oneself, the importance of freezing emotions so that expressions of grief can develop a veneer of sweetness. Like many other poems in Annie Allen, this poem reveals Annie’s obsession with exterior appearances and her desire to cohere with the standards of comportment

that extend even to expressions of extreme grief. At the same time, this poem reminds us of emotional repression that must take place in order to achieve this "sweet" performance of grief. Moreover, that the poem's use of the second person, addressing an undetermined "you," disables the privilege a reader has hitherto enjoyed as Annie's detached and silent observer. Instead, we are forced to inhabit Annie's emotional distress and pain as she not only contemplates the prospective loss of her lover but also the challenge of concealing and molding that pain into a socially appropriate expression of grief. The second poem also manipulates forms of address, again using second person to describe an earlier, happier time when Annie and her lover first experienced the rush of youthful passion: "We two are worshippers/ of life… We want nights/ of vague adventure, lips lax, wet and warm, / Bees in the stomach, sweat across the brow. Now" ("2"). The poem's use of "we" at once describes the private impatience of Annie and her paramour while also insinuating readers into her story. As with the previous poem, we are placed into Annie's world, experiencing joy as well as sorrow.

The third and final poem," the sonnet-ballad," again returns to the issue of her lover's departure for the war. Importantly, this is first poem in Annie Allen where Annie acts as the singular, first-person speaker of her own experience, setting the stage for "The Womanhood" section where Annie's perspective is granted more sustained attention. It is, therefore, no accident that this poem is also one that actively blends two poetic genres, as signaled by the poem's title. Like the epic, the sonnet too holds a privileged position in Western poetic tradition, offering a careful and proscriptive structure: 14 lines, each consisting of 10 syllables. The ballad, on the other hand, eschews the sonnet's tight formal parameters, offering an unstructured narrative. Further, the ballad itself is very firmly affiliated with popular and vernacular culture; the ballad's early association with music established it as a key part of oral and folkloric

traditions while its gravitation towards simple language and popular topics made rendered the form more widely appealing than the sonnet.[65] The poem itself indeed follows the format of the sonnet, organizing Annie's lamentations into the required form. It also, however, draws from ballad tradition, offering a kind of chorus: "Oh mother, mother, where is happiness," a rhyme pattern that calls up the ballad's musical history, simple language (particularly in comparison to the rest of Annie Allen), and a tragic narrative, for though Annie knows that "Some day the war will end," she also understands that her lover "won't be coming back here any more" after he's experienced the horror and violence of war ("2 the sonnet ballad"). Brooks's blending the sonnet and ballad into a single poem, coupled with the first appearance of Annie's individual voice signals the necessity of the folkloric tradition in liberating Annie from the confines of the poetic traditions that have elsewhere limited? and restricted her voice.

The scrapped, genre-bending qualities of the "Appendix" provide new voices for a poetic speaker largely silenced by the epic tradition, as Julia Bloch has described: "By combining received poetic forms... with gestures borrowed from the epics of high modernism, Annie Allen grapples with the fundamental dilemma faced by certain kinds of poetic speakers writing at midcentury: how to write a poetic subject's personhood into the long cultural poem. In its formal multiplicity, Annie Allen illustrates how competing formal traditions can help understand the ways in which literary inheritance is always a matter of contradiction and dilemma" (Block 440-1). Juxtaposition between the generic conventions of the "Anniad" and its Appendix points to the narratives that Annie will never be a part of; she's left to reflect on this disjuncture between her

[65] The *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* provides a concise outline of the ballad's history, including the distinction between the so-called "literary" ballad, the folkloric ballad, and the popular ballad, an offshoot of the folkloric ballad riddled with humor and satire. The description notes that all ballads adhere to the following criteria: The beginning is abrupt the language is simple, the story is told through dialogue and action, the theme is often tragic, and there is often a refrain (Cuddon 71).

impossible fantasies and the realistic possibilities offered by her life's circumstances. Annie appears ruthlessly excluded from the broader cultural narratives in which she wants to take part and thus the poem's wholistic, structural revision and, in particular, its use of the scrapped, loose-leaf diary as a corrective to the epic, revises a dominant poetic form in order to create space for Annie's voice and her story.

Though less explicitly tied to a kind of scrapbook aesthetic, Maud Martha too draws from the spirit of the scrapbook, inserting rounded portraits of the building residents against the backdrop of reductive, dominant narratives, particularly those associated with the tidy aesthetic of whiteness routed through midcentury modernist design. In the chapter, "Kitchenette Folks," the novel's omniscient narrator departs from Maud Martha and flits through the adjacent rooms, providing snapshots of the lives and personalities of the residents. In some, the snapshots seem to reiterate the stereotypes that Maud Martha wants so desperately to counteract yet also reveal the complexity and goodness of these characters despite their apparent "shortcomings." In other vignettes, the narrator reveals that characters who buy the right objects and brands are not necessarily "good," disrupting Maud Martha's faulty elision of good purchasing with good character. Oberto, a man with a coveted three-room, first-floor flat, for example, is described as "a happy man..." whose beautiful wife, Maria "fluffed herself all over with expensive lavender talcum, and creamed her arms and legs with rosy night cream, and powdered her face, that was reddish brown" and wore "clothes out of Vogue and Harper's Bazaar, and favored Kleenex, and dressed her hair in a smart upsweep, and pinned silver flowers at her ears, and used My Sin perfume" (Maud Martha 106, 108-9). Yet Maria also has shortcomings: "Maria dusted and swept infrequently, scrubbed only when the floors were heavy with dirt and grease. Her meals were generally underdone or burned. She sent the laundry out every week…" (Maud Martha

105). Further, “it was well thought on the south side that Oberto’s wife was a woman of affairs, barely taking the time to lay one down before she gathered up another. It was rumored too, but not confirmed that now and then she was obliged to make quiet calls of business on a certain Madame Lomiss, of Thirty-fourth and Calumet” (Maud Martha 105-6). The descriptions of Maria’s person, as well as her space, suggest that she has succeeded where Maud Martha has failed; that is, she successfully manages to model brands lifted from the glossy magazine pages where Maud Martha’s dreams reside; she possesses a significantly larger flat than Maud Martha and her husband, Paul; she purchases name-brand facial tissues. Yet these objects fail to bring about the “goodness” or general regard Maud Martha elsewhere in the novel imagines that they will bring. Further detail about Maria suggests that she fails in nearly every aspect of housewifery in addition to the fact that her frequent extra-marital affairs necessitate the occasional visit to her local abortionist. Yet, Oberto is happy to be married to Maria, undermining both the notion that a tidy home, rigorous housewifery, or proper purchasing constitute the stuff of happiness or that these narratives are the only models through which kitchenette residents can give meaning or shape to their lives.

Elsewhere in “Kitchenette Folks,” Viota, another resident with an exceptionally cleanly home is described as a boisterous, big woman, with a voice of wonderful power, and eyes of pink-streaked yellow and a nose that never left off sniffing” (Maud Martha 106). No continuity exists between Viota’s clean home and her person—her perpetually running nose suggests an image of uncleanliness as well as the more abstract unruliness of that body that Viota seems unable to control. Nevertheless, she is imbued with a voice of “wonderful power,” suggesting that her source of validation comes from outside the markers of respectability visualized by her home or physical appearance. Little Clement Lewy lives at the back of the building on the

second floor; his mother works as a housemaid, leaving him for long stretches of time where he's expected to look after himself. Despite this, the narrator insists that Clement "Looked alert, he looked happy, he was always spirited. He was in second grade. He did his work and had always been promoted. At home he sang. He recited little poems. He told his mother little stories wound out of the air by himself" (Maud Martha 111). Clement's story signals two important aspects of Brooks's intervention: first, the absence of Clement's mother reasserts the economic and racial privileges attached to the role of housewife; rather than tending to her own home and child, financial circumstances dictate that Clement's mother perform this task for another, presumably wealthier family. Such an insertion reiterates again that fantasies of "good design" and the "good lives" brought about by the glamorous organization of one's physical space are privileges out of reach for working-class women. Yet Clement is a bright child who successfully moves through grade school and asserts his creativity not through any material methods but through stories and poems "wound from the air." Juxtaposition in Brooks's vignettes not only serve to draw out the disparity between the drab dilapidated kitchenette building and the lives of those that inhabit it; it also offers vital correctives and alternatives to the narratives that Maud Martha has internalized.

The vignette style seen in Maud Martha appears again in Brooks's long poem, "In the Mecca." Set in the Mecca Flats apartment building, a symbol of urban decay, the poem explores the story of Mrs. Sallie as she searches for her missing daughter Pepita, who, the speaker later reveals, has been murdered by a fellow Mecca resident. As with Maud Martha's kitchenette and Annie Allen's narrow room, the setting's association with decay and decline offers a stark contrast to the vibrant lives of the Mecca's residents. Sheila Hassel elaborates:

> The actual Mecca building is a palimpsest, marking the processes of American history. It was built as a modern apartment building in 1891… But by 1912,

> whites had abandoned the South Side of Chicago to the Black Belt and the Mecca building had become a residence for the black elite… The building's decline was precipitated during the Great Depression, and it rapidly deteriorated to a slum… In 1941, the Mecca location was purchased by the Illinois Institute of Technology, which was house (in juxtaposition) across the street. This other building, designed by Mies Van der Rohe, stood as a monument not only to modern technology, but also to modern art. (Hughes 268-9)

The Mecca was eventually razed to make room for the Illinois Institute of technology's expanding campus in 1952 (Hughes 270). Thus, the setting of the poem itself stages of series of ideological conflicts: modernism's powers of urban renewal are set against the dirty decrepitude of urban decay; the righteousness of (white) ideals of progress collides with the processes of gentrification that ultimately marginalize poor, non-white Chicagoans. Like the "Two Dedications" poems discussed at the beginning of the chapter, Brooks's uses her epigraph to underscore these ideas, quoting from John Barthlow Martin's Harper's Bazaar article: "A great gray hulk of brick, four stories high, topped by an ungainly smokestack, ancient and enormous, filling half the block… The Mecca Building is U-Shaped. The dirt courtyard is littered with newspapers and tin cans, milk cartons and broken glass… Iron fire escapes run up the building's face and ladders reach from them to the roof" (Martin qtd. in Brooks "In the Mecca"). Martin's account of the Mecca emphasizes the building's hulking size, its drabness, and its general status as an enormous eyesore. Notably, Martin's only mention of people is made indirectly, recounting the dirt and detritus that surrounds the exterior of the apartment complex presumably left behind by the residents, drawing clear parallels between the decrepitude of the building the assumption of the residents' moral decrepitude who, in Martin's mind cannot be bothered to clean away their

trash, to take pride in the places they live. As Courtney Thorsson notes, “Martin represents the building in terms of objects rather than people. Martin’s Mecca building includes ‘tin cans, milk cartons, and broken glass’ but no Melodie Mary or Pepita” and by pointing to Martin’s silence on the presence of the Mecca’s human residents Brooks implicitly asks readers to “consider these girls as individuals rather than abstracted figures in a newspaper story or a sociological report” (Thorsson 159).

The poem’s opening, like the description of Maud Martha’s kitchenette building, then prepares us for a poem that contrasts the vibrancy of the Meccan’s lives with their dreary settings but also for one that juxtaposes a narrative that emerges from inside the building with the story that’s projected onto the residents from the outside. Like the “kitchenette folks” chapter from Maud Martha, “In the Mecca,” provides a series of vignettes of the apartment complex’s residents, following the progression of Ms. Sallie’s journey as she travels throughout the building looking for her missing daughter, Pepita. The stanzas mimic the building’s architecture, each encapsulating the life of a resident who resides in each room; the stanza like a room contains characters of the Mecca but offers a glimpse of the humanity that resides within these constraints. Midway through the poem, the speaker in fact, specifically acknowledges the condition of the residents: “And they are constrained. All are constrained / And there is no thinking of grapes or gold / or of any wicket sweetness and they ride /upon fright and remorse / and their stomachs / are rags or grit” (“In the Mecca”).

Within the vignettes, the speaker continues to reveal Mecca not as a space of degradation, but as a space vibrating with possibilities that have been denied or foreclosed to the residents, especially residents who have been denied the ability to create. One of the residents, Alfred, is introduced as an aesthetically-minded individual: “To create! To create! To bend with the tight

intentness / over the neat detail, come to / a terrified standstill of the heart…To have the joy of deciding—successfully- how stuffs can be compounded or sifted out / and emphasized" ("In the Mecca"). Alfred's fantasy about art, we see, is entwined with a fantasy about narrative and about representation. He associates the power of creation with the power of "deciding" what's important, which narratives and experiences are elevated and valued. The speaker goes on to point out that Alfred "reads Shakespeare in the evenings or reads Joyce / or James or Horace, Huxley, Hemingway. / Later he goes to bed with Telly Bell / in 309" ("In the Mecca"). Such a line, coupled with Alfred's aspirations, implicitly gestures to the kinds of stories that are important, the types of authors that have been granted the privilege of deciding what's important and it's no accident that these writers are white and male, and that a significant portion of the writers are associated with high modernism.

The poem's introduction to Alfred, in other words, provides a kind of thesis for Brooks's ambivalent engagement with Western literary traditions; they offer Alfred a glimpse into what it means to create, to decide, to determine who gets represented and how, and yet the definitive end to Alfred's literary explorations—going to bed with Telly Bell—definitely shuts down Alfred's dreams, insisting that these models offer him no means of imagining creative possibility within the physical and socioeconomic space he cannot escape. Ms. Sallie expresses a similar desire to create; as she enters her apartment, she remarks: "'I want to decorate!" But what is that? A / pomade atop a sewage. An offense" ("In the Mecca"). Like Alfred, Ms. Sallie experiences an outpouring of creative impulse, quickly dismissed as useless or impossible. Decoration, according to Sallie, would simply amount to smearing "pomade" over waste, a comment that configures art (as she understands it) and her environment as implicitly antagonistic. Both Alfred and Sallie see art as inherently hostile to the lives they lead and the places they dwell. Yet in

writing these dreams—making art of these failed aspirations—Brooks reformulates the relationship with art and her characters, suggesting that the will to be other than what one's environment is in and of itself is a form of art, albeit one not recognized by any official avenues or outlets.

In both Annie Allen and Maud Martha, juxtaposition highlights the disjuncture between dominant narratives of validation through consumerism with the everyday realities and possibilities of working-class black women. Annie's story is juxtaposed with that of her mother, Maxie, illustrating the paradoxical re-entrenchment of materialist fantasies as a mechanism through which both seek to affirm their humanity. At a broader level, Annie's story also comes to stand for the lives of Bronzeville residents who come to recognize the sharp contrast between life Chicago's segregated Southside and life in the white suburbs. The juxtaposition between the rhetoric used to describe these disparate areas of the city begin to allude to an aesthetic of whiteness (and implicitly blackness, as well), which makes a more explicit appearance in Maud Martha. Throughout the novel, Maud Martha's décor dreams employ the promotional rhetoric of midcentury modern interior design, allying the ideal of the beautiful home with the recognition of her humanity and worth. Alongside this fantasy, however, is an indictment of the racist and elitism politics of interior design, its outward promises to democratize against the reality of its role in upholding existing power hierarchies. This reality becomes especially stark as Maud Martha's dreams collide with the grey reality of a kitchenette apartment, a place that cannot physically be transformed through design, foreclosing the social transformation that she seeks to achieve through her homemaking. Both Brooks's long poem and her novel thus employ juxtaposition to emphasize the precarity of characters' dignity, respectability, and humanity within a capitalist framework that's always already designed to keep working-class black woman

hopeful but never rewarded, spending, but never enough, improved but never equal. Juxtaposition, however, also serves not simply as a form of critique but as a kind of corrective for the narrow forms of validation that dominant narratives appear to offer. Using a vernacular-inspired form of juxtaposition to disrupt generic conventions, and to insert narratives that run counter or exist outside the parameters of these dominant cultural narratives. In doing so, Brooks also emphasizes the many ways that poor African Americans experienced exclusion from the dominant cultural narratives—like upward mobility through consumerism—dismissal and dehumanization from media narratives—like the lurid accounts of Bronzeville's tenement life—and most damningly, distance and frigidity from aesthetic institutions that declared their lives and spaces incompatible with "Art." Pushing back against these notions, Brooks modifies existing artistic paradigms to position Bronzeville's people as an art of their own making.

CHAPTER 4 A Disappearing Act: Mina Loy's Materiality and the Representation of Precarious Experience

> "Past the lobby, you'll find the living quarters for the 125 residents of this hotel. The Sunshine is one of the last places in the country where people live in cubicles. Maybe it's a little hard to imagine for those of you living in more affluent circumstances. Picture a long hallway, with a series of doors on either side. These are the cubicles. Four by six, no windows. The cubicle walls are only seven feet high, so there's chicken wire along the top to keep guys from climbing over into the next room. It's like living in a bird cage… So it's not the Waldorf. But where else can you get a room in New York for $10 a night? If it wasn't for this hotel, a lot of these guys would have no place to go." – Nathan Smith, Manager of the Sunshine Hotel (Isay et al.)

In 1998, radio producers David Isay and Stacy Abramson traveled to the Sunshine Hotel, a flophouse in New York's Bowery neighborhood, where they spent several months aurally preserving the lives and impressions of the 125 residents who then called the Sunshine home. Throughout the process, Nathan Smith, manager of the hotel, served as their informal guide, providing a narrative framework for Isay and Abramson's recordings. Smith's descriptions of the Sunshine's architecture—the sparseness of its individual rooms, the sense of enclosure, reinforced by "cubicle" sized rooms, the lack of windows and the chicken-wire partitions—in many ways specified and concretized commonly-held assumptions about the Bowery both as a literal and metaphorical cage. Yet in spite of this familiar, or at least expected, representation of the hotel and its residents, Smith's comments also gestured to a series of economic and social

barriers that made the Sunshine an unexpected refuge, a "last place to go" for many. More than by walls and wire, the Bowery's flophouse-dwellers, Smith suggests, were trapped by finances, joblessness, addiction, and familial rejection. And while Smith's reflections acknowledged the sadness that underscores this sense of entrapment, he also implied that the Sunshine created a community for those rejected or excluded from other urban communities, a community drawn together by a shared sense of precarity, made ever more so by the incessant waves of urban gentrification.

Though Isay and Abramson's project nicely illustrates the neighborhood's more contemporary situation, their work also continues a narrative history of the Bowery that stretches back into nineteenth century, when the neighborhood and its residents served as targets for New York's attempts at urban architectural and social renovation, and the area's stubborn refusal to neatly align with the objectives accompanying each new organized effort. Initially on the outskirts of New York proper, the Bowery took its name from the Dutch word "bouwerij," meaning "farm." Over the course of the nineteenth century, what had once been farmland became more fully incorporated into the city; in the early 1800s, the Bowery became especially well-known as an entertainment district, anchored by the Bowery theater, located on the neighborhood's namesake thoroughfare. In the wake of the Civil War, however, as Broadway also emerged as an upscale theater district, the Bowery became more focused on "cheaper" forms of entertainment including "nickel museums featuring mermaids, snakes, sword swallowers, lions, dwarfs, and women in various states of undress" (Jackson 131). The Bowery's reputation for seediness only became more entrenched in the late nineteenth century as New York instigated a widespread overhaul of the city's mass transit offerings. Large, above-ground train tracks were installed above Bowery Street. The elevated railways dripped grease and debris

onto the sidewalk below, sullying any unlucky passerby. The tracks also became an eyesore for the area, enclosing the city streets beneath a dark and almost labyrinthine series of claustrophobia-inducing tunnels. Preferring cleaner and less noisy areas, theatergoers took their business elsewhere.

By the early 1900s, the Bowery had become a symbol of urban destitution. In his 1913 essay "Dante and the Bowery," Teddy Roosevelt compares the Bowery to Dante's depictions of hell, characterizing the area's "sordid and terrible tragedy" "haunted by demons as evil as any that stalk through the pages of the Inferno" (Roosevelt). Further, as Kenneth Jackson notes, the neighborhood became infamous for its large and uncomfortably visible homeless population:

> Early in the twentieth century the Bowery was even more infamous as a place of squalor, alcoholism, and wretchedness. Even prostitutes gravitated to other neighborhoods. In 1907 the street had 115 clothing stores for men, none for women. In the same year the nightly population of the 'flop houses,' missions, and hotels on the Bowery was estimated at 25,000. No other skid row in the United States attracted so many vagrants or so much notoriety. (131)

Throughout the twentieth century, in other words, the Bowery manifested the extreme underside of city life that came to stand in for a model against which an idealized urban modernity could be defined. According to Sara Blair, "Observers of all sorts—nativist, philosemitic, artistic, and disciplinary—shared a tendency to view the Lower East Side and its inhabitants as outside or behind the temporal reach of the city's modernity" evidencing a desire for onlookers to ironically configure the Bowery (and its neighboring areas) not as tangible proof of urban modernity's failures—its too rapid expansion and uneven distribution of social and economic opportunity—but rather as evidence of its necessity and urgency (Blair 13). As a part of this imaginative

framework, the Bowery's occupants took on a symbolic status as victims who could only be resuscitated to full personhood by embracing the wide range of ideologies that accompanied the call for a "modernization" of city: embracing the sureties of normative domestic life, and by modeling the visual markers of respectability based on middle-class standards of comportment, dress, and décor.

Perhaps because of the uniquely infamous status of the neighborhood and its stubborn evasion of reformist efforts, Mina Loy, despite a lifetime of inhabiting the stylish Italian Villas of Futurism's founders, the comfortable New York salon of the Arensbergs, and the intimate Parisian gatherings of both Gertrude Stein and Natalie Clifford Barney, elected to make the Bowery her home in 1948. As Europe became more turbulent in the years leading up to World War II, the danger of Loy's Jewish heritage, as well as pressure from her two daughters, convinced her to take part in the mass artistic exodus to America. She arrived in 1936. For a short time, Loy lived with each of her daughters before the youngest, Fabi, introduced Loy to Irene Klempner, Fabi's friend and former landlady (Burke 409).[66] Klempner operated a boardinghouse on Second Street and after a cursory visit, Loy agreed to move into one of the building's rooms. During Loy's first stint in New York, from 1916-1917, she'd socialized widely in Greenwich Village; her daughters hoped that her new location on Second Street would help her to re-forge connections, overcoming her depression and self-imposed isolation.[67] She lived in

[66] When Loy first arrived in New York she lived with her daughters but her difficult behavior caused a good deal of strain for both Joella and Fabi (Burke 388). However, in 1942 Joella became engaged to Bauhaus artist Herbert Bayer and moved with him to Aspen to help realize Walter Paepcke's vision of a ski resort cum artists' retreat. During a visit to see her sister, Fabi also became enamored with architect Franz Benedict and also decided to move to Aspen. Though they tried to persuade their mother to join, Loy was not yet ready to leave New York and Fabi was forced to find Loy alternative lodging (Burke 409).

[67] Loy moved to NYC for the first time in 1916 (Prescott xvi). During this time, she became involved with the Arensberg Circle, which included William Carlos Williams, May Ray, Francis Picabia, Clara Tice, and Marcel Duchamp (Prescott xvi). Loy also connected with the artists and personalities associated with the little magazine

the boardinghouse for a short time before moving again in 1949, "to the Lower East side, although only a couple of blocks from 2nd Street to 5 Stanton Avenue" (Twentieth Century Photography 123).[68] Despite her family's worries, Loy's heightened awareness her new status as a refugee, as well as her career-long interest in seeking artistic inspiration from society's most unsavory crevices, made the Bowery an ideal location for the aging artist.[69] Rachel Potter suggests that her close proximity and intimacy with the Bowery offered a manifestation of Loy's own sense of displacement and alienation, while at the same time giving concrete shape to her conception of the artist as an outsider with clear similarities to the Bowery's bums: "Loy regarded her enforced expatriation as a form of homelessness" and as such "her poems of this period combine images of literal homelessness with more abstract ideas of artistic homelessness" (256).

Others (including Carl Van Vechten) one of the first publication venues to embrace and publish Loy's radical work (Churchill 180, 179).

[68] The extent to which Loy identified with her neighbors in the boardinghouse is captured in her fragmented short story, "The Agony of the Partition." According to Sara Crangle's editorial notes the piece was likely written during Loy's residency on Second Street, a hypothesis strengthened by Loy's own handwritten notes on the manuscript, indicating interest in writing more about the particular neighborhood that inspired her initial short story. The story relays in first person an account of a boardinghouse room punctuated by the multilayered intrusions of the narrator's neighbors. In the opening lines, the narrator describes these intrusions in sensory terms, emphasizing aural violence of her neighbors percussions, "In this old apartment, spacious rooms had been sliced to cubicles where the staccato chatter of the inmates, relayed like tomtom messages, mingled with the crash of irreconcilable radios" ("Agony" 5). Yet perhaps the greatest "agony" of the partition is the wall's seemingly mystical capacity to draw the narrator into unwillingly compassionate relationships with her neighbors: "In my drowsiness it was as if the partition was breathing. A breath that, as it rose and fell with mine, filled me with unaccountable anxiety. I was drawing-in dread. I was made heavy with responsibility; and soon, under those feeble winds I could feel a stranger's heat beat on my compassion. Its convoy of breath heaved through the partition as through a second breast," ("Agony" 5-6).

[69] Loy scholarship, particularly in regard to marginalized social positions, often emphasizes the dialogic relationship between Loy's life experiences and her work, casting Loy's artwork as biographical. Cristina Walter's article, "Getting Impersonal: Mina Loy's Body Politics From 'Feminist Manifesto' to *Insel*" represents an important exception to this tendency. Rather than understanding Loy's art through the lens of biography, Walter traces Loy's investment in an "impersonal aesthetic" that "would resist the Romantic legacy of art as an expression and affirmation of a self-possessed personality" (Walter 664).

Loy's residency in the Bowery proved to be an incredibly prolific period in her career—the culmination of her parallel, and sometimes paired, endeavors as both a visual and poetic artist; the amalgamation of the various, overlapping methodologies that had animated her engagement with a series of avant-gardes; and the final refinement of a lifelong interest in the confluence of social, political, linguistic, and aesthetic forces that created and sustained boundaries between mainstream culture and those forced to precariously occupy its margins. Over the course of the 1940s and 50s, Loy not only produced a series of poems that cast an unjudgmental and unsentimental gaze upon the Bowery's bums, but also on the religious and civic institutions aligned against them. Alongside these poems, Loy also created a series of large-scale assemblage artworks that visually and materially represented the human discards of her poetry. Rendering the flesh of her human subjects in trash picked from Bowery rubbish bins, Loy's "refusees" as she called them, offer a stark commentary on the dehumanization of the neighborhood's homeless and transient populations and gesture, via the inevitable degradation of her materials, to a broader cultural erasure of lives out of synch America's post-war demand for lifestyles measured in timecards.

The co-emergence of these two types of Bowery projects—one poetic and one both sculptural and material—suggests an important linkage between Loy's ongoing consideration of the bum, and of precarious figures more broadly, with her methodological transformations across the span of her career. While Roger Conover points out that "As early as 1915, one can detect in [Mina Loy's] letters and poems a sympathy for and identification with the tramps, addicts, and derelicts," Loy's early interest in outsiders was largely filtered through the lens of her own sense of alienation as a "new woman" who eschewed the values of traditional marriage and motherhood, as an artist whose creative vision inherently separated her from her social peers, and

as a person of hybrid national, racial, and religious descent excluded from a nationalist project (Last Lunar Baedeker 297). Steeped in the poetic and textual manipulations of Futurism, Loy's first attempts to develop a rubric for outsiders linking them through a shared albeit generalized sense of alienation. When Loy moved away from Futurism, her engagement with other emerging art movements—including Surrealism and documentary photography—offered new visual paradigms for representing the experience of the outsider while also providing an ideological framework that encouraged Loy to more specifically define her interest in the outsider not simply as one excluded and silenced, but rather an active antagonist of urban modernity and sociability, leading to a more narrowed focus on the specific status and experience of homeless and transient individuals. The influence of each of these methodologies and Loy's accompanying desire to rework them to better reflect her critique of the ways dominant discourses worked in and through art to reiterate the exclusion of outside figures, underwrite Loy's politics and methodology in the dialog between Loy's Bowery poetic and assemblage works. Thus ultimately, in tracking Loy's conceptual and formal strategies for representing the outsider, we come to understand her Bowery works as the culmination of a long-developed aesthetic critique of language's ability to silence and visuality's capacity to erase and as the most salient iteration of her formal focus on materiality as a means of drawing attention to and countering these tendencies.

Leaving Space for Outsiders: Silence and the Poetic Gap

Throughout her career, Loy consistently developed, revised, and refined an interest in aesthetically representing precarious social positions, primarily through the overlaid lenses of gender, race, and socioeconomic status, often in conjunction with an exploration of the artist's role as a kind of self-selected exile who shared with these peripheral figures a sense of alienation germane to the artist's role as an outside observer. Helen Jaskoski argues that for Loy, "The

outsider can be different from the normative society by virtue of such innate qualities as superior intelligence, creativity, or integrity, or the outsider may be alienated by poverty or social class… Above all, the artist is Outsider because of superior insight, craft, or talent; he or she is exiled from the conventional, philistine society which cannot tolerate difference and so repulses it. The poor, the disfigured, and the ill share with the creative genius an alienating condition of difference" (351). Over the first decades of Loy's career, her conceptualization of the precarious individual extended to many different subject positions but identified a shared distance and exclusion from the conventions of mainstream culture. The "outsider" for Loy thus included women—those who actively chaffed against the norms of Victorian bourgeois society, those more subtly subjugated by the policing of women's sexuality, and those who sought out seemingly radical political and artistic groups only to discover that superficial liberatory politics covered over deeply conservative ideas about gender—immigrants, and individuals of hybrid identities. Some of Loy's most explicit indictments of Victorian mores can be seen in "Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots," as well as Songs to Joannes and "Parturition." The first critiques the reduction of women to their bodily and monetary value, while the latter two poems eschew bourgeois modesty with their frank and unromanticized depictions of women's sexuality and childbirth. In works like her famed "Feminist Manifesto," as well as a myriad of poems exploring the social and aesthetic subjugation of women, Loy equally indicts Victorian prioritization of women's virginity, Suffragette puritanism, and Futurist misogyny for constraining and categorizing women in ways that inevitably result in women's sexual, social, and artistic marginalization. Loy's more explicit critiques of Futurism appear in a variety of works including her poems "Sketch of a Man on a Platform" and "Giovanni Franchi," and her play "The Pamperers" which satirizes the self-aggrandizement, hypocrisy, and sexism of Futurist

figureheads F.T. Marinetti and Giovanni Papini. In her short story, "Pazzarella," Loy is similarly critical of male avant-garde personalities but also reserves considerable ire for the titular character, Pazzarella, whose passivity and romanticism render her complicit in her sexual and intellectual exploitation by an artist/lover.[70] Finally, Loy's formulation of an "outsider" persona also thematically dominates her poetic series, Anglo- Mongrels and the Rose, which not only foregrounds the importance of gender but the entwined characteristics of nationality, race, and religion, as well. The poems of Anglo-Mongrels tell the story of Ova, the "Anglo-mongrel" offspring of Exodus, a Jewish immigrant and Ada, an "English Rose," as she comes of age in London.[71] Throughout the series, Loy explores two related forms of exile—Exodus's Jewishness and Ova's hybridity—questioning whether these peripheral positions cultivate a privileged aesthetic insight by enforcing an observational isolation.[72] Collectively, these works reveal that Loy understood that exile and exclusion could occur in many, sometimes overlapping, registers.

[70] See Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas's "'Little Lusts and Lucidities' for a discussion of Futurist hypocrisy in "The Pamperers" and Sara Crangle's notes in *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy* for careful analysis of "Pazzarella."

[71] Several scholars have noted the undeniable parallels between Ova and Loy. Helen Jaskoski argues the titles for the sections of "Anglo-Mongrels" stand in for the major characters who are based on her family: Exodus is her father, English Rose is her mother, and Mongrel Rose is Loy herself, the child of Albion and Israel (Jaskoski 350). Similarly, Alex Goody not only argues for the poem as autobiographically inspired but also contends that it reveals Loy's attempts to grapple with the experiences that grant her unique and singular perception as an artist and "displaced individual": "Loy's depiction and interpretation of her own life can be described as *auto-mythological*, that is, an individualized (and personally applicable) adaptation and conglomeration of an eclectic range of mythological structures and stories which fundamentally refutes the transparent process of personal realization celebrated in the Romantic artist-hero" ("Autobiography/Auto-mythology: Mina Loy's *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*" 275, 270).

[72] Laura Vetter contends that Loy spent "decades contemplating mixed ethnic identities" and came to conclusions surprisingly different from the eugenicist opinions of her time, ultimately understanding hybridization as a means of furthering evolutionary progress, of pushing beyond the capabilities of a single race. Her representation of Ova's hybridity in "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" illustrates this principle (Vetter 48). Further, the trope of the Jew-as-Exile or "wandering Jew," as a position of aesthetic insight notably also appears in Loy's poem "Gertrude Stein." Walter notes that Loy furthers the notion of Stein as an exile in her poem "Gertrude Stein" by referencing Marie Curie, whose status as a Polish refugee fleeing to France from a tsarist crack-down on Polish nationalism was well-known (673).

Loy would eventually become disillusioned with Futurism, seeing its misogyny as promoting the same sorts of problematic boundaries for women as bourgeois norms or even of the militant puritanism of the Suffragettes. But the movement modeled for Loy a vitriolic vocabulary and voice to critique society's mechanisms for creating and sustaining boundaries of exclusion and, more importantly, a methodological attention to the visual and material dimensions of text that inspired Loy to critique the exclusionary power of language using formal constructs of her poetry and writing. Especially in works penned earlier in her career, Loy's poetic investigations into outside or peripheral positions formally coincide with an interest in manipulating the appearance of the poetic spacing and text, a central theme of Futurist innovation. In Marinetti's "Destruction of Syntax—Untrammeled Imagination—Words-in-Freedom," he underscores the importance of viewing text as both a linguistic and visual medium:

> I am initiating a typographical revolution, directed against the beastly, nauseating concept of the book of verse… My revolution is directed against the so-called typographical harmony of the page, which contradicts the ebb and flow, the leaps and bounds of style that surge over the page. We shall therefore use three or four different colors of ink on a single page, and we should think it necessary, as many as twenty different typographical characters. For example: italic for a series of like or swift sensations, bold Roman characters for violent onomatopoeias, and so on. With this typographical revolution and this multicolored variety of characters, my purpose is to double the expressive power of words. (Marinetti 128)

Marinetti's attention to color, as well as the disruption of the "harmony" of the page exemplifies his efforts to employ the visual and dimensions of text to advance his project of abandoning "traditional syntax, the elimination of adjectives and adverbs, the employment of mathematical"

and "musical symbols to supplant standard punctuation," (Cundy 349). Indeed, as Joanna Drucker underscores, Marinetti's realization that "the poem was the object of the look, of looking, and that recognition of its visuality was a significant feature of the radicality of the Futurist practice" (Drucker 118).[73] Though Loy did not necessarily share the political objectives of Marinetti's theories on typography, her early works reveal careful attention to the visual properties of writing and of the poetic page, playing not only with font size and forms of typographic emphasis but also with a generous use of poetic spacing that draws power from a Futurist-inspired attention to the myth of the "unmarked text" and disruption of traditional syntax.

To see the emergence of this methodology in Loy's work, let's turn first to one of her most famous pieces and her most overt articulation of the precarious social status of women: "The Feminist Manifesto." Natalia Lusty describes the manifesto as a reworking of Marinetti's generic and rhetorical tendencies to condemn Futurism's misogyny as well as the moralizing and therefore confining ideological underpinnings of the feminist movement. (Lusty 246-7).[74] Janet Lyon offers a different view of Loy's priorities, framing the manifesto as primarily a critique of the suffragettes' reductive views of women and femininity (154).[75] Both, however, agree that

[73] Drucker notes that Futurist and Dadaist typographic experiments were influenced by typographic manipulation commonly used by the burgeoning advertising industry to attract consumers' attention (94). Nevertheless, the idea of literature as an "unmarked text," persisted—that is "the authority of language resided in its capacity to signify, not its mutability… The unmarked text, the even gray page of prose and poetic convention, appeared, as it were, to 'speak itself.' Its production codes lent the text a transcendent character" (Drucker 46). By creating their own "marked texts"—pieces that communicated via both meaning and appearance of the text visually, the Futurists forced a recognition that literature could not be relegated entirely to the real of linguistic signification.

[74] Loy's bold declaratives here are similar to those of Loy's own avant-garde manifesto, "Aphorisms on Futurism."

[75] Both Lusty and Lyon address broad trends in the suffragettes' rhetoric; in summary, many voices of first wave feminism argued to enfranchise women on the basis of their moral superiority to men and as such, the necessity of their participation in the public sphere. While these formulations cleverly manipulated existing stereotypes of women in order to rationalize the importance of enfranchisement, they also reinforced notions of women as pillars of morality and sexual restraint.

Loy's manifesto revises avant-gardist forms of address. For Lusty, the piece maintains Marinetti's rejection of "lyric interiority by embracing the dynamism of public rhetoric and performance" while also "cling[ing] to a more intimate form of address in order to stake her radical vision of emancipation on individual consciousness and on the recognition of the psychological constraints impeding women's self-determination" while Lyon sees Loy's use of "we" not as a gesture to collectivity more typical of the genre but rather a nod towards an artistic individuality (Lusty 250, 250, 25; Lyons 251).[76]

Loy's manipulations of the manifesto's typical forms of address reveal three important conceptual underpinnings of this particular work: first, that she was committed to warping Futurist paradigms to suit her own aesthetic needs and commitments; second, that Loy's early conceptions of precarity were influenced by the rigid and binaristic "us/them," and by engaging in this form address, Loy, implicitly allies with the artist and the manifesto's writer/speaker, with the aggrieved "we," suggesting a growing sense of kinship between artist and outsider; finally, and perhaps most importantly, Loy's "Feminist Manifesto" reinforces this allyship through the document's visual elements, formally echoing the theme of the manifesto. Using different typographies for visual emphasis, Loy underscores the language representative of the rigid categorizations that limit women's liberty and rob them of alternatives. One of the manifesto's most-quoted lines exemplifies this strategy: "Leave off looking to men to find out what you are not—seek within yourselves to find out what you are. As conditions are at present constituted—

[76] In *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern,* Lyon describes three characteristic, argumentative gestures of the manifesto: first, it offers a highly selective, foreshortened history, which narrates the oppression leading up to the manifesto's writing; second, it forcefully catalogues the grievances "which cast a group's oppressing as a struggle between the empowered and the disempowered"; and finally, it names an oppressor but rhetorically allies with the reader/hearer of the manifesto ("we")" (15). Loy's reworking of the collective "we," in other words, represents an important aspect of her departure from generic conventions.

you have the choice between parasitism, & Prostitution- or Negation" ("Feminist Manifesto"). Here, underlined words emphasize rigid categorizations, and opposites. Elsewhere in the manifesto, Loy follows a similar pattern, using visual tactics to highlight the tensions such as "women and" "wretch," "reform" and "absolute demolition," "mistress" and "mother" ("Feminist Manifesto").

Loy's "Feminist Manifesto" thus offers an important, early example of her experimentation with the simultaneous activation of a text's linguistic and visual registers and of this formal methodology's ability to reinforce the dismissiveness and the reductiveness of the era's language for describing possibilities for women, therefore also drawing attention to the power of language to create and uphold the gendered ideologies that produce the alienating affect Loy associates with the outsider. Loy's interest in manipulating the visual elements of text also appears in her poetic representations of subjects made precarious through gender but also through race, religion, and nationality. Where the manifesto experiments with a heightened visuality, many Loy's poems take a different track, experimenting with absence as an equally powerful visual form. Carving out gaps on the page that at once function symbolically for the physical and psychical distance between a series of peripheral figures and mainstream society while also mimicking the silence imposed upon people controlled and excluded through language. This is especially evident in Loy's "Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots," a poem that bitterly critiques bourgeois calculation of a woman's value as the sum of virginity and dowry. The poem's "subjects" are excluded from the freedoms of public life and unhindered movement by Victorian codes of femininity that insist on sequestering young women as a form of protection, while also excluded by finances from the familial norms of marriage that might allow the poem's subjects to exchange one form of entrapment for another, placing the women at the

peripheries of society; they can neither reject nor accord with the expectations placed upon them. Loy critiques these formulations of femininity by using generous spacing to stand in for possibilities unspoken, possibilities that indeed can't be named in the dominant discourses available to the work's subjects. The poem opens:

> Houses hold virgins
> The door's on the chain
>
> 'Plum streets with hearts.'
> 'Bore curtains with eyes'
>
> Virgins without dots
> stare beyond probability. ("Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots")

These lines establish what Jessica Bernstein has called the poem's "central trope of constraint and confinement" where the women are characterized as both "exiles" and "inmates" (Burnstein 167, 170). The personified houses "hold"—a word that at once connotes embrace and restraint—the women inside. The "chain" that holds the door further develops the sense of imprisonment, while personified actions of hearts and eyes— "plumb" and "bore" allude to a foreclosed desire to explore the world beyond the house. Moreover, the speaker's emphasis on the intense metaphorical labor of eyes and hearts underscores the sedentariness, contrasting with the literal movement attributed to men. The women only "see men pass" who "go somewhere" and who "look everywhere" and "into" things while the women's eyes can only look "out" contrasting masculine activity in public spaces with the feminine passivity expected in private, domestic spaces ("Virgins"). These lines thus explicitly indict restrictive formulations of gender for

physically, as well as emotionally and psychologically, confining women and excluding them from participating in the worlds that exist beyond their tightly regulated houses.

Like the "Feminist Manifesto" the poem's awareness to the visual dimensions of text serves to reinforce the feminist politics of Loy's writing; the poem's unusual spacing metonymically registers silences and, ultimately, also shows how women are confined equally by gendered ideology as it acts through language as they are by houses and other physical spaces.[77] In the passage above, for example, the separation of "stare" from "beyond probability" reserves space on the page in order to signify silence. Rather than visually emphasizing the dominant discourses that constrain these women, then, Loy's poem, in an almost compensatory fashion, attempts to salvage some agency for the women by marking their silence, leaving room for what might be inserted into the poem if they were empowered, if they had access to the words, that might allow them to authentically critique or describe alternatives for their situation.

Janet Lyon has addressed Loy's use of spacing with respect to her "Florence works" including her frank depiction of sexuality in Songs to Joannes and her vivid description of childbirth in "Parturition." In these poems, spacing plays a pivotal role in visualizing the passage of time. Lyons points out that particularly in Songs "the field of vision includes more than the spatial and disjunctive aspects of the poem's canvas. It also includes a temporal component which callus upon us to 'see time' cinemagraphically: to watch events unfold diachronically and synchronically and even retrochronically" ("Mina Loy's Pregnant Pauses" 393).[78] In Lyon's

[77] To be clear, I'm not using the term "feminist" here to refer to suffragettes for as we've seen Loy had a tenuous relationship with that iteration of feminism. Rather, I'm here using "feminist" in a broad sense to connote Loy's frustration with gender inequality and the subjugation of women on the basis of Victorian idealization of women's sexual purity.

[78] Lyons notes that the poem's relationship to time must be seen as antithetical to the Futurist valorization of forward velocity" (Lyon 393).

analysis of "Parturition," she sees spacing standing in for alternative possibilities for the poem's speaker: "The experience of maternity… is shown to be coterminous with a vision of potential experience in this poem which displays many possible outcomes at once, and offers the meaning of fetuses aborted or sperm gone astray as deferred meanings occupying the freighted spaces of 'what might be' between 'what is'" ("Mina Loy's Pregnant Pauses" 394). Seen through this lens, Loy's manipulation of space in "Virgins," in addition to signaling Loy's Futurist-derived interest in the important interplay between the text's linguistic and visual registers, also implicitly suggests an artist's obligation to think self-reflexively about the tools of her craft. Throughout "Virgins Plus Curtains" the speaker demonstrates greater suspicion towards language's complicity in upholding existing social structures, here structures of gender inequality; spaces, by contrast, attempt to represent women without employing language, which remains so irrevocably entangled with their subjugation.

In her poetic series Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose, Loy adopts a similar strategy for representing two different kinds of precarious individuals: Exodus, a Jewish migrant who feels at home neither in his native Budapest nor his adopted city, London. Caught between two words, his daughter, Ova, experiences similar feelings of estrangement. The first poem in the series tells Exodus's story and the opening stanzas of the sequence establish him as a curious young man who feels alienated from the culture of Jewish Budapest. As with "Virgins" the spacing performs two overlaid functions; first, to reinforce the physical isolation that the poem's narrative associates with Exodus's, and second, to use this physical space to gesture to the psychological and ideological distance Exodus feels. This is evident in the speaker's first introduction of Exodus:

Exodus lay under an oak tree

boarding on Buda Pest he had lain

him down to overnight under the lofty rain

of starlight

having leapt from the womb

eighteen years ago and grown

neglected along the shores of the Danube

on the Danube in the Danube (Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose 11)

Narratively, these lines repeatedly insist on Exodus's physical location at the peripheries; he feels restful only at the border of a city his family calls home; his boyhood has been characterized by his unique relationship with a river, a symbol of never-ceasing movement. Even in the description of his birth, the impatient connotations of "leapt" emphasize Exodus's eagerness to liberate himself from the confining space of his mother's womb. The poetic spacing, in turn, works in concert with this characterization of Exodus. The space that follows "Buda Pest" uses the space of the page to manifest a physical distance, to imagine Exodus's separation from the city life and from the place occupied by his family and parents. Similarly, the space between "neglected" and "along the shores of the Danube" emphasizes the physical as well as emotional distance that separates Exodus from his parents. This use of poetic spacing is also apparent when the speaker begins to describe the resentment that spurs Exodus's desire to leave Budapest:

The arid gravid

intellect of Jewish ancestors

The senile juvenile

Calculating prodigies of Jehovah

Crushed by Occident ox

They scraped

The gold gold golden

Muck off its hoofs

moves Exodus to emigrate

coveting the alien

asylum of voluntary military

service paradise of the pound sterling

where the domestic Jew in lieu

of knouts is lashed with tongues (Anglo-Mongrels 112-3).

Not only straining against mistreatment of the "occident ox," the gentiles of Budapest, Exodus equally indicts Jewish ancestors for their willingness to accept such an unjust situation. The diction used to describe the supposed "intellect" of Jewish ancestors emphasizes the hollowness of such wisdom for Exodus—his sense of it as dry, brittle, wizened, and outmoded. The situation for Jews, as Exodus sees it, is described in compressed lines that correspond to his sense of confinement. The lines describing immigration and its possibilities, by contrast, employ a greater number of spaces, as the words stretch across the page mimicking Exodus's own movement across the ocean to England.

Later, when Exodus establishes himself in London, poetic spacing again reinforces Exodus' sense of isolation from the English community that surrounds him:

The London dusk

wraps up the aborted entity

heeding Solomon's admonishing spends

circumcised circumspect

his evenings doing lightning calculations

for his high pleasure Painting

feeling his pulse (Anglo-Mongrels 118)

And, several stanzas later:

He paints

He feels his pulse

The spiritual tentacles of vanity

That each puts towards the culture

Of his epoch knowing not how to find

And finding not contact he has repealed

to fumble among his guts (Anglo-Mongrels 119).

In contrast to Exodus's youthful optimism at the beginning of the poem, these stanzas depict a desperately lonely man, multiply excluded from the society he'd hoped to join. The speaker's description of Exodus as an "aborted entity," coupled with a description of Exodus's intensely solitary evening hobbies suggests that he has perhaps failed to find the "paradise" of the "pound sterling." Instead, the speaker's language suggests that Exodus fights to remind himself of his own humanity, repeatedly "feeling his pulse" and "painting," as a means of validating his existence. Exodus is also described as "heeding" Solomon's advice—possibly an allusion to Solomon's judgment, a story of a child famously and violently caught between two women but

also a possible allusion to Solomon's own mistake of falling in love with foreign women. [79] Both possibilities forecast the unhappy fates of both Exodus and his daughter. Like the gaps in the stanzas describing Exodus in Budapest, Loy's use of spacing in these passages symbolizes the physical as well as psychological distance Exodus experiences as a Jewish immigrant in London. The generous spacing between descriptors of Exodus's body as both "circumcised" and "circumspect," for instance, explicitly tie Exodus's isolation to the physical mark of his Jewishness, a mark that differentiates him from surrounding English gentiles. The spacing in the stanza describing Exodus's "spiritual tentacles," works to similarly confirm Exodus's status as an outsider desperate to find a connection. Like Loy's use of spacing in "Virgins Plus Curtains," the gaps here seem to attempt to visualize Exodus's more abstract and intangible sense of distance and alienation but also silence. As the lines stretch across the page, describing Exodus's quest to find connection with the culture, the spacing seems to stand in for the nameless things he reaches towards and the emptiness his finds when he does so.

Poetic gaps are also used to characterize the inheritance of a peripheral status passed from Exodus to his daughter, Ova. As she matures, Ova becomes more cognizant of her inability to perfectly fit the mold of either Jewish or English femininity, experiencing instead the unique isolation of never fully belonging to the culture of either parent, a feeling that produces a sense of alienation similar to but also distinct from that of her father. Further, Ova's feelings are

[79] 1 Kings 3:10-28 tells the famed story of "King Solomon's Judgement": Two women come before the king both claiming to be the mother of a small baby; they seek a decision from Solomon regarding the baby's true parent. The king orders for the baby to be sliced in half so that each woman might "share" the child equally. One woman agrees while the other insists that she will give up her claim to the baby so long as it remains unharmed. Seeing the latter's concern for the child's safety, Solomon declares her to be the child's mother. While Biblically, the story serves to showcase the justice and wisdom possessed by a powerful ancient King, the allusion in Loy's long-poem is clearly more fraught gesturing to violent severances and the pain of being caught in between. 1 Kings 3:13 tells the story of Solomon's love for women of other nations. Despite God's explicit warning against such mingling, Solomon allows his affections to lead him to commit idolatry, a sin for which God punishes Solomon by promising to tear apart Solomon's kingdom.

heightened as she becomes acquainted with the same bourgeois expectations—routed through her mother—that confine the women of "Virgins Plus Curtains." Ova's journey to womanhood as one marked by an increased awareness to language's power to shape, enable, and foreclose possibilities, particularly for a person at the delicate intersection of so many precarious identities. Elizabeth Frost emphasizes this idea in her critical overview of the poem: "'Anglo-Mongrels portrays the inheritance not only of racial attributes but of language itself, and a female subject's entry into its symbolic, social system" (149). Ova's maturation, in other words, is intimately tied to a recognition of how language restricts her by naming what she can and cannot do as a woman and as a person of mixed national, racial, and religious heritages. This is evident in a section entitled, "Ova Begins to Take Notice," which Alex Goody characterizes as Ova's "attainment of selfhood and language" ("Empire, Motherhood and the Poetics of Self" 71). These lines describe Ova's attempts to sew a rose using red threat. This more concrete narrative, however, quickly gives way to Ova's meditations on more symbolic forms of making represented by an English Rose, the poem's appellation for Ova's British mother, and how Ova's product of feminine handicraft yokes these two processes to one another:

She must
make her a rose
out of red thread
but red-
ness is inadequate
to the becoming of a rose
    The red reel rolls (Anglo Mongrels 137)

These lines importantly underscore the dialogic relationship between the physical process of making a decorative rose—one that produces a thread-constructed decoration for a hat or clothing—and a more abstract form of making involved in constructing the symbolic rose of British femininity, embodied by her mother.

What Ova does understand is lack—that "red/ness is inadequate to the becoming of a rose." The enjambment of the lines, as well as the spacing here reinforce her inability to do so. The concrete qualities called up by the "red" are separated from "ness," a suffix that refers to a more abstract state or quality that Ova remains unable to generalize or apprehend using the same tangible languages that allow her to describe the thread. Loy's use of space in this stanza thus gestures to the gaps and pauses in Ova's thinking, the moments where she tries to connect the concrete, physical qualities that she can see, touch, and name with those ineffable qualities of womanhood that she sense but cannot yet put into language. On a practical level, Ova understands that the concrete "red-ness" of her thread is not enough to produce a decorative rose; she needs to guide the threat into predetermined patterns that produce not only a recognizable color but also a recognizable shape. Likewise, in another register, Ova understands that a symbolic "red-ness"—simultaneously a reference to a woman's virginity or to the menstrual blood that physically transitions a girl into womanhood—does not alone construct an idealized British femininity. As with the rose she sews, Ova senses that the "English Rose" must be constructed through patterns that reproduce a recognizable shape. Looking to her mother, Ova also understands this pattern to be one of carefully managed sexuality, a financially secure marriage and the pursuit of motherhood. This latter expectation, in particular proves a fraught task for Ova because of alliance of motherhood with Britain's empire-building, bringing into sharp relief the tension between the feminine ideals to which Ova feels obligated and her

struggle to reconcile the national, racial, and religious heritage of her father with the quintessential Britishness of her mother.[80] To acquiesce to her mother's standards of femininity involves, embracing a narrative of cultural supremacy and a project of eugenics that implicitly dismisses her father's culture and subsumes her hybridity to a homogenous nationalism. The spacing of the stanza's final lines "The red roll reels," at once returns to the tactility of Ova's sewing project where a skein of thread continuously rotates as it is used and resonates with Ova's meditations on expectations for women, once again referenced through "red," the symbolic quality that partially but not fully constructs an idealized femininity. The use of "reel" here registers a sense of repetition, of spooling and unspooling, reiterating a sense that womanhood is based on patterning. At the same time, "to reel" also connotes shock and disorientation or even, a staggering motion, conveying Ova's unease not only with her inability to translate or name the unspoken expectations she senses but also with the obligations themselves. Thus, the elongated line's staggered spacing serves to underscore the ambivalence Ova feels but lacks the means of describing.

Anglo-Mongrels thus offers two additional examples of Loy's understanding of figures at the margins, people made socially precarious through their subject-positions, and an accompanying methodological attention to poetic spacing to symbolize both the physical and psychological alienation of these characters from their environments and discourses of nationalism and femininity that govern these spaces. In combination with Loy's other, Futurist-inspired experiments in textual visuality, Anglo-Mongrels at once gestures to the important entwinement of Loy's conceptual meditation on the status and significance of the outsider with a

[80] Alex Goody's analysis of motherhood in *Anglo-Mongrels* points out that Ova's social milieu requires women to value purity and to "disavow… the body in order to function within an imperial order of signs" ("Empire, Motherhood, and the Poetics of the Self" 71).

methodological exploration of the most effective means of capturing these kinds of experiences and recreating them using formal frameworks of her medium.

Through these projects we begin to see some of the important threads of Futurism that would evolve and mature in Loy's later work. Futurism's influence allowed Loy to explore the overlap between the enforced social exclusion of society's misfits and the artist—an outsider with a similarly antagonistic relationship towards bourgeois norms. More importantly, Loy's experimentation with Futurist-inspired textual manipulation offered her a methodological paradigm for yoking a text's thematic disruption to its formal disruptions; the need for this kind of project stemmed from Loy's growing sense that art—her art rooted in language—must seek methodological disruption in order to counter the risk of reinscribing the power structures working through dominant discourses of race, gender, and nationality. As such, we might see Loy's intense engagement with poetic spacing as a particularly salient example of her attempts not only to symbolically gesture to the ways that outsiders are silenced, to create visual space for these silences on the page, but also her attempts to harness the text's materiality as well, transforming abstract experiences of marginalization into the concrete whiteness of poetic spacing. In his study of absence as an aesthetic strategy, including forms of literal and symbolic silence, Craig Dworkin emphasizes two important "lessons" that these types of experiments teach us about media. First, that "one can never locate a medium in isolation; media "are only recognizable as collectives because of the multiple modes of material interaction necessary to know or interact with just one form of media (30). Second, "we are mistaken when we think of media as objects. Indeed, the closer one looks at the materiality of a work—at the brute fact of its physical composition—the more sharply a social context is brought into focus" (Dworkin 20). When applied to Loy's poetry, Dworkin's first "lesson" reminds us that reading Loy's poem is

not a disembodied experience but instead one where fingers encounter printed paper, eyes move as they traverse the space of the page, laboring more intently in those moments where they must cross white space in order to piece together the poem's syntax and its meaning. Similarly, Dworkin's second lesson dovetails with Marinetti's ideas—that poems operate within a particular social context of readerly behaviors, where people are socialized (to return to Drucker) to regard literature as "unmarked," intended as linguistic signification rather than as a visual display or as an material object that dictates terms of engagement or embodiment. Yet the labor required to simultaneously take in the meaning of poems like "Virgins Plus Curtains" or Anglo-Mongrel and the Rose while also contending with the white space that both visually distracts from a desire to see only "unmarked" text and physically challenges a reading practice based on syntactic organization. This in turn activates a form of alienation, a sense of disorientation that (if only momentarily) mirrors the linguistically alienating experiences of the outsiders described in her poems. As we will see, this desire to mobilize materiality as a means of capturing these experiences, comes to fruition most clearly in Loy's Bowery works, but in the intervening years too, Loy's interest in a kind of methodological fidelity to the outsider's experience would shape her engagement and experimentation with other emerging avant-garde practices.

The Visual Politics of Homelessness: Photography and Erasure

Thus, one of the most significant consequences for the first stage of Loy's investigation into outsiders and its confluence with Futurist typographical practices, was that it coincided with a pivot towards the possibilities of text as a visual phenomenon but also a material one. In doing so, Loy began to reach towards a methodology that not only offered a cerebral representation of the outsider's experience but indeed demanded that the work of art itself formally recreate the conditions of that experience. While Loy's poetry and writing continued to incorporate the

typographic practices she had integrated during the Futurist stage of her career, her most explicit writings on precarious individuals over the next two decades turned away from both Futurism and the poetic genre to instead focus on prose and the idioms of a technology increasingly associated with modern urban life: photography.

Broadly, photography offered up two appeals to an artist already attentive to issues of materiality. While the materiality of text and page in Mongrels or "Virgins" employed materiality to activate a moment of alienation similar to that of Loy's poetic subjects, the photographic object, as an index, maintained a certain material connection with its original subject matter.[81] The film negative imprinted a moment, marking the conditions of its making and by extension the conditions of the photographic subject. At the same time, the ability to endlessly copy the film negative into photographic objects raised concerns about the loss of the material conditions of an artwork's production, as Walter Benjamin discusses in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction":

> Even the most perfect reproduction of a work is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of a work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical conditions over the years… The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes the plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. (221).

[81] According to Mary Doane: "The index is sutured to its object by a physical cause, a material connection" (5).

For Benjamin, the process of photographic reproduction leads to the deleterious "shattering of tradition" that is the "obverse" of the "renewal of mankind" (221). Thus, while the original film negative might insufficiently or partially index the material conditions of the work's production, the photographic print could not claim the same level of authenticity or preservation of a material context. Its various copies therefore showcased the risk associated with images divorced of their context, flattening and distilling complex social problems into easily consumable iconography. The medium, in other words, offered to Loy new lessons in both the political mobilization of materiality in art, while also underscoring another mechanism through which art might inadvertently re-ensconce dominant narratives that refuse nuance or specificity, particularly photography of urban decay, poverty, and homelessness.

Its aesthetic history too, offered compelling links to Loy's interest in outsiders. Photography had long claimed to provide a privileged and unembellished visual account of vulnerable urban residents; Jacob Riis' photographs, for instance, operated by promising to temporarily place a moral, middle-class viewer into the place of an overcrowded tenement apartment, providing an "experience" that would provoke outrage and galvanize social change. In Paris, Loy's home for most of the 20s and 30s, photography took on an especially central role in documenting the urban landscape; this landscape included a visible homeless population, which had become hyper-visible against the backdrop of a city still coming to terms with the consequences of its modernization under Haussmannization. In addition, Paris was becoming the prominent site for a different kind of homelessness in the form of refugees, including artistic refugees, fleeing the rising tides of authoritarianism and nationalism that would culminate in the Second World War.

Moreover, Loy's continued contact with avant-garde thinkers and artists exposed her to the new political urgency attached to debates surrounding the aesthetic status and mission of photography.[82] Beginning in 1923, Loy settled in Paris, reconnecting with old friends from the Arensberg salon including Man Ray, who had begun to experiment with Surrealist modes of photography, and his new assistant, Berenice Abbott.[83] The two women began a friendship that lasted for the remainder of Loy's life.[84] Though at the time Abbott had not herself emerged as a defining force in twentieth-century photography, she was in the process of developing her photographic style, a style influenced not only by the avant-gardism of Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp, but also by the street photography French urban photographer Eugène Atget, who had used his camera to document the disappearing sights of Paris.[85] Revered by Surrealists and documentarians alike, divergent receptions of Atget's work showcased the tension between two competing interpretations of photography—one rooted in experimentalism and the other, so-

[82] Linda Kinnahan has called "straight" photography - that is images that invite viewers to see them as "objective," "authentic," and "as a document of 'real' life" (131).

[83] Abbott had arrived in Paris in 1921, where she interacted with prominent "Left Bank" figures including Ernest and Hadley Hemingway, Djuna Barnes, William Carlos Williams, and James Joyce. Man Ray had also arrived to Paris in 1921 where he had begun steadily building his portraiture business. Friends and occasional collaborators in New York, the pair renewed their acquaintance. Abbott, as she had in New York, occasionally agreed to pose for Man Ray. In 1923, however, she began steady work as Man Ray's darkroom assistant (Haaften 70).

[84] According to Amy Elkins: "Abbott and Loy had been friends since the 1920s, when they frequented the same art scene in Paris, where Abbott was Man Ray's assistant. Abbott photographed Loy's children, and the two artists are pictured together, along with Tristan Tzara, Jane Heap, and Margaret Anderson, in a famous photograph taken at a party in Constantin Brancusi's studio in 1920… Their friendship picked up again in New York in the 1940s and 1950s, where it was defined by Abbott's interest in Loy's success and well- being" (1094-1095). During Loy's Bowery years, Abbott was also one of the few people who saw Loy's assemblage artworks; she photographed them and encouraged Loy to exhibit.

[85] Between 1926 and Atget's death in 1927, Abbott visited his atelier on several occasions, each time purchasing as many of his prints as her meager funds would allow. The first print she purchased from him was *The Ragpicker's Hut (1910)*. Following Atget's passing, Abbott became concerned about the fate of his work and in 1928, she secured a loan that allowed her to purchase Atget's archive (Van Haaften 114-117). Considerable publicity followed this purchase; newspapers across America ran articles about Abbott's acquisition, raising interest an interest in Atget's work that Abbott hoped to capitalize on both through exhibitions and through the sale of prints (Van Haaften 122-3).

called “straight” photography, subscribing to the values of unvarnished truth, authenticity, and objectivity.[86] Loy’s close relationship with both Abbott and her son-in-law, Julien Levy, would’ve made her intensely familiar with this work and with its contested status; Atget was the subject of enthusiasm for both Abbott and Levy, who began working together in 1930 to organize at Atget exhibition at the Wehey Gallery in New York.[87] For the Surrealists, Atget’s work the dream-like qualities of the urban landscape or could heighten awareness to the city’s ever-present undercurrent of violence (MacFarlane 18). Such an interpretation spoke to the Surrealists’ interest in defamiliarizing ordinary urban sites in order to recast the city in terms of memory.[88] For “straight” photographers like Walker Evans, however, Atget’s work modeled

[86] It should be noted that before she settled in Paris, Loy was often in New York, giving her an early taste of the city that sharply differed from New York in the years before and after WWII. During Loy’s first, extended visit to New York in 1916 and 1917, documentary had not yet become the dominant or even popular mode, particularly for those in Loy’s circle, largely composed of figures from the Arensberg salon, who favored experimentalism, including Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp. Loy viewed this city as “the embodiment of the new, the site where the twentieth century was being unveiled” and came to represent for Loy “a vortex of energy, an urban parade, an artistic and intellectual community, and refuge for those who, for diverse reasons, were the outcasts of Europe,” (Burke 212). When she returned again in the 1920s America had already begun to change, anticipating some of the earmarks of a nationalist ethos that dominated the postwar era: “Americans were wary of foreigners, anti-Bolshevist hysteria had replaced anti-German sentiment, and the term ‘radical,’ which three years ago evoked a harmless crackpot, now conjured up a bomb-throwing terrorist. Similarly, since the country’s turn inward, ‘international’ was taken to mean anti-American” (Burke 282). This sentiment likewise extended to art, as Americans increasingly rejected an experimentalism associated with Europe and European avant-gardes, sentiment that in part fueled the rise of documentary photography, a supposedly objective and unbiased method for capturing images, epitomized by the work of Depression-era American photographers like Walker Evans, James Agee, and Dorothea Tanning (Kinnahan 126, 130).

[87] Throughout the process, Levy corresponded with Loy, describing Atget’s work in almost erotic terms, writing: “My photographs are giving me a heavenly summer… There is nothing I could ask for better than to roll myself between the sheets of Atgets, each new one I find (and there are thousands” is a revelation” (Levy qtd. in Shaffner and Jacobs 28).

[88] “The Surrealist understanding of photography turned on more than the medium’s facility in fabricating uncanny images. Just as important was another discovery: even the most prosaic photograph, filtered through the prism of Surrealist sensibility, might easily be dislodged from its usual context and irreverently assigned a new role… This impulse to uncover latent Surrealist affinities in popular imagery accounts, in part, for the enthusiasm with which Surrealists embraced Eugène Atget’s photographs of Paris. Published in *La Révolution Surréaliste* in 1926 at the suggestion of his neighbor, Man Ray, Atget’s images of vanished Paris were understood not as the work of a competent professional or a self-conscious artist but as the spontaneous visions of an urban primitive—the Henri Rousseau of the camera. In Atget’s photographs of the deserted streets of old Paris and of shop windows haunted by elegant mannequins, the Surrealists recognized their own vision of the city as a “dream capital,” an urban labyrinth of memory and desire” (“Photography and Surrealism”).

attention to detail but also "simplicity and directness," bespeaking the documentarist values of capturing the unvarnished truth of something overlooked or ignored (MacFarlane 19, Michaels 460).

Examining Atget's work—its interpretation through both documentary and Surrealist lenses—we can begin to glean some of the thematic and methodological threads that no doubt interested Loy and encouraged her to borrow from these intersecting visual vocabularies. The Ragpicker's Hut (1910) features the image of a shanty constructed of found materials, pieced together.[89] Mismatched boards and tarps create the hasty structure. Rocks keep the roof in place, underscoring the delicacy and temporariness of such a dwelling. Outside the hut, abandoned boots and run-down furniture line the exterior walls; taxidermized birds and other paraphernalia hang from the outside walls, proclaiming the trash-picking occupation of the hut's residents. Though the image betrays no hint of the processes of Paris' modernization, it nevertheless asks viewers to consider the status of the hut, and by extension, the ragpicker him/herself under processes of urban progress that promotes a street-level cleanliness that seeks to erase evidence of the ragpicker's living conditions as well as the trash-heaps that make possible his form of unregulated labor. Implicitly, then, this reveals Atget's struggle to visually capture not only the ragpicker's inevitably fading way of life, but also a sense that time and its politicization in discourses of progress play an integral role in reinforcing, or even worsening, the status of the precarious individual. Such an image also underscores what both "straight" documentarians and Surrealists each found irresistible about Atget's work. For the Surrealists, the odd series of juxtapositions evident in the home's construction itself and, especially, by the taxidermized birds that appear to decorate the outside of the ragpicker's home, the photograph offers a primer in

[89] Interestingly, this image was the first to attract Berenice Abbott's eye. It was the first of many that she purchased from Atget.

desire to re-purpose and reenchant banal, everyday items for new and disruptive effects. The photograph also draws on a Surrealist preoccupation with dream and memory as it simultaneously remembers an "old" Paris where sights like that ragpicker's hut were more common, while also looking forward and anticipating the loss of these last vestiges of an older way of life. For the documentarians like Walker Evans such a photograph offers a view into the details often ignored while also providing stark evidence of the plight of the precarious worker of the contemporary city; each detail of the photograph bespeaks abjection as a way of life for the person who dwells in the hut, signaling at once the inevitable misery of the modern condition, and the need for pressing social change.

Turning to Loy's own writing of the 1920s and 30s, we see a narrative language that not only echoes the concerns of Atget's photographs, but also one that harnesses a tension between Surrealist treatments of urban scenery and documentary ones as a means of capturing the experiences and conditions of urban outsiders. Modulating between these modes of perception, Loy's descriptions of homeless and street people engage a Surrealist concern with memory and the passage of time, while the penetrating concreteness of her physical descriptions interrupt these dream-like states to confront readers with a raw reminder that the changing urban landscape is not merely a means of activating new or deeper states of consciousness, but indeed a physical place with pragmatic consequences for the city's residents, particularly those most sensitive and vulnerable to the visceral effects of modernization. Through these vocabularies too, Loy questions the role of the artist in assigning or projecting a single narrative onto her subjects, maintaining a suspicion towards collusion between dominant social discourses and aesthetics, also seen in her early work. Finally, although Loy's work in these pieces turns away from a formal engagement with materiality, her concrete physical descriptions of confronting the

homeless people of Paris reassert the importance of the material encounter, setting the stage for the development of her Bowery assemblage work.

Loy's most striking attempts to refine her ideas of the outsider while also experimenting with these photographic influences appears in "A Hard Luck Story." Included in this writing is the story of Loy's encounter with a bum in a Paris metro station, as well as her encounter with a Parisian street woman.[90] In both stories, Loy moves back and forth between the dream-like qualities of a Surrealist narrative and the more concrete, detail-oriented language of "straight" documentary photographers demonstrating the pitfalls of each. In "A Hard Luck Story," the initial sight of a sleeping clochard prompts the narrator to slip into a meditation on a primordial past and of the bum's status as a remnant of an era predating the obsession with urban cleanliness. The narrator describes the clochard as "One of the disinherited who, clad from cataclysmic wardrobes, look more like rocks or landslides emerging from the earth's decisions to cast away old clothes" ("Hard Luck Story"). This description configures the bum as familiar and unfamiliar—familiar in the sense that a dirty hobo is an all-too-common urban sight and unfamiliar in the sense that the grime seems so incredible that it nearly escapes recognition as something human. The narrator's use of "disinherited" reinforces this idea; the bum is not a beneficiary of modernity but rather a nagging remnant? of another time. The narrator continues with this same kind of meditation when her consideration of the bum gives way to a broader, philosophical discussion of dirt and time: "When we think that the smut on our cheek having once been coal… dirt is a decoration whose historic past cheapens the upstart satin of feathered negligees" ("Hard Luck Story"). Here the clochard activates the narrator's historical musings on

[90] This section of Loy's writing has been excerpted and edited into a format appropriate for a short story and published in Bronte Adams and Trudi Tate's *That Kind of Woman: Stories from the Left Bank and Beyond.* I have worked from this version of the text.

the emergence of a societal aversion to dirt. Given the importance of dirt, its many forms, and uses, its omnipresence, the narrator wonders why it is accorded so little respect or appreciation when compared to the superfluous "frippery" of a negligee, a subtle indictment of capitalist values.

That Loy's narrator uses the bum as a portal to philosophical meditations, that the bum's own precarious situation becomes subsumed to this project, is illustrative of a Surrealist influence. Images trigger deeper thinking—here a longing or a valuation of a long-forgotten past written over by a consumerist present—but eschew both the social commitments and the apparent objectivity prized by documentarists. Evidence of Surrealism's influence becomes more explicit as the narrator veers into a discussion of aesthetics. Referring to the bum as an example of an "Inordinate flower," the narrator intones the Surrealist goal to reenchant the banal: "In such bouquets a trodden magnolia has an additional value, a dusty iris is twice as beautiful and disheveled hair makes less formal fernery than a coiffure by Antoine. For what would be inadmissible in a drawing room is the pure matter of sculpture, and the precisions perfecting our mode Art can make little of. The more we seek, the more we discover of the unexpected exotics rooted in the banal, to flower enhanced by our recreative perception until all the earth is gilded with our gift of seeing anew" ("A Hard Luck Story"). Here, the narrator insists that one must find beauty in the banal, the ugly, and outmoded, made metaphorically "dusty" with time. Only through this kind of endeavor, she insists can the world be gilded or reimbued with richness and glamor. Such a statement aligns closely with Surrealist prerogatives as they harnessed images in order to reenchant the world, undercutting a positivist framework reinforced by capitalism. Equally important here is the narrator's sense that objects devalued and dismissed by society are precisely the purview of art and the artist; further, that in taking up these objects and insisting on

their importance, the artist symbolically rejects the capitalist value-system that insists new commodities must rapidly replace old ones.

These abstract contemplations on history and art, however, are interrupted by the narrator's jolting return, as she's confronted with a blunt reminder of the clochard's proximity and humanity; he responds to her voyeurism with a glance so potent that it feels like physical violence: "He does not think, but to our shame, of our relation to himself he knows… Indeed, the accumulated force of his disgust was so terrific I felt it must blow me across the station... he yet seemed to have gotten in the last word, the sullen, silent accusation of his 'I am'" ("A Hard Luck Story"). The narrator's sudden sense of shame suggests her awareness and embarrassment at being "caught" in the act of looking. Moreover, the fact that the clochard's disgust has "accumulated" shows that while the narrator has only recently become aware of the way she's used him for her own musings, his has been aware of her exploitation throughout; he has recognized his own dehumanization and his tokenization in service of her intellectual project. The narrator notes that his look asserts, "I am," a declarative that reasserts the humanity and individuality ignored or at least elided with the narrator's interior dialogue on time and art. This moment of confrontation between characters thus signals a confrontation between two ways of seeing and interpreting the bum: one where he merely becomes a means of activating some deeper kind of personal reaction or aesthetic insight and one, where his confrontational presence disrupts the narrator's ability to use his form to reach a symbolic register without also engaging a material one and in doing so, indicts the narrator for her casual use of a person as a vehicle for her own ends.

This moment thus forces the narrator to more fully consider the uneven power dynamics of her relationship with the homeless man. Forced to reckon with the exploitative dimensions of

her visual engagement with the clochard, the narrator also finds herself concluding that a social, or verbal encounter could prove equally problematic: "But how to communicate with the clochard? … we cannot follow him lost in his inaccessible world of neutral shades where roofing and quilts, larders and libraries, market basket are all contrived of yesterday's newspapers… we cannot fraternize with the clochard, there being a time-lapse between us and one to whom it is not accorded to live in our actual world of the latest edition" ("Hard Luck Story"). Summarizing the living conditions of the clochard—and especially of his tendency to rely on a single product or type of item to fulfill a myriad of everyday functions—fundamentally separates him, bars the narrator from "fraternizing." A different experience of time too creates a gulf between these two individuals; the narrator lives in the present but, echoing her earlier interest in the bum's connection to a primordial history, he remains irrevocably rooted in the past, willfully resisting and rejecting the common language of materialism. From "A Hard Luck Story" we thus see Loy narratively experimenting with the different forms of vision modeled primarily in Surrealist photography but documentary photography as well, neither of which, the story emphasizes, offer an ideal model for accessing the experience of the "outsider" or in formally recreating an experience that models the outsider's sense of alienation. While the politics that emerge from the story, particularly the critique of capitalism drawn from Surrealism, help to refine the parameters of the outsider's exclusion via his inability to speak through the language of consumerism and materialism, these moments also illustrate the dangers of abstracting a human into a philosophical position. At the same time, a documentary-style "objective" mode of seeing, one more visually attentive to the details overlooked and grounded in advocacy for social change, also fails to provide authentic access or insight into the bum's precarity, falling victim to the very different problem of reiterating the importance of capitalism by insisting that the bum's

exclusion can be entirely understood through an examination of his grotesque living conditions, and also implicitly suggesting that the bum's problem must be solved by integrating him into the forms of labor and materialist values that would resolve these unsavory conditions.

Many of these same tensions are showcased in a second story of Parisian homelessness, entitled, "Street Sister." As with "A Hard Luck Story," a first-person narrator comes into contact with a woman who activates abstract considerations of art and history. Also like "A Hard Luck Story," the narrator's jolting confrontation with the titular character forces her to grapple with art (and the artist's) exploitative relationship to sights of human misery. "Street Sister" opens with the narrator's attempt to establish her status as someone out of time, place, and tradition—all characteristics that naturally predispose her to greater understanding and empathy for the woman she later observes: "Being that uncircumscribed entity, an infinitarian, traditionless, almost conditionless, I have been privileged, but so seldom, to slip over the psychological frontier of that unvisited region where those others withhold the confidences of their deprivation, and see the light that lingers in the shadow of mankind" ("Street Sister" 42). Because she herself has been metaphorically unmoored from place and tradition, she imagines that her own sense of being at the peripheries of society will naturally incline her to greater psychological connection with a person literally unmoored from place.

The narrator then proceeds to recount her first encounter with the "street sister," describing the woman as possessing the "arresting manner of living things detected in unusual relationship to the inanimate" and as a "perpetual reiteration of the deranged" ("Street Sister" 41). Each of these descriptions grapples with a physicality that seems bizarre, unsettling, and grotesque. Similar to the descriptions of the clochard in the Metro, the narration showcases an appearance that seems bizarre, unsettling, and grotesque, engaging a Surrealist vocabulary to

capture the uncanny and eerie— "arresting"—sense of a human form not immediately recognizable as such. Additionally, that the woman represents a timeless and repeated concretization of the deranged signals the narrator's fascination and undeniable attraction to sites of insanity or madness, sites that represent clear divergence from behavioral norms. After inviting the homeless woman for a drink, the narrator begins to more carefully consider the woman's appearance but slips into language steeped in more abstract concerns of time and history:

> Now I could see her face—it was like an empty rough country road, cracked all over with that shrinkage damp day undergoes in the process of freezing and the unclean rheumy icicles, dripping from the corners of her eyes, would have appeared—had one failed to remember the prehistoric descent of dirt or to compare all rheum to the inoffensive drip from other machines such as the painting sweating engine of propellers—appalling. ("Street Sister" 42)

First, the narrator identifies similarities between the woman's wrinkled cheeks and the ruts of a country road, alluding to the fact that this woman calls up a sense of an earlier time; the gravel and dirt country road, no longer a visible presence in modern Paris, reminds us of a fading pastoral past. Similarly, the narrator's curious digression with regard to the woman's tears reminds us of dirt's timeless past as well as its quintessential affiliations with modern machinery. Such a meditation suggests that even when confronted with the woman's appearance—her unsettling physical attributes—the narrator merely uses the encounter as a touchstone for considering a philosophical relationship between past and present.

As the story comes to a close, however, the narrator is jerked away from her interior digressions, forced to become conscious again of her environment, circumstances, and finally, of

the person who has been accompanying her through the city. After being ejected from multiple bars by owners unwilling to serve a disheveled homeless woman, the narrator undergoes an unsettling moment of intimacy. Looking at her companion the narrator remarks: "Then I noticed something quite queer. The half-delirious dead-eyed wreck I had picked up had vanished, and a perfectly normal human being with light in her friendly eyes, laid a land on my arm. 'But, my dear,' she said… I hate you to have unpleasantness on my account'" ("Street Sister" 42). The end of the short story, of course, raises the question of who or what has transformed. Perhaps the narrator has finally recognized the humanity of her companion; perhaps she has only been able to do so because she comprehends, despite her own comparatively respectable exterior appearance, she has been mistaken as a clochard, rather than a charitable do-gooder. According to Rachel Potter, the end of the story signals the narrator's realization that her sense of herself as an outsider cannot be collapsed or elided with the forms of marginalization experienced by the "street sister" because they're "fundamentally different" despite the narrator's initial sense of affinity: "Both the narrator and the homeless individual are embodiments of a peculiar kind of social freedom. They are uncircumscribed, traditionless, and conditionless. These similarities allow the narrator to cross a mental barrier which separates her from the homeless individual and to attain a momentary glimpse into the humanity they share yet the initially psychological barrier is the product of a fundamental economic difference which returns quickly to control the relationship between the writer and the particular homeless woman described in the story" (Potter 264). Like the encounter in the Metro, the narrator's moment of realization is one where she's forced out of the realm of abstract, interior thinking.

Together these two pieces tell the story of Loy's engagement with a different type of visuality and visual vocabulary but also her ultimate conclusion that merely looking could be as

silencing, as exploitative, as the dominant discourses she sought to counter with her poetic spacing. Through receptive to the Surrealist project of reenchantment and energized by their politics of questioning the underlying values of capitalism, Loy's work nevertheless recognizes that the symbolic mobilization of people like the Metro clochard or the street sister risks overlooking their humanity and their experiences made precarious not only through their filth, their hideousness or even their alienation from the physical and metaphorical significance of a home, but also through their apparent relationship to time. For as the narrator of both stories demonstrates, the bums become objects of scorn precisely because they visualize a resistance to urban modernity and its range of accompanying ideologies including cleanliness, consumerism, and purposeful goal-driven movement. To use the bum to visually access an interior realm or even in the documentary mode, as a symbol of urban decay, involves glossing over the material realities of precarious subjects, as the respective narrators' epiphanies suggest. Thus a critique of vision in these narratives offers a broader methodological critique of artistic mediums that rely wholly on visuality, particularly in instances where visual access is naively assumed to either exert a neutral force on the precarious subjects being observed or, worse yet, one that purports to convey some unvarnished truth about the lives of outcasts and outsiders. Although photography offered a medium with goals seemingly aligned with Loy's desire to represent the alienation of outsiders while also using form to mimic these experiences, her narratives instead reject the vocabularies of both Surrealist and documentarist visuality. Instead, Loy's stories turn back to the impulses of her early work, thematically reiterating the importance of material confrontation as an important counterbalance to the trap-laden process of presuming to represent the experiences, visually or textually, of precarious people.

Despite proving an unsatisfying solution to the representational challenges preoccupying Loy, her brief, narrative integration of Surrealist and documentarist photographic vocabularies did, however, offer a valuable primer in art's ability to reiterate dominant discourses and practices of marginalization through more than just written and spoken language. Moreover, her engagement with these visual paradigms held important consequences for her later work. In the first place, her early suspicion of photography's exploitative tendencies prepared her to look critically at the politics of representation associated with the images of misery and decay associated with the Bowery and with New York's Lower East Side, more broadly. Second, despite Loy's recommitment to the import of the material encounter, she also retained a concern for the symbolic status of outsiders generally and bums specifically as antagonists of the modernity. The bum at once eschewed (though not necessarily by choice) standards of urban dress, comportment, and economy, standing in as an unwanted reminder of urban modernization's failures to cover over the vestiges of the past and to conceal evidences of its own failures to inculcate uniform adherence to its values.

Silence and Disappearance: Towards an Aesthetic of Obsolescence

By the time Loy moved to the Bowery at midcentury, hostility towards the Metro clochards and the street sisters of the world had been re-invigorated by post-war New York's aggressive commitment to its own project of urban modernization in the form of "renewal," repackaging language and aims pushed by reformers since the mid-nineteenth-century.[91]

[91] According to Alexander von Hoffman's history of the 1949 Housing Act: "The roots of the act's public housing provisions extended back a century to when the movement for housing reform began in the United States. In the 1840s, religious, moral, and sanitation reformers embraced the idea that slums degraded the health and morals of the people who lived in them. To counteract the malevolent influence of the slums, housing reformers during the 19th and early 20th centuries campaigned for building and sanitary regulations and helped develop model housing projects to teach private real estate developers and landlords to provide better housing for the urban poor" (300).

Symbolic of this impulse was the passage of the Housing Act of 1949, a federal law aimed to empower American cities in redevelopment and slum-clearance projects in order to solve the problem of urban blight (Abramson 10). According to Samuel Zipp, the Housing act was part of a cold-war politics that aimed to establish Manhattan as "symbolic of international modernity" (5).[92] Under this new rubric, New York, like other large U.S. cities, made use of new federal subsidies to target the slums and tenements that failed to accord with the government's overarching goal for cities to visually and architecturally reinforce America's global power and hegemony. And while figures representative of poverty had long attracted a mixture of pity and scorn, at midcentury they came to represent a much clearer threat to the American nationalist project and to the other cultural institutions bolstering it. Because of their mobility and sense of placelessness, hoboes represented a very particular threat to familial structures (and the strident sexual policing that accompanied these structures) that worked to bolster capitalism. In his history of homelessness in American discourse, Todd DePastino underscores that the persistent casting of the tramp as a threat both to the idealization of labor and of middle-class family life: Tramps were also described in terms of an unchecked virile, male, sexuality. Because they were "homeless," they existed outside the realm of the balancing influence of feminine domesticity. With no sexual constraints, homeless tramps of middle-class commentary not only eschewed the disciplines of productive labor; they also attacked the very moral foundations of the sentimental home itself" (DePastino 27).[93] Similarly, in his investigation of the intersections of class and

[92] "The 1949 act was the most successful of President Truman's domestic Fair Deal policies, providing federal subsidies for municipal purchases of built-up urban land acquired through eminent domain and giving cities the financial leverage to prepare land tracts for either privately backed redevelopment or new public housing" (Zipp 8).

[93] DePastino's narrative of the "tramp" begins in the 1870s. In the wake of the Civil War, the majority of Americans were for the first time in history, working in industrialized urban centers rather than in an agrarian setting, for themselves. The shortage of cheap housing responding to these changes meant homelessness became more visible, thus giving rise to a range of discourses aimed at explaining and solving the problem (DePastino 9). Further, DePastino explains: "Tramps were both victims and agents of the new economic system, itinerant laborers clinging

sexuality in literature, Michael Trask points out, "wanderlust" as a disorganized and non-goal oriented form of movement was increasingly viewed with a suspicion and fear, inflected by class biases. The hobo, especially, epitomized an "ever-shifting" and "unsafe underclass" that, in part, the Housing Act of 1949 aimed to eliminate by concealing visible examples of urban poverty behind the walls of new public housing facilities (Trask 14).

In response to this new urban vision, many artistic renderings took on a much darker tone than those produced earlier in the century, as Edward Dimendberg summarizes:

> No longer romanticized as a fantasy of speed, dynamic machine production, new perspectives on quotidian realities or technological precision, the post-1939 American city was rendered by many artists as a coldhearted and treacherous mechanism more likely to provoke fear than awe… if for earlier modernists the factory and its systems were emblematic of a new social order, for many late modernists this mechanization was now evident on the level of the entire society, now experienced as a nightmare of spatial regimentation, consumer manipulation and corporate control. (4)

This treatment of the urban landscape rang especially true for depictions of the Bowery. Its iconography at midcentury was dominated by images of deprivation captured in the "straight" photographic style that had emerged with particular strength and fervor in the 1930s. Abbott's images of the area in her Changing New York series maintained an important role in cultivating the Bowery in public imagination as a dark and destitute space that contrasted sharply with the

beneath the speeding freight train of industrial capitalism expansion. Because they seemed strange and placeless… trams served as convenient screens onto which middle-class Americans projected their insecurities, anxieties, and fantasies about urban industrial life" (DePastino 4). Tramps were blamed for laziness, were the subjects of eugenicist tirades, and were routinely blamed for instigating strikes (DePastino 17, 24). This treatment of the bum, as Loy's work reveals, persisted (and arguably continues to do so today) into the twentieth century.

gleaming skyscraper modernity beginning to appear in other areas of the city. Abbott's iconography of the Bowery saliently appeared again in Lionel Rogosin's documentary film, On the Bowery (1959). Following the lives of several transient laborers who called the Bowery home, Rogosin's film attempts to humanize the men maligned by law enforcement and social reformers. Rogosin's depictions are suggestive of the urgent and systematic efforts to eradicate the lifestyles of men who accepted sporadic jobs, found solace in "Creepy Pete," and resigned themselves to the impermanent shelters of doorjambs and cardboard lean-tos. Thus, more than ever before, Loy's surroundings and the history of aesthetic representation of those surroundings, configured outsiders not just as individuals to be silenced, quarantined, or ignored but as enemies to be rehabilitated or else eliminated.

When Loy moved into the Bowery she became witness to and part of a community where art and visual representation had too often dovetailed, even inadvertently, with the objectives of municipal authorities and middle-class meddlers, reinforcing the status of the neighborhood as an foil against which an idealized urban modernity could be defined rather than questioned. These evident problems of representation helped Loy to more forcefully reject the photographic forms of vision she'd explored in her narratives of Parisian homelessness while at the same time fostering her suspicion of art's potential to reinforce one-dimensional ways of seeing and apprehending precarious individuals. These concerns are reflected in many of her poems during this period, as Linda Kinnahan observes: "Loy's late works galvanize a set of questions not only about economic deprivation but also about the documentation of this deprivation during a period of proliferating images of poverty in America." (Kinnahan 125). In her poem "On Third Avenue," Loy puts particular pressure on the problems of vision. Drawing from the language of sculpture, Loy interrogates the problematic ways that passersby see the Bowery, drawing not

only from the insights of her Paris work—where she recognized the risk accompanying the tendency to abstract a human into a symbol—but also the insights of her Futurist-inspired manipulations of typography and poetic spacing which had served to remind readers in multiple registers of the how dominant discourses aimed to silence and alienate outsiders by robbing them of the agency to speak their own stories. The poem opens:

> “You should have disappeared years ago”—
> so disappear
> on Third Avenue
> to share in the heedless incognito
>
> of shuffling shadow-bodies
> animate with frustration
>
> whose silence’ only potence is
> respiration
> preceding the eroded bronze contours
> of their other aromas
>
> through the monstrous air
> of this red-lit thoroughfare. (“On Third Avenue”)

The quotation marks that surround the first line signal the speaker’s intonation of another’s voiced hostility towards the Bowery bums who indeed acquiesce by becoming “incognito” “shadow-bodies.” Disappearance, the poem suggests, happens at both physical and metaphorical

levels; bodies become indistinguishable from the haze of neon and the stench of the "monstrous air" but individuals are also, like Loy's other "outsiders," compelled to silence as poem notes with the generous space that follows mention of the word. The bum's only recourse against this mandate is their respiration, an act that is also obscured by the odor that characterizes the Bowery, eliding the hoboes with the inanimate trash lining the Bowery's streets. These early lines also introduce an important motif of the poem involving sculpture. In this section, the speaker employs the language of sculpture to describe the unpleasant smells of the neighborhood as "eroded bronze contours," lending a certain kind of permanence and solidity to the smells that contrasts sharply with the transience and obsolescence of the bums' breaths.

The second half of the poem, however, shifts from looking at the bums to looking with them. Twice, the speaker repeats: "These are the compensations of poverty,/ To see—" before showcasing the details of the Bowery that go unnoticed by most including the eerie flickering of neon signs "like an electric fungus," and a "reliquary sedan-chair/ out of legend, dumped there/ / before a ten-cent cinema" ("On Third Avenue"). On the one hand, these "sights" seem to reiterate the perceptions of those that pass through the Bowery: the neighborhood is a place of material and immaterial detritus alike, of which the bums are merely a part. On the other hand, the speaker's attention to sight as a "compensation" of poverty also suggests that to occupy this position is to see in ways that the comparatively wealthy are blinded. These lines thus offer a different interpretation of the sculpture of "odor" described at the beginning of the poem, insinuating that Bowery voyeurs imbue the neighborhood's most unsavory elements with visual significance, even those typically relegated to an invisible realm, while willfully overlooking and thereby deprioritizing the people of the Bowery. The final lines of the poem again return to the metaphorical language of sculpture, this time to describe the bums' impressions of the trolley-

riders who quickly pass through the Bowery: "Transient in the dust, / the brilliancy/ of a trolley/ loaded with luminous busts;// lovely in anonymity they vanish with the mirage" ("On Third Avenue"). Here, the passengers' bodies are likened to "luminous busts" and while much of the other language in the passage communicates the temporariness of the riders' presence in the Bowery, this comparison offers a visually striking solidity to their forms. The bums, this metaphor insinuates, "see" the people on the trolley contrasting sharply with the passengers' sole ability to "see" putrid smells.

In yoking attention to processes of seeing—from either side of the glance, Loy continues to question the politics of visually representing the Bowery's people and its role in recreating problematic forms of "vision" that operate much more like blindness. As the first half of "On Third Avenue" demonstrates, tramps are seen only via their relationship to inanimate refuse, their humanity ignored and willfully overlooked by an ideological desire to see the Bowery transient and all that he represents, disappear. The second half of the poem reiterates a problem with visuality from a different perspective, underscoring the scenes missed or ignored by those who interpret the Bowery through the demonizing lens of urban renewal. Moreover, the fact that the bums associate both the visual and therefore metaphorical social stability of art with the passersby guilty of these modes of seeing further underscores a suspicion towards art's role as a servant of dominant culture.

This introduction to Loy's Bowery work thus serves to highlight several important and continued trends in the entwined exploration of socially precarious individuals and the methodologies best suited to the unjudgmental and unsentimental representation of their experiences. Taking aim not only at the Surrealist modes of seeing, but here more explicit nodding to and condemning the unacknowledged limitations of the so-called objectivity of

documentary modes of seeing, Loy also here maintains attention to processes of linguistic silencing and the refiguration of this process into the visual phenomenon of disappearance. In this way, "On Third Avenue" hints at the ways in which two disparate moments in Loy's career and engagement with avant-garde methodologies culminate in her Bowery works, and especially those pieces that establish a dialogic relationship between poetic representations of the Bowery bums' experiences, of being robbed of the agency to represent their own narratives, and sculptural representations of the bums' flesh that confront viewers with the solidity of the body while also tangibly modeling the disappearance that dominant modes of seeing – including the camera lens—will into being. In doing so, Loy fully commits to the importance of materiality as central to making viewers and readers aware of the mechanisms through which dominant discourses—here urban renewal—work in and through art to the detriment of precarious subjects. No longer a fleeting experience of the outsider's alienation built into the white space of the page or a narrative epiphany prompted by a forced return to and recognition of the clochard's material circumstances, Loy's poems and assemblages intensify the scrutiny of her past works, insisting that audiences engage both intellectually and physically with the consequences of urban modernization, art's complicity in its objectives, and the forceful ways that both help delineate lines of inclusion and exclusion.

To see the emergence of this methodology, let us turn to one of Loy's first assemblages, Househunting (c.1952), featuring an oversized portrait of a woman's head and shoulders, surrounded by images of different building exteriors. Carolyn Burke describes:

> Househunting shows the head and bust of a woman modeled in flesh tones on cardboard and drawn with Pre-Raphaelite delicacy. Against a mottled background where broken images of Italianate buildings hover, the woman sees in her

> imagination all of the places where she has lived. Above her head, in a concave aureole or crown, are gather her domestic objects: a ball of yarn stuck with miniature knitting needles, doll-sized dishes, a tea-pot, a ladder, and a laundry basket—all of them surmounted by a clothesline to which items of clothing are attached with tiny pins. (422)

The surrounding building facades suggest the many places the female subject has viewed or occupied; that these are exteriors suggest an inability to access those interior spaces, reminding us that "househunting" can be a euphemism for homelessness and alienation from the comforts of a fixed location. Burke further explains that the "frailty of daily life is reflected in its materials" (Burke 422). Made from cardboard cutouts with painted bricks, the facades are designed to fade, mimicking the degradation of the buildings as well as the memories.

The importance of deterioration in the material construction of Loy's works becomes even more important in the assemblages, No Parking and Communal Cot. As Burke points out, these collages were startlingly confrontational primarily because of Loy's use of trash to represent the human body: "One could not help feeling assaulted by the contrast between the delicate modeling of the derelicts' features and the squalor of the materials used to depict them" (421). Burke's descriptions emphasize that material, not subject matter, makes these works disturbing. Loy's assemblages thus leverage a discomfort with elision of trash and the human body to question a social logic wherein objects, bodies, and art can all be similarly categorized. In No Parking, sleeping bums wrap their bodies around a street sign that reads: "No Parking." Like all of Loy's assemblages from this period, the trash-made-flesh will inevitably degrade and disappear, and the work insists on reminding us of the materials of provenance by depicting the trash at the bums' feet. Importantly the words featured in the assemblage are allied with passive

but omnipresent practices of urban policing both legally and socially. This detail reiterates Loy's enduring sense that language aims to control and curtail, and that language creates the boundaries for belonging and exclusion. Ironically, the canvas's promised obsolescence seems to acquiesce to the sign's wish for the bodies to be removed.

Another large-scale canvas populated by sleeping hoboes, composed in bits of rag and cardboard, Communal Cot, offers a similarly pessimistic view of its homeless subjects. Here, however, Loy's assemblage enacts a more pointed dialogue with her poetry, drawing its title from a line in "Hot Cross Bum," an exploration of the alcohol-dazed lifestyle of the Bowery's bums who are treated with condescension by services both religious and secular, and are viewed as less sacred than the waste in the rubbish bins. With its heavy use of enjambment, the poem staggers forward at a halting pace that at once mimics the strides of its subjects and recalls Loy's earlier use of poetic spacing to convey the silences that characterize the experiences of the outsider. An exaggerated, almost excessive use of alliteration and assonance similarly enforce the poem's pace, troubling a reader's efforts to push onwards. Take, for example, the following lines:

> And always on the trodden street
>
> --the communal cot—
>
> embalmed in rum
> under an unseen
> baldachin of dream
> blinking his inverted sky
> of flagstone

prone

lies the body of the flop

wher'er he drop ("Hot Cross Bum").

The dashes of the first stanza, as well as its isolation from the surrounding stanzas slow the pace. Similarly, the repeated glottal stops produced by "under" and "unseen" maintain this slowness before giving way to the momentum of two pairs of end-rhymes: flagstone/prone and flop/drop. This tendency throughout the poem suggests Loy's continued attempts to use the space of the page (and its interplay with the poem's aural components) to represent the bum's status as an outsider—someone out of synch with the typical urban rhythms.[94] The poem's manipulation of visuality to draw attention to the drunken physical patterns of movement that differentiate the tramp and enforce a staggered and prolonged reading experience reminiscent of these off-kilter movements, stressing Loy's continued manipulation of poetic materiality as a means of activating an alienating experience that mimics that of the outsider. Communal Cot, in addition to the unsettling use of rags and cardboard, the arrangement of the composition is also unsettling. The bodies are arranged across the canvas so that they are almost evenly spaced. The grid-like rendering of the pavement background reinforces this spatial disruption. Figures are spread across the lines when they should, it seems, lie within the tidy visual cubicles laid out for them. This simultaneously gestures to the bums' unwillingness (or inability), as in No Parking, to cohere with the city's patterns of organization, a refusal that places them outside and mandates their disappearance.

[94] Tara Prescott addresses these halting rhythms in her reading of the poem's ebbs and flows: "The stream analogy running through "Hot Cross Bum": "The use of air and water currents describes the passive, floating movement of human jetsam on the stream-like street. Like particles caught in the wind or silt in the tide, the people are pushed and trapped" (190).

In the end, the assemblages that grew from Loy's "Compensations" poetic series evidenced her belief that the status of society's most stridently policed outsiders needed to be positioned as a confrontation—a confrontation best accomplished through harnessing the materiality of both text and assemblage in order to counter to the power dynamics underwriting art rooted in visuality and in language. Drawing from the futurist-inspired work of her early career, as well as her brief narrative engagement with the photographic vocabularies of documentary and Surrealism, the last works of Loy's career represent the culmination of her life-long refinement of a methodology suited to representing the experiences of outsiders, to formally mimic the alienating effect of that position in her artworks, and to force viewers and readers to confront their own complicity in the languages upholding the outsider's exclusion. Moreover, in directly considering art's indebtedness, its inescapable bind to the power dynamics underwriting both poetic and visual production, Loy used her Bowery assemblages to initiate a radical new understanding of the artist's ownership over her subject matter; embracing an aesthetic of obsolescence, Loy renounced aesthetic authority over her subject matter—like the subjects she represents, she planned for her product and legacy to disappear alongside her subjects, letting time and natural processes speak the truths that language could not.

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