PERFORMANCES OF AUTHORSHIP IN THE MODERNIST SALON

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Literary salons were a vital part of modernist culture. Although scholars have called attention to the ways in which salon conversations shaped subsequent works of literature, they have ignored the extent to which modernist writers conceived of conversation as a form of literary practice in itself. *Performances of Authorship in the Modernist Salon* argues that within the modernist salon, conversation first came to be treated as a medium that could be circulated, and even "saved," like the printed page and the sound recordings that were just becoming available. What had been a metaphor became a material practice: for Gertrude Stein, writing was *like* "talking and listening," but for lesser-known American salon organizers, talking and listening *were* forms of writing. "Salon writing," as practiced by Natalie Barney, Muriel Draper, Margaret Anderson, and Jean Toomer, challenges presumptions about the irretrievability of modernist sociability. The blank pages, unpublished memoirs, transcribed conversations, broadcasts, and performance skits that compose the archives of these writers are not mere supplements to literary and historical analysis; these artifacts are themselves the literature of the modernist salon.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In 2005, Cecily Swanson received her B.A. in English with highest honors from Reed College, where she completed an undergraduate thesis on Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. She studied in Paris during the summer of 2004, earning a certificate for superior level French from the Sorbonne. She completed her Master degree in English at Cornell University in 2009 and received her Ph.D. in 2013. During the summer of 2008, she received a certificate for graduate work in French from the Institut d'études françaises d'Avignon. In 2012-2013, she was the recipient of an FGSS (Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies) dissertation completion fellowship. Her dissertation emerged out of research at rare book and manuscript libraries on both sides of the Atlantic: the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet, the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, and the Bibiliothèque Nationale in Paris; the British Library in London; the Beinecke Library at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut; and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. She has published essays in the *Journal of Modern Literature, Metropolitan Archivist,* and *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory*.

For my parents, Devon Hodges and Eric Swanson.

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This dissertation tries to eschew pieties about conversation—that it inspires, that it is an end in itself, that it is the goal of all intellectual endeavors. Yet, when I consider my debt to so many interlocutors, I can only think in gushing platitudes about the importance of colloquy. Ellis Hanson's perceptive comments on an early seminar paper about Oscar Wilde sparked my interest in conversation as a writerly form. I am so thankful for his insightful reading of my work throughout graduate school. His superlative sense of literary style raises the bar for academic writing; with his fine ear and attentive eye, he improved each of my dissertation chapters. Working as his research assistant in the summer 2011, I gained first hand appreciation of his critical acumen. Jeremy Braddock profoundly influenced my conceptualization of this project. It was he who encouraged me to pursue archival research, and at each step of the writing process, he invigorated my ideas and opened my eyes to critical possibilities I would have missed otherwise. Talking with him made working hard feel worth it. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to learn from such a challenging and brilliant scholar. Margo Crawford joined my dissertation committee at a turning point in the project's evolution; it is thanks to her shrewd readings and incisive questions that I began to understand how to frame my theoretical apparatus. I always leave her office with a renewed sense of purpose, motivated by her energy and buoyed by her suggestions. Jonathan Culler has been extraordinarily generous with his time and provided crucial support for my research in France. I am thankful for his encouragement of my forays into French literature and for the high example he sets as a scholar and a teacher. I owe sincere thanks Rick Bogel, for his long encouragement and sharp responses to my writing, and also to George Hutchinson, for his extremely helpful thoughts on my Toomer chapter and his support of my work.

Numerous grants made my archival research possible: a FLAS scholarship from the U.S. Department of Education allowed me to spend a summer studying French literature in Avignon, France; a year-long fellowship as the graduate assistant to Cornell's study abroad program in

Paris permitted me to study Natalie Barney's archives; a Society for the Humanities travel grant enabled me to work at the British Library; and two awards in the summer of 2011—the Alice Hanson Cook Award and the M. H. Abrams award—provided resources for my research at the Beinecke Library. This year, a FGSS dissertation fellowship gave me the time and support to complete this project.

"I am not solitary whilst I read and write." So claimed Emerson, but few graduate students at the end of their dissertations would agree. How wonderful to have friends with whom to talk "through tea, through whisky, through dinner. Through the night," as Muriel Draper put it. Grey Anderson has been a careful reader of my work for more than ten years; I trust his opinion always. Other Reed friends—Osman Balkan, Jake Becker, Jacob Bromberg, Dan Denvir, Kate Hardy, and Andy Rumbach—have exemplified the twinned art of living well and thinking well. Many thanks are due to the remarkable friends I made during graduate school: Caetlin Benson-Allott, Jacob Brogan, Jane Carr, Lily Cui, Sarah Ensor, Andrea Gadberry, Danielle and Jameel Haque, Paul Flaig, Ari Linden, Leo Pollak, and Seth Perlow. Particular gratitude is due to Stephanie DeGooyer, who provided much cheer and encouragement, and to Jess Keiser, Owen Boynton, and Ingrid Diran, who offered useful comments on various iterations of these pages. And, in the words of Montaigne when asked to explain his friendship to de la Boétie, I say to Myranda Gillies, "Par ce que c'estoit luy; par ce que c'estoit moy."

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Eric Swanson and Devon Hodges, for their unflagging interest in my work, their careful feedback on all my writing, and their commitment to intellectual rigor. I am the lucky writer who can count her parents among her most important readers. I also thank my brother Tristan Swanson, and my dear extended family, especially Kathryn Swanson, Carmela Ciararu, and Bill Tagliani. Kip Berman was an advocate of my studiousness when I was a somewhat wayward college freshman and he was an even more footloose senior. He has remained a pillar and has shown me what it means to be steadfast—to another, and to a goal. When my grandma Shirley Wolfe died last April, we discovered that she had been a prolific diarist. Her journals—witty, cranky, serious, and artistically ambitious—

remind me of the tireless performances of authorship I discuss in the pages that follow. To keep writing, without a clear end or an audience, is an achievement from which I draw inspiration.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Talking of Michelangelo? The Salon Writers Against Influence

"Most inspiration [is] merely unconscious plagiarism, and writing in general [is] a moment of arrested development"—Natalie Barney (*The One who is Legion* 96)

"We talked through tea, through whiskey…through the night"—Muriel Draper (*Music at Midnight* 111)

"I can conceive of a library without books"—Margaret Anderson (*"*Home as an Emotional Adventre" 54)

"My entire associative process is composed of such images and such conversations!"—Jean Toomer ("Notes from Mill House Gurdjieff Meeting" 1**)**

In New York City in the early 1940s, Muriel Draper drafted a short screenplay about the music salon she had run in London between 1909-1914. Her salon, whose guests included John Singer Sargent, Henry James, and Vaslav Nijinsky, had been the inspiration for several popular articles in *Harper's Magazine*, a bestselling 1928 memoir, *Music at Midnight*, and an improvisational NBC radio show, "It's a Woman's World" (1937-1938). Draper's "arrangement for filming," stored within her capacious archive at the Beinecke library, describes the lively, impromptu quality of these gatherings, but also communicates her sense of her salon's literary importance:

> It was not long before London heard about this miraculous private concert season, and used every means to obtain invitations and place in this exclusive auditorium….Results show immediately. Musicians who had been afraid that this music at midnight was only a new lion-hunting ruse are convinced of the Drapers' sincerity and of their own opportunities for musical happiness in the big room, and they turn up with and without invitations, sometimes in such numbers that small orchestral works can be performed….

> Muriel's guest at [one] concert is the leader of the American intellectual colony, Henry James. As a special favor, Paul asks to arrange the midnight music for Henry James' first experience of this ritual. Paul's program is to be made of surprises, novelties, and experiments—possibly world-shattering experiments, worthy of their distinguished guest. (2-3)

The scene grows increasingly wild: by the end of the evening, the guests are "ankle-deep in china fragments" but "Mr. James' interest has never flagged" (5).

Draper may exaggerate her salon's exclusivity and James's enthusiasm for her gatherings. She claimed the distinction of James's acquaintance first in an article about him, then in her memoir, and again in this script for a movie that was never made. Draper's marshaling of James's authority is, to use her words, the "lion hunting" of a minor writer. The archival recovery of neglected artistic contributions tends to be its own form of "lion-hunting." Scholars shed light on forgotten but important figures like Draper, expanding scholarly understanding of the cultural settings that shaped modernist experimentation in the early 20th century. But these studies tend to leave intact the terms of Draper's obsolescence: a restrictive understanding of modernist literature and a surprisingly under-theorized conception of the role of literary sociability. Salons, and their organizers, tend to be read as sources of influence, through which subsequent artistic developments can be better understood. "Performances of Authorship in the Modernist Salon" rethinks modernism's relationship of indebtedness to the scenes of its creation. When studying salons, other scholars have found the conversations that shaped literary production. I find conversational modes of literature, performed by writers for whom authorship emerged through social networks and literary exercises but rarely cohered into a final, written product. These writers are literary lions of a sort, but they change the way we hunt through

archives.

Within salons like Draper's, literary form was reassessed to challenge the arbitrariness of limiting literature to books and to destabilize still-persistent origin myths that describe texts as the stable products of imperfectly accessible, but profoundly influential, social contexts. Modernism's gatherings were not simply sources of creative inspiration or cultural arbitration. Salons were themselves a form of artistic production in which the social differentiation of literary form—the inevitable drift of the meaning of "the literary" through a range of authors and audiences, through enactment and embodiment—became visible as an evolving "work" of literature. Published books gave way to the interdisciplinary performances of authorship I call "salon writing": conversations, musical recitals, radio broadcasts, skits, letters, and journals. For example, Draper's insistence that only a writer—Henry James—can appreciate the "midnight music" of her salon captures her long effort to show how literary qualities are best apprehended through relational engagement and aesthetic diffraction.

Echoing earlier media theorists,[1] John Guillory writes, "remediation makes medium visible" (324). My project suggests that within modernist salons, the work of remediation—of trying to understand and represent that contested element, "the literary," by viewing it through other mediums—became itself a practice of authorship. Literature as we conventionally understand it (single-authored, imaginative texts that achieve recognition as such) is hard to

[1] Guillory's 2010 essay, "The Genesis of the Media Concept" takes its inspiration from Walter Benjamin's insistence that "the medium through which works of art continue to influence later ages is always different from the one in which they affect their own age." Later writers have made similar statements; most famous, of course, is Marshall McLuhan's dictum that "the medium is the message." Guillory's discussion of the process and effects of remediation echoes Lisa Gitelman's claim in *Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (2006) that "It is not just that each new medium represents its predecessors, as Marshall McLuhan noted long ago, but rather, as Rick Altman (1984, 121) elaborates, that media represent and delimit representing,

"see" within these shifting settings and varied careers. By continuously "remediating" literature through different aesthetic forms, salon writers turned what we tend to read as literary *effects*—the ability to highlight connections or fissures between ideology and its instantiation, to reflect on circuits of communication, to prefigure new environments and forms of reception, and to expose the personae of a speaking position—into *examples* of literature. Through these performances, "the literary" became visible as an unfolding object, challenging the conventional reading of the salon as influential, but not itself a mode of literature. This literature of process, or salon writing, refused the ontological separation of the textual object and its author, a distinction that is often read as constitutive of literary modernism. The work of the writer also became an unfinished performance, a labor of being, through which a range of activities—salon discussions, improvisational radio shows, reader-response columns, and reading group games—acquired literary value while also calling attention to the tendency for values to change.

I examine four key scenes of salon authorship: Natalie Barney's unpublished, experimental memoirs about her Paris literary salon, which posit her own patronage as work of literature; Muriel Draper's acclaimed memoir and NBC radio show, which circulate her London music salon as a literary form; Margaret Anderson's "Reader Critic" column in *The Little Review*, in which she sought to write the salon in collaboration with her audience; and Jean Toomer's mystical exercises within his Gurdjieff reading groups, which dramatize, through social enactment, *Cane*'s interrogation of normative performances of race. By drawing attention to efforts made by these writers to record, archive, and perform transient literary experience, my work questions the presumed irretrievability of forums of modernist literary sociability. I take seriously as material practice what has been treated as a metaphor: for Gertrude Stein, writing

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so that the new media provide new sites for the ongoing and vernacular experience of

was *like* "talking and listening" (*Lectures in America* 174) but for the lesser known American salon writers of my study—Barney, Draper, Anderson, and Toomer—talking and listening *was* a form of writing.

At the turn of the 20th century, histories of salons proliferated.[2] It would be going too far to say that salons did not exist as an object of thought until this moment, but the paucity of earlier histories does suggest that salon-mania is a distinctly 20th century phenomenon, at least within the English-language publishing market. Almost all of these turn-of-the-century studies concern the French Enlightenment. Of these, Europeans wrote the majority, and women wrote nearly half. The authors tend to trot out platitudes about women's powers of influence. "Nothing has struck me so forcibly as the remarkable mental vigor and the far-reaching influence of women whose theater was mainly a social one," wrote English writer Amelia Gere Mason in 1891 (v). "If [salon hostesses] do not make history," wrote another English writer, Edith Sichel, in 1895, "they compile it, and allow their own names to disappear admidst those of their authorities" (23).[3]

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representation as such" (4).

[2] I limited my search to nonfiction books written in English. Between 1800 and 1890, there were a total of 5 books published on salons, all but one concerning France. Between 1890-1915, there were 17 books published on salons. Of these, 14 concern French salons. 2 concern American salons and 1 concerns German salons. Of the first editions copies of these books, 8 were first printed in the United Kingdom, 4 were first printed both in the UK and the USA, and 5 was first published in the USA. This means that in the 25-year period between 1890 and 1915, there were 240% more books published on the salon than in the preceding 90 years. Of the total 17 books, 9 were written by women, 4 of whom were American.

[3] The sheer numbers of books published on this subject in the years preceding women's enfranchisement may suggest that they compose a backlash, whether avowed or not, against women's rights activism. Of course, the irony is that the Enlightenment salons represent the possibility of cultural and political change through the energy of private actors, a legacy the women's rights movement extended and enlarged. As with most displays of nostalgia, then, these salon historians' expressed longing for their period of study is predicated on their sense of the undesirability of its modern reenactment. But there are notable exceptions. Helen Clergue's 1907 study, *The Salon: A Study of French Society*, credits the salon with enabling the "overthrow the

These turn-of-the-century histories share the belief that the informal, free-spirited sociability of the Enlightenment has died out.[4] English biographer Evelyn Beatrice Hall lamented in 1901 that "The Salonières have passed, like their Salons, forever. In the rush and hurry of modern life there is no time for women to make conversation a cultivated accomplishment" (1-2). This sentiment continued well into the first decades of the 20th century, even as bohemian circles flourished. The French salon, wrote English historian Henry Shelley in 1912, "never took root in England and every effort to establish it in America must prove abortive" (180). Shelley attributes this supposed absence of modern salons to a failure of modern "temperament," but other writers provided fuller accounts. "The reasons for [the death of salons] are many," explains Valerian Tornius in his lengthy 1929 homage, *Salons,*

> but the chief is that our times are ruled by the material . . . The power of interesting oneself in others, the earnest discussions of serious subjects, the delightful talks with one of the other sex, which made the charm of society in past ages—these things are completely at an end. Above all, the absence of well-worded conversation is most noticeable nowadays, and where this is lacking no true salon can develop. (313)

Such opinions about the decline of salon conversation were not limited to the mainstream press. Within A. R. Orage's modernist journal, *The New Age* (1907-1922), Francis Crierson published a series of romanticized articles about French salon culture, lamenting the ascendancy of the music

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old régime" (43) and subtly emboldens contemporaneous women to take seriously their intellectual equality with men.

[4] In the late-nineteenth century, Sir John Pentland Mahaffy, a noted classicist and conversationalist who counted Oscar Wilde among his students and protégés, penned a very popular conversation manual aimed at addressing the fact that "conversation is at a point far lower than it might be" (19). Through his work, he hoped to correct the impression that "no one in London knows how to have a *salon*" (100). This guide were reprinted several times, and also modified. See, for example, *The Principles of the Art of Conversation* (1887), which was reprinted 5 times. See also *Conversation, Containing Thoroughly Practical Suggestions on the*

salon over the literary salon, since "it is easier to make music than it is to converse with wit and distinction" (61).

Although fewer in number, the contemporaneous accounts of American salons are less gloomy. In her 1900 study *Salons Colonial and Republican*, Anne Hollingsworth Wharton, to whom Edith Wharton was related by marriage,[5] writes,

> The word 'salon' has been used to designate the Republican drawing-rooms here described, because no other term so fitly represents social circles presided over by cultivated women as that which was first applied to the brilliant coteries gathered together by the famous French women of the seventeenth century. (vii)

Muriel Harris makes the same point in her 1921 article "Salons Old and New," "It is possible that the next salons may exist in America…Here again culture is sought, very much as it was sought in the eighteenth century" (831). As if confirming this prediction, Americans ran English-speaking modernism's most important salons, with the notable exceptions of the Bloomsbury group and Violet Hunt's Camden circle. Across Anglo modernism's principle cities, American-led salons flourished: the Steins' salon in Paris; Natalie Barney's salon in Paris; the Arensbergs' salon in New York City; A'Lelia Walker's salon in Harlem, the Stieglitz circle in New York, Mabel Dodge's salons in Greenwich, Florence, and Tahoe; Muriel Draper's salons in London and New York City; and Floyd Dell's 57th street gatherings in Chicago, to name a few of the most famous.

Of course, none of the participants at these salons would have seen themselves reflected in articles like Harris's, which offers a too hearty endorsement of growing American "lecture

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Important Subject of What to Say, and Just How and When to Say It (1896, reprinted 1908).
5 See Anne Hollinghurst Wharton's 1880 *Genealogy of the Wharton family*. Edward Robbins, Edith Wharton's first husband, is mentioned on page 44.

audiences," much less in the stodgier accounts by Tornius, whose history offers nothing but "pearls" (34), "charm," and "politesse" (130). Modernists repudiated the wealth and manners associated with old European salons as well as the parochialism of American club culture. "Salon" is retroactive appellation: few modernists identified with it. Even wealthy, imperious Natalie Barney, whose "Fridays" were regular and luxurious, scoffed at the idea she had ever had a "salon."[6] Floyd Dell called the "salonière" a "failure" (17); Rebecca West lamented the "dull salons of London" (187); Pound questioned "the value/ Of well-gowned approbation/ Of literary effort" (*Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* XII); and an anonymous columnist[7] complained in *The Little Review*, "I am sick of the salon-like groups who gather for the purpose of thinking and then forget to think" ("Blaa-Blaa-Blaa" 41).

These writers' distaste for the idea of the salon, even as they organized and attended artistic gatherings, has been read as characteristic of bohemia's ambivalent relationship to its own cultural privilege and institutional networks. Janet Lyon offers the clearest appraisal of what she calls the "salon-driven paradox" (691): that salon organizers acquired social distinction through its disavowal:

> On the one hand, within the dramatic setting of the salon, certain incongruities inherent in modernity may be smoothed out: class distinctions and gender barriers can be partially suspended; social stigmas accruing to sexual transgressions (homosexuals, mistresses, actresses, libertines) can be ignored or frankly acknowledged and even thematized for an evening or a season; a form of titular equality can be extended to some few of those

[6] Barney mused in an interview, "Did I have a salon? Nothing official in any case. No party nor position reigned there, and even less me." Jean Chalon remembers her being even more blunt, stating, "I had never had a salon, I only had *têtes-à-têtes*.

> modern subjects constituted by, but unavailing of, the social fraternity pledged in political modernity"
>
> […]
>
> On the other hand, and at the same time, the salon's Enlightenment scripts help to secure it as a legitimating institution, to use Pierre Bourdieu's idiom, by which he means, in the case of the salon, an institution through which artistic legitimacy and political power are simultaneously valorized in an exchange of mutual consecration. (690)

Discussions of salons have tended to favor a single side of this paradox. Some critics have drawn attention to how the egalitarian spirit of these communities enabled new collaborations, diverse forms of artistic production, and cross-cultural pollinations, while others have shown how avant-garde coteries gained prestige through the rejection of bourgeois values—an elitist gesture with an aristocratic pedigree.

These different perspectives, as Lyon argues, are compatible, and can be assessed within Pierre Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, in which complicity and emancipation are co-implicated. When a bohemian community asserts its separation from society, it posits its own critical distance as an inalienable social value—an axiom of the field it would repudiate. Disenchanted relations, in other words, are not proof of exemption from social determination. The critique of normative values can nonetheless enable forms of progress by making manifest (and thus available for scrutiny) a field's structuring principles. Although Bourdieu has been accused of the same "pessimistic functionalism" for which he rebukes Althusser ("Men and Machines" 308), Bourdieu's work should instead be characterized as showing the possibility of immanent

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[7] A series of columns signed "The Scavenger" ran in *The Little Review* in 1915. I have not been able to identify "The Scavenger's" identity, but I suspect Anderson or Heap, who often assumed pseudonyms within the journal.

social transformation, as critics such as Lyon, Guillory, Richard Terdiman, and Toril Moi have shown.[8]

These careful assessments of reciprocal power structures have enlivened modernist studies, challenging the "cultural divide" theses of Huyssen and Burger (and to some extent Adorno and Habermas) that read modernism's strategies of cultural exclusion as less equivocal (and more successful). But even critics sensitive to Lyon's "salon-driven paradox" have left intact what might be called a "paradigm of influence," used by nearly every scholarly appraisal of salons and similar social gatherings. Liberal or reactionary, artistic or political, salons are read as notable for their effects. Just as in the nostalgic histories written at the turn-of-the-century, salons are still treated as the absent centers of cultural production. Salons "enabled connections" (Farfan 52); "accelerated the social processing of ideas" (Marek 64); "taught artists to

[8] Toril Moi argues in "Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture" that Bourdieu "enables us to reconceptualize gender as a social category in a way which undercuts the traditional essentialist/nonessentialist divide" (1019). She explains that when gender is understood as shaped by a spectrum of constantly shifting fields, each marked by different discursive limits, the nodes that identify these crisis points between doxa and anti-doxa become more visible. Legitimate speech, or speech that is in Bourdieu's reading "dominant, but not recognized as such" (1021), can be made recognizable through just such sociological analysis which "situates" a "discourse…in relation to the structures of the field in which it arises" (1028). Richard Terdiman invokes Bourdieu to describe the processes by which the social field reinstates but also can transform itself. He describes these field-specific modes of struggle as "counter-discourses," not be confused with dialectical discourses. Though they challenge the dominant discourse, and may subvert it, they can still be co-opted by the dominant discourse because they "evoke a principle of order just as systematic as that which sustains the discourses they seek to subvert" (56). In other words, a counter-discourse seeks to replace the dominant discourse, but will not necessarily abolish the hierarchical structure of domination. John Guillory offers one of the clearest appraisals of the possibility for immanent change within Bourdieu's social model, a possibility that is not always actualized, nor with good results, but that exists as an inevitable effect of interacting fields of production: "Bourdieu's sociology in no way denies the ubiquity of the struggle or the fact of social change. Bourdieu offers at least an implicit descriptive theory of social change, to wit, the failure of reproduction. But he would say that such change is an effect of struggles that do not usually have as their conscious end the progressive transformation of society implied in the cultural studies project ("Bourdieu's Refusal" 370).

communicate in a modern way" (Crunden xiv); and helped "publicize and arbitrate," "shape consensus," and "unite in dialogue those who would not normally meet" (Braun and Bilski 2). Such statements are not much different than Helen Clergue's comment in 1907 that the "influence" that salons "exerted on literature is incalculable" (7).

A salon, in these as in most critical accounts, is either the mythic origin of creativity (the inspiration for future projects) or the eventual outcome of creativity (where, in utopian imaginings, attachment and community defeat alienation and contention). Political scientists have tracked the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere out of 18th century gatherings of *Lumières*; sociologists have described the significance of salons for the creation of artistic autonomy; historians have credited the salon with helping to routinize national languages; literary scholars have traced the development of the idea of personal style out of salon correspondence; and feminist scholars from a range of disciplines have drawn attention to how salons helped detach the home from domesticity, rendering femininity a more variable attribute, capable of transforming and transcending familial space. Out of these studies, the salon has emerged as both an historical phenomenon associated with periods of upheaval (a response and solution to unsatisfactory social norms) and a conceptual model for *any* cultural formation that acts as an influential fulcrum between institutional and informal settings (where the salon describes emergent cultural groupings of all sorts, as seen in the word's contemporary appropriation by the "indie" marketplace, which uses it to feign resistance to commercialism).

Modernist writers' refusal of the descriptor "salon" surely indicates their vexed relationship to cultural prestige and commodification. But it is also an indication of their distress at this pervasive "paradigm of influence," in which the salon is reduced to an abstract elsewhere—the beginning or end of artistic production but never an instantiation of it. Margaret

Anderson put it this way: "[*The*] *Little Review* is an existence…It needs no anterior functioning to explain it" (*The Little Review Anthology* 85). Bruno Latour has made a similar observation about the broader category of the "social," the grouping through which the salon derives its meaning. The "social," he argues, has been paradoxically identified as a given quality of a society and an activity undertaken by society, leading to an impasse where the social is a structure that simultaneously acts on itself.[9] Bourdieu could be similarly criticized. He, like Latour, provides useful descriptions of how objects change through social use. But his dependence on a *deus ex machina* like "transubstantiation"[10] to describe the process by which a disposition (an inclination for a social role, or a habitus) is substituted for a position (inherited social means, or a field) reveals some circularity within his own schema. To avoid such circularity, salons should not be read as both inculcating dispositions (an inclination for dialogic literature, for example) and as the effect of these same dispositions (where the fact of salon conversation reveals an inclination for dialogue amongst writers).

As early twentieth-century sociologist Karl Mannheim wrote, "the particular features of a given process of modification cannot be explained by reference to them" (387). My research of

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[9] See Latour, "Introduction: How to Resume the Task of Tracing Associations" and "First Source of Uncertainty: No Group, Only Group Formation" in *Reassembling the Social.* Latour describes the standard understanding of sociology (in which the social designates a "special domain of reality" often invoked to explain itself) (13) as the "sociology of the social" whereas his own model provides a "sociology of associations" (9), seeking to understand the "principle of connections" (13) behind all assemblages and movements.

[10] In *Distinction*, Bourdieu uses the example of academic scholars to illustrate the "transubstantiation" (6) involved in every assertion of personal fitness for a social position. Scholars, in Bourdieu's analysis, secure their position by employing their symbolic capital (as manifested in their degree, in their ability to seem at ease in conversation, and in their knowledge of culture beyond their field of study) and by simultaneously denying it (by claiming that their abilities are not reducible to the certificate, nor the product of their usually haut-bourgeois background). This is equivalent to a substitution of disposition (seeming natural aptitude) for position (a place in society determined by a set of cultural, economic, and social factors), a

the modernist salon begins here, with social epistemology's injunction that we readdress the contradictory logic that is characteristic of studies of society. Such a project has applicability to "social" literature, in particular, the conversational writing and literary conversation of the salon. Franco Moretti describes literature as a "system of genres"[11] (30). The literary activities of the salon must be read in this way: as a "divergence" within the system of genres instead of, as is so often the case, a force outside the system that, confusingly, is also its origin. In particular, I consider the role of conversation for writers who were, unsurprisingly, superlative talkers. For the American writers of my study, salon conversation was not literature's wellspring or ideal culmination, but rather an ongoing demonstration of the literary, disseminated through radio shows, role-playing games, reader-response columns, and unpublished writing. This salon writing, with its pauses, interruptions, and provocations, should be understood as the *practice* of Moretti's "theory—of [literary] diversity": a dramatic exemplification of modernism's insistence that "[n]othing affects these people, except our conversation" (Pound, quoting Yeats, *Canto 83*).

I have suggested that displacement has heretofore defined the scholarly relationship of the salon and its conversations *to* writing—the salon always receding from discussions of the textual object. Displacement is in fact a quality *of* salon writing—another reason why salon practitioners have been hard to identify as authors, perpetuating the "paradigm of influence."

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replacement (or "transubstantiation") that Bourdieu locates in every competition for distinction (6).

[11] Moretti explains that we can only appreciate this system of genres through a long view of literature (or through what he calls "distant reading" in "Conjectures on World Literature"). Elsewhere in *Graphs, Maps, Trees* he explains the system of genres through the model of tree: "instead of reiterating the verdict of the market, abandoning extinct literature to the oblivion decreed by its initial readers, these trees take the lost 99 per cent of the archive and reintegrate it into the fabric of literary history, allowing us to finally 'see' it" (77). This is a very different

Jean Toomer, author of Harlem Renaissance masterpiece *Cane* (1923), for example, sought to integrate what he called "non-identification" into his writing and his reading group exercises, a process through which he re-articulated racial double consciousness as a necessary feature of successful authorship. Toomer's voluminous archive, which he began to keep in 1924, presents "non-identification" as a philosophical model for understanding the inevitable alienation of identity ("Notes on Gurdjieff Practice"). But "non-identification" also describes Toomer's dispersive writing and archiving practice, in which authorship emerges through multiple, unfinished forms (lists, letters, journal entries, skits, and memoir manuscripts), resisting coherency. Whatever Toomer hoped would someday "be discovered"[12] in this archive is not what we would normally label a work of literature. Fragmentariness has long been seen as the *sine qua non* of modernism. But the standard examples—*The Waste Land*, *The Cantos*, *Finnegans Wake*—are only fragmentary at the level of style, in the formal fragmenting of content on the page. Salon writing, as is particularly evident in Toomer's archive, forces us to contend with not just fragmentary texts but also fragments *of* text.

Other salon writers displaced the text altogether. Margaret Anderson, who published intentionally empty pages within her influential modernist magazine, *The Little Review*, used blankness to present the new speaking positions engendered through the reader-editor debate of her conversational column, "The Reader Critic." André Malraux's description of sculpture as

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activity than using the archive for *reinterpretations* of the literary canon—an activity that is always posited in relation to "the verdict of the market."

[12] In 1924, Toomer wrote a letter to his friend Howard Schubert, explaining he was beginning to keep his own archive: "It is possible that…my writings will be 'discovered' one of these days, and be published, and do all I had hoped they would do. It is also possible and even probable that none of them have really come off, that they are not worth publishing because I was not able to put the real stuff into them" (Selected Unpublished Writings xix).

"voices of silence,"[13] could be applied to Anderson's "blank issue." It is an almost sculptural presentation of the "voice" of discursive space, enlarged by discussion and also marking the distance between conversing subjects. T.J. Clark has argued that modernism "presents itself as a work of interminable and absolute decomposition, a work which is always pushing 'medium' to its limits—to its ending" (153) and indeed, the blank pages, unpublished memoirs, broadcasts, and performance skits that I identify as the practices of salon writing could be read as demonstrations, whether intentional or not, of literature's collapse (as well evidence of the effort to recover unmediated experience, long seen as an endeavor that distinguishes the modern from the postmodern). But by attesting to the literariness of activities that do not seem to wield recognizable forms of authorial power (and may even appear to be in opposition to authorship), I read the salon writers' exploration of the "ending" of literature as an effort to call attention to the conflicted borders between text and context, agent and object, that make possible the renewal of literary form.

In describing the cultural topography of the modernist salon and in arguing for its identity as a mode of literature, deployed by writers for whom the literary object was partial, underway, and relative, not, as in many accounts of modernism, whole, stable, and essential, my project deemphasizes historical genealogy (which risks reading the modernist salon as the weaker progeny of its robust, Enlightenment parent) in favor of an archeological practice that takes seriously the literariness—and authorial deliberateness[14]—of modernism's vast archives.

[13] Malraux's *Les Voix du Silence* was published in 1951. I first found reference to this work in an appendix syllabus Marshall McLuhan wrote for *Understanding Media* (527).

[14] This insight is indebted to Jeremy Braddock's conclusion to *Collecting as Modernist Practice* (2012), in which he considers the surprising fact that so many modernist authors, even relatively unknown ones, had "maintained their records," organizing evidence of their "author-practice" for future archival study (224). Braddock suggests that the modernist period might be "the age of 'author-practice," which "oblige[s] a reflexive mode of inquiry when approaching these

Voluminous collections like Toomer's, Barney's, and Draper's have been read as supplements available for textual and historical analysis; I suggest that these archives—composed of journals, letters, broadcast notes, and performance scripts—are themselves the texts of the salon. In the related case of Anderson's *The Little Review*, I show how periodicals must be read for the long-view discursive strategies deployed by their editors and re-appropriated by their readers. Anderson's salon-in-print, and her distinctive editorial voice, became visible to me through comparative study of two peer journals: *The Dial* and *The Ladies' Home Journal*, the latter an archival holding at the Kroch Library.

This archival work turned my attention to how the salon writers theorized the conditions of their literary participation by making these conditions available as writing and archiving practices. Through self-archiving, daily writing, and evolving performances of authorship, these writers also posited their literary contributions as artifacts of activity—but ones that decay or necessarily remain imperfectly legitimated and incomplete. Yet materialist ontology, with its focus on reading the social meaning of objects, has its limits when studying the salon. Salon writers refused to objectify the literary and instead transmuted literary form into praxis—into the struggle of *remaining* a writer, of never being reduced to a final, written text. The analyst of salon writing thus has to be a recorder of movement, not simply a reader of objects.

For example, Natalie Barney's unpublished memoirs could be read as a sign of the failure

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documents" (225). "We must consider ourselves," he continues, "as one *intended* audience of the seemingly private letters" (225). *All We Know: Three Lives* (2012), Lisa Cohen's study of the writing, collecting, and curating practices of forgotten modernist women writers and artists, corroborates this suggestion that modernists were particularly interested in their own archival legacies and in interpellating future readers. Cohen partly credits modernist self-documentation to burgeoning fan culture: by building archives that "documented various artists' careers, traced…rapport with these figures" (159), artists could also save "less well-known figures and [themselves]," attesting to the "continual, conflicting needs for intimacy and distance that direct the traffic between stars and fans" (158).

of a sexist literary market, whose options for female literary fame were limited, or as proof of Barney's failure to work around these obstacles. But I view her personal writing as evidence of the extent to which salon writers like Barney understood their social and sexual activities as akin to published authorship. In Barney's *L'Adultère ingénue* [*The Naive Adulterer*][15] (1912), an unpublished memoir written two years after a period of great literary production, she describes her performances of a lesbian disposition within her salon and, more surprisingly, within a brothel, as forms of authorship. Robert Scholes has argued for the centrality of the brothel within modernism. In his opinion, women never truly become modernists because they have never have access to the double-position of male writers (who are prostitutes but can also buy prostitutes). Thus far the counter examples to Scholes's argument have all been metaphorical: feminist scholars have expanded the definition of a "brothel" to include both its various figurative meanings and the impact of less visible forms of prostitution on women writers. For Barney, prostitution was not simply a constitutive trope: *L'Adultère ingénue* may be the only literal "brothel text" in modernist women's writing. Barney, like Scholes's male modernists, deeply understood the relationship between output and putting out. Indeed, all the salon writers experimented with how best to "embody" authorship; their archives highlight the non-textual dimensions of literary participation—perhaps what Margaret Anderson meant when she commented in *The Little Review*, "I can conceive of a library without books" ("Home as an Emotional Adventure" 54).

Barney's *L'Adultère ingénue* alternates between reflections on literature and the story of her love affair with poet and writer Elisabeth de Gramont, who was unhappily married. Barney

[15] Barney wrote *L'Adultère ingénue* in French, her language of choice for nearly all her published and unpublished works. On the first page of the manuscript, Barney notes that it was

describes her literary tastes: "I only like authors who tell me what I already think" (59), voicing a smug indifference to literary inspiration and authorial competition that finds corollary in the bland heterosexuality her memoir skewers. She again displays this nonchalant relationship to books as she prepares for a boat trip. She writes, "I had brought on board diverse books: Stendhal, The Iliad, William Blake, a navigation guide, Whitman, Zarathoustra…two dictionaries...Louys's Songs of Bilitis, Pascale's Pensées, Keats, Theocritus, Je me souviens, Éparpillements and Rimbaud." She continues, "I knew however that many of these books would never be read…other books had titles that pleased me even though I knew would never open them" (83). That Barney's list includes two of her own books [*Je me souviens* and *Éparpillements*] but no other women authors might suggest a degree of egotism, a self-styled masculine exceptionalism that has been imputed to a host of modernist women writers, who are faulted for not fulfilling today's conceptions of feminist authorship. But the haphazardness of Barney's list (Stendhal next to the *Iliad*, Whitman next to a navigation guide, her own books in between Theocritus's bucolic poetry and Rimbaud's Parisian decadence), along with her insistence that she won't read these books anyway, undermines the organizational logic and the presumed literary value of the masculine literary canon from which she nevertheless derives her sense of literary belonging.

Barney's attitude toward her "diverse books" provides an implicit critique of New Critical tenets *avant la lettre*. New Critical strategies of objective interpretation were consolidated by and through modernist books; where New Criticism would begin, Barney ends. For her, books are *just* objects, no different from the other possessions she brings on her voyage, like the red leather slippers she describes in loving detail. This discussion sets the stage for

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"écrit vers 1912" [written around 1912], describing events from 1911. All the English

Barney's trip to the brothel, an excursion Barney claims was meant to "take away" de Gramont's "romantic view" of heterosexuality (123a). By locating her lesbian difference within this allegedly oppositional framework, she reveals the illusoriness of all claims to autonomy, be they sexual, or as in the case of her reading list, textual. Through her objectification of bodies in the brothel and books in her collection, Barney calls attention to the acts of intention that create the appearance of "natural" sexuality and "stable" literary canons. In this way, Barney shifts importance away from final product—the literary work or the sex act—to the decisions that framed and thus that helped create its sense of naturalness and value. Modernist studies has increasingly foregrounded the "strategies of authorial self-construction" (Galow 317) that led to the creation of a modernist canon; Barney's interest in the experiences that shape sexual and literary preference shows how authorship includes not merely the production of books but the production of attitudes towards them.

Joan Scott has cautioned against the use of "experience" as an axiomatic form of historical evidence. Scholars acknowledge the constructed, revisable nature of historical narratives but treat "experience" as authentic—a "reflection of the real" (776). Experience, she contests, is not a transhistorical fact—it is contingent, taking on different meanings in different settings. Feminist literary scholars have drawn on Scott,[16] particularly her claim for "the literary"

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translations are my own.

[16] In her essay "The Authority of Experience" within Ardis and Lewsis's 2003 edited collection, *Women's Experience of Modernity: 1875–1945*, Francesca Sawaya writes,

> "'Experience,' a concept crucial to the development of pluralist and feminist discourse, has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years. Joan Scott, for example, writes that the concept has been useful for 'historians of difference' because it fits so comfortably within disciplinary paradigms whereby old narratives are displaced 'when new evidence is discovered' (24). Such success, however, also reveals the concept's limitations. Histories that use experience as evidence, Scott argues, tend to 'take as self-evident the identities of those who experience is being documented and thus naturalize their

as quality that should be used to describe the "complex, contradictory processes" that compose even the most seemingly basic events of personhood (794). By challenging those who would differentiate her "work" as a lesbian lover from the canonical literature she brings on her voyage, Barney presents her "experience" as both indisputable (it is as solid as a book by Stendhal) and as questionable (as dubious a source of literary or personal depth as her indifferent reading practices). The other writers of my study also equivocated about the "truth" of their experiences, even as their writing drew heavily on their own personal histories and quotidian social interactions.

Toomer, for instance, followed Gurdjieff's mandate to "keep a notebook" but "do nothing" with it, so to remain attentive to shifts of "conscious experience" rather than being limited to recorded experience, or what he calls "mechanicality" ("Notes from New York Gurdjieff Meeting"). And Margaret Anderson, in her 1951 memoir, *The Fiery Fountains,* claimed *The Little Review*'s "blank issue" had "sixty-four blank pages" when it actually had thirteen, as if to further un-write the pages of her own history (108). The salon writers actively resisted being understood through their experiences and the racial or gender subjectivities associated with their experiences. Even the concept of an instrumental (rather than epistemological) standpoint, advocated by many contemporary feminist scholars,[17] would

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difference' (25). Experience becomes a 'foundational concept,' posited as working in 'a realm of reality outside of discourse' (32)."

[17] Since the classic articulations of feminist standpoint theory, Nancy Hartsock's *The Feminist Standpoint* (1983) and Patricia Hill Collins's *Defining Black Feminist Thought* (1991), numerous scholars have returned to their claims (that, according to Hartsock, that "women's lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy" and, according to Collins, that "[a]ll African-American women share the common experience of being Black women in a society that denigrates women of African descent"), seeking to understand how an identity can be relational, contingent, and nevertheless function as a truth category. How, in other words, can women be mobilized as a like-minded community without the problematic demarcation of what counts as a "valid" demonstration of womanhood? See, for example,

overstate the salon writers investment in the meaning of (or influence exerted by) a background, sexual proclivity, skin color, and so on. Scott asks, "whether history can exist without foundations and what it might look like if it did [?]" (781). The answer might partly take the form of Barney's unserious memoirs, Draper's interest in her "invisible listener[s],"[18] Anderson's production of negative space, and Toomer's intentionally inconclusive archive.

Sianne Ngai has provocatively argued that an "artform's potential to not-faciliate racial identification should not be confused with its potential to facilitate racial disidentification," a reading that could easily be transposed to questions of gender identification. The salon writers I study I also elected to "*not*-play," to "create and *preserve*….expressive gaps" (199). They wanted neither to be held accountable for their speaking positions nor be held unaccountable for them: an effort that is, as Ngai shows, different from incipient identification or dis-identification. Instead, they suspended the discussion of the "grounding" of identity, a move analogous to their repudiation of the salon as a fount of creativity. They did not exhibit the "embodied formalism" (7) that Marcia Brennan identifies in the Stieglitz circle, in which an artwork was seen to represent the personal life of its creator, thereby reflexively enhancing the aesthetic value of group's collective experience. Nor did their salons demonstrate what Stephen Voyce describes as the "conflat[ion] of art and life" displayed within the Arensbergs' circle (634). Brennan's and Voyce's readings of modernist sociability implicitly ascribe an older role to salon participants, that of the aesthete, for whom the artist is a person who feels like an artist whether or not she produces art. Such focus on identity within the salon also tends to entail a connection between "social experience" and psychological depth (the uncovering of a "real" self), against the grain of

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Hekman, "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Revisited"; Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*; and Intemann, "25 years of Feminist Empiricism and Standpoint Theory: Where are We Now?"

the era's understanding of sociability as it was being theorized within the emerging discipline of sociology.

Sociologists at the turn-of-the-century were at pains to distinguish their field from psychology. "The sociological form of the study of human association starts out from the point where physiology and psychology stop," wrote Albion Small in 1900 (179). Small, founder of the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology, refines this point,

> The psychologist, as such, takes association as the known and fixed factor, in order to pursue investigation of his undetermined subject-matter—the mechanism of the individual actor. The sociologist, as such, on the contrary, takes the individual actor for granted and pursues investigations of his undetermined subject matter, viz., associations (180).

The tendency to seek out associations, or sociability, was at the center of the turf war between psychologists and sociologists. By the late 1920s, *Popular Science* magazine was touting new psychological tests for sociability, which involved mesmerizing the subject with a crystal ball while testing her sensitivity to noise.[19] But sociologists took a different approach. Georg Simmel's argument in "The Metropolis and Mental Life" not withstanding, his 1910 essay on the "The Sociology of Sociability" insists upon an anti-psychological paradigm for understanding social gatherings and sociable people. Although sociability can be "nullified by contrary psychological factors" (255), he does not treat it as itself a psychological factor: "sociability in

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[18] See *Music at Midnight*, 73.

[19] See, for example, "Now They Test your Sociability in Day Dreams," which ran in the Chicago Tribune on April 22, 1926 and "Now We Have Sociability Tests," which ran in *Popular Science* in March of 1927. Both articles discuss an experiment conducted at Northwestern University in which a hypnotic state was induced on the subject through a crystal ball, after which the subject's sensitivity to sound was assessed. High sensitivity to sound indicated a very social person.

its pure form," he argues, "has no ulterior end, no content, and no result outside itself." He stresses that sociability is detached from "content-determined concreteness" of reality; it is a solution to, not an indication of, the "objective content" of an individual's life. In a 1911 article in *Harper's Magazine*, William Dean Howells reasserts that sociability is "objectless." "Ultra-modern sociability," Howells continues, does not even depend upon "personal contact" (640). The salon writers I study seem to have acted like turn-of-the-century sociologists. Like Albion Small, they took "the individual actor for granted," focusing instead on the structure and functioning of their salon associations—understanding these assemblages as *departures* from an individual's personal experiences. As Draper writes at the very beginning of *Music at Midnight*, the "invasion of other people's lives must cease" (17). Her memoir holds to this principle, focusing instead how her guests "participate in the active performance" of her salon (24).

Natalie Barney and Jean Toomer are sometimes read as forsaking essential features of their identities, to their peril. Critics debate whether Barney compromised her lesbian feminism through her conversion to fascism and whether Jean Toomer compromised his legacy as an African-American writer through his alleged racial-passing. Discussions of psychology, and charges of false-consciousness, inevitably loom large in an epoch of enormous cultural tumult. Yet Barney and Toomer, as well as Draper (called the "white negress"[20] by her peers and hounded as a "hard core" Communist by HUAC[21]) and Anderson (whose homosexuality was no

[20] See Steven Watson, *Prepare for Saints: Gertrude Stein, Virgil Thomson, and the Mainstreaming of American Modernism*, 255.

[21] Draper founded the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship in 1942, and became the president of the Congress of American Women (CAW) in 1949 (an offshoot of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), whose ranks included poet Muriel Rukeyser, writer Katherine Anne Porter, and the wife of Sherwood Anderson.) Draper was also an active participant in the League of American Writers, a subsidiary of the Communist Party USA. In 1949, she and the CAW were targeted by the House of Un-American Activities for their Communist sympathies. Draper was hounded throughout the 1950s for her involvement in these

secret), sought to undo processes of identity formation and resisted entering into debates about "representative" subjectivity. Gurdjieffian mysticism, to which all of them but Barney subscribed,[22] mandated that devotees reject the "cartoon" versions of themselves ("Notes to Chicago and Portage groups"). The indeterminate nature of much salon writing must also be read this way—as a rejection of the "cartoon" versions of authorship. In her study of post-bellum African American reading societies, Elizabeth McHenry has called attention to the "planned" invisibility of minority experience by structures of domination (4). But as the salon writers of my study show, invisibility is not always an effect of someone else's power. Perhaps like countless other "minor" modernists, Barney, Draper, Anderson and Toomer seem to have "planned" a degree of invisibility.

Of course, many scholars have rebuffed experiential and identitarian accounts of modernist art. Jennifer Ashton has been particularly critical. She contends that scholars who claim experience as a "principle of composition" advance a psychological "fantasy" of the personal value of literature not endorsed by modernism's practitioners (336). But Ashton insists upon a rigid separation of the artwork from its creator and its audience, a standard argument for aesthetic autonomy—and a related subject/object divide—as the basis of modernism. Ashton's model is inadequate for salon literature, a time-based art form receptive to how production and

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groups: at the end of her life, she was known a "Leader in Red Groups" (*Chicago Tribune* B11). Her *New York Times* obituary states that "Mrs. Draper in recent years had been the storm center of a controversy revolving about her affiliation with groups charged with holding pro-Communist views. The House Committee on Un-American Activities, for example, cited the Congress of American Women as being 'composed primarily of a hard core of Communist party members and circle of close sympathizers'" (L27). Her letter exchange with HUAC is in the Beinecke archive. I have often wondered if Draper's obsolescence from literary history was partly the effect of her having been blacklisted.

[22] Barney's sadomasochistic lovemaking, as described in her memoir, *Amants féminins ou le troisième* (1926), offers her a means to "non-identify" with her experience. See my discussion in Chapter 1 ("Salon Style: Natalie Barney and the Imprint of the Archive").

reception shift between different fields and within different publics. While the salon writers did not psychologize their literature-of-process, they did call attention to the structural effects of a subject's (or a group's) entrance into the field of the artwork's creation. In his discussion of a social group's evolution, Mannheim describes the conditioning effects of "the continuous emergence of new participants in the cultural process" (368). To present this "continuous emergence" as a mode of literature was the ambition of the salon writers. For Barney, it looked like transcribed conversations that become unmoored from assigned speakers; for Draper, it looked like a growing circuit of fan-mail writers; for Anderson, it looked like so many unwritten pages; and for Toomer, it looked like group skits designed to foster non-identification.

A theory of culture tends to begin with a definition of a social group. "Performances of Authorship in the Modernist Salon" asks how theories of groups have tended to define culture, a project that requires reflexive engagement with our assumptions about literary objects and an awareness of how representations of social gatherings can limit and expand our understandings of texts and authors. Salon writing, caught between praxis and form, forces us to think more about literary objects precisely because they are put under pressure. Like the "objects" of performance studies, which have resisted the terms of object-oriented ontology because the constitutive features of performance are social relations and actions, the "objects" of modernist literary salons invite consideration of what sorts of actions compose the material text and, conversely, what forms of boundedness might compose the allegedly more open scenarios of a spontaneous conversation, a discussion group, or a skit. "We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us," writes Bill Brown (4). Modernist salon writers confronted the thingness of literature, exploring how literary form functions and dysfunctions by remediating it through other mediums and ongoing writing practices. Their effort provides an

impetus for literary scholarship today. “If it works, it’s obsolete” (24), wrote Marshall McLuhan, whom Brown inadvertently echoes. Salon writing is very new: not only because what McLuhan calls “chatty form[s]” are the preferred mode of the current generation of emerging authors, who tweet, blog, and comment, but also because these forms, first made visible by modernist salon writers, have yet to be authenticated (44). The literary field, which we mine for forgotten texts, arbitrate through past models, and arrange within genres, is also ours to multiply, complicate, and sunder through attentive reading and careful analysis of salons and their literature. We must keep trying to understand how literature stays current—how it, in other words, stops working.

Chapter 1

Salon Style: Natalie Barney and the Imprint of the Archive

"I never had a salon, I only had *têtes-à-têtes*" ["*Je n'ai jamais eu de salon, j'ai eu seulement des têtes-à-têtes*"] (38) claimed Natalie Barney, a wealthy, overtly lesbian American writer who spent the bulk of her life in Paris and hosted there, from 1909 to 1969, one of the most influential literary salons of the twentieth century.[23] Barney's reduction of her Friday afternoon gatherings to mere "*têtes-à-têtes*" captures one of the crucial dilemmas for scholars of modernist salons and literary sociability. Not only, as Jayne Marek comments in a recent article, is it difficult "to pin down the effects of amorphous movements of authors and aficionados through salons, that is, through temporary and non-material exchanges that occurred in conversations," but also the very organizers of these salons seemed uninterested in ascribing any material validity to their gatherings (63). "Did I have a salon?" Barney mused on another occasion, "Nothing official in any case. No party, nor position, reigned there, and even less me" ["*Ai-je un salon? Il n'ya rien en tout cas d'officiel. Aucun parti, ni aucun parti-pris n'y règne, et encore moins moi-même*"] (40). Barney's refusal to acknowledge the institutional stature of her salon even as it became a fixture of literary Paris can be read both as indicative of bohemia's democratic impulse and as evidence of the latent aristocratism of the avant-garde. The social fluidity she associates with her salon is at once a rebuke to Paris's more snobbish and stolid literary coteries and a signal of her support for older forms of upper-class sociability, where successful rule-breaking indicates one's status as a rule-maker.

This tension between egalitarianism and elitism animating Barney's salon may lie at the

[23] All French translations are my own.

heart of autonomous communities in general,[24] but it is also an historical feature of what Lucy Delap has characterized as avant-garde feminism. In her study *The Feminist Avant-Garde* (2007), Delap argues that critics have mistakenly projected a progressive political program onto early twentieth-century feminists. Her reading "upsets these assumptions and uncovers a distinctively individualist and elitist strand within feminism…[which] was not committed to attaining the vote…[nor] focused on the state and women's inclusion within the state" (5). Barney, who at times described herself as an ardent feminist and yet at other times mocked feminism, who professed the power of association and yet asserted the necessity for detached individuality, and who celebrated homosexual freedom yet subscribed to a particularly potent form of fascism during World War II, certainly exemplifies these very mixed political currents of the early woman's movement. This individualist dimension shapes, and is shaped by, what might seem like Barney's more conventionally acceptable feminist investment in collectivity, in both her salon and in the literary imaginary of her artistic productions. Indeed, Barney is a paradigmatic figure of feminist modernism's complex struggle to prove the individuality of its accomplishments while also finding a home in alternative communities. Other prominent female modernists, such as *Little Review* editor Margaret Anderson and *Egoist* editor Dora Marsden,[25] display a similar investment in individualism that seems at odds with the collective energy of the equal rights activism of the early woman's movement. Barney's difference is one of scale: only

[24] As Pierre Bourdieu has argued, non-consecrated cultural spaces may be "most attractive to those whose social origin has provided them with an inclination towards risky investments" (*Distinction* 297), in other words, to members of an elite background with financial security in the form of an inheritance or investments. Challenges to bourgeois mores—through sexual deviance, flouting of manners, or artistic iconoclasm—may reinforce traditional class hierarchies.

[25] For a detailed account of writer and editor Dora Marsden's turn from feminism to individualism, as seen in the evolution of her journal from *The Freewoman* (1911-1912) to the *New Freewoman* (1913) and finally to *The Egoist* (1914-1919), see Rabaté.

in her case does this elitism culminate in fascism, and although little magazines surely produced, and were in part produced by, publics of readers,[26] the community Barney helped create through her salon is of a more tangible kind, and thus appears to be in greater conflict with an individualist rhetoric. Barney's fascist politics are one effect of her conflicting interests in individual purity and group power; the other is her experimental writing that explores the libidinal dimensions of encounters between individuals to challenge conventional forms of community-building.[27]

Critics first championed Barney for her bohemian lifestyle, at the expense of a discussion of her literary work.[28] More recently, she has been resuscitated as a modernist writer, but at the expense of a true engagement with the politics that informed her writing and her conception of

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[26] For a discussion of the development of reflexive circulation within late 17th and early 18th century print journalism, see Warner 90-100.

[27] Autonomy, for modernist writers in general but female modernists in particular, was a powerful but also precarious rallying point. Because of the difficulties they had with publishing, female modernists found themselves too autonomous, isolation that some of them, like Barney, made into a virtue through authoritarian politics, where individual autonomy could be channeled as a source of cohesion, rather than fragmentation. Andrew Hewitt argues, "This, if anything, seems to be the message of Fascist Modernism: totalization is necessarily a coexistence of totality and fragment; *it is a totalized process of fragmentation and of the articulation of those fragments within an organized whole*. Totalitarian bureaucracy, not a repressive authoritarianism, should be the model: totality as an organization, not as the simple self-identity of power" [emphasis mine] (41).

[28] The image of Barney as a wild bohemian, but indifferent writer, was solidified by the first book-length studies of Barney's life: *Portrait d'une Séductrice* [*Portrait of a Seductress*] (1976) by Jean Chalon and *The Amazon of Letters: The Life and Loves of Natalie Barney* (1976) by George Wickes. Both writers admire her unconcealed sexuality but mostly ignore her literary accomplishments. "She was not truly dedicated to literature," Wickes writes, "she was an indifferent writer, both in the sense of not caring and in the sense that her work was undistinguished" (50). For him, Barney's worth is in her life: "Genuinely pagan…she was free of the trammels that have controlled the behavior of most lovers of the millennium" (59); and it is this passion for life, for love affairs, and for defying convention that Wickes documents. His study is also a swansong to Paris and "the freedom that Paris allowed…for Natalie that meant freedom to love as she pleased, love being the only thing in life that seemed essential" (45). Chalon only mentions Barney's writings to elaborate upon her sexual escapades. All his writings

her salon, and without a sustained examination of the terms of modernism she is seen as evincing.[29] Barney criticism has remained mostly unsatisfactory because critics have not

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on Barney make the same point: "She was beautiful, intelligent, rich, American and scandalous. Her life was nothing but a long train of great loves, all women" ("Sedure en 1900" 18).

[29] Shari Benstock's groundbreaking *Women of the Left Bank* simply turns Wickes's and Chalon's claims on their head, rather than dispensing with them. Benstock writes that the "very forms of Natalie Barney's art—romantic poetry and the epigram—were considered slight, occasional, sentimental, glib and clichéd" by the "Modernist enterprise" (293). She acquits Barney by arguing that Barney "preferred to ignore [modernism] altogether, to deny the effects of time on her body or the evidence of a modernized world that surrounded her wooded garden, and to pursue the elemental, sensual, feminine" (307). Benstock's explanation problematically relies on Wickes's and Chalon's premise that Barney wrote in outdated modes and eschewed Modernist trends. Both Barney's life and works suggest the opposite: a deep interest in, and commitment to, literary modernism. For Benstock's full discussion of Barney's salon, see 268-307.

Suzanne Rodriguez's recent study of Barney, *Wild at Heart: A Life* (2002), marshals much more biographical detail than do any of these earlier analyses, shedding important light on Barney's relationships with a variety of important modernist writers, such as Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Djuna Barnes. Though Rodriguez still treats Barney's life as mostly interesting for its literary gossip (a problem reinforced by her decision to refer to Barney and Barney's friends by their first names), Rodriguez's study is the first to squarely address Barney's conversion to fascism. And yet, because Rodriguez chooses to believe Barney's own profession that "whatever my passions had been, they were no-wise political" (Rodriguez 222), she regards Barney's World War II politics as somehow less real than, for instance, Ezra Pound's. Wickes had subscribed to the same general rule that "Natalie…detested politics" (140), which allowed him to regard the political passages of her writing as aberrant or foolish.

Rodriguez does offer a more sustained exploration of Barney's alleged lack of politics but her conclusions are equally unsatisfying. The first half of her argument claims that Barney merely parroted Pound: "Perpetually at sea on political issues, she implicitly trusted [Pound's] judgments. If [he] said that the coming war was caused by Churchill and the Jews, he knew what he was talking about" (316). Barney's "implicit trust" in Pound is not at all sure. She disregarded the editing advice he gave her on several of her poems, and in her letters she questioned his judgment at the end of World War II. The second half of Rodriguez's argument depends upon the dubious idea that Barney's anti-Semitism was self-protective. Twice, once in Paris and once in Florence, where Barney made her home during the War, Nazis checked up on Barney's Jewish background. One eighth Jewish, Barney was forced to produce her Protestant confirmation certificate to avoid further investigation. Although there is no doubt that Barney's Jewish heritage complicates any interrogation of her political beliefs, it does not stand scrutiny that Barney's numerous anti-Semitic tracts were merely a form of self-defense. Were Barney's anti-Semitism limited to her public writing, Rodriguez's point might hold water. But her private writing is riddled with anti-Semitic aspersions; it is implausible to imagine that these personal texts were a defense against Nazi scrutiny. Furthermore, her decision to weather the war in Mussolini's Italy when she had the finances and the papers to return to the United States suggests more than a superficial commitment to the fascist cause. For more on Barney's politics during

sufficiently distinguished her public claims about herself (both in her published writing and in interviews) from the self that emerges in her unpublished manuscripts and memoirs. Her published oeuvre comprises works of poetry, most notably, *Quelques Portraits-Sonnets de Femmes* [*Several Portraits-Sonnets of Women*] (1900); some early Greek-inspired dialogues and plays; three books of aphorisms, *Éparpillements* [*Scatterings*] (1910), *Pensées d'une amazone* [*Thoughts of an Amazon*] (1920), and *Nouvelles pensées d'une amazone* [*New Thoughts of an Amazon*] (1939); and four memoirs, *Je me souviens* [*I remember*] (1910), *Aventures de l'esprit* [*Adventures of the Mind*] (1929), *Souvenirs indiscrets* [*Indiscreet Memories*] (1960), and *Traits et portraits* [*Traits and Portraits*] (1963). Barney's breezy tone in many of these works has contributed to her reputation as dilettantish or, in more flattering appraisals, as boldly indifferent to her literary reception.

Barney's unpublished manuscripts are more complicated. She was a prodigious private writer, leaving a wealth of documents to Paris's Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet. This archive is quite varied: it contains defenses of homosexuality and attacks on Jews, straightforward memoirs and much more exploratory self-portraits, sentimental love poetry and experimental novels, and boxes of correspondence with major and minor modernist artists. Within this archive is one of Barney's most important literary accomplishments: an unpublished memoir, *Amants féminins ou le troisième* [*Feminine Lovers or the Third One*] (1926), that describes Barney's ultimately fruitless effort to create an "Association de Femmes" [*Association of Women*]. Written shortly after the period that Barney, with the help of Ezra Pound, unsuccessfully endeavored to launch herself as a modernist poet, *Amants féminins* challenges the aridity of modernist individuality in ways she was evidently not capable of doing publicly, perhaps because she never felt sufficiently

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World War II, see Rodriguez 310-328.

accepted by the modernist publishing world to critique it. By nominating exclusion as a constituent of sexual pleasure, Barney reveals the inevitable breakdown of even the most rigorous displays of autonomy. And by employing dialogue that unmoors itself from identifiable speakers, she captures the verve of salon chatter that is connected with individual experience but not reducible to individuals. "Neither alone, nor together" ["*ni seul, ni ensemble*"] (7), Barney muses about her elusive modernist practice in *Amants féminins*, capturing the key challenge of her salon and of bringing this struggle into aesthetic being (5).

Individualism and Bohemianism in Barney's Early Writings and Salon

During the 1920s, Barney's salon was the destination of choice for modernism's rising stars. French regulars at her gatherings included André Gide, Colette, Anatole France, Max Jacob, and Paul Valéry; British and American regulars included George Antheil, Djuna Barnes, Nancy Cunard, T.S. Eliot, Janet Flanner, Ford Madox Ford, Mina Loy, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Virgil Thomson. Her salon was both the center of exciting literary events aimed at the recognition of new work by female modernists, such as evenings in honor of Colette, Mina Loy, and Rachilde (with Djuna Barnes's works presented by Ford Madox Ford); a night billed as "Gertrude Stein presented by herself"; and a retrospective of Renée Vivien's poetry. It was also a stronghold of the more institutionalized side of expatriate modernism. As George Wickes comments, "during the twenties [Barney's] salon became one of the standard tourist attractions for Americans who flocked to Paris" and invitations "were quite an honor, and part of one's education" (14).

The modern salon has been characterized as both a location for transgressive sociability and a holdover of old world elitism. These interpretations need not necessarily conflict: as we

shall see in the case of Barney, and as has been shown in the cases of several prominent modernists, such as Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and others, an investment in avant-garde aesthetics and an anti-bourgeois lifestyle can go hand in hand with reactionary politics. As Andrew Hewitt has convincingly argued, the modernist avant-garde demands the "recognition of the nonalignment of political and aesthetic 'progress'" (*Fascist Modernism* 25). Recent feminist critics, including Delap, have made similar observations. Mary Louise Roberts, in her study *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (2002), argues that feminist historians must acknowledge the extent to which anti-Semitism offered female writers the chance to harness a liberative identity connected with the nation-state rather than with gender. And Laura Frost, in her book *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism* (2002), uncovers a fascist eroticism at the heart of purportedly democratic feminism.

Some accounts of Barney's salon highlight its increasingly conservative elements. For a brief period, Barney threw wild parties, but her subsequent literary salon was a comparatively staid affair. At her home in Neuilly, where she lived from 1903 to 1909, Mata Hari rode naked upon a white horse, Colette performed dramatic readings of erotic verse, and Barney's friends enacted *Equivoque* (1901), Barney's revisionist retelling of Sappho's life. These scandalous theatrics ended when Barney moved out of Neuilly and took up residence at 20, Rue Jacob in Paris's sixth arrondisement. Here, her salon established itself, albeit in a seemingly quieter form. Barney's "Fridays," as her salon came to be called, come across as stuffy and respectable in the account given in an interview by Barney's housemaid, Berthe Cleyrergue. Cleyrergue remembers,

> Trays were passed around with little sandwiches. It was a reception where you took only your tea at the table…The women were very elegant. The men too tried to dress

> up…Miss Barney always wore white for her receptions…[Barney] was seated in a chair, right at the door of the dining room, over there, and when the people came she did not get up. They came over to greet her in her special place. She was surrounded…There was a friendship among all these women that was purely literary. (488)

Janet Flanner, not an admirer of Barney, was more blunt. When asked in interview with George Wickes to describe Barney's salon, she replied flatly, "Cucumber sandwiches" (296).

But the more pervasive impression of Barney as salon hostess is quite different, due in large part to characterization of Barney as a libertine in numerous *romans-à-clef* and memoirs written during her lifetime. As Dame Evangeline Musset, the heroine of Djuna Barnes's *Ladies Almanack* (1928), Barney was satirized for her *grande dame* airs and her sexual appetite. And in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Barney as salon hostess Valérie Seymour exudes an otherworldly confidence in her homosexuality that the novel's troubled lesbian narrator, Stephen Gordon, can scarcely imagine.[30] These texts and others, such as Colette's *Le pur et l'impur* [*The Pure and the Impure*] (1932) and Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's *L'Ange et les prévers* [*The Angel and the Perverts*] (1930) portray Barney not only as snob, but also as lascivious Sapphic anachronism, a perception that has been essentially confirmed by her biographers. Critics have tended to take for granted the veracity of these mythologizing portraits, and thus haven't considered why Barney corroborated these fictional versions of herself, and how this blending of arrogance and

[30] Here is the key passage about Barney (Valerie Seymour) from the *The Well of Loneliness*: "And as [Seymour and Gordon] talked it dawned upon Stephen that here was no mere libertine in love's garden, but rather a creature born out of her epoch, a pagan chained to an age that was Christian, one who would surely say with Pierre Louÿs: '*Le monde moderne succombe sous un envahissement de laideur*.' And she thought she discerned in those luminous eyes, the pale yet ardent light of the fanatic" (224).

insouciance might have aided both the reputation of her literary salon and her career as a writer.

Corroborate she did, in the rhetoric of informality she used to describe her salon and in the individualist thrust of her published writing. Barney shrugged away the work of running an established literary salon with quips like "[m]y house is an atmosphere. Burglars can come, but they won't find anything. You can't yet steal atmospheres" ["*c'est une atmosphère. Les cambrioleurs peuvent venir, ils ne trouveront rien. On ne vole pas encore les atmosphères*"] (38). This belief in the ineffability of the truly individual self and its society is the watermark of her early publications. In *Éparpillements* [*Scatterings*], a book of epigrams written in 1910, a year after her salon had established itself in Paris, Barney emphasizes the importance of maintaining one's distinction: "To avoid: intimacy and its progressive shamelessness" ["*A éviter: l'intimité et ses impudeurs progressives*"] (23). Of cultivating aesthetic discrimination she writes, "If only art were as rare as good taste" ["*si l'art était aussi rare que le goût*"] (44). Her ideal social milieu is similarly beyond the pale of common apprehension. As she sneers, "He has made it. Where?" [*Il est arrivé? Où*?]" (40). Another epigram asks, "What did you see at the salon?" ["*Qu'avez vous vu au Salon?*] (26). Barney's smug response—"I saw that I was being seen"—suggests that the actual content of her salon (literary readings and events) was less important than its creation of an individualizing point of view [*J'ai vu… qu'on me regardait*"] (26). This sort of commentary continues in Barney's next book of epigrams, *Pensée d'une amazone* [*Thoughts of an Amazon*] (1920). Here again she celebrates individuality—"The most beautiful roses flower alone on their stems" ["*Les plus belles roses fleurissent solitairment sur leurs tiges*"] (73)—but castigates "collectivities" for their "bloody brutality" ["*la brutalité sanguinaire de la collectivitié*"] (50-51). And similarly: "'The life of a people is nothing but a chain of

miseries, crimes, and follies" but "[i]ndividuals are more wise and more moderated" ["*La vie d'un peuple n'est qu'une suite des misères, de crimes et de folies…Les individus sont plus sage et plus moderés*"] (50-51). Even the "map" of her salon that she drew for the 1929 publication of a memoir, *Aventures de l'esprit* [*Adventures of the Mind*] highlights her aloofness. She crowded her salon with the radiating names of her guests, but placed herself outside this inner sanctum, alone on a pathway leading to her gazebo, the "Temple à L'Amitié" [Temple to Friendship], with Remy de Gourmont as her only *confrère*.[31]

Janet Lyon's description of modernist salon culture in her essay, "Sociability in the Metropole: Modernism's Bohemian Salons" (2009), sheds light on the "fringe" status of Barney's anti-institutional and anti-collective rhetoric. She notes that the "bohemian salons of the modernist period [were] frequently characterized by nothing so much as the channeling of sociability through hermetic, idiomatic, and seemingly spontaneous forms of anti-bourgeois critique" (690). She argues, however, that "the bohemian-modernist repudiation of the salon…gestures toward a more 'authentic' aesthetic and social activity taking place in some mobile formation that is no longer quite a salon, something that flies below institutional radar, created by individuals operating on the farthest fringes of the literary/artistic field" (692). In Lyon's account, the "creation of a radical individualism" was "rooted in the acknowledgment of European modernity's others" (705), who were mostly united by the "social stigmas accruing to

[31] Barney's friendship with acclaimed French Symbolist poet and novelist Remy de Gourmont began in 1910. Their teasingly romantic relationship launched Barney even more into the public eye and solidified her friendship with important modernists like Pound, who was a great admirer of de Gourmont and had translated de Gourmont's *Physique de l'amour* as *The Natural Philosophy of Love* in 1922. From de Gourmont came Barney's powerful epithet of "amazon," but also the compromising rumor that de Gourmont was inspired by Barney's blond good looks, not her mind. De Gourmont's *Lettres à l'Amazone* (1914) and *Lettres intimes à l'Amazone* (posthumously published 1926) further enhanced Barney's celebrity status and are perhaps the

sexual transgressions (homosexuals, mistresses, actresses and libertines)" (689). Lyon thus follows Pierre Boudieu's contention in *The Rules of Art* (1992) that outsider status and the refusal to acknowledge affiliation with institutional conventions or group trends are key parts of the "symbolic alchemy" that produces an autonomous avant-garde (Bourdieu 170). The constructed nature of bohemian marginality is particularly apparent in Barney's case, since her marginality arises out of a repudiation of institutionality that is more discursive than it is material.[32] Barney's homosexuality may have made her one of "modernity's others," but her wealth, her good looks, and her preference for a genteel lifestyle firmly planted her among the elite. That this sort of "objective content" could be so easily transformed through a discourse about "atmosphere[s]," "têtes-à-têtes," and personal originality suggests the extent to which modern bohemia was receptive to this sort of language. Indeed, "[b]ourgeois…is very much in the eye of the beholder, the abjected term against which all authentically social versions of culture-making must imagine themselves" (431), as Sara Blair has commented about another famous salon, Gertrude Stein's.

While Lyon's and Blair's accounts capture the egalitarianism and social importance of even merely symbolic anti-bourgeois gestures, other critics have been less optimistic, connecting bohemia's self-professed social fluidity with upper-class snobbery. In this reading an anti-bourgeois gesture is less a challenge to the bourgeoisie's conservative conception of democracy than it is a defense of the aristocratic privileges under threat by middle class democratic values.

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reason she smugly claimed to have brought him back to life. See Rodriguez 190-196 and Wickes 48, 121-9.

[32] For Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the "cultural *difference*" performed by counter-cultural groups does not count as truly marginal or anti-institutional behavior because counter-culture is "already singled out, often privileged" by a society and thus is "already partly absorbed into [its] folklore" (xii). De Certeau is interested in the cultural practices that are

In his essay "Women, the Public Sphere, and the Persistence of Salons" (2002), Steven Kale reconnects the nineteenth-century salon with its origins in the Ancien Régime, where salons were "predominately noble, linked to courtly society, and not overtly 'oppositional'" (119). Modern salons, in this framework, "belong to the history of an aristocratic alternative to the antinoble, antiliberal, and antifeminist excesses of the revolutionary bourgeois" (124). Although Barney's twentieth-century expatriate salon does not perfectly dovetail with Kale's French nineteenth-century model, his argument offers an historical re-reading of bohemian claims to informality and spontaneity. Aristocratic sociability, Kale explains, was developed around the dissolution, not separation, of public and private spheres. The informal formality of a salon like Barney's is predicated on a similar dissolution, where one's sociability is highly visible (attractive, elegant, and influential) but never connected with any of the material requirements (a rented club house, a meeting agenda, a newsletter) that would make it completely public and bourgeois.

Kale's most compelling insight is that female participation in salons has become a de facto sign of egalitarianism, effacing the salon's connection to aristocratism. Critics, he claims, have mistakenly treated French salon culture as a static social enterprise, one that since its development in eighteenth-century France has existed as an "instantiation of an egalitarian social discourse in competition with the hierarchical discourse instantiated by the existing order" (121). The eighteen-century salon is credited with helping establish the free speech of the emergent bourgeois public sphere and the nineteenth-century salon is credited with critiquing the bourgeois public sphere's clear division of private and public realms, a separation which diminished women's power. In other words, salon hostesses get to have it both ways: the best of the revolution with none of its consequences.

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completely below the radar of a society's folklore, the daily interactions and choices that "have

Kale's argument offers a historically sensitive assessment of how the presence of women in salons has been confused with social progress. By addressing the salon only in very general terms, though, his account does not explain the more local dynamics and political complexity of a salon like Barney's. Indeed, as Michael Warner claims in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), the denial of overt political content is not just an aristocratic gesture. It is an important way that deviant public spheres, or counterpublics, assert their difference from normative modes of publicness.[33] Barney's claim to a salon free of political biases might be a strategy for highlighting how free association of the sort happening in her salon did not depend on pre-authorized circuits of communication. In a moment in which literary "isms" flourished—surrealism, imagism, futurism, vorticism—Barney's emphasis on her political independence and her social spontaneity also looks like a critique of the literary avant-garde's dependence upon the more conventional method of group identity to accrue recognition. By claiming her salon was nothing official, Barney was able to advance a queer and feminist agenda—as seen in her selection of mostly female lesbian writers for her 1927 reading series—without sacrificing the appearance of bohemian autonomy necessary for avant-garde legitimation. Barney's frivolity also can be seen as an effort to restore openness to literature. Directly opposed to the didactic tone of so many modernist tracts, Barney's casualness *vis-à-vis* her salon's literary engagements challenges modernists whose stated receptivity to new forms is belied by their doctrinal rigidity.[34]

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not given rise to a discursive configuration or to a technological systematization" (48).

[33] See Warner 14-16.

[34] Many works by Pound, perhaps most notably "A few Don'ts by an Imagiste" (*Poetry* 1913) and *The ABC of Reading* (1934), and various modernist manifestos, such as Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto" (1909), *Blast*'s "Vorticist Manifesto" (1914), the "Dada Manifesto" (1921), and Breton's "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), participate in this programmatic modernist culture. For a fascinating analysis of how this doctrinal dimension of modernist experimentation

Moreover, if the individualism Barney emphasized in this anti-institutional environment was not completely sympathetic towards traditional forms of feminist activism, such as suffrage advocacy, it was also not completely of the avant-garde sort described by Delap, where "expressing one's will" or "'developing one's personality'" reign far above "the attainment of liberal rights and freedoms" (9).[35] Alongside her individualist epigrams in both *Éparpillements* and *Pensées d'une amazone* we find several recognizably "women's rights" based statements. In *Éparpillements*, Barney offers this image of female subjugation: "Women, with impersonal chains of pearls around their necks. Chain of a symbol that has become almost universal: representing anonymously the hours of servitude…pearls doubly painful, having, as result of dealing with so many poor girls, lost all connection with their mysterious origins" ["*Des femmes avec, autour de leur cou, l'impersonel collier de perles. Chaine d'un symbole devenu presque universel : représentant anonyme d'heures serviles…perles doublement douloureuses, ayant, à parer tant de piètres demoiselles, perdu tout lien avec leurs origines mystérieuses*"] (27). Here Barney proposes that anonymity is not always a mark of an individual's autonomy or a salon's anti-institutional spontaneity. It can be instead a mark of generic conformity, suggesting why, within the discussion of individualism, modernist female writers sometimes endorse personality and other times impersonality, as if unsure which is the more liberative and less stereotypically

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challenges broader ideologies of democracy in the early twentieth century, see Janet Lyon's *Manifestos: Provocations of the Modern*.

[35] In her review of *The Feminist Avant-Garde*, Janet Lyon calls attention to how even the most politically detached "avant-garde" feminism shaped political activism. She writes,

> "Avant-garde" feminism, as it is shaped in conversations and circulates on the page, is more affect than ism, a style of relentless critique, a performance of antibourgeois refusal. There were other affect-driven forms of feminism, of course—the most memorable being the militant suffragism that eventuated in campaigns of (often very witty) violence against private property and the state, and one might argue that the extreme positions adopted by these militants resembled nothing so much as the continental avant-gardism of the Italian Futurists. (244)

feminizing term.[36] In *Pensées d'une amazone* (1920) Barney puts forward her most direct endorsements of women's rights. Her turn toward more explicitly activist writing was perhaps partly due to the momentum of having led pacifist discussions during the World War I and partly due to the favorable feminist environment established by the recent passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Although she claimed later in life that running a political salon during World War I was a disillusioning disaster, her writing of the period tells a different story.[37] The *Pensées* include a section entitled "The Opposite Sexes, the War, and Feminism" [*Les sexes adverses, la guerre et le féminisme*], where she condemns marriage as a "false value" ["*Le mariage, une fausse valeur*"] (2) and proposes feminism as the responsibility of both men and women: "feminism can never be a question of sex" ["*Le féminisme ne peut être une question de sexe*"] (7). She also argues for the inclusion of women in government: "We accord to women the qualities of shrewdness, intuition, craftiness, and skills superior to those of men, why would we not give them the chance to use them in the service of the Nation, the minister of foreign affairs, etc…?" ["*On accorde aux femmes des qualités d'astuce, intuition, de ruse et d'adresses supérieures si souvent à celles des hommes, pourquoi ne leur accorderait-on pas la possibilité de s'en servir au profit de l'Etat, au ministère des affaires étranges, etc…?*"] (7). In criticizing the war as a product of unilateral masculine judgment—"War, the child of men. They give birth to

[36] Margaret Anderson, editor of *The Little Review* (1914-1929), displays a particularly strong ambivalence about which is her privileged term, sometimes endorsing "personality" as the ideal mode for judging art, other times praising her "impersonality" as the key to her journal's success. For accounts of the connection between modernist impersonality and a conception of radical personality within the works of Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson, but also in the works of male writers like T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, see Christine Reynier and Jean-Michel Ganteau, *Impersonality and Emotion in Twentieth-Century British Literature*.

[37] Writes Rodriguez, "Natalie's wartime salon turned into a meeting ground for peace lovers…In the end [Barney] decided that this would be the 'last time [her] literary salon took on colors of political enquiry. . .And [Barney] now felt like [saying] that whatever [her] passions had been, they were no-wise political" (221-222).

death as women do to life" ["*La guerre, cet accouchement de l'homme. Ils enfantent la mort, commes elles la vie*"] (6)—she follows the party line of the more radical branch of American suffrage, Alice Paul's National Woman's Party, which refused to support the war effort on the grounds that, given women's disenfranchisement, Wilson's purportedly democratic mission was hypocritical.[38]

In 1920, the same year that the *Pensées* were published, Barney sent her lover Romaine Brookes a clipping about a new Italian state. It makes visible the extent to which the *Pensées*'s politically progressive epigrams structure Barney's vision of optimal social formations, even though the majority of her epigrams repudiate her salon's political content and social significance. The clipping, "Poet Would Make Fiume Model State," describes Gabriele d'Annunzio's proposal for a state that ensures both autonomy and collectivity: "The Constitution may be altered every seven years, or whenever one-third of the citizens demands its revision. All citizens without distinction of sex, race or creed are guaranteed full freedom of thought, of speech and of Press. The right of union and association, whether religious or not, is assured."[39] This state model *legislates* autonomy and spontaneity, giving its constituents much greater democratic control over the political process than individual citizens enjoyed in the United States and France and also adjudicating basic "freedom of expression" principles that the passage of The Sedition Act of 1918 in the United States seemed to threaten.[40] Barney's interest in d'Annunzio's idea suggests the extent to which she considered autonomy to be an implicitly fragile value, one that needs consecration to be truly effective, but also one that must be

[38] See Southard 409.
[39] France has had a very conflicted relationship to unions; Barney's interest in the right to union might be born out of this context. For a discussion of the evolution of the right to free association in France, see Sowerwine 33-34, 80.
[40] See Conolly-Smith 7-24.

constantly open to reinterpretation, in this case through a mutable constitution. Since d'Annunzio was a writer Barney knew and admired,[41] Barney's interest in this clipping also suggests her implicit belief that artists are singularly capable of understanding and effectuating an ideal vision of autonomy. In this way we can read the *Pensées*'s strange mixture of communitarian and individualist statements as not the sign of Barney's unsystematic thinking, to which her early critics frequently attest,[42] but instead as evidence of her nuanced understanding of the very delicacy of the social formation she wished to endorse in her salon—one where autonomy is a flexible but meaningful concept.

Barney's perception of her sexuality also reflects her simultaneous appreciation of the power of outsider status and her desire for public legitimacy. Rita Felski has described how, in the early twentieth century, women were "positioned outside the dehumanizing structures of the capitalist economy as well as the rigorous demands of public life" and thus became "symbol[s] of nonalienated, and hence nonmodern, identity" (18). Barney herself embraced ahistorical forms of femininity and lesbianism; her dehistoricized self-conception has remained the model for understanding Barney's precursor status as a "liberated" lesbian woman. For her contemporaries she was the embodiment of Sappho,[43] and so she has mostly remained, a "pure daughter of Eve" ["*une pure fille d'Eve*"] (Chalon, "Seduire en 1900" 18) and the "Pope of Lesbos" ["*pape de*

[41] Barney's long-term partner, painter Romaine Brook, had been d'Annunzio's lover. Barney discusses their friendship with him in her World War II manuscript, *Memoirs of an Amazon.* See Barney, *Memoirs of an Amazon by a European American* 39, 51, 180.

[42] See Jean Chalon, *Portrait d'une Séductrice* and "Seduire en 1900." See also Wickes 10, 20, 46-47.

[43] *Quelques Portraits-Sonnets de Femmes* (1900), for instance, allegedly made tabloid headlines like "Sappho Sings in Washington." Many Barney critics cite this headline. Rodriguez, however, notes that "I have been unable to locate this article, which Natalie often mentions in her writing" (22). There is a possibility that this headline was invented by Barney to enhance her own wild reputation. The most notable early description of Barney as a modern-day Sappho is courtesan

Lesbos"] (unsigned, "Le pape de Lesbos" 79). Barney certainly took pleasure in this mythic status, as seen in her proud adoption of de Gourmont's nickname for her, "L'Amazone," and in the epitaph she chose for tombstone: "I am this legendary being in which I will live again" ["*Je suis cet être légendaire où je revis*"]. By corroborating her status as the inheritor of a mythic past and as the producer of her own future mythic reception, Barney was able to present her sexual desire for women publicly within the acceptable space of fin-de-siècle lesbian typography where lesbianism was pure and, more importantly, never of the now, and thus not a threat to conventional mores.[44] Indeed, in Barney's published epigrams, lesbian eroticism is always close to a discourse about chastity: "White should never be worn except by those who radiate it," she pontificates in *Éparpillements* ["*Le blanc ne devrait être porté que par celles qui en irradient*"] (21).

Barney's refusal to contextualize her social and artistic success as an openly lesbian hostess within the sexually permissive climate of early twentieth-century Paris must also be seen as a way of defending herself against the potential failures of her own socially complex position. By not articulating a context where her lesbianism has any historical or political significance, she could neither be subject to charges of inauthenticity nor blamed for the uneven emancipation of non-normative identities—in other words, for failing the "cause" of her sexuality. This is not to say that Barney shirked political responsibility, but simply that she managed to avoid being forced to assume a spokesperson role that would not be expected of a heterosexual. In private, however, she drafted two essays on the subject of her sexuality: "Essay on Homosexuality" and "Love Defended." These treatises, both from the mid-1950s, attest to the variety and subtlety of

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Liane de Pougy's *Idylle Sapphique* (1904), in which Barney as "Flossie" first received attention for her beauty, her blondness, and her unabashed homosexuality.

[44] See Kosinski 196, 197, 199.

homosexual desire, beyond the ken of normal comprehension or earthly lust, but they also offer a much more practical and surprising program to check population growth and thus end world hunger and world war through non-reproductive love.[45] This Malthusian endorsement of homosexuality slows the otherwise mystical tone of these essays, once again revealing Barney's awareness of how personal autonomy, if taken too far, can degrade into political anonymity.

In the 1930s and 40s, Barney's writing grew hostile to democracy, to public discussion, and to feminism. Her salon also waned in importance: she suspended it during World War II and after the war there was rarely more than a handful of guests in attendance. But in the 1920s, Barney's rhetorical investment in detached individuality was in tension with her desire for individual rights, producing the mixed political position we see at work in her early writings and in her salon during its peak moment. During this period, Barney and Pound collaborated on a set of imagist poems and made a joint effort at literary patronage. Neither venture was a success. She reflects on these failures within a memoir manuscript, *Amants féminins ou le troisième* (1926), written during the moment that links her salon's bohemian heyday to her fascism leading up to and through World War II. In the memoir she explores the increasing isolation she felt from modernist institutions and within the lived community of her salon. Barney's published writing in thirties became much more emphatically individualist,[46] but *Amants féminins* reveals

[45] See Natalie Barney, "L'Amour défendu" (ca. 1955) and "Essai sur l'homosexualité" (ca. 1955), NCB Ms 48, in the Natalie Barney Collection, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris.

[46] As I have shown, Barney always professed a degree of detached elitism that gave her salon part of its bohemian appeal. It is not until her *Nouvelles pensées d'une amazone* (1939), however, that her writing fully endorses autonomy, condemning literary recognition in lines like, "The word best-seller doesn't dominate the lettered public or the great minds" (52) and "A published book—an author cut off like a detached coupon" (52). She inquires, "Honor dishonors?" then responds affirmatively with this image: "Full of decorations, overwhelmed by honors, he gets by with a mass of outdated successes and bad habits" (55). These epigrams compose Barney's most complete endorsement of the sort of aesthetic autonomy that Bourdieu

the social and sexual possibilities of individualism and the connections forged even through alienation. The conversations and movements of her salon may be unrecoverable, but they have given force to this erotically charged and polyvocal text, refuting critics who reduce her writing to the veiled exploration of her lesbian sexuality or to outmoded romanticism.[47]

Brokering Modernist Experimentation in the Wake of the Salon

Throughout the twenties, Barney devoted herself to modernist literary ventures of all sorts: patronage, the organization of various literary nights featuring new writers, and, most importantly, the publication of her own poetry. After completing a set of imagist-inspired poems in 1922, Barney paid Pound to critique them and help her find a publisher. Their exchange is one of the most interesting suites of letters in the *Doucet* archive. Pound is stern with her, writing, "this shows that you are out of touch not only with editorial connections but with the best contemporary work." Her main problem, he tells her, is her tendency to revert to boring iambs. In a subsequent letter, he directly addresses the question of her money:

> "I hope you realize (a) that the job…would come to 20 pounds.
>
> (b) that I should add little in principle to what I have put in my last letter […]
>
> (c) that you might get the same benefit @ much lower rate from careful study of critical data in my 'Pavannes & Divigations'[…]

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describes in *The Rules of Art.* Bourdieu explains how during the formation of an avant-garde, such as we see in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries, the market for art diminishes, the artistic field separates from social and political history, and the art object's symbolic value becomes incommensurate with its production value. As a result, artists may have no recognizable fame in their own time, but their art "make[s] a new position beyond established positions, ahead [*en avant*] of those that are currently available" (157).

[47] Karla Jay has referred to Barney's writing as a "lesbian code," a description that ignores the highly uncoded nature of much of Barney's expressed lesbian desire (73). George Wickes and

(d) There are, naturally, various things which can only be demonstrated viva voce

(e) some works cannot be saved merely by judicious deletion and rearrangement after which warnings remain.

Critics have often overlooked this event, probably because it seems somehow embarrassing to them that this imperious lesbian writer would have gone to such lengths to secure Pound's attentions. The fact that money crossed hands also seems to undercut the stature of her salon, as if her celebrity status should have been repayment enough. But Pound is warm and funny in these letters, which do not peg him as mercenary nor her as desperate. Rather, we can see these letters as another example of the extent to which modernism was born out of real but not necessarily cynical brokering.[48]

In this case, brokering with a major modernist like Pound did not lead to an enhancement of Barney's literary reputation. She adopted imagistic techniques too late to profit as had H.D., Richard Aldington and Amy Lowell. By the 1920s, imagism was all but dead. Pound hints at this in the letters—his item (e) in the paragraph quoted above suggests that Barney give up the whole endeavor. Pound nevertheless dutifully edited all the poems and two of them were published in

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Shari Benstock have both in different ways and to different effect described Barney's writing as more romantic than modern. See Wickes 45 and Benstock 286.

[48] Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (1998) offers the most compelling recent account of the marketing of major modernist texts. He describes how Eliot's *The Waste Land* was marketed through a series of bluffs and challenges made by Pound and Eliot to journals at different positions within the commercial spectrum—*The Little Review*, *The Dial*, and *Vanity Fair*. Through this maneuvering they were able to sell *The Waste Land* as a privileged literary event, and thus make money through the very denial of their interest in it. Many other recent critical accounts such as Mark Morrisson's *The Public Face of Modernism* (2001), Catherine Turner's *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars* (2003) and John Xiros Cooper's *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (2009) have approached the question of modernist group formation from an economic perspective. These books shed important light on the commodity nature of even the most seemingly esoteric artworks, but in making the marketplace the ur-model for all forms of modernist sociability, they have sometimes failed to sufficiently acknowledge the *literary* effects of various social networks.

the October 1924 *Transatlantic Review* under the subtitle "Arranged by Ezra Pound." Here is one of Barney's poems in its original manuscript form:

Repercussions

Because the cows have fed on garlic,

with cow-slips and butter-cups,

On the hill-side pastures—

The king must taste at breakfast

A butter that stinks of this herb!

In the manuscript Pound cuts this poem down to two much more comical lines:

Garlic among buttercups

Butter stinks

And yet, the version published in the *Transatlantic Review* is almost identical to the manuscript version. Barney merely deleted the exclamation point and substituted "millionaire" for "king," suggesting that she found Pound's comments unhelpful or, less probably, that Pound was happy with these minor changes. The other *Transatlantic Review* poem, "After Reading Chinese Poems," also ignores Pound's editorial suggestions. Why did he allow her to go ahead and publish these mostly unchanged poems, especially when he had told her some of her longer, less imagistic poems were better? Perhaps she felt that imagism was the natural extension of her talents as an epigrammist and he must have felt he could not refuse her since she had paid him for his work. Even taking this payment into consideration, it is odd that a poet as scrupulous as Pound allowed her to use his name as the "arranger" of poems he did not like and barely arranged. It is possible that *The Transatlantic Review* would only accept the poems with his name attached. Rodriguez offers another reason for these poems' slapdash publication: "The

Transatlantic Review's editor, Ford Madox Ford, had a somewhat selfish interest in publishing these poems, because on a few occasions it was a financial contribution from Miss Barney that helped his magazine stay afloat" (243). Barney appears to have received very little, if any, acclaim for her *Transatlantic Review* poems and the rest of the poems in her manuscript were never published. Thus ended her most major public effort to refashion herself as a modernist poet.

At the same time Barney was trying to launch herself as an imagist she also tried to help other modernists. In 1922, she and Pound discussed establishing a fund, the Bel-Esprit, to allow writers a sufficient income to quit their day jobs. The Bel-Esprit, however, never got off the ground. Neither Eliot nor Valéry, the poets Pound and Barney had hoped to first support, were interested in the Bel-Esprit's patronage. Barney's letter to Eliot mixes her own interest in being published with her desire to help him:

> I'm to be in London Monday 16th…and should very much like to see you one of the days you're free of Lloyds Bank after 5 or evenings of that week: about the 'Bel Esprit' idea, which we are trying, first, on Paul Valéry…I am also seeking an Anglo-American editor for my "Pensées d'une Amazone" […] Can you suggest any likely publisher I could make arrangements with? (Wickes 183).

Wickes claims this letter "embarrassed" Eliot (183), perhaps because it pointed too directly to his work at the bank. It may also be that he did not want to barter with Barney, trading a publisher for her sponsorship. Valéry also turned her down since the *La Nouvelle Revue Française* had decided to assist him instead. Pound did not seem concerned about the Bel-Esprit's failure, encouraging Barney to influence even richer donors, such as the Guggenheims. Although Pound was unaffected by Eliot and Valéry's refusal of support, Barney was so ashamed that she

completely rewrote the incident in a 1965 interview. Rodriguez reports that she claimed, "We saved T.S. Eliot from his bank and Paul Valéry from his government profession" (244). This "we" may be the general patronage of modernist institutions, but it was certainly not the Bel-Esprit.

Amants féminins ou le troisième (1926), is Barney's most direct meditation on the failures of collaboration and association, as exemplified by her stymied effort to create an "Association de Femmes" ["Association of Women"] and its negative impact on her relationship with two women, Mimi Franchetti and famous courtesan Liane de Pougy. Barney's voice in this text is alternatively fragile and violent as she seeks to understand how an individual can preserve a sense of self within a group. It has little of the imperious tone Barney would take on in her overtly fascist writings in the late thirties, and in suggesting that individuality is always connected with collectivities, it is a departure from Barney's easy claims to distinction in some of her earlier epigrams. *Amants féminins* opens with a preface about the function of "le troisième," or the "third one" who disturbs and is disturbed by couples:

> [T]his third one, who is not fictitious, we know that from any other point of view, it is more than human.
>
> But the couple will always be its enemy, as much to the couple which it is part of as to the couple it is excluded from – since the enemy, isn't it the one we need and is opposed to us?
>
> This odd number, this singularity, works at the destruction of the odd number, of the singularity—
>
> [*cette troisième, qui n'a rien de fictif, qu'on sache qu'à tout autre point de vue, elle est plus qu'humaine*.

Mais le couple sera toujours son ennemi, autant celui dont elle fait partie que celui dont elle est exclue – car l'ennemi, n'est-ce pas celui qui nous est nécessaire et qui nous est contraire ?

Cet impair, ce singulier, travaille à la destruction de l'impair, du singulier—] (6)

Here Barney lays out the problematic of her text: that both couples and outsiders, the "third ones," are disintegrative. The group's cohesion is predicated on the dangerous exclusion of the outsider; the outsider works against herself by attempting to placate the group. Under these terms, Barney's "Association de Femmes" was doomed from the start. To Liane de Pougy, who had just been jilted by her husband, Barney writes the following invitation to her association: "Nothing is more solitary than love…[and so] I propose to you an association—more indissoluable than any union—because it comprehends all unions" ["*Rien n'est plus solitaire que l'amour…je te propose une association—plus indissoluable qu'aucune union – puisqu'elle les comprend toutes*"] (*Amants Féminins* 25). But as Barney had already implicitly suggested in her preface about "Le Troisième," neither pure association nor true solitude is possible. De Pougy begins an affair with Barney's lover, Mimi Franchetti. Harmony between the three is not possible: "the best position, but the most difficult one to maintain, is where one is three and no one is the third one!" ["*La meilleure position, mais la plus difficile à maintenir, c'est celle où l'on est trois et où personne n'est le troisième!*"] (67). And so Barney turns to more general philosophizing, consoling herself for her losses through her understanding that "[t]here are third ones of circumstance—these don't remain so…Almost everyone is a third one of this type—almost no one is a third one of the pure type" ["*Il y a…des troisièmes d'occasion—ceux ci ne le restent pas…Presque tout le monde est un troisième de cette espèce—Presque personne n'es un troisième d'espèce pure*"] (67). Moreover, there are also no pure associations: outsiders are made

not only through abandonment but also through connection. In both cases they shape the group contours, either as the group's remainder or its motivating principle: "The third one having become the third one…at the moment of its suppression—or its alliance. If it waits, before long it becomes the Odd One Out, or the Animator" ["*le troisième devenu le troisième…à ce moment de sa suppression—ou son alliance. S'il patiente, avant longtemps il deviendra soit l'Intrus, soit l'Animateur*"] (69).

Barney's reflections on the role of groups and outsiders are interspersed with fragmented, sardonic descriptions of Parisian socializing. She critiques both men who idealize bohemia and women who feel dejected by it. In a chapter ironically titled "At 'The Select'" ["*Au 'Select*'"], a pompous man drinks "his 20th glass of mint liqueur, [and] explains to those who don't want to hear him in what ways he outdoes Shakespeare" ["*sa vingtème menthe verte, explique à qui ne veut l'entendre, en quoi il dépasse Shakespeare*"] (37) while tragic women smoke cigarettes between lips "paler than their eyelids" ["*plus pales que ses paupières*"] and wobble glasses of liqueur (39). These may be stock types but Barney's arrangement of these caricatures between various aural repetitions, such as a mime repeating, "Isn't it true, Madame, that plastic art is the future of art?" ["*N'est ce pas, Madame, que l'art plastique est l'avenir de l'art* ?"] (39) and the wailing of a violin, make these moments some of Barney's most evocative writing. Foreground gives way to background, literary discussion to bar noise. As Jed Rasula comments in his essay "Listening to Incense": "the technical distinction between thematic development of material and structural padding collapses in modernism" (5).

Barney's rejection by Liane de Pougy and Mimi Franchetti and her struggles with modernist publishing seem to have given her writing here a rawness lacking in her stilted, derivative *Transatlantic Review* poems. The text's rhythm—quiet pages devoted to the role of

"le troisième" followed by louder social episodes—matches its thesis, that individuals inevitably and unpredictably merge and break with groups and that one can be simultaneously the center and the observer of action. Walter Benjamin writes, "As flâneurs, the intelligentsia came into the market-place. As they thought, to observe it—but in reality it was already to find a buyer" (85). Barney complicates this position; she observes the bar scene, but already refused by both other lovers and other writers, she has nothing to sell and is dismayed by what there is to buy. Although it might seem that Barney's rejection of the marketplace reverts her to an outmoded, fin-de-siècle aestheticism, by peopling her bar scene with stereotypes, she nominates her own critique of materialistic modernism as yet another clichéd position within the literary scene she would repudiate. In this context, Her awareness of the inevitability of derivativeness seems a defense against any of her own feelings of inadequacy vis-à-vis her disappointments with modernist publishing and publication and thus also a trump card to modernism's various calls for novelty and artistic autonomy.

There is sexual violence at the heart of Barney's reflections: her awareness of the way in which individuals and groups, and outsiders and insiders, necessarily give shape to each other, is predicated upon a fascination with the erotic dimension of exclusion, where the effort to assert one's autonomy can produce new social and sexual intrigues. In an opening scene, before Liane de Pougy has arrived, Mimi Franchetti is in Barney's erotic thrall:

> Her legs wrap around my boots, which separate them. Her abdomen demands an employment: the drunkenness of slavery…Her cry rises and falters and suffers the joys of her entrails: 'Take me! Take me!'
>
> …Then her body starts again to dance the love between my arms, which ceaselessly renew it. I accelerate the nerves of her neck that I pick up with a hot palm, I gather and

release her blood across all its blue paths. Her feet make handles against my dripping flanks.

[*Ses jambes s'enroulent à mes bottes qui les séparent. Son ventre demande un emploi : ivre d'esclavage. Et je deviens tous les ruts l'univers pour la combler. Son cri monte et chancelle et souffre la joie de ses entrailles : 'Prrends !....prrends !....'*

… Puis son corps recommence à danser l'amour entre mes bras qui sans cesse le renouvellent. J'accélère les nerfs de sa nuque que je cueille dans une paume brûlante, je rassemble et rejette son sang à travers tous ses parcours bleus. – Ses pieds contres mes flancs ruisselants font des anses.] (20)

Sexual pleasure here is connected with the potential for pain: Franchetti's submission of her body to Barney is also a submission of her life, and Barney's own proxy pleasure is predicated on her awareness of the violent potential of her sexual domination. The second image is as much a description of erotic stimulation as of bruising, or almost vampiric possession. Indeed, even the original idea of the "Association de Femmes," before its calamitous dissolution, was predicated on exploring the pain and subjugation of affection, as evinced in the poem that Barney sends to de Pougy by way of invitation to the Association, which invokes "The tortures of Sade" ["*Les supplices de Sade*"] as integral to the Association's "country of Tenderness" ["*pays du Tendre*"] (25-26). Indeed, Barney's simulation of sadism in her erotic encounter with Franchetti cedes to real sadism as she attempts to gain control over the women who have rejected her. She burns her lover with a cigarette, an incident which provokes erotic delight in her victim, who does not recoil her arm until the third burn.

In *Time Binds* (2010), Elizabeth Freeman sketches the trends in the theorization of sadomasochism within queer studies. Freeman's suggestion that critics should consider both the

historical imprint and the ahistorical potential of sadomasochism seems particularly useful for an interpretation of the erotic violence in *Amant féminins* that does not simply read Barney's later fascism as the lived political fulfillment of her sadistic literary imaginary. Freeman argues that sadomasochism is a "means of invoking history" (137): specifically, of invoking the "obsolete social system" of Sade, in which, she explains, aristocrats "revived their status as 'lone and sovereign feudal despot[s] symbolically, in the bedroom'" (138). But sadomasochism is also a means of escaping historical determination, a way of destabilizing conventional forms of being, of re-writing power relations, and in finding pleasure "beyond identity" (140).

That Barney in *Amants féminins* channels an historically-inflected sadism, one that privileges Sade's aristocratic alienation from the social changes happening around him, is corroborated by her numerous correlations of her salon with France on the eve of revolution, an identification that captures her distaste for democratic uniformity.[49] However, she hardly re-inscribes traditional roles. Her conformity to normative patriarchal hierarchies (her female victims submitting to her masculine power) does not diffuse the subversive potential of her sadistic lesbian sexual encounter.[50] Instead, in *Amants féminins*, she asserts a violent autonomy to show how even the most dramatic displays of individual authority give way to erotic pleasure and new social formations. Her detachment from her own sexual dominance, as seen in the almost clinical vocabulary she uses to describe it ("I accelerate the nerves of her neck") and in the way she takes an observer's stance to her own activity, describing not how she feels but how

[49] Barney writes in *Aventures de l'esprit* [*Adventures of the Mind*] (1929), "So ends this account of these representative women and these adventures of the mind that had their setting in these old gardens belonging to Racine, this house, certain parts of which date back to the Directory, and this mysterious little Temple to friendship surely built on the eve of the Revolution" (97).

[50] For a discussion of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century's conception of two forms of sexual perversion, the masculine "sadistic" woman and the effeminate "masochistic" man, see Moore 138-157.

she looks, produces a structure that Freeman sees as representative of sadomasochism's straddling of historical and ahistorical impulses. "Various techniques of visual distantiation," Freeman writes, "produce a temporal noncoincidence between action and result," which in her account produces in turn "a liberating gap between the effect and the 'self' as its cause" (139). Although Freeman underscores the autonomy made possible by this "liberat[ion]" from causality, in Barney's case, her disconnection from her lover's libido, and the delay between giving erotic pleasure and feeling it herself, prompts her awareness of the way social and sexual roles detach and recombine. It is impossible to maintain the pure individuality she thought she was asserting: after the quoted encounter, Barney worries, "could I seriously….suffer from [Mimi Franchetti's] *don juanism*, which is so close to my own nature?" ["*Et pourrai-je sérieusement…souffrir du don juanisme de M. si semblable à ma propre nature*"] (24). Moreover, Barney's objectifying of the sex scene restores her sense of control over her audience in the wake of her failed efforts to accrue public recognition through her poetry and patronage. By describing the visual composition of the scene ("Her legs wrap around my boots…Her feet make handles against my dripping flanks") she creates the feeling of a viewer even as she claims her indifference to the only actual viewing subject, her lover. Barney thus shows how an audience is flexible and relative, less in the beholder than in the manipulations of the beheld.

This idea is taken to its extreme in the final pages of *Amants féminins*, where Barney stages an elaborate dialogue between herself ("N") and the "Nouvelle Malheureuse" [The New Suffering Woman], who appears to be a fictionalized version of Djuna Barnes, victim of sculptor Thelma Wood's infidelities, which were the autobiographical template for the vexed relationship between Nora Flood and Robin Vote in *Nightwood* (1936). At first their separate roles are clear, Barney telling Barnes to invest in her literary talent, not an unfaithful lover, and Barnes

wondering how Barney will spend old age, since she has ruined so many of her relationships. Soon the roles unmoor completely from an identifiable speaker. Barney offers advice that would seem to be more logically voiced by Barnes; Barnes encourages Barney to continue the rakish behavior she had earlier criticized. The confusion here could be read as carelessness on Barney's part. But this blurring of self and other, of speaker and receiver, and of victim and victimizer, upholds the overarching thesis of *Amants féminins,* that groups and individuals inevitably, and infinitely, shape and re-shape each other. Moreover, by abandoning clearly assigned parts in the dialogue, Barney captures the feeling of salon conversation, where chatter might be overheard and misremembered, more important for how it leaves a general impression of personalities and ideas than any authoritative record of stable identities or specific topics.

Amants féminins, and this final dialogue in particular, is Barney's most successful stylistic expression of the verve and energy of her salon, the literary fruit of her effort to find a clear and stable voice within the modernist market, and her ultimate election of a style at once more personal and more ambiguous. Her great challenge—as a salon hostess, a modernist writer, and as a literary patron—was to be autonomous but not, like so many female writers of her day, anonymous. Her varied career and her complicated politics reveal how difficult it is to separate social and political losses from their concomitant aesthetic gains. She lamented early in her career, "When you do not respond to me, I doubt myself, I feel bad, I am disloyal to myself" ["*Quand vous ne me répondez pas, je doute de moi, je m'en veux, je me suis déloyal*"](*Eparpillements* 32). *Amants féminins* captures the pain and the pleasure of this alienation, of mapping an individual identity onto a community. Hidden in the Barney archive, forgotten and unpublished, is a literary record of the struggles that shaped modernist social experience.

Chapter 2

Conversation Pieces: Circulating Muriel Draper's Salon

Four years before Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* would become a bestseller, catapulting Stein from relative obscurity to celebrity, her friend Muriel Draper published a memoir of equal popularity, but considerably less cultural longevity. *Music at Midnight* (1929) describes the music salon Draper presided over in London between 1911-1915, before she returned to her native America and became a leading New York socialite, writer, radio show host, interior decorator and Communist activist. *The New York Times* praised Draper's "fascinating" picture of a salon whose guests included Henry James, John Singer Sargent, George Meredith, Vaslav Nijinsky, Sergei Diaghilev, Arthur Rubenstein, and Norman Douglas (62). The literary press was equally favorable, calling Draper's memoir "evocative…incandescence" (Gilman 324) and "gracefully personal" (*The Forum* x). That Draper's warm and witty reminiscences were a mainstream hit is not surprising. But even in more avant-garde venues, she was lauded: *The Dial* compared her seemingly straightforward realist work to "a Picasso of the same period, made up of dissected violins" (430).[51]

And yet, despite this wide-ranging acclaim, Draper's memoir and her subsequent career in radio have been all but forgotten.[52] This essay seeks not only to reestablish her once

[51] The review continues by saying that Draper is "a poet" whose book should "be judged not as history but as literature." Another article, published in *The Bookman* in 1930, comparing Draper's *Music at Midnight* to Margaret Anderson's *My Thirty Years' War*, credits both books with inaugurating "a new literary form" (566).

[52] A few studies have addressed Draper in some depth, although they have tended to focus on Draper's role as *friend* to artists rather than as an artist herself. These accounts include Betsy Fahlman's "That Great Draper Woman: Muriel Draper and the Art of the Salon"; Steven Watson's *Prepare for Saints: Gertrude Stein, Virgil Thomson, and the Mainstreaming of American Modernism* (in particular 172-189); and James Mellow's *Walker Evans* (in particular

preeminent position as one of the "vivid ornaments in the New York scene" (Waugh ii) but also, more importantly, to make her visible again as "a key Manhattan literary figure" (*Life* October 4, 1937), a role that has been hard to appreciate because her body of work exceeds conventional understandings of the literary text. As I show through previously unexamined papers in the Beinecke Library's Draper collection, she took seriously as practice what has been treated as metaphor: for Stein, writing was *like* "talking and listening" (*Lectures in America* 174) but for Draper, talking and listening *was* a form of writing. In her treatment, texts—which grew to include not only the pages of her memoir but also the pathways of transition between speech and its inscription—became less material, even as experiences, like listening to live music, became more textual. Conversation, for Draper, was associated with that "perfected art"[53]—music—but the wide circulation of her talk, first through her memoir then through her NBC radio show, challenged modernist conceptions of music as nonlinguistic and impersonal.

Ambivalence about the ontological status of the textual object is characteristic of a range of ongoing practices (letters, personal writing, books, radio scripts, performance skits, and so on) that could be loosely called salon-writing. Perhaps to justify such formal indefiniteness, Draper made overt—and found authorial power in—similar modernist uncertainties about ideal musical performance. Draper's exploration of how literature may operate beyond the borders of a piece of writing has made her work hard to read as illustrative of literary modernism, which is often seen as conditioned by belief in the integrity of the text and, concomitantly, its separation from

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125-138). For descriptions of Draper by her peers, see *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten*; *The Correspondence between Mabel Dodge and Gertrude Stein, 1911-1934*; Carl Van Vechten's *The Splendid Drunken Twenties: Selections from the Daybooks, 1922-1930*); Mabel Dodge's chapter on Draper in her *European Experiences*; Stein's portrait of Draper in *Portraits and Prayers*; Lincoln Kirstein's *The New York City Ballet*; and Alec Waugh's *A Year to Remember: A Reminiscence of 1931*.

[53] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, 88.

its author. The Beinecke archival record, which includes an outpouring of fan letters and Draper's broadcast notes for her NBC radio show, "It's a Woman's World" (1937-1938), reveals that her conversation was received by both her literary and radio audiences not as an alternative to writing but rather as an incitement to re-envision authorship as a series of exchanges, both spoken and written, in which authors and readers (who are also speakers and listeners) share in the production of textual authority. To recognize the ephemera that fills Draper's large archive as a mode of literature necessitates a reassessment of the expectations of authorship of the kind that Draper's audiences were capable of making; for Draper's network of female fan mail writers, an authorial identity could be born out of something as seemingly negligible as a piece of correspondence or a conspicuously well-turned sentence. As the responses of these fans indicate, Draper's ability to merge orality with textuality was as revolutionary as paintings of "dissected violins" because her evolving literary practice offered women a new, flexible model of literary engagement, where conversation and short-form writing could be seen as essential components of authorship.

As evinced by her memoir's chatty writing style and her radio show's engagement with a range of voices, Draper was receptive to the literary possibilities of new technologies for recording sound, where "talk" and "text" became inextricably linked. Mary Sherman, the only woman on the board of the NBC advisory council in the thirties, wrote in 1933, "I believe radio has benefited women….more than any other class," adding that radio gave women access to modes of being beyond "the rut of housekeeping" (Benjamin 75). Sherman's perception of access was not merely a sign of her participation within what Timothy Campbell calls "the

collective audience" of a "radio imaginary" (xiii).[54] By establishing a link between speech and text, not only through her show's style and content but also through the countless letters she received from female fans, Draper's broadcasts are a reminder that radio offered women real opportunities for re-envisioning their relationship to, in Sherman's words, "the four walls of their homes." Draper's facility at creating a "roomscape" is indicative of how seemingly passive acts of listening and reading were active in producing new kinds of literary authority and new kinds of texts (*Music at Midnight* 74).

Beginnings: Edith Grove and *Music at Midnight*

From a wealthy Massachusetts family, Muriel Draper scandalized her parents by becoming pregnant before marrying her suitor, Paul Draper, a singer of German lieder and brother of famous monologist Ruth Draper. With just enough income to escape further family scrutiny, the couple emigrated to Europe in 1909, spending two years in Italy before establishing themselves in London in 1911, where Draper began her influential music salon at 19 Edith Grove, with a life of luxury made briefly possible by Paul Draper's success at the racetracks. In 1915, Draper returned to New York, a decision motivated by the outbreak of World War I and by bankruptcy: Paul had bet away their last penny. In New York, Draper divorced Paul, whose singing career had been lost to alcoholism, and she continued to host an important, although more impecunious, salon at 312 East 53rd street. Nineteen-twenties New York was her oyster: she wrote essays in a variety of journals, gave lectures, moonlighted as an interior decorator, and became an active participant in the Harlem Renaissance literary scene. She was a close friend of

[54] Campbell's conception of radio's ideological power—as captured in his phrase, "radio imaginary"—informs Cohen, Coyle, and Lewty's edited collection, *Broadcasting Modernism*

Carl Van Vechten; mentor to jazz singer Taylor Gordon, avant-garde composer George Antheil, photographer Walker Evans, and New York City Ballet founder Lincoln Kirstein. She was also a dedicated member of the New York Gurdjieff reading group that included Jean Toomer, in whose company, according to one source, *Music at Midnight* was drafted.[55] Draper was seen as representing the spirit of "high bohemia" (Mellow 123) and both her London and New York salons fostered an inclusive atmosphere that shunned the social conventions maintained by another famous modernist salon hostess, Natalie Barney.[56] In Kirstein's assessment, Draper "seemed the Big World itself": she was "shameless; immediately intimate, but did not try to scare me" (15).

Music at Midnight is the materialization of Draper's cultural ascendancy during the 1920s. Her memoir not only correlates Draper's success as a writer and talker with her ability to gather together noted musicians, but it also offers a critique of music's presumed aesthetic self-sufficiency. As many other writers sought to realize Pater's dictum that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (86) and achieve music's alleged freedom from quotidian

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(2009), an extensive recent survey of radio and modernist literature. For the editors' discussion of Campbell's term, and its relevance for their volume, see 2-3.

[55] *The Encyclopedia to the Harlem Renaissance* comments, "While participating in a creative writing group (to which Jean Toomer also belonged) conducted at her home by Orage, Draper wrote *Music at Midnight*"(309). Draper and Toomer were both involved in A.R. Orage's Gurdjieff reading group in the late twenties. I have not seen it corroborated that Draper wrote her memoir in this context, but it is a compelling proposal, given Toomer's shared insistence that he was a stronger conversationalist than a writer.

[56] Although she flouted heterosexual mores, American heiress and writer Natalie Barney cultivated a genteel atmosphere at her Paris salon (1909-1969). See a description of Barney's decorum in Gloria Feman and Berthe Cleyrergue, "The Salon of Natalie Clifford Barney: An Interview with Berthe Cleyrergue" (488); Janet Flanner's description of Barney's atmosphere of "cucumber sandwiches" in George Wickes's *The Amazon of Letters* (296); and Barney's own promotion of propriety in her most famous book of epigrams, *Eparpillements* [*Scatterings*] (1910).

circumstance,[57] Draper's memoir revealed the social contingencies cross-cutting even the most seemingly rarefied forms. Modernist evaluations of literature were often based on principles of aesthetic impersonality derived from music. Brad Bucknell's *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics* (2001), one of the most thorough critical explorations of modernism and music, traces the development through the nineteenth century of the "idea of music's expressive, and specifically nonlinguistic power," a conception that then enters into "modernist justifications for innovation in writing" (2). Ezra Pound, for whom the Provençal troubadour represented a poetic ideal, was particularly vehement about the need for literature to recapture its lost musicality[58] and by extension impersonality. He stated bluntly: "Poets who will not study music are defective" (*Ezra Pound and Music: The Complete Criticism* 42), an idea that was correlated in his mind with music's capacity to liberate poetry from the vagaries of its social context, producing "luminous details" ("I Gather the Limbs of Osiris" 23) infused with "virtù" (28) and rendering the banalities of circumstance into "clear impersonal song" (*EPM* 193). Even unfavorable assessments of music's separation from society, as superlatively voiced by Adorno in his 1932 essay, "On the Social Condition of Music," make music's isolation seem inevitable, albeit lamentable. Popular music's commodity nature prevents it from offering true critique and thus estranges it from the truth of society; avant-garde music, in its esotericism and its abnegation of all continuities with bourgeois categories of aesthetic appreciation, "severs the last communication with the listener" and thus has "no social function at all" (397).

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[57] This idea, that music is the only art that does not copy the fluctuations of the phenomenal world, expressing instead the quintessence of the world itself, is famously articulated by Arthur Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Idea* (1818), in which he claims that music is "so much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts, for they speak only of shadows, but it speaks of the thing itself" (333). Schopenhauer's conception animates subsequent assessments of music's supreme autotelism.

The oral recitation of poetry was affected by these attitudes about music. Modernist poets and patrons valued non-referentiality, and thus musicality, in poetry's oral performance above the converse—the way poetry could call attention to music's referential potential. As Mark Morrisson explains in *The Public Face of Modernism*, one important facet of modernist literary culture developed around the ideal of impersonal recitation, where the reciter abnegates his or her own personality so as to give the greatest possible platform to the poem's individuality. Indeed, the major spokesperson for the modernist verse recitation industry, *The Poetry Review* editor Harold Munro, hoped reciters would "have sufficient restraint and self-surrender to submit themselves…to the cadence and rhythms of poetry, becoming, for the time being, a sensitive medium for their conveyance to the audience, rhapsodist rather than exponent, instrument rather than representative" (qtd. in Morrisson 74-75). The irony here is that Munro hoped this method would bring poetry "in closer contact with life" (qtd. in Morrisson 81), even as it sought to purge the poem's performance of any personal flourishes. Pound reiterated Munro's perspective, inveighing against musical performances that sought to connect with the listener. He wrote in a 1918 London music review, "It is a malversion of art for the performer to beseech the audience (*via* the instrument) to sympathise with his or her temperament, however delicate or plaintive or distinguished" (qtd. in Kenner 442).

But even as Pound inveighed against the "obsessed personalit[ies]" who try to "'dominate' an audience" (*EPM* 39), he was also interested in restoring a degree of naturalness to performance, where the cadences of normal speech would shine. He explained, "The horrors of modern readings of poetry are due to oratorical recitation. Poetry must be read as music and not as oratory" (42). In this way, his assessment is indicative of a general cultural trend away

[58] For recent discussions of the role of music, or, as he termed it, *melopoeia*, in Pound's

from stylized elocution,[59] in which we can also situate Draper's memoir, which champions the power of unscripted, lively speech, turning the social experience of her salon into an aesthetic principle involving intimacy, directness, and the personable. Draper's production of a musical, female voice would offer a new kind of authority to women writers and their female audiences, who would begin to see the literary possibilities of casual conversations. Through music, in other words, Draper conferred prestige on conversation, making it seem a desirable literary form. But she also revealed the fallacy of precisely what gave music distinction—its alleged silence about its social context. Indeed, within Munro's and Pound's equivocal statements about music's relationship to speech, literature, and performance is an implicit awareness, which Draper dramatizes, of the impossibility of distinguishing the text/score from its author/composer and in turn from its audience. The complexity of the performance scenario was compounded in an era when gramophones were liberating texts from their material form while also producing new instances of embodiment, the talking or singing object.[60] Charles Altieri sees this ambiguity and flexibility as broadly characteristic of modernist assessments of the autonomy of aesthetic objects: "[r]ather than pursue distinctive and fixed concepts of author, work, audience, and world, [modernists] treated those conceptual elements as mutually dependent and variable. Each work could in principle define how author, work, audience, and world meshed" (108).

Other contemporaneous salons valorized an older, more stable separation of social relations and objects, the hostess herself often operating as the corollary for the aloof art form. In her hand-drawn map of her influential Paris literary salon, Natalie Barney situates herself outside her circle of guests next to her "Temple of Friendship," rendering herself less a participant than a

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conception of poetry see Van Durme, 324-348; Stark, 1-19; and Canton, 941-957.
[59] See Middleton, 85-91.

totem.[61] And, as Stephen Voyce notes, citing Bilski and Braun's study of salons, "'Salon sociability prospered…on flexible seating arrangements—ad hoc pairs and small clusters, open circles for the enjoyment of a performance—save for the commandeering centrality of the salonière, who often presided on a daybed or divan'" (631). *Music at Midnight* begins with a cautionary tale about such impassivity through a damning portrayal of rival salon hostess Mabel Dodge, who ran a salon in Florence between 1905 and 1912 that Draper had frequented before establishing her own London salon.[62] Although Draper's account of Dodge's salon is friendly, Dodge herself is represented as inert. In Draper's description, Dodge represents the performer who has taken Pound's advice too seriously. Mute and immobile, she is impersonal, but also boring. "Mabel….just sat there," Draper laments (11). A paragraph describes some of the guests' wild conversations, and yet, "Mabel sat on" (11). The whole memoir is peppered with such lines: "Mabel…sitting calmly" (120) and "Mabel….sat smilingly silent" (124). At one point Draper more generously observes, "Mabel did not move. She did not have to…Mabel did not speak. Words were too slow for her" (12). But Draper's explanation of Dodge's silence rings false in the context of a memoir where Draper's own facility at talking and making social connections reigns supreme. Draper, unlike Dodge, "is not a good 'sitter,'" (110) and can talk "through tea, through whisky, through dinner. Through the night" (111). Dodge, whose "silences were legendary" (Everett 9), seemed aware that Draper's conversational facility made her look like the lesser hostess, writing bitterly to Stein from Florence about "Muriel who is here & who makes me feel more like mush" (75). Dodge would exact revenge in her own memoir, *European*

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[60] In his study, "The Sound of Evolution", Eric Ames historicizes the new forms of embodiment and disembodiment of music made possible by Edison's "talking machine." See Ames, 297-325.
[61] Barney drew the map of her salon, "Le Salon de l'Amazone," for a book of reminiscences, *Aventures de l'esprit* (Paris: Émile-Paul Frères, 1929).

Experiences, which paints an unflattering picture of Draper's marriage and implies that Draper's skill at conversation was mere egoism.

The reviews of *Music at Midnight* rarely discuss the music played at Draper's evening parties. Indeed, music takes second-stage to Draper's rhapsodic treatment of the "infinitely varied inflections" of her guests' conversations (104). The music Draper selects, mostly Brahms and Beethoven, furnishes Romantic counterpoint to the modern antics of her guests, throwing into relief the salon's deviance (its late hours, its unconventional guests who look like "gypsies,"[63] its dramatic moments, such as the violent intrusion of a gun-wielding ex-lover) and thus aiding its members' recognition of their participation within an alternative community. When Draper receives a letter threatening legal action if her salon's music continues after midnight, the revelers achieve an even greater sense of shared identity, now defined by their separation from London's broader social world. But like most counter-publics in which members of diverse backgrounds affiliate because of a mutual interest in interrogating the terms of normative public participation, their social difference is predicated on the possibility for connection beyond their own circle, with representatives of seemingly opposed communities. Their young neighbors take umbrage at the noise, but their oldest neighbor finds in their music "the only real pleasure he had extracted from life in years" (73). His words of praise reaffirm the surprising inclusivity of what appears to be an exclusive event and challenge the pretensions of artists who might restrict avant-gardism to bohemians. Draper's salon makes room for "invisible listener[s]," prefiguring her radio career (73).

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[62] Dodge described her Florentine salon in her 1935 memoir, *European Experiences*. For its critical discussion see Barolini, 131-179.

[63] For a discussion of the role of the "Gypsy" in modernist bohemia and its relationship to the salon and sociability, see Lyon, "Sociability in the Metropole: Modernism's Bohemian Salons," 687-711 and "Gadze Modernism," 517-538.

Other listeners in *Music at Midnight*, like Henry James, are extravagantly visible. James serves a central role in *Music at Midnight*, both as the old-guard writer who confers authority on the younger set and as a test of Draper's conversational mettle. Draper nominates herself as his translator, the only person who can make fluent his labored speech. She describes her first encounter with him:

> I walked up to him as bravely as I could, and we met. I told him how it had come about that he had entered my childhood as a uniquely living genius. He listened…and then it began. With a laboring that began stirring in the sole of his feet and worked up with Gargantuan travail through his keen and weighty abdomen to his heaving breast and strangled column of throat, hoisted up by eyebrows raised high over the most steadily watching eyes I have ever looked into, he spoke. Having imaginatively participated in every effort his body made, I was exhausted by the time the words were finally born. (88)

Although exhausted, Draper perseveres, setting James at ease by treating him like a piece of music:

> My effort to ignore the words and extract the meaning by a sense of weight, inflection and rhythm which emanated from him, removed the burden he must have felt at keeping me – anyone – waiting so long, and gradually the full current of his thought was flowing steadily, pauses and hesitations becoming accents rather than impediments. It proved an excellent modus operandi from then on. (92)

Draper's recognition of the non-mimetic features of James's speech elevates Draper's status as a hostess to that of an artist; like James, she is a connoisseur of forms. And by abstracting James's voice into rhythms and accents, Draper suggests that her salon's success had less to do with the music performed than the way in which anyone's discourse could, with Draper's help, be

rendered musical, echoing Pound's sentiments about ideal recitation. Draper thus challenges those who would restrict music's anti-referential capacity to a single domain by showing how the impression of a voice may linger independently of the content and context of its utterance.

But even as she points out these features of James's conversation, seeming to reaffirm the ascendancy of all successful arts to the realm of the impersonal, Draper also uses James to show the impossibility of determining the boundary between an object and a subject, of separating a body of work from a person's body. James's massiveness of "head, shoulders, arms, body, legs" makes the highly-wrought aestheticism of his literature—"the astounding structure of words that so decorate his written page" (88)—seem an extension of his person, his literary style an effect of his "cornices of eyebrows" and "magnificently domed head" (87). It is as if James is caught between living praxis and abstracted form, his labored speech a sign—but also, in Draper's witty treatment, a benefit—of this entanglement. *The New York Times* review of *Music at Midnight* lamented that Draper's acquaintance with James had "left little residue of quotable good things" (62). But it is exactly the idea of quotation that Draper's memoir resists: James, in her treatment, is memorable as an example of the inseparability of author and text, writing and speech, convergences that Draper would exploit throughout her career to draw attention to the creative work of her very being—of conversing, hosting, and listening. In her account, James's literary stature, like her own, is not confirmed by quotations but through the intersections of his speech with hers, and their shared ability to turn the role of the audience into a performance—a skill not all "sitters" have, as Draper had shown through Mabel Dodge's negative example. In the James scene, Draper describes how James would "listen [to music] by seeing" (93). James's "listening eyes," his synthaesthetic visualization of an allegedly temporal form, are a reminder of the expressivity of receptivity—his "organs of sight" "absorb" (95) but also "devour" the room (90).

Draper's memoir built up a fan base before publication with the release of three articles in *Harper's* that showcased the best moments in the book: "I meet Henry James" (March 1928), "Buffeting in a South Wind: Some Memories of Norman Douglas" (April 1928) and "Music at Midnight: London Memories, 1911-1914" (August 1928). The fan mail within the Draper archive attests to her writing's glowing reception by individual readers. "I could hear you talking when I read your article," one admirer gushed (September 2, 1929). A friend confirmed this sentiment, "It has all the quality of your talk in wit and fluency and insight and evocation…it carries over into print—the beautiful glazed surface, as of enamel, through which, as you talk, one watches the rich colors glow and glint below" (February 28, 1928). The winsomeness of Draper's conversational style led other readers to want access to her social circle: "As a true disciple of Muriel Draper, I'm writing to invite myself to see you sometime" (July 21, 1928). *Music at Midnight*, published the following year, garnered equally favorable reader feedback. Fans remarked upon the sonorousness of Draper's style: "I wish to thank you for these most beautiful hours I have ever spent – reading, or shall, I say listening – to your exquisite *Music at Midnight*" (October 6, 1929) and "Last night, I sat up long after midnight listening to the music of your book."[64]

The popularity of these articles, followed by the success of the memoir, helped Draper catch the eye of the commercial publishing world. A literary agency contacted her, hoping to "find [her] agentless" (January 29, 1929) and Blanche Knopf, wife of publisher Alfred Knopf, wrote to Draper twice to express her regret that Knopf hadn't had *Music at Midnight* on Knopf's list.[65] What seems to have made Draper so appealing is her display of authorial accessibility and

[64] Undated, anonymous letter in Draper archive, YCAL MSS 49, box 14, folder 456.
[65] Blanche Knopf to Muriel Draper, 2 letters: February 24th, 1928 and January 29th, 1929, in the Draper archive, YCAL MSS 49, box 14, folder 456.

intimacy. As one particularly humble but curious reader wrote to Draper, "I am not at all interesting and I can't write or anything, I just spend my time reading and wishing that I had some entrée to the lovely people I would like to know" (Mrs. Alicia Wilby, March 23). Peter Middleton's *Distant Reading* describes the growth of the live poetry performance in a century that has heralded the "death of the author" once through the intentional fallacy and again through deconstruction's repudiation of the primacy of speech. Middleton's insight that "poetry readings make fleetingly perceptible the unstable transitions between different signifying media, as if the poem's significations could be best understood at the margins of significations…[where] meaning is produced on the border of transition between sound and visual marks" (69) seems true for another transitional space, the salon, which is neither completely private nor completely public, neither a full-fledged artistic institution nor a spontaneous gathering. And the "productions" of the salon, its fleeting conversations and chance meetings, are recreated through a memoir like Draper's, whose chatty writing style also seeks to capture "the border of transition between sound and visual marks," thereby making authorship seem more available, even to fans who claim they "can't write" as they nevertheless send letters.

Because of its liminal position between orality and textuality, the modernist salon has been a difficult phenomenon to account for. Its artistic legacy seems at once too limited, lost to unrecoverable social encounters, and too diffuse, marking but never defining a variety of texts. *The Copywrights*, Paul Saint-Amour's fascinating study of how copyright law helped to produce the idea of stable authorship, offers a model for taking seriously the relationship between speech and the written text, where orality is not simply the primary fiction of logocentrism but also a real dimension of authorship as it is legally and conventionally understood. On one hand, "the longing for orality as origin, nature, or authentic prehistory may be the most characteristic thing

about print culture" (94), a classically logocentric desire Saint-Amour sees best demonstrated in the figure of Oscar Wilde, whose writing "both embodies and inflicts an ache for forms of orality while elaborately demonstrating their irrecuperability." Wilde offers an apt corollary for Draper, of whom Mabel Dodge, in a generous moment, wrote, "Since the time when Oscar Wilde talked so effervescently I doubt whether [there has been] any more gifted monologist than Muriel" (270). Like Wilde, Draper's success seems due her ability to construct a *longing* for her salon's conversations, made possible through her memoir, which can never quite erase the fact that the transmission of her speech is only possible at one remove, that of her written text. Nor would she want to, since the desire her text cultivates in her fans is partially the result of the acknowledged irretrievability of the salon conversation she claims to reproduce.

On the other hand, as Saint-Amour argues, orality is not a completely illusory construct, since desire for it can effectively be satisfied in a literary culture where texts only remain exclusive for the fixed duration of a copyright, afterward becoming more oral, insofar as they become borrowable and easily transmissible. This is not to say that the oral text operates simply as metaphor for works with lapsed copyrights. As Lisa Gitelman has shown, debates about the copyright status—and implicit textuality—of reproduced sounds (via gramophones, phonographs, and player-pianos) heightened the legal connection between sound and script. As a result of the 1909 United States Copyright Act, Gitelman explains, the phonograph was effectively deemed a reader of pieces of "writing" (283) that could not, like normal texts, be visually read but nevertheless could be parsed, giving musicians monetary compensation for the mechanical reproductions of their compositions and enlarging the onotological scope of writing. Within this climate in which listening, playing, and reading were growing entwined, and following the success of *Music at Midnight*, Draper would become interested in another media

format, radio, which would give her a new venue in which to continue exploring how best to transmit her conversation—and how to render it a mode of authorship.

Draper's turn away from conversational literature to the transmission of her conversation through radio looks less like a departure from literary participation than the exploration of its limit point. Radio offers a better illusion of unmediated speech than her memoir does, but also entails a textual dimension that Draper would implicitly acknowledge and advance through the content of her broadcasts and the fan mail circuits she activated. *Music at Midnight* proposes that conversation is an art equal to music and also questions the viability of claims for music's aesthetic impersonality; Draper's NBC radio show, "It's A Woman's World," which ran from 1937-1938, reveals how this traditionally "feminine" art could be a vehicle for radical political engagement and for re-configuring female authorship to include even small acts of verbal participation. No recordings of the show exist; NBC only began regularly recording its shows in the late thirties, and Draper's was not selected.[66] But her broadcast notes in the Beinecke Library testify to Draper's understanding that *Music at Midnight*'s achievement—the performance of conversation that led readers to identify with her voice and long for her lifestyle—could be re-worked to advantage on air, where listeners could believe they were at her salon, members of her artistic and literary world. Draper also used the show to draw attention to the writerly quality of her speech and, simultaneously, the oral features of the written text, encouraging her mostly female audience to take the literary potential of their own conversations seriously.

"Talking It Over" after *Music at Midnight*

Draper's print journalism in the twenties had already conveyed a mistrust of the standard

conceptions of the written word, foreshadowing her preference for live radio. In one particularly telling essay, published just a few months before *Music at Midnight*, she inveighs against "The Habit-Forming Drug of Words." We should be wary of "written words," Draper advises, since books "confer prestige without distinction," cultivating "the desire for experiencing without active participation" (438). Yet even as she laments "passive" reading, she draws attention to a threshold moment between orality and textuality, where the written word achieves a powerful mutability. During the early stage of literary acquisition, Draper explains, "strange little shapes and lines become letters, letters make words and words convey sensations…Fingers held this way or that on a pen reproduce these shapes and one learns" (438). Eventually, words become a "drug" and a reader "can roller-skate over the polished wooden surface of the mind without raising a splinter of thought," but rather than reject reading altogether, Draper would repeatedly stress the possibility—and desirability—of prolonging the phase when the processing of written language is unfamiliar, operating much like the higher-order literary activity we now call close-reading (439). Henry James, whose conversation in *Music at Midnight* occupies a fraught space between speech and writing, represents just such an intersectional moment—he is as an object of Draper's masterful close-reading as well as a subject capable of re-endowing language with "strange…shapes" and strange sounds.

Draper's first radio broadcast, aired on June 8th, 1937, promotes C.K. Ogden's Basic English for the "new women" and "new men" of the world, capturing the challenge of Draper's position as someone interested in language's capacity for slowness, sensuousness, and opacity—precisely the qualities that tend to flag a discourse as piece of literature—but that she wishes to show as characteristic of conversation, a seemingly antithetical linguistic mode. Ogden (1889-

[66] See the Library of Congress' description of its NBC Resources Held by the Recorded Sound

1957) was promoter of a system for simplifying English and had famously rewritten a passage of *Finnegans Wake* into Basic English. Draper's broadcast argues that his system will "reduce [English] to its essential structures so that it may travel safely through the next centuries of civilization, and not die by the wayside." She acknowledges that "[we are] accustomed to a haphazard use of English from birth"; however, she continues, we must sacrifice the "heat" of idiosyncratic usage for the "light" of clarity that Basic English will promote. This argument for English's easy transmission contradicts her broadcast's other central claim—that "we must seek out new 'experience[s]'" and relish language's ability to "MAKE," not simply record and convey. It is precisely this tension between speech's improvisational potential and the more rigid strictures of Ogden's written system that points to radio's deepening relationship to writing during this period when more and more broadcasts were scripted and to Draper's increasing investment in a dialectic between speech and writing, where conversational speech may be a literary mode just as literature may be conversational, as her memoir had shown. Michael North has suggested that one "fundamental irony" of modernist art is that "avant-garde disruption and utopian transparency produce one another" (217). In Draper's first radio broadcast, with its demand for language that is at once descriptive and performative, such an irony is almost in her grasp.

After her first few programs, Draper began to invite guests on to "It's a Woman's World," such as socialist labor organizer Mother Bloor, German soprano-turned-anti-Fascist-writer Lotte Lehman, and Dr. Lin Yutang, a Chinese dance historian. This suggests the increased demand for discussion programs, where dialogues between the host and a guest, even if sometimes scripted, would establish a sense of a rapport and colloquy with the listening

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Section: http://www.loc.gov/rr/record/recnbc.html

audience. In "Vox Pop: Network Radio and the Voice of the People," Jason Loviglio describes how radio programs in the 1930s and 1940s "drew an analogy between participatory radio, participatory democracy, and a new culture of consumption" (90). Loviglio has a cynical take on this simulation of community, invoking Habermas's opinion of "'talk shows' of radio and television as the epitome of mass culture's 'sham public,' where the public/private distinction has become hopelessly blurred" (93). According to Loviglio, "intimate" radio programs were used to simultaneously conduct market research and inculcate consumer desires. But Loviglio ignores the fact that even the most critical thinkers of the period were interested in audience reception, as seen in Adorno's analysis of classical music audiences in his study of Walter Damrosch's "NBC Music Appreciation Hour" and his participation in the Princeton Radio Research Project. Moreover, by assuming that all audience/host intimacy was veiled capitalist complicity, Loviglio fails to take account of the subversive potential of "mainstream" shows like Draper's.

Many recent studies of modernism's relationship to radio have highlighted feelings of anxiety during the thirties that "the subject was becoming, in Foucault's phrase, an 'object of information, never a subject of communication'" (Willihnganz 125) and have explored how radio revealed for writers that "intimacy [was] an illusion in any medium" (Wheeler 239). But it is worth drawing attention to a proto-feminist counter-discourse during the period that demonstrates that interaction between radio programs and their listeners was not merely a fantasy. In 1939, Jeanette Sayre, research assistant to the Princeton Radio Research Project, published a comprehensive survey of radio fan mail, in which she attests to the growing importance and shifting demographics of fan mail writers. Sayre explains that "fan-letter writers" had been previously "thought to be neurotics," not in the content of their letters but in the fact

"that they wrote at all, transgress[ing] the boundary between themselves and the impersonal broadcasting company" (272). Sayre argues that her research challenges this impression: it reveals that fan mail writers tend to be from big cities, disputing the opinion that fan mail is a sign of "small town" naïveté. She also testifies to a "startling reversal of the usual sex ratios among writers…women's letters run as high as five to one, almost always three to one, as compared with men" (262). Women's "interesting and useful" commentaries must be taken seriously, Sayre concludes.

That radio produced such an overwhelming textual response from women is evidence of radio's material production of community—specifically a community of women who may have considered their letters the first act of a burgeoning authorial identity. Janet Casey, who has written about women's letters to magazine editors in the nineteen twenties, asks of brief, singular correspondence, "At what point—what emotional intensity, what level of detail, what *length*—does a self-narrative gesture reify (and not merely reference) an individual 'I,' and when, conversely, is it readable only or primarily in terms of its contribution to the understanding of a particular social group?" (97). This question is also worth asking of Draper's fans, whose correspondence in praise of *Music at Midnight* expresses a degree of urgency and importance, as if their letters could extend the literary work Draper had begun. Draper's radio listeners, some of whom write with the crude style of the newly initiated to pen and paper ("Mrs Draper your last work on the air were your best one I am sure every one that were lucky to listen in will be with you"[67]) also index the "intensity" that Casey sees as distinguishing a "particular" "female" narrative form, however hesitant, from the epiphenomena of social history. When Draper's least educated fan struggles to describe her impression of the literary merits of Draper's show—"your

[67] Draper archive, YCAL MSS 49, Fan mail for "It's a Woman's World," Box 14, folder 474.

voice well just your words…is new to the world"—she registers her own attempt to make her input count beyond what Casey calls the "perceived functionalism" of such missives (101).

During a time period when, as Randall Patnode argues, radio was being championed as a way to bridge rural life and urban life, "redeem[ing]" farmers who had no access to culture (285), it also seems to have "redeemed" working women who didn't have time for, or access to, cultural and political discussion. By couching her more radical political opinions within a benign, typically feminine framework, Draper highlighted her connection with her female audience and her sympathy for mainstream American values as well as her commitment to radical socialist and feminist principles. In one set of broadcast notes, Draper amends her tone to make it more inclusive, changing 'Next Tuesday I will talk to you" to "talk *with* you" ("3rd Broadcast" 3). And many broadcasts end with a version of these lines—"And now may I ask you a question? Are you still with me? I really need to know"—suggesting the extent to which she wanted her program to cultivate a salon-like atmosphere, where Draper was not so much imparting information to a passive audience as helping to simulate, and stimulate, an exchange ("Oberlin College Broadcast" 6). Moreover, a recent study has suggested that radio fans during this period did not necessarily perceive interactivity in ways we would expect. In general, a "mediated experience," Charlene Simmons explains, may be perceived "to be interactive even when the medium lacks the technological features often associated with interactive media" (446). In other words, what appears to be one-sided feedback may have been perceived as a mutually responsive circuit between Draper and her fans.

Draper's fans responded encouragingly, praising her "natural" delivery and her "unique" "method of expression and presentation."[68] A fan wrote to NBC asking if it would change

[68] Undated, anonymous letter in the Draper archive, YCAL MSS 49, box 14, folder 456.

Draper's broadcast timeslot: "I heard Mrs. Draper in her broadcast and I was very pleased to hear such a capable woman. Is it possible to change her time and make her evenings so I can hear her every week? I hate to miss her talk when I'm at work (June 28, 1937). Another reiterated, "It would be a good idea to make her broadcasts during lunch time, so we can listen more regularly" (June 27, 1937). To modify Timothy Campbell's words, Draper's show seems to have provided a "salon imaginary" where any listener, not just a member of the artistic elite, could "participate" in the relevant discussions of the day. But it also, like *Music at Midnight*, turned the salon into a literary process, where speech and text can merge, not only through conversational writing style but also through the creation of a material circuit between spoken utterance and written response.

In 1931, Katherine Seymour and J.T.W. Martin published *How to Write for Radio*, a study of how to write good radio scripts in an era that was skeptical of "'canned' programs" but was beginning to demand a "written record of every work spoken on air" and to circulate pre-recorded broadcasts to the entire nation. Seymour and Martin encourage writers to make their scripts as natural as possible, giving them advice about how to create "written continuity" (the filler spoken by a broadcaster between programs) that sounds improvised. "The first lesson the continuity writer learns," they explain, "is that he must eliminate many expressive and descriptive words from his vocabulary." They continue, "he must unlearn many of the prose writer's rules of sentence structure…[but] There is one rule of all prose writing which applies to radio – the advisability of using active verbs wherever possible and the inadvisability of using two many adjectives" (52). Draper's discussion of Ogden's Basic English and the "habit-forming drug of words" resonates here, suggesting that her focus on "active" language was less a sign that she was interested in rejecting reading and writing *tout court* than reformulating expectations of the written text for radio, where improvisation is an effect, not the rejection, of

written cues. Indeed, whereas her first few broadcasts followed a lecture she had written in advance, she began to insert the cue "improvise" in her notes, suggesting her listening community's demand for "natural" speech but also the continued relationship of the impromptu to a text. And as Sayre mentions, many fans wrote to radio stations to request transcripts of the shows, suggesting the extent to which radio shows like Draper's were heard as a piece of writing.

In one of her later broadcasts, she addresses the question of replication—both in the sense of "canned," recorded broadcast and in the sense of listening remotely to live events—a problem at the heart of how her performance of "spontaneous" conversation on air connects with her career as a writer and salon hostess. In this broadcast, "Let's Talk it Over" (November 1, 1937), Draper admits to approaching recorded and broadcasted music with reluctance: "I protested that people who wanted to hear music could always get to where music was being played; that to fully understand music, one must participate as closely as possible in its actual performance" (2). But that was before, she continues, "I really listened, really received what the radio offers. Our eyes have been so over-burdened…it is time we used our ears again. When you think of how much we READ, how dependent we are on the printed word, for what we learn and believe, it is staggering – a staggering weight to put on one sense organ" (3). She continues, "I believe everything happens first in music – it was this feature of radio programs that claimed my serious attention." Radio's unique capacity to democratize access can, in Draper's account, effectively change the very nature of the avant-garde, whose limited audience was always in conflict with the desire to reinvigorate the relationship between art and daily life.[69] Draper's own voice comes to stand in for the salon as an ambassador for the artistic innovation she claims music always

[69] See Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 47-109; 113-127; 141-159. See also Huyssen, vii-44 and Bürger, xlix-3; 35-83.

heralds and as an invitation to the audience's participation, which would appear to be auditory not textual. But, in a reversal that has come to seem characteristic of Draper's relationship to writing, this lecture ends with a set of penciled notes reminding her to "improvise" about the importance of literature at the end of show, "lest I should seem to advocate reading nothing and listening to everything." "Talk of those [writers] you have greatly read," she notes, and discuss "the value of books" (6).

Her "written" radio lecture cautions against reading, although her "improvised" notes remind her to endorse it. This tension between speech and writing made Draper a versatile participant in New York's modernist scene, a writer who you could "listen to" and a talker whose speech had "definiteness" (Letter from NBC Division of Women's Activities, June 21, 1937). And yet, her melding of these two modes has made her difficult to read as figure of literary modernism. By disseminating her salon's conversations once through her memoir and again through her radio show, Draper turned social experience into a mode of literary engagement, one that could reach a growing, largely female audience. Her audience who was also, possibly for the first time, sending letters to a reader they did not know personally, and beginning to think of themselves as part of a public of writers. As she made clear to the countless women who wrote to her in praise of her memoir and radio show, a literary voice emerges not in isolation, but through an exchange of conversations and through the manipulation of a range of textual modes—some recognizable as literature and others less so. Her manipulation of the literary text to fit the demands of radio prefigures the multifold author-practices emerging online today, which also challenge normal expectations of literary participation. In an oft-quoted phrase, Jay Rosen has described current social media users as "the people formerly known as the

audience."[70] The women Draper inspired to talk, to listen and to write letters might be similarly described: formerly known as her readers, they had become more like fellow writers.

[70] See Jay Rosen, "The People Formerly Known as the Audience," *Pressthink* (June 7, 2006): http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html. Electronic.

Chapter 3

The Little Review and the Rise of the Reader Critic

You must know English prose; you must write it as though you are talking instead of writing; you must say quite frankly and in detail the things you would not be allowed to say in the prostituted, subsidized, or uninteresting magazines; and you must be true. This begins our warfare. —Margaret Anderson, *The Little Review*, May 1915.[71]

"This is NOT a chatty literary review; its mission is not to divert and amuse"—*The Egoist* (advertisement in *Poetry* 1918)[72]

"The Little Review is not a chatty journal giving mere publicity about the Arts"---*The Little Review* (advertisement in the *Dial* 1919)[73]

"[*The Dial*] won't be as much fun as the L.R. [*Little Review*]…*The Dial* will never be any real fun"—James Joyce to Ezra Pound, 1920.[74]

Most online forums—e-journals, blogs, and social media sites—facilitate user participation. *The Huffington Post* is as much a news source as a message board; *Gawker* confers celebrity status to its commenters; and even that pillar of tradition, *The New York Times*, encourages substantial online response. In light of this explosion of venues that solicit readers' contributions, it is hard to appreciate just how novel was such a dialogic format in 1914 when Margaret Anderson introduced "The Reader Critic" column to her influential modernist magazine, *The Little Review* (1914-1929). Anderson's column put her opinions in conversation with her readers' letters—a remarkable innovation in an era in which magazines tended to be one-sided, offering either editorial commentary or reader correspondence, but rarely both. Most critical studies of *The Little Review* have focused on its serialization of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (beginning in 1918) and the consequent suppression of the journal after it was charged it with

[71] See Anderson, "What We Are Fighting For," 4.
[72] See "The Egoist" (advertisement) in *Poetry*, 63.
[73] See "The Little Review" (advertisement) in *The Dial*, 169.
[74] Quoted in Golding, 51.

obscenity (in 1920).[75] This event, which took place after the journal moved from Chicago to New York in 1917, has overshadowed the magazine's other achievements and, because it occurred during the years Ezra Pound served as foreign editor,[76] has led to an overestimation of Pound's influence on Anderson.[77] This chapter focuses on *The Little Review*'s less discussed early years, when it was still based in Chicago and before Pound joined the masthead. During this period, Anderson's "Reader Critic" re-envisioned the reader-editor relationship and offered a venue where art and literature could be debated both on the page and off. Anderson actively engaged with her readers about the form literary communication should take in the modernist era, distinguishing her journal from other little magazines. "Modernism began in the magazines," Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman have claimed (73). This is especially true for *The Little Review*, but not simply because it published important writers like Joyce. *The Little Review*'s most important contribution to modernism was its creation of a literary salon that was first and foremost in print.

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[75] The Society for the Suppression of Vice had suppressed an earlier issue of *The Little Review* for its publication of Wyndham Lewis's "Cantleman's Spring-Mate" in the October, 1917 issue. This incident, and the more famous suppression of the Nausicaa section of Joyce's *Ulysses*, have been discussed in depth by Hofer, "Modernist Polemic: Ezra Pound V. 'The Perverters of Language,'"; Casado, "Legal Prudery: the Case of 'Ulysses,'"; Adam Parkes, "'Literature and Instruments for Abortion': 'Nausicaa" and the Little Review Trial"; and countless other places.

[76] Pound joined the masthead in May of 1917. He worked closely with the magazine until spring of 1923. See *Pound/The Little Review: The Letters of Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson: the Little Review Correspondence*.

[77] Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman's major recent analysis, *Modernism in the Magazines*, urges scholars to reconsider broad categories, like "the literary" and "editorship" (53), that have remained under-interrogated in periodical studies. Yet they repeat a familiar story about who controlled modernism when they claim that *The Little Review* only achieved literary significance after Ezra Pound became its foreign editor in 1917: "[Pound] finally found his pliable female editor in Margaret Anderson in *The Little Review*" (12). Other critics have made similar overstatements. For example, in "Make it Sell! Ezra Pound Advertises Modernism," Timothy Materer claims that Pound "took over" (21) *The Little Review*. More surprisingly, Shari Benstock, in her groundbreaking feminist study, *Women of the Left Bank*, claims that *The Little Review* allowed itself to be "directed by Pound's interest" (372).

This chapter first makes an historical claim about the disparate origins of Anderson's groundbreaking column. Anderson, I argue, drew from the mainstream *Ladies*' *Home Journal*, which under the editorship of the charismatic Edward Bok solicited and reflected upon readers' personal letters but never published them, and from the Chicago literary review where she first apprenticed, *The Dial*, which published readers' correspondence but whose editor at the time, Francis Fisher Browne, rarely offered his own feedback. In bridging the *Ladies' Home Journal*'s strong editorial voice with *The Dial*'s willingness to reproduce readers' letters, and in permitting both personal musings and serious critical reflection, *The Little Review* not only offered an unprecedented (and unparalleled) written forum for the discussion of avant-garde work but also turned her readers into theorists of the literary publics they participated in, since readers were encouraged to reflect on the biographical determinants that shaped their aesthetic impressions. The magazine's famous "blank" issue of September 1916, which left thirteen pages empty, gave visual form to the colloquy fostered by "The Reader Critic." The blank pages were both an offering of writing paper during wartime shortages and a materialization of the metaphorical space of reader-critical debate.

My second claim is that *The Little Review's* "Reader Critic" column and the attendant "blank" issue challenge the contemporary critical usage of what has become a key explanatory term for the period's literary exchanges: conversation. As the discussion of modernist networks and cultural cross-pollination has superseded that of modernist autonomy and elitism, scholars have elected "conversation" as a constitutive metaphor for modernism: Adam McKible and Suzanne Churchill argue that "[l]ittle magazines provide a record of the large-scale conversation that became modernism" (5); Christine Stansell claims that "the mingling of men and women in conversation came to seem the very essence, the condition of modernity" (13); and Mark Goble

shows how "scenes of conversation and communication" (*Beautiful Circuits* 42) in modernist literature reveal a fascination with new technology. Other critics have treated conversation less analogically, describing the catalytic importance of actual modernist social interactions for subsequent literary work: for Jayne Marek, "conversation" between Anderson and her co-editor and lover Jane Heap, who joined *The Little Review* in 1915, became "one of the forces that moved modernism" (*Women Editing Modernism* 61); for Janet Lyon, conversation within modernist salons flourished as "an art unto itself" and motivated "the development of modernist aesthetics and practices" ("Gender and Sexuality" 236). Neither the metaphor model nor the catalyst model adequately describes conversation in *The Little Review*. Conversation as it is published in *The Little Review* is not just a record of actual conversations, although it sometimes functioned this way. It was also the inspiration for a series of salons and discussion groups, inverting "live" sociability's relationship of priority to literary production. And the "blank" issue, by giving shape to an allegedly absent center of modernist activity (its missing encounters and unrecoverable conservations), turned what tends to be seen as a substrate or model for artistic production into a mode of it.

The Ladies' Home Journal and *The Dial*

Under the leadership of the innovative Edward Bok, the *Ladies' Home Journal* garnered the largest circulation of any magazine in the world by 1901,[78] a distinction it kept until *The Saturday Evening Post* overtook it in 1910.[79] Bok, editor of the *Journal* from 1889-1919, expanded the journal's readership by shifting its focus to the whole family, not just women, and by soliciting its readers' participation in practically every column. In addition to a popular and

[78] See Bok, "The Magazine with a Million," 16.

long-running column, "My Girls," in which "questions of interest to girls [were] cheerfully answered"[80] (both within the journal and by correspondence, if the girl enclosed a stamp), the journal included "Mrs. Rorer's answers," which addressed housekeeping queries, "Side talks with Girls" written by Bok under the pseudonym "Ruth Ashmore,"[81] "Problems of Young Men," in which Bok himself answered questions sent in, and as well as host of other columns that either directly solicited and responded to readers or created a space for more indirect debate over topics such as "Conversation and Good form in Public Places" and "The Ideals and the Ambitions of Girls." In addition to these "question and answer" columns, the journal styled many of its imaginative pieces in an epistolary format: there was a fictionalized "Gossip of a New York Girl" letter series, a "confidential" set of letters about an aunt's "dreamy, young niece," and a variety of commissioned letters from Paris. When the journal's circulation hit the record-breaking one million mark in 1901, Bok sought new ways to involve his readers, introducing "Mr. Bok's question box," which offered $25 (approximately $650 today) to the reader with the best answer to the question of the month (such as "what single idea—practical, literary, or artistic—would improve *The Ladies' Home Journal* most?" (t.p.). Bok's strategy was so successful that in 1914 alone the *Journal* received almost half a million letters,[82] leading him to call it "the world's 'largest possible pulpit'" (qtd. in Scalon 51).

Interestingly, Bok did not attempt to mask the commercial objectives of this endeavor—"A magazine is purely a business proposition," he had told his readers in an earlier issue ("Personal" 18). "Is it likely," he asked, "that an editor…will be indifferent to what his readers think of his magazine, that he will be unapproachable, or too busy to heed what his readers have

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[79] See Damon-Moore, 151.
[80] For a representative "My Girls" column, see Margaret E. Sangster, "My Girls," 18.
[81] See Scanlon, 50.

to say to him?" (18). And so, as he explained in another piece, "[t]he more the letters, the happier we shall be" since "it is the public that edits a magazine" ("Two Centuries and This Magazine" 16). What did Bok's readers want more than anything else? A column devoted to literature. "Responding to the expressed desires of hundreds of readers for a department about modern books and authors," Bok explained in February of 1902, a year after he had introduced his question box, the journal had arranged "a series of literary talks" putting "readers intelligently in touch with books, authors and literary affairs as they come up" ("Mr. Mabie's Literary Talks Written by Mr. Hamilton W. Mabie" t.p.). This series, "Mr. Mabie's Literary Talks," is discussed at length in Amy Blair's study of the inculcation of highbrow literary taste in middle class readers, *Reading Up*. Unlike the *Journal*'s preceding literary columnists, Blair explains, Mabie did not censure popular literature, seeking instead to expand pleasure reading to include classic works (40). Mabie emphasized the readers' role in establishing the literary canon: "Books are circulated much more largely by readers than by critics, and one's curiosity is quickened when he hears the title of a new novel in current conversation'" (qtd. in Blair 17). Mabie's "Talks" frequently discussed the publishing trade, often alongside practical advice about how to become a writer—the highest ambition of *The Journal*'s readers after "[to be] wives and mothers" and "womanly women" (Hamilton 4).

It is strange, then, that neither Bok nor Mabie chose to publish the letters and questions readers wrote in, publishing instead just their own answers. Readers complained, to which Bok responded, "we ask for criticism as well as commendations, and it would certainly be most ungracious to those of our contributors criticized to publicly print what is written of them." He concluded, "[t]he value of these letters is to the editor of *The Journal*, not to the public" ("Some

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[82] Ibid., 244.

Letters to the Journal t.p.). Although scholars have remarked that the *Journal*'s use of discussion-based columns created "a discursive female community that transcended consumer society even though it operated within it" (Snyder 313) and helped establish its reputation as "the most serious of the women's magazines" (Hunter 585), this "community" remained largely virtual, insofar as unpublished. Indeed, in February 1901, Bok's memorably granted his correspondents a voice only to use their letters as evidence against writing as vocation for women. In an article titled, "Is the Newspaper Office the Place for a Girl?" (18), Bok published excerpts from letters from "forty-two" of the "leading newspaper women of the country." Only "three" letters "answered in the affirmative" that women should work as journalists: the remaining thirty-nine, whose opinions Bok gleefully printed, warned against women joining their profession.

Unlike *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *The Dial* was not interested in establishing an intimate, "discursive community" with its subscribers, but it did speak directly to the interest in literature expressed by the *Journal*'s readers. It had established its reputation in 1840 as Margaret Fuller's transcendentalist journal and was revived in 1880 as journal for "Literary Criticism, Discussion, and Information" in Chicago by Francis Fisher Browne, who remained its editor until his death in the spring of 1913. *The Dial*'s most important era for modernism began in 1918 when Scofield Thayer bought the journal: during his tenure, the journal would publish some of the period's most famous works of literature: T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, fragments of Jean Toomer's *Cane*, and poems by Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, e.e. cummings, and others. Because Browne only published criticism, not literary works, there has been little written about

The Dial's years under him,[83] but his journal is worth consideration because it was as his employee, shortly before his death, that Margaret Anderson learned the basics of the periodical trade.

Browne's approach to literature was conservative; his journal displayed a preference for staid, historical columns that attracted scholars and educated readers, mostly from the Chicago area but from other regions too, in particular the Northeast. Through a dedication to "consistency and stability" ("The Dial's Quarter Century" 305) and by championing "more stoutly than ever before what has been tried and approved rather than what is experimental and of dubious worth" ("The Note of Modernity" 225) Browne had raised his journal's circulation to 5,000[84] (3,000 subscribers higher than the figure Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich use as the cut-off point for the "little magazine" in their foundational 1946 survey, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*). Browne's *Dial* included relatively frequent "Communications" section, but, in a reverse of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, he printed the entirety of the subscriber's letter but almost never published his own responses. These communications concerned facts not feelings: readers wrote in to shed light on historical or etymological questions, not to share their opinions or literary aspirations. If, as Scholes and Wulfman suggest in their recent study *Modernism in the Magazines*, editorship tends to serve an author function for periodicals (through which a journal's range of articles becomes associated with the editor's own discursive predilections), then Edward Bok's distinctive, opinionated voice offered a particularly strong "unifying element"[85] for *The Ladies' Home Journal*, whereas Browne's mark on *The Dial* is effectively absent. His name is rarely mentioned, the magazine's editorial columns were unsigned, and the

[83] There is scant scholarship on Francis Fisher Browne's years at the Dial, with the exception of Nicholas Joost's commendable overview, *Years of Transition: The Dial, 1912-1920*.
[84] See Joost, 6.

"Communications" generated scant debate.

Margaret Anderson, born in Indiana in 1886 to a wealthy family, was sociologically poised to draw on both magazines: she shared the literary ambitions (and age-gender demographic) of the *Journal*'s subscribers and her college education and Midwest background put her in *The Dial*'s orbit. The magazines' different attitudes to their audiences would inform her editorship of *The Little Review*, in which she drew on Bok's display of reader-editor intimacy and Browne's willingness to cede space to his readers' communications.

Like the millions Bok motivated to send letters, Anderson had once been a young girl seeking advice from women's magazines—advice that she credits with changing her life. In her first memoir, *My Thirty-Years War* (1930), she describes how she was saved from the constraints of domestic banality by a letter she wrote to *Good Housekeeping*, which had reformatted itself around *The Ladies' Home Journal's* reader-participation model and had begun to offer a "Talking It Over with the Editor" column in 1904, along with other similar columns. Anderson describes,

> We subscribed to all the more obnoxious magazines—the *Ladies' Home Journal* and another in the same category called *Good Housekeeping*. One day in this I noticed a department conducted by Clara E. Laughlin—a department of advice to young girls...[Her] advice seemed to prescribe none of the immobility usually urged upon the young, so I decided to ask Miss Laughlin how a perfectly nice but revolting young girl could leave home. My letter was long (I was always long); I listed everything I found immoral in the family situation and asked her if she considered me crazy. She answered by return post that I didn't seem crazy, that my letter was the most interesting she had

[85] See Scholes and Wulfman, Kindle Location 926.

> received—had I read Edward Gosse's "Father and Son," and wouldn't I come to Chicago to talk to her? (12).

Anderson went to Chicago to meet Laughlin, with whom she "lunched and talked," "teaed and talked," and "dined and talked" (17). Laughlin was so impressed by Anderson she proposed to take her "under her wing" and offered her job doing interviews and book reviews. Shortly after, in the fall of 1908, Anderson moved to Chicago and launched her literary career, activating—much to her parents' chagrin—the dormant potential of the advice columns to "young writers" that Bok had popularized even as he warned women against realizing these ambitions.

The Dial provided Anderson with a practical education: it was under its auspices that she "learned the secrets of the printing room" (28). Francis Fisher Browne, whom she enchanted when she successfully completed a line of an Arnold poem he had forgotten, took her on as his "chief assistant" in mid 1912. Anderson left *The Dial* in early 1913 when her relationship with Browne had become, in her words, "too lyrical" : he "had been moved to kiss" her (31). Anderson must have appreciated *The Dial*'s willingness to publish its readers' letters but she also must have been puzzled by its refusal to engage in editor-reader (or reader-reader) exchange, particularly since her own correspondence with Laughlin had been so fruitful. During the moment that Anderson was leaving *The Dial*, it published the only controversial "Communications" column of its history under Browne. On May 1, 1913, Wallace Rice, a well-known poet, wrote *The Dial* a long letter lambasting Ezra Pound's work in *Poetry*, which had been founded in Chicago the year before by Harriet Monroe, who devoted an issue to Pound in April of 1913. "[O]ne must regret," wrote Rice, that "that 'Poetry' is being turned into a thing for laughter" (370), referring to Monroe as an "edito[r] who ha[s] never before edited" and faulting her for seeking "novelty for novelty's sake" and using "'traditional' as term of contempt" (371).

Monroe responded in the May 16 issue, mocking Rice's editorial fitness: "Mr. Rice has edited so many anthologies—among them, "The Little Book of Brides," "The Little Book of Kisses…—that the keenness of his judgment as an authority on poetry is somewhat worn" (409). Moreover, she continued, "'Poetry' will not be able, either in [Pound's] case or those of other adventurously modern poets, to sit on the fence of tradition until the verdict of time is pronounced; *we commend it to those who always think the last word has been said*" [my emphasis]. Rice wrote back a snide response in the next issue, followed by another retort from Monroe, who was granted the last word even as she made clear her preference for unfinished verdicts.

To Anderson, who founded *The Little Review* less than a year later, in March of 1914, this sole, lively debate must have seemed like what was missing in the other issues of *The Dial*, and for that matter in *Poetry*. Monroe*'s* interest in new, unusual poets and her passionate defense of free verse set her journal apart from *The Dial*, but her magazine had significantly less exchange with its readers. Monroe hardly published any letters at all: in its first two years, only two issues printed readers' correspondence, and these "readers" were well-known or soon to be well-known writers: John Reed, Witter Bynner, and W.B. Yeats. In other words, despite the goodwill of *Poetry*'s motto, borrowed from Whitman, that "To have great poets there must be great audiences too," Monroe did little to establish a circuit of communication with her readers. Although Anderson would eventually adopt Pound's disgust with *Poetry*'s professed populism—*The Little Review*'s motto became "Making No Compromise with the Public Taste" in June of 1917—her sustained investment in a dialogic relationship with her readers belies even this hardline tone and suggests that the modernist pursuit of "difficult" art forms did not come at the expense of a willingness to engage with the "public." From *The Little Review*'s inception, Anderson brilliantly bridged *The Ladies' Home Journal*'s commitment to editorial responses and

personal reflection with *The Dial's* willingness to print readers' letters, within the context of a journal committed not only to experimental content but also to theorizing, and facilitating, the process by which readers of experimental literature becomes its writers and by which writing becomes a form of talking.

"Tokens of Familiarity" in "The Reader Critic"

Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich begin their chapter on *The Little Review* irreverently: "The 'personal' magazine usually reflects the editor's personality on the cover and on every page. There was Margaret Anderson's very personal *Little Review*" (52). Anderson's "impulsive temperament," her "exiting, quixotic, somewhat immature" nature, attracted immediate attention to her journal. The first issue began with an impassioned announcement from Anderson, who promised that her journal would be "fresh and constructive, and intelligent, *from the artist's point of view*"—a claim that distinguished her from both purely critical magazines and purely literary ones (2). *The Little Review* was, as she later formulated, "The Magazine That Is Read by Those Who Write."[86] Scholes and Wulfman comment that "a theory of reading based on the book will not work for the periodical" (45), seeming to propose an Iserian model of reader participation, where the periodical would foreground the reader's ability to make connections between disparate articles and issues. Anderson literalized this phenomenological process, demanding that her readers constantly re-position themselves as writers who share responsibility for the journal's success. This dialectic would not firmly establish itself until two separate columns, "The Critic's Critic" and "Reader Letters," merged into the "The Reader Critic" column in September of 1914, but the preceding issues demonstrate an engagement with reader

correspondence and an interest in submissions that staged a dialogue between two writers.

One such dialogic contribution was the "Two Views" column, which began in the second issue, of April 1914, offering a "point/counterpoint" model that would become one of the journal's mainstays. April's contribution, "Two Views of H.G. Wells," is fairly tame by comparison to what would come later: in this issue, neither critic actively ridicules the other (12). Later, once the magazine had established its combative tone, the "Two Views" columns would have much more brio: Anderson and Heap would publish their conflicting opinions side by side. Heap would disparage a book, "Nauseating feminine sentimentalism. Boring talk, talk, talk"; Anderson would passionately disagree, "The reviewer above is absolutely mistaken …[the book] is radiantly absorbing" (2.10 29). In the early April issue, the dialogism may have been less ardent, but it was everywhere, marking the majority of the submissions. Even the literary contributions were in colloquy. In the April issue, lovers' repartee was staged between two sonnets: "To E" by Sara Teasdale and "To S" by Eunice Tietjens, poems whose lesbian content is surprisingly overt, especially given the two poets' well-known heterosexual relationships[87] and growing fame (17-18). Teasdale had already been published in *Poetry* one month earlier in March of 1914, and Tietjens would be picked up by *Poetry* a few months later, in December of 1914. To put these two poets in amorous conversation must have felt as groundbreaking as the free verse Monroe was already featuring. *The Little Review* did not publish free verse until its third issue, in May of 1914, suggesting that its early impact on the Chicago art scene had less to do with its selection of experimental poets than its experimental use of dialogism.

The letters to the second issue, in April, 1914, reveal the extent to which *The Little*

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[86] See Golding, 50.

Review's self-reflexive, conversational format both attracted and repulsed its audience. Some readers were ecstatic: "Thank you so much for *The Little Review*," wrote one, "I liked it from the moment I saw it….I liked particularly the personal note you put into your writing. It's as though you were really talking to me and telling me how you feel" (Whitson 54). Another praises "the trick of throwing the light on from different angles—like the Galsworthy and Nietzsche discussions" (Marney 54). Others were more critical of the journal's opinionated tone: "I must warn you," cautions one, "that you are tempting your readers and must not be surprised if you are overwhelmed with letters, questioning, approving, and criticizing" (Tappert 51), a viewpoint shared by another reader who bluntly asks that this personal tone be curtailed, ["[The Review's] critical judgments are too personal—are too largely temperamental judgments—to be of any permanent value…I'm afraid you'll all blush…in ten years" ("A Well-Meaning Critic" 52).

Not only was there no other literary journal publishing this many letters in 1914, but also there was no other literary journal publishing letters of this kind—letters whose primary function is the conveyance of a personal sensibility (appreciation, disapproval, bafflement) rather than a specific correction to an article or a piece of information. *The Ladies' Home Journal* was similarly invested in the production of intimacy through Bok's familiar voice and his entreaties to his readers to divulge their desires, but he did not allow his readers' to directly participate in the community he claimed to cultivate. And unlike the editorial practice of *Poetry* and *The Dial***,** which preferred correspondents of established pedigree, Anderson selected letters from a range of sources. In addition to letters of congratulations from a Yale professor and *Poetry*'s co-editor Alice C. Henderson, Anderson published letters from unknown young women and men of

[87] Sara Teasdale was the lover of Vachel Lindsay before she married Ernst Filsinger in December of 1914. Eunice Tietjens (née Hammond) married Paul Tietjens in 1904. She divorced him in 1914 and remarried Cloyd Head in 1920.

diverse provenance, as well as a note from an unidentified "contributor" to *The Little Review*, and, most surprisingly, a lengthy and somewhat unfavorable missive from Anderson's own sister.

Michael Warner has remarked that a "public might be said to be stranger-relationality in a pure form" (75). Unlike other ways of "organizing strangers"—such as "nations, religions, races"—which "select strangers by criteria of territory or identity or belief," a public should ideally "unit[e] strangers through participation alone." He qualifies that, in practice, a public "selects participants by criteria of shared social place (though not necessarily territorial space), habitus, topical concerns, intergeneric references, and circulating intelligible forms" (106). A public's inevitable undermining of its own anonymity through its preference for pseudo-strangers who in fact share a common background (educational, economic, racial, etc.), is dramatically exaggerated—and thus made available for analysis—by Anderson's publication of her own sister's letter. Anderson appended a teasing commentary to her sister's criticism, "Being a sister of the editor, Mrs. Peters speaks her mind with a freedom that enchants us. It also helps us—though we want to shake her for one or two of those remarks. However—may her letters serve as a model to timid but opinionated readers!" (52). Whereas in a normal public "strangerhood is the necessary medium of commonality" (Warner 75), in *The Little Review*'s April, 1914 issue, commonality estranges: Anderson, by so overstepping the normal boundaries of acceptable (meaning impersonal) editor-reader exchange, makes overt the mediations, presumptions, and intimacies that discreetly structure all publics.

The Little Review in these early years was deeply political, committed to anarchism, feminism, and pacifism. But one of its most radical gestures may be the way Anderson turned her readers into theorists of the publics they participated in. Echoing previous readers'

complaints, a correspondent in the next, May issue was aghast at the magazine's displays of intimacy—"I blushed at the sight of these tokens of familiarity and tappings over your shoulder on the part of the benevolent readers…I could hardly make myself believe that this irritating copy was *The Little Review*" (A.S.K. 52). But other readers embraced Anderson's decision to lay bare the reflexive circuit between "impersonal" participation and shared disposition that literary journals like *Poetry* and *The Dial* masked. *The Ladies' Home Journal* demonstrates a slightly more insidious version of this process, what Warner calls mass media's "artfulness in managing the reflexivity of circulation" (102). In other words, Bok's performance of an intimate vernacular offers the illusion that his journal is a spokesperson *for* his readers' desires when it is actually the inculcator *of* their desires. In baldly displaying the way that social, economic, political, and even familial affinities always structure a public, Anderson made the criteria for "appropriate" discourse available for scrutiny and thereby inspired her readers to consider new ways of participating within the journal.

One of Anderson's early critics quickly saw the potential and reaped the benefits of *The Little Review*'s insistence that a public's "strangers" are—or will soon be—its familiars. In the April, 1914 issue of *The Little Review*, a reader named Sade Iverson had admonished the magazine for its impertinent tone, "What an insouciant little pagan paper you flourish before our bewildered eyes!...but you must not scoff at age…[and]…one thing more: Restraint is sometimes better than expression" (Iverson 49). Several issues later, in July of 1914, Sade Iverson appears again, but this time as one of the journal's contributors, author of the poem "The Milliner," a free verse lament of poverty and thwarted artistic ambitions (32-33). In the following issue, Anderson published an editorial entitled "Sade Iverson, Unknown," which stated, "We wish the mysterious poet who sent us *The Milliner*—which we liked profoundly and printed in our last issue—would

come in and see us" (32). Anderson added beneath her invitation a poem written in Iverson's honor by Max Bodenheim, a poet who was en route to becoming well known, having had his first poems published a few months earlier in the April, 1914 issue of *Poetry*. By sending in a poem to the journal, and receiving commendation for her work, Sade Iverson's original resistance to *The Little Review* was rearticulated a sign of her identification with it—a transition made possible by Anderson's incessant "shoulder-tapping," her reminders to her readers that even the most detached or "neutral" speech is socially identifying, awareness of which may enable new authorial identifications.

Pierre Bourdieu has described the complicated social and institutional vetting processes that confer distinction to some but not to others. Symbolic capital, in his account, is accrued through the substitution of one's social, economic, and political privileges for the appearance of a natural aptitude for good taste, taste that claims to be irreducible to the very factors that guaranteed it. Bourdieu refers to this process as the substitution of a disposition for a position, or habitus for habitat. He explains that artistic and political revolutions rarely happen because the very process of seeking distinction ensures that each actor negates the forms not available to him. Anderson, through her willingness to acknowledge the (social, economic, and familial) relationships and sensibilities which situate and shape her periodical, performs the sort of reflexive sociology Bourdieu encourages, which does not diminish the structuring effects of the social field but does make her display of intimacy and familiarity available for critique and re-appropriation. Sade Iverson, who originally rejects Anderson's over-exuberance as a form of social trespass (and thus negates a form of artistic being not available to her), finds courage in Anderson's repeated disclosure of the contingency of her discourse, and thus, in an avant-garde revolution of minor scale, changes her position, moving from dismissive reader to engaged

writer, by turning her own poverty and anonymity into the grounds for (rather than an interdiction against) producing art.

This is not to say that Anderson explicitly challenges the idea of "natural" taste or transparent speech. She constantly invokes her "natural" fitness as a judge of art: "genius…is really simple and natural," she claims (1.3 5), and the ideal critic is not a trained intellectual but a "clairvoyant" (2.1 27). But despite this display of what Bourdieu characterizes as the confusion of one's social inheritance with natural aptitude, Anderson partially objectifies her "natural" disposition, identifying the forms of capital that have enabled her sense of an artistic calling, without making her past the complete condition of her present. Anderson's 1930 memoir describes how she, after her inspirational meeting with Clara Laughlin, wrote a letter to her parents stating her claim to independence. However, in an article in the July, 1914 *Little Review*, "The Renaissance of Parenthood," she tells this story from a different perspective, by proxy of a "letter of some twenty pages written by a girl to her mother," a girl who, just like Anderson, "was in her early twenties; had a sister two or three years younger; and…had reached a least a sort of economic independence" (6). This other girl's letter is most certainly invented, a pretense for Anderson to explore her own "home conditions" that made her both "desperate" for change and capable of "new arrangement[s]" (7). By writing her own story at one remove, Anderson neither completely fictionalizes her experience nor completely claims to possess it, refusal of objectivity (self dis-identification) *and* of subjectivity (self-identification) that, as Michael Lucey suggests of semi-autobiographical fiction, "produces a kind of reflection on the functioning of a first person dealing with the forms of its own figurality" (208). This is what Bourdieu calls an awareness of "the partial indeterminacy" of any position that makes possible "antagonistic interpretations" of determining social structures (*Masculine Domination* 14).

Anderson's simultaneous "offering and masking," as Bourdieu would put it (*Rules of Art* 31), of herself to her audience became the template for "The Reader Critic" column, in which subscribers made their personal experiences available for scrutiny and artistic reconfiguration within the context of the journal's other dialectical negotiations, as seen in Sade Iverson's twinned reader/poet role, in the "two views" column, in Emma Goldman's migration from object of study to columnist,[88] and in Anderson's refusal of critical touchstones (her once beloved Clara Laughlin, for example, was lauded in the second issue and then mocked in the fourth). The first "Reader Critic," in September of 1914, was explosive, capturing the gamut of emotions the magazine inspired, from the laudatory ("It's getting banal for me to praise the magazine—I'm sorry, but I can't help it," wrote "W.M") to the incendiary ("I'm am going to ask you to please discontinue my subscription…as your ideas which you set forth in your leading articles are so entirely crude and vastly different than my own," wrote "H.G.S.") (56). This sort of reader debate had been carried out in the earlier "Letters" column, but "The Reader Critic" gave correspondents more space to expound their personal stories and included lengthier commentary from Anderson herself, who frequently staged the letters around a common point of concern.

Anderson seized upon the most negative letter in the inaugural "Reader Critic" column—which had the "honor" of being their "first cancellation"—and then offered, by way of response, a letter from a mother whose "poison" represents "the older generation's response to the new order" and a letter "which ought to throw some light on the subject from the young generation's standpoint" (1.6 56). The mother's letter takes umbrage at "The Renaissance of Parenting" article in which Anderson had given partial access to her own family experience. The mother

[88] Emma Goldman had been the topic of a number of *The Little Review* articles since its inception. She sent in an appreciate letter in September of 1914 and published an article in the magazine in December of 1915.

asks pointedly, "I wonder what could have been the home-life of such a girl as you quote from, that she should write that kind of letter" (Pixlee 56). The next letter, from "A boy reader, Chicago," painstakingly delineates the writer's "youthful self-assertion" in the form of a "list of grievances" he gave to his parents, which includes a lengthy disquisition on their poor hygiene and diet. He ends his piece, "Was rebellion necessary? It was in my case and I may as well add that it has already had results—to give details would be getting too personal" (58).

A letter that lists "33 concrete faults" of family life, including the admission that the whole family shares a single tooth brush, *is* "too personal" by the standards of any other contemporaneous periodical. Bok solicited and received these sorts of missives but wouldn't print them; *The Dial* and *Poetry*, by restricting their printed correspondence to literary exposition from established practitioners, positioned themselves as "above" this sort of material. But by having established her journal as forum where readers may become writers, where subjective experience could be rendered objective, and where *challenges to* the reading public's anonymity helped expand her journal's readership to include not only confirmed members of the intelligentsia but also more "anonymous" readers, such as the disapproving mother and rebelling "young boy," Anderson turned *The Little Review* into an advice column for the would-be avant-garde, where familiarizing reflection of the sort that would normally be seen to oppose "serious" (objective) literary discussion could become an extension—and a critical theorization—of it.

The Literary Genealogy of Salon Conversation

Jayne Marek argues that "The Reader Critic" allowed Anderson and Jane Heap, who began writing for the magazine under the pseudonyms "R" or "K" in 1915, to critique "the dictates of the patriarchal world" and to "encode private meaning" about their lesbian

relationship (61, 83). "The Reader Critic" column certainly deserves recognition for its valuable public demonstration of "female nonconformity," but this reading relies on a familiar model of sociability's relationship to literary output, where the "integrity" of the magazine's written exchange is derived from the "deeply meaningful," "private" "experience" of the two women's actual intimacy. *The Little Review* reversed the creation myth that places conversation at the origin of artistic production—as may have other "conversational communities"[89] within modernism. In the October 1914 issue that followed "The Reader Critic's" debut, Anderson placed the following announcement:

To Serve an Idea

> There is no more vivid thing in life. All those people who are vitally interested in *The Little Review* and its idea, its spirit and its growth, may want to become part of a group which has just been suggested by several of our contributors and readers. An attempt to influence the art, music, literature, and life of Chicago is an exciting and worthy one, and should have its opportunity of expression. Such an opportunity is planned in a s of gathering—first to be held in the 1917 Fine Arts Building at eight o'clock on Saturday evening. October 10. For further details, address *The Little Review Association*, 917 Fine Arts Building, Chicago. (58)

This invitation to a literary salon modeled on "The Reader Critic" column offers fascinating evidence that modernist social experience was not always the *inspiration for* new literary forms; it may instead have been a *response to* them. It also suggests how seriously Anderson took the relationship between her journal's facilitation of written "conversation" and corollary, "live" formations like the discussion group she proposes here. Indeed, as the journal progressed and

[89] This is McKible and Churchill's preferred shibboleth for the exchanges facilitated by

"The Reader Critic" column continued to grow in importance, Anderson created other social venues to extend the magazine's literary discussions: a Russian literature class (2.8 35), meetings with *The Little Review* to discuss founding a modern school of "cooperative learning" (1.8 55), a benefit recital for the magazine (2.1 31), and a book shop at the front of the magazine's production office where you could "sit by the fire…and perhaps even drink a cup of tea" (3.10 24).

Janet Lyon describes how the modernist salon "represented an unusual intersection of public discourses and intimate interiority…. a site of, among other things, the development of modernist aesthetics and practices" (236). The "distinctively modern concept of sociability," she continues, "offered a detached refuge from modern alienation [that] was tested in the role of the modern hostess, who typically aimed to create a space in which modern conversation (however disjunctive or polemical) could flourish as an art unto itself." Lyon's insights shed important light on conversation's foundational position within modernism, but both of her formulations of it—as an art "unto itself" and as a forum that led to "development" of other aesthetic practices—retain the idea of modernist sociability's separation from, and precedence to, more sanctioned and recognizable art forms. "The Reader Critic" column complicates this model, showing the extent to which "conversation," as promulgated within the pages of the magazine and by its offshoot series of gatherings, was not always conceived of as an alternative (because more intimate, more authentic and thus less alienated) artistic sphere. Conversation in *The Little Review* demands the reassessment of what is conferred precursor status in the genealogy of modernist aesthetics. Indeed, to describe (feminine) salon conversation as *apart from* (but *conducive to*) modernist literary experimentation risks repeating a classic dichotomy about a

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modernist little magazines. See McKible and Churchill, 13.

non-alienated female muse, which is exactly the sort of piety that Anderson challenged by showing how a more mediated form, like her spirited reader-response column, lay at the heart of seemingly less mediated, spontaneous discussion.

In 1915, Anderson printed a new credo for the magazine, as if inspired by her successful creation of a feedback loop between the printed "Reader Critic" and the salon discussions it galvanized:

> You must know English prose; you must write it as though you are talking instead of writing; you must say quite frankly and in detail the things you would not be allowed to say in the prostituted, subsidized, or uninteresting magazines; and you must be true. This begins our warfare. ("What We Are Fighting For" 4)

Andrew McKible and Susan Churchill, in their introduction to *Little Magazines and Modernism*, question the "martial rhetoric" frequently used to describe modernist journals, proposing instead a "conversational model," which positions periodicals within a "collaborative" instead of "competitive" framework (12). As *The Little Review* grew more and more radical in both its format and tone—privileging blank space, attracting even more dramatically opposed reader responses, obsessively revising its criteria for literary appreciation, and giving greater length to the oblique, ironic musings of Jane Heap—its "conversational" qualities become indistinguishable from its "combat," as the militant credo above suggests. World War I had been an object of scrutiny and suspicion for the pacifist magazine since its September, 1914 issue.[90] Conversation, as it is most dramatically presented in the September, 1916 "blank" issue, is both a trenchant critique of the war and a type of warfare—waged against the restrictiveness of literary

[90] This issue was the first to contain critiques of the War. See Margaret Anderson, "Armageddon"; Sonya Levien, "Women in War"; Eunice Tietjens, "Children of War" in *The Little Review* 1.6 (September 1914): 3-4, 4-5, 6.

schools, against definitive cultural arbitration, and against the surface/depth model of art versus experience that informs Jayne Marek's assessment of the "blank" issue as an "encod[ing]" of Anderson and Heap's muffled lesbian relationship. My own reading of the "blank" issue, a "want ad" for better art that left thirteen of the journal's pages empty, follows Sianne Ngai's suggestion that some blank spots refuse the logic of repression, neither avowing nor disavowing forms of social meaning and identity. The issue stood *as* the debate activated by "The Reader Critic"; it did not simply stand *in for* other exchanges.

"Vers Libre Prize Contest" and the "Blank" Issue

The Little Review's radical invitation for—and expression of—reader participation in the "blank" issue must be read partly as a response to the magazine's waning interest in imagism, as made evident in a "Vers Libre Prize Contest" that Anderson promoted, nominated judges for, and then debunked. Situated after the call for submissions to the Vers Libre Prize Contest (in March of 1916) and before the final verdict (in March of 1917), the "blank issue" was both a sign of the antipathy Anderson had begun to feel toward her contest and the inspiration for her ultimate refusal, despite being the contest's host, to take a definitive position toward what determines a literary or authorial "success." Instead, Anderson elected to show how such positions are socially created—but also are re-creatable. The "blank" issue, by giving form to the spaces of cultural negotiation (between editor and reader, journal and public, social background and aesthetic preference, and written "conversation" and oral talk), offered a prescient theorization and critique of the constitutive fiction of any field of art—that art is forged in the struggle between artistic autonomy and bourgeois consecration. Through her contradictory treatment of her "Vers Libre Contest," Anderson underscored this analysis, revealing the

complicity between allegedly autonomous cultural capital as validated by "detached" critics and the more profitable forms of capital associated with cynical investments in an incentivized art market. Anderson, in other words, through the "blank" issue and the farcical contest it motivated, once again played the role of her own interpreter, extreme self-analysis that rendered a potential critical impasse into a call for new forms of reflexive engagement on the part of her readers.

In its March of 1916 issue, *The Little Review* ran the following ad:

A Vers Libre Prize Contest

> Through the generosity of a friend, *The Little Review* is enabled to offer an unusual prize—possibly the first prize extended to free verse. The giver is 'interested in all experiments, and has followed the poetry published in *The Little Review* with keen appreciation and a growing admiration for the poetic form known as *vers libre*. (32).

The magazine offered $25 (approximately $500 in today's dollars) to the "two best short poems in free verse form." The claim to being the first free verse competition is quite possibly right: three years earlier there had been much excitement surrounding a poetry competition judged by Ferdinand Earle, Edward Wheeler, and William Stanley Braithwaite for *The Lyric Year*, but its prizes all went to traditional verse entries.[91] *Poetry* magazine also administered a prize, but it was not conducted as an open-submission contest, and its earliest awardee, in January of 1914, was the already well-established Yeats, who returned the money, commenting, "there must be some young American writer today to whom it mean a great deal….[so] I send back to you $40…why not give [it] to Ezra Pound?" (150). *The Little Review*'s contest, by contrast, was directed at the unknown and untried poets amongst its readership, although the contest seemed

[91] *The Lyric Year*'s first prize went to Orrick Johns for a protest poem, "Second Avenue," composed in iambic tetrameter. See Braddock, "*The Lyric Year* and the Crisis in Cultural

less interested in gathering new forms of poetic innovation than to *instructing* participants in a specific form of vers libre—Imagism—through ads that stipulated that entries be "no longer than 25 lines" and, in a mandate similar to Pound's famous Imagist tenet, "compose in a sequence of the musical phrase," the contest insisted that "free verse is wanted—verse having the beauty of rhythm, not merely prose separated into lines" (3.5. 24).

The Little Review had been focused on Imagism for some time. *Poetry* had launched Imagism,[92] and negotiated the initial scandal of its debut (as exemplified in Monroe's debate with the William Rice in the *Dial*), but *The Little Review*, after turning from the traditional verse of its earliest issues, became one of the most important sites for Imagism's critical appraisal. *The Little Review* gave voice to its discontents in articles like "The Spiritual Dangers of Writing Vers Libre" (Tietjens 25) and its champions in polemics like "In Defense of Vers Libre" (Ficke 19) and "The Decorative Straight-Jacket: Rhymed Verse" (Bodenheim 22). Much of the debate seems generated to drum up interest in the Vers Libre Prize Contest: Anderson announced the contest in every issue and slowly leaked information about it. In April 1916, the month submissions were supposed to be due, she announced two of the judges ("Helen Hoyt and Zoë Aikens" [sic]) and changed the contest's deadline, explaining, "the contest will be continued until August 15, as it seems wiser not to close it before it has been fully heralded" (3.2 40). The third judge, William Carlos Williams, was not announced until June-July 1916. All three judges were moderately established poets and, with the exception of Hoyt, their work had not appeared in *The Little Review*, lending them the air of impartiality.

During this period after the contest's announcement and before its verdict, Imagism was

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Valuation" (*Collecting as Modernist Practice* 29-39) for a discussion of the controversy caused by the selection of Johns's poem over Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Renascence" for first prize.

most stridently debated within "The Reader Critic." The magazine had already made imagism seem a passkey for becoming one of its writers: in June-July 1915, Anderson republished in "The Reader Critic" a letter that had already been published in Dora Marsden's English avant-garde journal, *The Egoist*, in which the correspondent, Huntly Carter, expressed his hopes to write "an article in *The Little Review* on the topic of Imagism and the question of modern literary form" (54). By sharing Carter's correspondence, *The Little Review* showed itself to be a more desirable forum than *The Egoist* for the discussion of "big and vital" developments in poetry and flagged itself as a magazine that gave special notice to the opinions of readers. Huntly Carter got his wish: his essay, "Poetry Versus Imagination," was published in *The Little Review* in September, 1915 issue. It sparked considerable debate in subsequent "Reader Critics," discussion fueled by an increased volume of articles on the topic: John Gould Fletcher's essay series, "Three Imagist Poets," Alice Corbin Henderson's "Don'ts for Critics," and Mary Aldis's discussion of the anthology "Some Imagist Poets, 1916," along with numerous Imagist poems by H.D., Richard Aldington, Amy Lowell, and others. Many correspondents continued to sneer at imagism—protesting even in 1916 that "I don't even know what an 'Imagist' is!" (Woods 34). Other readers began offering their own free verse experiments as "Reader Critic" correspondence, so as to test, within the pages of what a less sanguine reader had called the "ungodly family" (Rev. A. DR. 69) of the column, whether their submissions "were good enough for you to print?" before venturing to enter the contest ("A Boy Reader" 3.4. 43).

By printing readers' Imagist-inspired poems and critical essays within "The Reader Critic" and by entreating them to keep writing (Arthur Davison Ficke encouraged a "boy" reader-poet to "stop being a sixteen-year old worm, and to get up on his hind legs and bite the

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[92] See F.S. Flint, "Imagisme" and Ezra Pound, "A Few Don'ts" by Pound" in *Poetry* 1.6 (March

stars"), *The Little Review* "fully heralded" the Vers Libre Contest that it had simultaneously begun to question (2.2 41). Despite the contest's strict rules about submissions (which *The Little Review* repeatedly reminded its readers to "adhere to closely"), the journal was slowly beginning to reevaluate the "conditions" for successful literary experimentation even as it promulgated, through its contest and its content, a recognizable and increasingly codified form of imagism ("A Vers Libre Prize Contest" 3.1 32).

Anderson had already expressed irritation with attempts to define her journal's agenda, writing in June-July of 1915, 'What does The Little Review stand for?…I cannot 'explain' every day why the sunrise seems worth while…or why the brook rises from the rock" ("Our Credo" 36). Later, in the same March, 1916 issue that announced the Vers Libre Prize Contest, Anderson critiqued the possibility of setting criteria for the evaluation of Imagism, implicitly questioning her own contest's objectives. Of a recent literary meeting where Harriet Monroe had defended H.D.'s verse, Anderson lamented, "Miss Monroe 'explained' the miracle of such poetry as H.D.'s *Oread* so that even those who don't 'get' these things ought to have understood. *And still—what is the use*?" ("Editorials" 24). Jane Heap, who had begun writing for the journal in late 1915 under a pseudonym, was perhaps most responsible for the journal's gradual shift in tone. Her subtle teasing of Anderson ("An editor of a brave magazine, which allows its contributors the free use of the first personal pronoun, has rebuked *me* for my too-subjective animosity"[93]) and her oblique, *in medias res* book reviews that began as if in the middle of a conversation ("It does make you feel sorry," began one, "Sorry for a big talent corrupted"[94]) tempered Anderson's exuberance with sly irony.

1913): 198-206.
[93] See Heap, "Book Discussion: Egomania."
[94] See Heap, "Book Discussion: Pot-Boilers."

Ezra Pound took notice of the journal's increasing uncertainty about its own direction and voice. In April 1916 he wrote a note of mixed appreciation to "The Reader Critic," commenting, "Your magazine seems to be looking up….[however] I still don't know whether you send me the magazine in order to encourage me in believing that my camp stool by Helicon is to be left free from tacks, or whether the paper is sent to convert me from error" (36). Anderson made a virtue of Pound's criticism, proclaiming *The Little Review*'s undecidedness as a sign of her fealty, however unsatisfied, to real art. The August 1916 issue began with an impassioned editorial, "A Real Magazine," about the failure of American artists to produce the art Anderson would like to publish. She lamented,

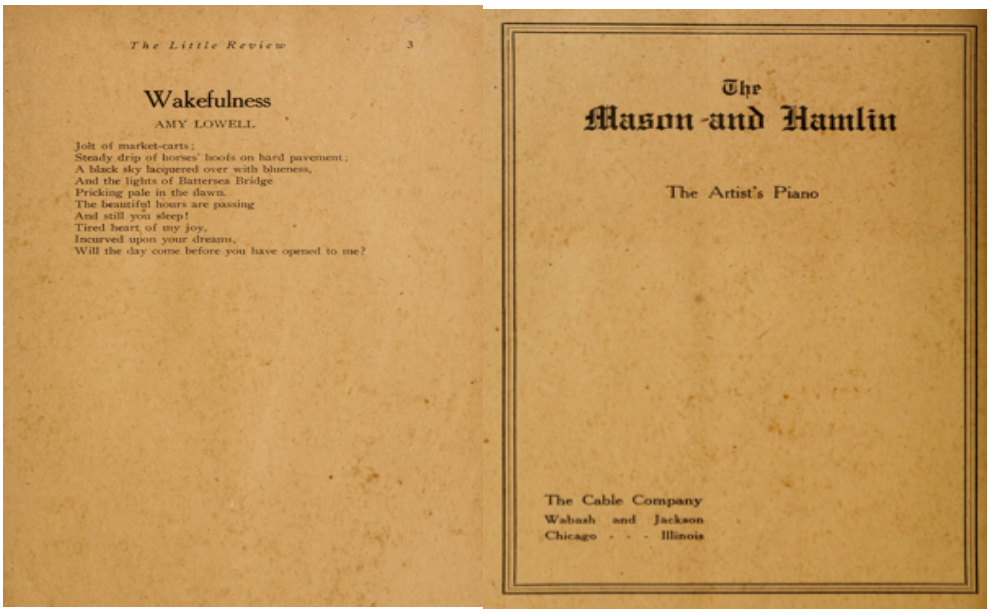
> I am afraid to write anything; I am ashamed. I have been realizing the ridiculous tragedy of *The Little Review*. It has been published for over two years without coming near its ideal.
>
> […]
>
> Now we shall have Art in this magazine or we shall stop publishing it. I don't care where it comes from—America or the South Sea Islands. I don't care whether it is brought by youth or age. I only want the miracle!

She closed this entreaty with a warning,

> I loathe compromise, and yet I have been compromising in every issue by putting in things that were "almost good" or "interesting enough" or "important." *There will be no more of it. If there is only one really beautiful thing for the September number it shall go in and all the other pages will be left blank*.
>
> Come on, all of you! (1-2).

This issue looks different, offering an intimation of the blankness Anderson threatens. Previous

issues used all available page space; beneath shorter poems or book reviews, Anderson tended to publish aphorisms or quotations from longer texts, often staging these excerpts as a "response" to the work printed above. But the August issue leaves Amy Lowell's very short poem "Wakefulness" alone on the page. While this decision might seem to suggest Anderson's waning interest in the colloquy format that had defined the *Little Review* and distinguished it from *Poetry*, which drew visual attention to the autonomy of individual poems through a marked use of blank space, Anderson challenges the implied "purity" of Lowell's isolated poem by mirroring its blank formatting in an ad for Mason and Hamlin pianos. Mason and Hamlin were one of the few companies that consistently supported Anderson, who in turn wrote them glowing reviews (much to her readers' occasional chagrin).[95] Their previous ads contained images, but for this issue, it seems that Anderson commissioned an empty ad:



The Little Review 3

Wakefulness

AMY LOWELL

Jolt of market-carts;
Steady drip of horses' hoofs on hard pavement;
A black sky lacquered over with blueness,
And the lights of Battersea Bridge
Pricking pale in the dawn.
The beautiful hours are passing
And still you sleep!
Tired heart of my joy,
Incurved upon your dreams,
Will the day come before you have opened to me?

The
Mason and Hamlin

The Artist's Piano

The Cable Company
Wabash and Jackson
Chicago - - - Illinois

Whereas modernism's relationship to commercialism was once understood as hostile, scholars have increasingly probed disparate spheres of the artistic production for continuities, identifying

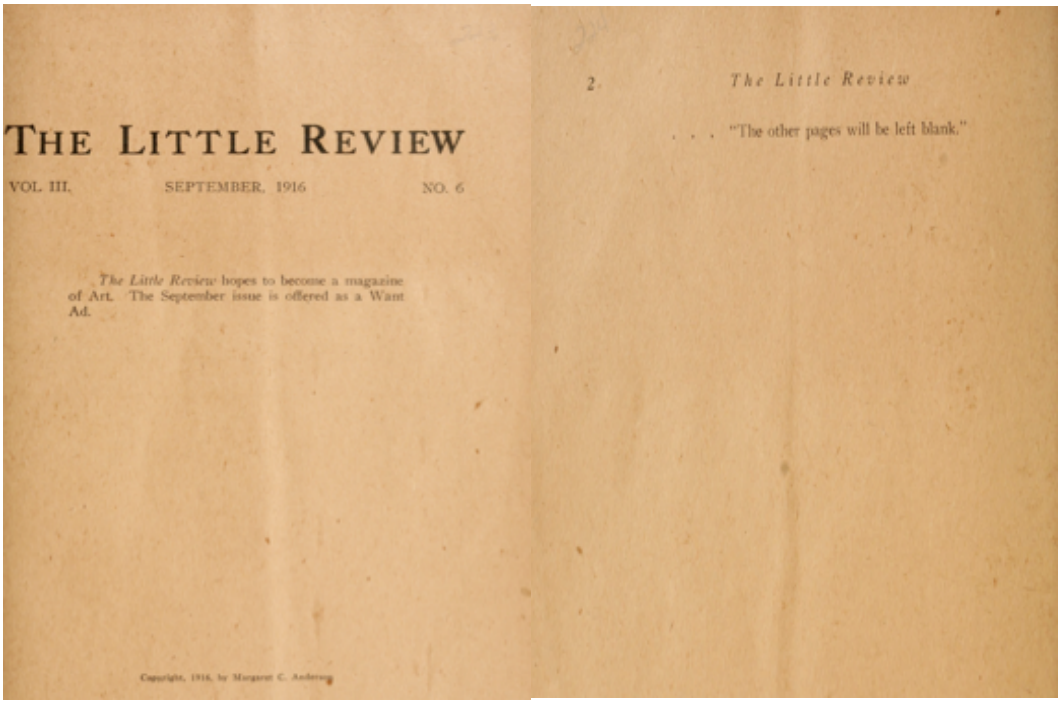
[95] A reader complained about Anderson's poorly veiled advertising plugs. See "Letters to *The Little Review*," *The Little Review* 1.2 (April 1914): 49.

productive cross-pollinations between mass and elite culture. Still, *The Little Review*'s blank Mason and Hamlin ad is hard to read: is it a satiric imitation of the pretentious emptiness surrounding Lowell's poem? Or a sincere *attainment* of blankness that poetry has yet to achieve? Is Lowell's poem, conversely, a successful re-appropriation of the clean lines of commerce, "wakeful" to the aesthetic potential of seemingly disparate arenas? The ad's slogan, "The artist's piano," positioned above the empty page, seems to suggest that such an object—or such a person—does not exist, that there are no artists in the currently beleaguered artistic climate or that there are no objects that can metonymically stand in for the creative act, rendered transcendent through absence. This issue coincides with the closing date for the Vers Libre Prize Contest. It is tempting to consider, in light of the 202 poems that the magazine had just received,[96] that the blank page of Lowell's imagistic poem and the blank page of the piano ad suggest together the failure of the contest to have satisfied the magazine's related needs for good art and good publicity. The circuit between Lowell's poem and the piano ad has either broken down, suggesting there is no longer anyway or any reason to "pay" for art and continue the journal, or the circuit has been too successful, the two pages' shared blankness an indication of Imagism's collusion with market forces.

The blankness of these pages also seems to signal the innovative potential of *The Little Review* and its readers, whose ability to generate discussion on a range of topics, including but not limited to vers libre and Imagism, had yet to be represented *as such* and was unfulfilled by the "Vers Libre Contest" submissions. In this reading, the blankness of the poem and the blankness of the piano ad offer less a commentary on artistic purity or commercialism than a reminder to the journal's readers of their real contribution to *The Little Review*: their on-going,

[96] See Anderson, "A Vers Libre Prize Contest," 3.7 (November 1916): 32.

unflagging ability to carve out, through "Reader Critic" debate, new positions for artistic innovation. Such positionality cannot be represented by a submission to the Vers Libre Contest; it is the space of creativity and the blankness of new interpretations and art forms. The next issue, the September, 1916 "blank" issue, makes this point more clearly: T*he Little Review* offers room for conversation, for reflexive engagement of all sorts, a generative activity captured by the positive void of thirteen empty pages:



THE LITTLE REVIEW

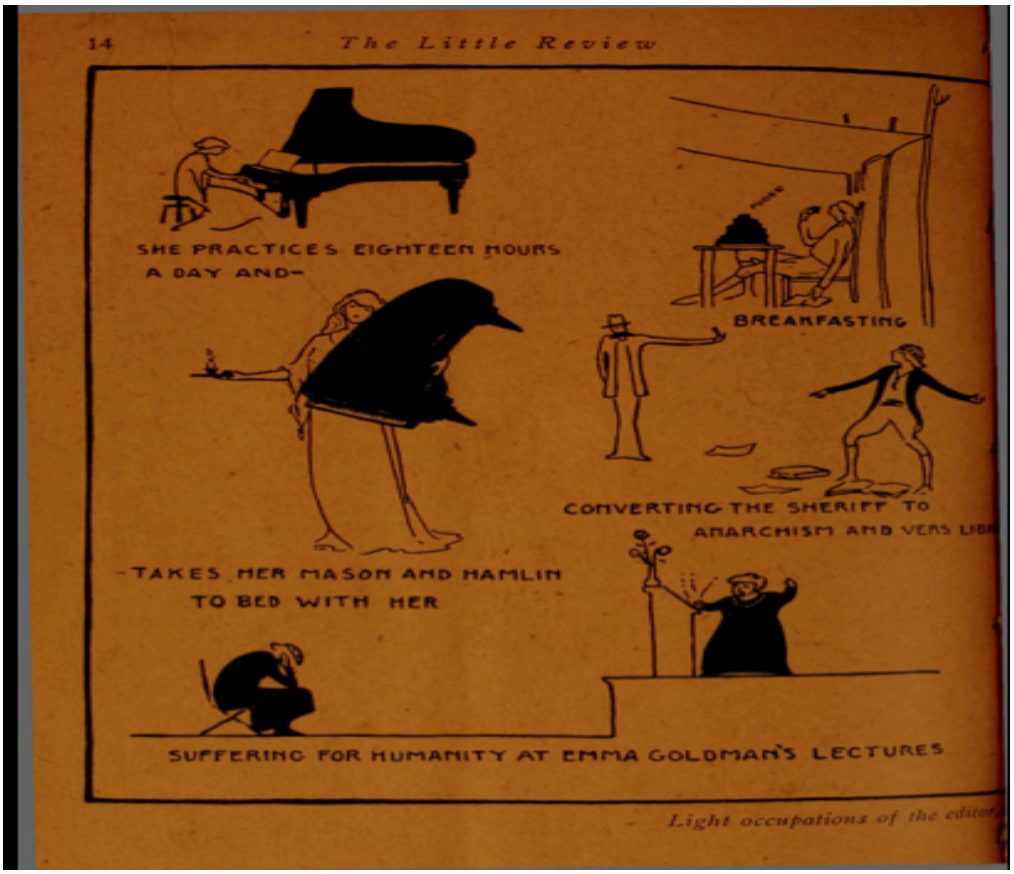
VOL. III. SEPTEMBER, 1916 NO. 6

The Little Review hopes to become a magazine of Art. The September issue is offered as a Want Ad.

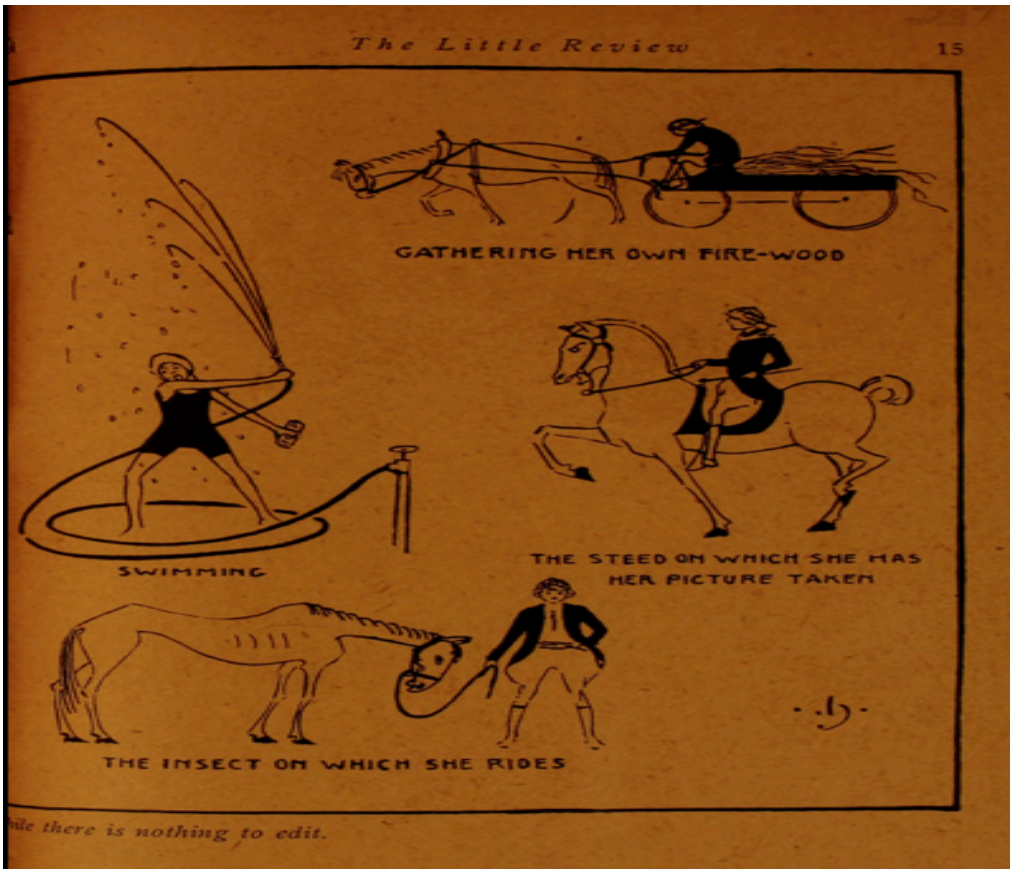
. . . "The other pages will be left blank."

On one hand, the "blank" issue can be read as the first example of the magazine offering *material* political action, as opposed to less material (though not necessarily less meaningful) political expression. In an earlier issue, Anderson comments, "'Because of the War' – Paper is going up. We can't help looking ugly this month" (3.2 26). In this light, the "blank" issue can be read as an emphatically anti-patriotic and anti-war gesture—the extravagant waste of paper a rebuke to wartime conservation efforts. The issue is not entirely blank—it includes a few entries at the end, including "The Reader Critic." One of these articles is an impassioned critique of

"The San Francisco Bomb Case,"[97] the conviction of two innocent labor organizers for setting off a bomb at a "Preparedness Day" march organized to drum up support for the U.S.'s entry into World War One. The blank paper seems a corollary for the bomb, an indication of the magazine's anger about the "Preparedness Day" proceedings and its willingness to detonate its own magazine in defense of the accused men. By underscoring a relationship between the blank pages and the bellicosity of *The Little Review*'s anti-war stance, the "Bomb Case" article also motivates speculation about the militant function of a seemingly much more frivolous entry within the issue, "Light Occupations of the Editor while there is nothing to Edit" (14-15):



[97] See Minor, "The San Francisco Bomb Case."



Marek comments of the "blank" issue, and this cartoon, that "part of the motivation…may have had to do with Heap and Anderson's fairly new relationship, fostered in the summer of 1916 by their retreat to a cabin in California; the format of the issue could be read as an oblique statement that each found the quality of the other's company and private conversation more interesting than nearly everything else" (83). The problem with this reading is the way it frames Heap's cartoon and its blank frame as *a retreat from* expression rather than an *attack on* conventional conceptions of expression. As Sianne Ngai has pointed out about another modernist work assumed to be "encoded," Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928), emotional (or, in the case of *The Little Review*, material) blank spots tend to be read as an indication of repressed content: "a lack of responsiveness" that is "in fact an outward display that hides strong

emotions," usually self-hatred and shame (194). But what if, as Ngai proposes, blank spots *refuse* the logic of self-rejection/self-acceptance—in other words, refuse to structure blankness as a sign of "empt[iness]" (dis-identification with lesbian consciousness, in the case of Anderson and Heap) or potential "fullness" (in the form of their incipient identification with homosexuality)? Nella Larsen, Ngai argues, offers the provocative suggestion that "that black-authored artforms do not necessarily promote dis-identifications with positive or negative constructions of blackness, even if they may have the capacity to do so" (199). Transposing Ngai's reading to an analysis of gender and sexuality in *The Little Review* complicates how we read the goal of the journal's subversions. What if the magazine's adamant blankness isn't directed at something simple like the heterosexual norms Marek claims that Anderson and Heap attack (or the homosexual desire she claims they muffle), but instead is aimed at dismantling the assumption that the two women, and their magazine, are expected to have such stable critical concerns?

Ngai seeks to give account of art forms that "preserv[e]…expressive vacancies" (201)—literary projects that never take "an appropriate object" and that "fail to produce the appropriate response legibly, unambiguously, and immediately" (188). Heap's illustrations of Anderson refuse complete readability because the extravagant severity of issue's blank frame is so at odds with the "low art" appeal of the cartoon genre. In mixing the low with the high, Heap mocks *The Little Review*'s lofty posturing. At the same time, by cheekily admitting to the journal's (specifically, Anderson's) excesses (fudge, horseback riding, piano-playing), she lends artistic value to forms of *incommensurability* (the disjunction, in Anderson's case, between the "blank" issue's serious ambition and more ridiculous outcome). In this way, Heap's cartoon calls attention to the tangled pathways of critical conversation that *The Little Review* has sought to make available, where writer's intention and reader's reception may not line up, but where such

misfires produce new ways of perceiving how communicative circuits operate. To return to Anderson's comment that "writing…like talking" is a type of "warfare," this cartoon might be said to wage against aesthetic representations and authorial positions that only count when they, to borrow Ngai's phrasing, "assert and celebrate," or "repudiate and disavow" (197) the preauthorized identifications found in race, creed, sexuality, or established literary schools. *The Little Review's* effort to *write* conversation, not just represent it, comes to fruition in the "blank" issue, which stands *as* the "conversational community"[98] of the "Reader Critic" and the work of Anderson and Heap to make such a forum available—one in which the interstices of literary production, the space occupied and the space made by writing and responding, was as valuable as what was written and who responded.[99]

Readers' panicked reactions to the issue register the confusion generated by the "blank" issue's attestation to power of *expressivity*. Many of them had expected a more definitive *expression*: "Why is there no encouraging editorial on Art? Thirteen empty pages and not a word from the pen of the Art-sick Editor? Why was not the whole magazine blank or is only half of it devoted to art? What was the idea, for Art's sake, in printing the frivolous caricatures of the Editor?" (Purdon 16). Other readers, like Frank Lloyd Wright, saw possibility in the empty pages: "The less money *The Little Review* has the better it *looks* anyway!" he declared (26). Indeed, years before Kazimir Malevich produced his epoch-defining "White on White" canvas, *The Little Review* gave form to the "blankness, absence, and transparency" that Judith Brown has called "the defining trope of the modern" (615). The most fitting response to the "blank" issue

[98]This is McKible and Churchill's phrase, but they use it as a metaphor (13).
[99] The "blank" issue debuted a new column, Heap's "And—", her first contribution under her own initials and a sign that "The Reader Critic" had been definitively become *The Little Review*'s watermark. Like the other correspondences to the magazine, Heap's "And—" articles

was proudly published in the next month's "Reader Critic." Anderson crowed, "The following letter was written in the thirteen blank pages of the September issue. If the understanding in it were divided among two or three million people the ways of editors would not be so difficult in a prosaic and literal world" (22). To this letter, she appended the title, in huge font, "For So Much Imagination, Our Thanks." The lauded correspondent understood that the blank pages were not only writing-paper for readers who had yet become critics, an offering to modernism's emergent conversationalists, but also the "text" of the new positions opened up by these conversations. "It takes the actual sight of the blank pages to get a sense of what's written so clearly on them," the letter explained, "These pages are a record bearing on life and art and you…You have life in your hands. You have everything. Never mind, you *have*" (George 24).

"So Many Really Bad Poems": Anderson's Condemnation of Her Contest

When Anderson finally published the verdicts for the "Vers Libre Prize Contest," she did so with incredible pique. "I know very little about prize contests," she admitted, "but I imagine there has never been one in the history of poetry which could boast so many really bad poems. Personally I think there are no more than four or five with any suggestion of poetry in them: the rest are either involuntarily humorous…or pompously anachronistic" (3.10 11). H.D's "Sea Poppies" and Maxwell Bodenheim's "Images of Friendship" won; however, Anderson explained, the judges "came to no unanimous decision as to which two poems were the best, and the only two they voted for mutually" won. Anderson concludes flatly, "The two prizes of $25 each go therefore to H.D. and Mr. Bodenheim. But it may be interesting to print some of the others" (12). Beneath the winning poems, Anderson published a handful of other submissions,

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explored, questioned, worried, and wondered, offering the sense of immersion in, but never the

appending commentary about the judges' or the poets' respective stupidity. A representative example of Anderson's vinegar:

> Dr. William's first choice was The Master, "for the reason that it has the most imaginative charm while possessing at the same time a fairly even unity of rhythm, a simple straight forward diction and a very subtle depth of thought"….*What or where is the subtle depth of thought? Almost every kind of person in the word has had this thought: it is not even a poetic thought. And what is there in the treatment to make it poetry?* (14).

Anderson's comically negative treatment of her own prize contest discredits both the search for pure literary prestige (judges aren't reliable) and for market validation (awardees don't deserve the money), thereby making room for critical reflection on the sorts of personal dispositions and social positions that produce successful authors and prize-winning poems. James English, in his analysis of "Prizes, Awards, and the Rules of Art," observes that "an essentially modernist" (110) consensus "regarding the distinction, indeed the opposition, between legitimate forms of artistic recognition on the one hand and mere bourgeois credentials or consecrations on the other" no longer holds true today, but nonetheless "continues to resonate even with those of us who are presumed to know better." English's argument that what we mean by artistic autonomy has changed in a cultural landscape where distinction is accrued "not by seeking out some ever-narrower margin of the field that remains uncolored by money…but by seizing and managing as advantageously as one can the various spatially scattered cultural instruments whose primary purpose is the negotiation of cultural conversions" (126) rests on the assumption that "[until] quite recently…there has not been much room in the game to acknowledge this simple fact of

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conclusions of, discussion.

complicity or convergence of interests between more or less lofty and disdainful cultural commentators and those who have a direct stake in promoting the prize and enlarging its cultural role" (115). *The Little Review*'s 1916 "blank" issue, and the "Vers Libre" contest it subtends, offer an early example of the sort of self-reflexive analysis that English, as well as other scholars of modernism and the marketplace such as John Xiros Cooper and Catherine Turner,[100] find missing in all but the last decade and suggests that modernists were much more skeptical of the separation between "legitimate" (autonomous) distinction and more parasitic forms of consecration than is sometimes acknowledged.

The "blank" issue, which gave space for the negotiation and exploration of "cultural conversions" (the processes that make readers into writers, that link high and low art forms, and that can make it hard to distinguish the art object from the beholder's constitutive gaze), made possible this critique of "the presumed proprieties of position and role" that consecrate some artworks and ignore others. Viewed together, the "blank" issue and the inconclusive contest suggest Anderson and Heap's shared ambivalence toward authorial power: how to enable it, how to express it, and how to reward it? Throughout their careers, the two women described conflicted feelings about writing. Anderson remembers in *My Thirty Years' War* how Heap would frequently groan, "I'm a talker, I'm no writer" (*My Thirty Years' War* 110). Anderson makes a similar profession, explaining, "I don't like [to write]. I'm not a writer. I will never be one. I'm merely an inspiration to writers – I tell them what they should be" (59).

Both women, of course, were talkers and writers, as demonstrated by Heap's sustained work as one of *The Little Review*'s principle editors and contributors and Anderson's prolific

[100] See John Xiros Cooper, *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Catherine Turner, *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003.

writing career—she wrote four memoirs after *The Little Review* disbanded in 1927. In 1918, *The Egoist* would state in an advertisement, "This is NOT a chatty literary review: its mission is not to divert and amuse," as if to distinguish itself from the digressions, personal reflections, and frivolities of its American competitor. *The Little Review* would retort in an ad in 1919, "this is not a chatty journal." Anderson and Heap found it hard to acknowledge that their talking and writing were mutually constituted— critics today find this hard, too. Indeed, that the word "chatty" still has a pejorative ring attests to the continued illegibility of *The Little Review*'s remarkable creation of the only reader-response column of its era. Anderson may not have liked the epithet "chatty" and may have resisted calling herself a writer, but she acknowledged that conversation was at the heart of her journal. Her 1930 memoir describes the moment she decided to found *The Little Review*:

> First precise thought: I know why I'm depressed—nothing inspired is going on. Second: I demand that life be inspired every moment. Third: the only way to guarantee this is to have inspired conversation at every moment. Fourth: most people never get so far as conversation; they haven't the stamina, and there is no time. Fifth: if I had a magazine I could spend my time filling it up with the best conversation the world has to offer. Sixth: marvelous idea—salvation. (*My Thirty Years' War* 35)

Anderson never stated directly during the years she edited the journal that she was "filling it up with the best conversation the world has to offer," suggesting once again that "conversation," as an important modernist contribution, didn't necessarily develop first out of social gatherings and then into literary texts. It took "stamina," it took time, and it took a lot of writing, and it took a variety of forms—from a sister's embarrassing letter to provocatively blank journal, whose empty pages grew in number from thirteen to "sixty-four" as the episode took on even more

significance in Anderson's later recollections (108). Salon sociability's priority over conversational correspondence and empty pages is not at all certain. When Joyce decided to serialize *Ulysses* in *The Little Review* rather than *The Dial,* he explained to Pound that *The Little Review* would be "more fun." *The Dial*, he deplored, "will never be any real fun." "Pound's influence on the magazine" may have been "immediate and profound," and the magazine's publication of Ulysses was doubtless one of "the high points in the magazine's history" ("Introduction" to *Pound/The Little Review* xxv) but the journal's early years, when "The Reader Critic" reigned and when thirteen blank pages mattered more to readers than H.D's prize-winning poem, established *The Little Review* as a venue where art could be could be both serious and, much to the chagrin of *The Egoist*, fun. By blending the intimate editorial ease of mainstream women's journals like the *Ladies' Home Journal* with the *Dial* and *Poetry*'s respect for its readership's acumen, *The Little Review* offered modernist readers and talkers, who were also modernist writers, a space for reflecting on the field of art, for re-arranging and re-evaluating the criteria for a participation in a literary public, and for the slow but gradual appreciation of conversation's importance as not just an inspiration for literature, but an important legacy of it.

Chapter 4

Author Dysfunction in Jean Toomer's Gurdjieff Archive

> Cane was a swan-song. It was the song of an end. And why no one has seen and felt that, why people have expected me to write a second and a third and a fourth book like Cane, is one of the queer misunderstandings of my life.—Jean Toomer, "On Being an American" (123).

In his 1934 manuscript, "On Being an American," Jean Toomer insisted that his masterwork *Cane* was a "swan-song," an elegiac testimony to the passing of African American folk culture during an era when, he hoped, racial categories were undergoing painful but salutary dissolution. And yet, Toomer's failure to write another "book like *Cane"* remains a source of "queer misunderstanding." Critics applaud *Cane*'s discontinuity and fragmentation, but have been less willing to admire these qualities in Toomer's subsequent performances of authorship, in which he dissected his writing process to the point of unrecognizability. As one particularly tenacious story goes, Toomer gave up his literary promise and negated his African American heritage after his conversion to Gurdjieffian mysticism in the years following *Cane*.[101] In the blunt words of a biographer, "Gurdjieff's gain was our loss" (Griffin x), an opinion that has been expressed by countless readers since the nonappearance of a "second or third or fourth" *Cane.* But as documents in his archive at the Beinecke Library suggest, Toomer did not abandon authorship; instead, he intensely analyzed it through mystical exercises. During his Gurdjieffian

[101] Toomer's 1923 declaration to his publisher, Horace Liveright, that "[m]y racial composition and my position in the world are realities which I alone may determine…feature Negro if you wish, but do not expect me to feature it in advertisements for you" has been cited as evidence of watershed moment in which Toomer made his race inscrutable. His apologists and detractors alike have had to resist, accept, excuse, or rebuke Toomer's racial passing to evaluate his fitness for the Harlem Renaissance canon (171). Toomer's racial passing is deemed a fait-accompli in the guide to the Yale University Jean Toomer Papers, which writes that Toomer "renounced his

period, from the early twenties[102] to the early thirties and again in the fifties, Toomer reformulated the literary text as an ongoing practice—composed of daily writing, mystical performances, and role-playing games. His meticulous archive of these activities is its own "song of an end," an effort to amplify through enactment what *Cane* had represented: the perpetual

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black identity" after *Cane*, an opinion shared by Nellie McKay in her older study *Jean Toomer: Artist* and reiterated by Michael Nowlin in "The Strange Literary Career of Jean Toomer."

[102] Critics, such as Nellie McKay, Rudolph P. Byrd, and Frederik L. Rusch, have tended to assign the date 1924 as the beginning of Toomer's involvement with Gurdjieffian mysticism, since it was in January of that year that Toomer met Orage and went to the first public demonstrations of Gurdjieff's dance movements in New York. Eldridge and Kerman offer a slightly earlier date and the most precise account of Toomer's growing interest in Eastern mysticism, first through the writings of Russian esotericist P.D. Oupensky and then through a Gurdjieff pamphlet: "[Toomer's] notebook records his first reading of Ouspensky on December 12, 1923" and "[c]lose to this same time, Jean first saw the brochure describing Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, which made an overwhelming impression on him" (126). This timeline situates Toomer's interest in Gurdjieff *after* the publication of *Cane*, which was released in September of 1923. Such a chronology has been used to explain Toomer's failure to produce another work of equal merit to *Cane*, since critics tend to agree that Toomer's post-*Cane* obsession with Gurdjieffian principles led to a literary output that was increasingly didactic and arid. But documents in the Toomer archive suggest an earlier exposure to Gurdjieffian mysticism, beginning as early as November of 1921, the month he returned from his two-month tenure as the substitute principal of the all black Agricultural and Industrial Institute in Sparta, Georgia—an experience that would provide the inspiration and material for Cane. These archival documents, marked "Transcript of Gurdjieff Lecture, 1st Meeting November 1921," begin with the following statement:

> These notes are in the order in which I got them, meeting by meeting. They are almost all verbatim expressions from Mr. O and Mr. G taken down at the meetings, immediately afterwards, so take [them] for what they are worth. All notes are from Mr. O's meetings unless otherwise stated.

It is unclear to whom "Mr. O" refers—Orage or Ouspensky. P.D. Ouspensky had begun lecturing on Gurdjieff in London in August of 1921 to an audience that "included Orage and T.S. Eliot" (Paul Taylor 16). Orage began holding Gurdjieff meetings soon thereafter. But news of Gurdjieff's teachings had crossed the Atlantic well before Ouspensky's influential London lectures: in June of 1921, numerous small papers across printed the same story about Gurdjieff's "new gospel of health" (*Aberdeen Daily News* 4) describing his "three personality theory" (*Olympia Daily Recorder* 3) that promised to restore man's thinking, feeling, and eating "personalit[ies]" to "harmony" (*Trenton Evening Times* 7). While it is clear that Toomer did not attend the 1921 meetings transcribed in his archive, which presumably took place in London with Ouspensky, Orage, and eventually Gurdjieff himself, it is entirely possible that he arranged to have these notes sent to him before his own first reading of Ouspensky and before the New

consolidation, and collapse, of classifications of being.

Toomer's supposed repudiation of *Cane*'s success has been attributed to his psychological incapacity to handle his reputation as its "Negro" author. Despite a commendable scholarly effort to turn attention to how Toomer tried to challenge the very system that would make "passing for white" a meaningful activity,[103] his racial passing remains at the forefront of critical commentary about him. Recently, and controversially, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Rudolph P. Byrd have endeavored to prove that the single truth of Toomer's race can be determined. Through highly debatable archival evidence, and despite their acknowledgment that for Toomer, "duality…is the very condition of modernity" (226) they insist that Toomer was a "Negro who decided to pass for white" (237).[104] This judgment, presented in their preface to the

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York arrival of Orage. This earlier timeline helps to de-centralize *Cane* within Toomer's oeuvre, challenging the simple decline narrative that has tended to describe association with Gurdjieff.

[103] George Hutchinson, in "Jean Toomer and American Racial Discourse," offers one the most powerful articulations of the problem with the paradigm of racial passing as it is applied to Jean Toomer. As he explains,

> Toomer's career, the reception of his published texts, and his texts themselves (including *Cane* and contemporaneous works) indicate how the belief in unified, coherent 'black' and 'white' American 'racial' identities depends formally and ethically upon the sacrifice of an identity that is *both* 'black' and 'white,' just as American racial discourse depends upon maintaining the emphatic silence of the interracial subject at the heart of Toomer's project. (228)

Subsequent critics have made similar observations, such as Siobhan Somerville in *Queering the Color Line* (see 134-165); Catherine Kodat in "To 'Flash White Light from Ebony': The Problem of Modernism in Jean Toomer's *Cane*"; Naomi Pabst in "Blackness/Mixedness: Contestations Over Crossing Signs"; Jeff Webb in "Literature and Lynching: Identity in Jean Toomer's *Cane*"; Jennifer D. Williams in "Jean Toomer's *Cane* and the Erotics of Mourning"; and Paul Stasi in "A 'Synchronous but More Subtle Migration': Passing and Primitivism in Toomer's Cane."

[104] In furnishing the photocopies of Toomer's census records and marriage licenses, which reveal that he sometimes declared himself "white" and at other times "negro," Byrd and Gates conclude that "Jean Toomer—for all of his pioneering theorizing about what today we might call a multicultural or mixed-raced ancestry—was a Negro who decided to pass for white" (237). A graphological critique would throw doubt on the finality of their interpretation: only one of the documents, his 1942 draft registration, appears to be in Toomer's hand. It clearly states that he is "Negro." The other documents – a 1917 draft card (negro), the 1930 census (white), and his 1931

2010 Norton edition of *Cane*, brought new, albeit unflattering, limelight to Toomer and reaffirmed an essentialist ontology of race—precisely the viewpoint that Toomer wished to subvert through his Gurdjieffian experimentation.

Toomer's unpublished, "mystical" papers at the Beinecke disclose a powerful challenge to Gates and Byrd's rigid conception of his identity. Toomer's Gurdjieffian writings do not offer proof of the aesthetic dilution or the racial transubstantiation[105] of *Cane*. Rather, these writings demonstrate authorship as an evolving practice of creative self-doubling in which a writer's subjectivity is exhibited as a series of "passing" formations—a continuation of *Cane*'s problematizing of normative performances of race. Gurdjieff instructed his pupils to practice a form of self-"non-identification" which transformed racial double consciousness,[106] or self-alienation, into a model for literary production, a continual process of un-naming that Gates and

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marriage license to Margery Latimer (white)—all appear to be in someone else's hand. Does this information suggest Toomer passed as white? If so, why would he revert to "Negro" in 1942? These documents may reveal less about Toomer's racial self-perception than the social ambitions of his white wife or the hasty assumptions of the census collector. But such an interrogation of Byrd and Gates' evidence merely repeats their premise that the "truth" of Toomer's race can be ascertained.

[105] Toomer may have abstracted away some of the historical complexity of racial passing when he correlated it with authorship in general. Although my essay seeks to understand why such abstraction was necessary for Toomer's reworking of authorship and racial identity as performative, Mark Whalan's seminar paper, "Jean Toomer and the Limits of Modernism," circulated at the "Harlem Renaissance Studies Now" seminar of the Modernist Studies Association Confernence 14, helped me better appreciate the critical resistance to Toomer's dehistoricized model.

[106] This essay does not offer a reading of Toomer's relationship to Du Bois, but it is a topic worth exploring. Gates and Byrd, in their "Afterward" to *Cane* (2011), suggest that Toomer offered a revisionary reading of Du Bois. In their account, double consciousness in Du Bois is a "malady," whereas for Toomer it is a condition of modern life (226). Recent critics, like Nahum Chandler in "The Figure of W. E. B. Du Bois As a Problem for Thought" and Thomas C. Holt in "The Political Uses of Alienation: W. E. B. Du Bois on Politics, Race, and Culture, 1903-1940" have proposed a much more nuanced reading of Du Boisian double consciousness. For Du Bois, these critics argue, double consciousness was not a malady; rather, the "two unreconciled strivings" of African American experience were sites of power and potential. In such a light, Toomer could be understood as extending (not upturning) Du Bois's model.

Byrd misread as false consciousness ("Notes on Gurdjieff practice").[107] As I argue through an analysis of two divergent moments of Toomer's career—the mystical exercises of his Gurdjieff reading groups and the troubled space of the theater in *Cane*—Toomer's interest in Gurdjieffian non-identification is indicative of his sustained resistance to the conventional paradigm of racial passing, which presupposes a verifiable, albeit alienated racial identity beneath a deceptive performance—usually of whiteness. For Toomer, Gurdjieffian "non-identifying" writing practices exposed the impossibility of a true self who could pass for a false one, revealing the inevitable alienation of any identification—be it authorial or racial.

Toomer's archive testifies to his effort to transform the partiality, continuousness, and insufficiency of racial identity into a form of literature—literature that is hard to "identify" as such. In 1924, Toomer began to keep his own archive, obsessively accruing the material proofs of authorship despite his Gurdjieffian belief in the immateriality of the self. Scripting and recording the activities of his reading group participants, Toomer made their shifting relationships available as modes of writing—a "mystical" discipline of the literary salon that showed the significance of fleeting interpersonal encounters for broader discussions of the racialized writer, who struggles not only to be associated with a discourse but also to disassociate from it. Although Toomer explained in a 1924 letter that it was possible his writings would someday be "'discovered'…and be published," [108] the documents in his archive—daily journals, carefully constructed skits, notes about the changing demeanors of the members of his reading

[107] Few of the documents in Toomer's archive have page numbers. When page numbers are not mentioned in my citations, none exist. Several of his manuscripts have the same title; for those, I have also listed the box and folder numbers.

[108] In 1924, Toomer wrote a letter to his friend Howard Schubert, explaining he was beginning to keep his own archive: "It is possible that…my writings will be 'discovered' one of these days, and be published, and do all I had hoped they would do. It is also possible and even probable that

groups, and painstaking reflection on his literary productivity—make for difficult recovery (*Selected Unpublished Writings* xix).

These documents instead stage the collapse of the classificatory power of authorship, giving literary value to Toomer's "passing" selves, as he formed and deformed the normative construction of the "Negro" writer. Toomer thus dramatizes a key problem for archival scholarship of minor figures of the modernist period, some of whom preferred self-archiving practices to traditional forms of literary legitimation. In other words, the "recovered" writers of modernism and the Harlem Renaissance are archive-born, but may also, like Toomer, have wanted to *remain* archival. By calling attention to authorship as a praxis, rather than a final product, Toomer's archive demonstrates how an authorial identity—of whatever race—is always an alternation between what Foucault calls an "author function," and conversely, an author *dysfunction*, a negotiation between what Toomer termed his "objectified" written self and his more mutable self who continued to write ("Transcript of Gurdjieff Lecture March 15, 1922").[109] Gurdjieff encouraged his disciples to keep "a little notebook, make a record. Write down, but do nothing" ("Transcript of Questions and Answers of the French Group"). Through attention to this "nothing" writing, and the labor of race and authorship it brings into view, we can begin to reassess who passes for an author and what passes for a text in the modernist era.

Toomer's Early Gurdjieff Practice

Born in 1866 in Armenia to a Greek father and Armenian mother, George Gurdjieff began practicing a form of philosophical esotericism in Russia that quickly attracted followers.

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none of them have really come off, that they are not worth publishing because I was not able to put the real stuff into them" (Selected Unpublished Writings xix).

[109] I am indebted to conversations with my colleague Ingrid Diran for this insight.

In 1922 he founded the Prieuré, his "Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man" at Fontainebleau, outside of Paris. Residents at the Prieuré engaged in "the Work," a combination of manual labor, dance-gymnastics, and lengthy introspection that was meant to give participants greater access to their personal and intellectual powers. Here, in 1923, Gurdjeff acquired overnight notoriety when British writer Katherine Mansfield died under his care. Many condemned Gurdjieff as a charlatan: D.H. Lawrence, for example, called the Prieuré "a rotten, false, self-conscious place" (422). But Mansfield's death also provoked fascination with the guru whom the press had already touted as a "dark man of mystery,"[110] an appellation which might have sparked Toomer's interest in him, since Toomer, in many of his autobiographical writings, lamented the *lack* of mystery in American attitudes about race.[111] Although the living conditions at the Prieuré were Spartan, Gurdjieff cultivated a lively, bohemian atmosphere not unlike that found in the numerous literary salons that dotted the London, Paris, and New York scene, with a steady flow of alcohol and music that, in the words of one 1924 New York Times reporter, "outjazzed jazz" (Hoffman X13). Other articles describe the surprising confluence of "oriental luxuriousness" and "hard labor with hands," a mixture that purportedly attracted "the ranks of the supposed to be cultured" ("Fontainebleau High Priest and His Cult" 32).

The Prieuré was financially thriving around the time of Mansfield's death, and Gurdjieff

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[110] Numerous articles published about Gurdjieff in 1921 use this phrase. See for example, Unsigned, "Calls Man Three, All Must Agree/Small, Dark Mystic is Now Preaching New Doctrine of Health," *Trenton Evening Times*, June 10, 1921, 7; Unsigned, "Each Man Has Three Personalities Says Turks' Health Code, *The Aberdeen Daily News*, June 8, 1921, 4; Unsigned, "Three Personality Theory Advanced by Latest Teacher, *Olympia Daily Recorder*, June 10, 1921, 3.

[111] In a 1922 letter to John McClure, Toomer emphasizes the hybridity of his racial composition; he possesses "seven race bloods" and by extension the capacity for a uniquely American "spiritual fusion" that did not fit into conventional categories (40). He makes the same point elsewhere: He claimed in 1931 to be a member of "new race in America" that was "neither

used this money to stage and support an American tour. First, he sent his appointed proselytizer, A.R. Orage, the former editor of the *New Age*, to New York in 1923. Orage hosted a series of talks to build up interest in Gurdjieff, who would arrive a few months later in January of 1924. During his visit to New York, Gurdjieff performed his dance exercises before a rapt audience that included Toomer, who was so moved by the recital that he set sail for the Prieuré in July of 1924. Toomer chose an inopportune moment for discipleship: Gurdjieff had just been in a terrible car crash from which he was slowly recovering. Because of his ill health, Gurdjieff decided to liquidate the Prieuré, and Toomer returned to New York City in October of 1924. After receiving permission from Orage, Toomer began hosting his own Gurdjieff reading group in Harlem in 1925. Toomer's lectures on Gurdjieff attracted the attentions of other Harlem literati, including Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman, Nella Larsen, Aaron Douglas, and Dorothy Peterson. Contrary to what is claimed in Jon Woodson's *To Make a New Race* (a very misleading account of Gurdjieff and the Harlem Renaissance)[112] none of these Harlem writers developed Toomer's passion for Gurdjieffian philosophy, with the exception of

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white nor black nor in-between" ("A New Race in America" 105) and he contests "narrow racialisms" in a manuscript essay, "A Fiction and Some Facts."

[112]Jon Woodson's *To Make a New Race To Make a New Race* offers a cabalistic account of the Harlem renaissance, making broad claims about Gurdjieffian mysticism's impact on Harlem writers with scant evidence. Every influential Harlem writer and associate, in Woodson's account, was a Gurdjieffian. For example: Carl Van Vechten attended a single Gurdjieff meeting—evidence Woodson uses to claim that he was a Gurdjieffian (despite substantial counter-evidence in Van Vechten's correspondence, where his few mentions of Gurdjieff are mocking). Nella Larsen, who derided Toomer's Harlem Gurdjieff group as "terribly funny," and who is never mentioned *anywhere* in Toomer's voluminous Gurdjieff archive, was, in Woodson's account, a committed Gurdjieffian. And there is no evidence, from my archival work, that Zora Neale Hurston had *any* interest in Gurdjieff; Woodson, however, deduces her involvement from a single line—"'Zora knows how to keep a secret'"—in *Dust Tracks on a Road* (13). Woodson's literary interpretations are even more problematic: he uncovers "hidden levels" (17) in canonical Harlem Renaissance texts, reading the works as composed of "cyphers," "anagrams," and "codes" (17). While Woodson's work cannot be counted as piece of

African-American writer, performer, and salon hostess Dorothy Peterson, who remained involved in the Gurdjieff work.[113] Toomer would seek new audiences, setting up a Gurdjieff practice in Chicago in 1926 and establishing a retreat modeled on the "Prieuré" in Wisconsin in 1931. He would break with Gurdjieff in the early thirties after a dispute over mishandled money (Toomer was accused, probably falsely, of embezzling funds meant for publishing Gurdjieff's work).[114] But Toomer returned to the Gurdjieff practice in the forties, setting up a Gurdjieff group at his home in Pennsylvania and attending another iteration of the New York group.

At the heart of Gurdjieffian philosophy is the idea that man is a "victim of mechanicality [sic]" and so he must learn to strip himself of his mechanical nature, called his "personality" ("Notes from New York Gurdjieff meeting, March 8"). Gurdjieff's pamphlets refer to man's mechanized personality as a "mask" that is created by his social environment and must be shed for man to find his "essence," or eternal being, which his personality and social context have obscured ("Pamphlet"). This essential being is always in process, but can begin to be recovered through what the Gurdjieffians refer to as an effort at "non-identification," where the "real 'I'" of the self is conceived of as "outside the organism" ("Notes on Gurdjieff Practice" Box 68, Folder

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trustworthy scholarship on Gurdjieff and the Harlem Renaissance, it does suggest the liveness of Gurdjieffian mysticism in our own day.

[113] In his autobiography, *The Big Sea* (1940), Langston Hughes wryly accounts for Toomer's failure to convert Harlem writers to Gurdjieffian mysticism:

> [T]he trouble with [the Gurdjieff] life-pattern in Harlem was that practically everybody had to work all day to make a living, and the cult of Gurdjieff demanded not only study and application, but a large amount of inner observation and silent concentration as well. So while some of Mr. Toomer's best disciples were sitting long hours concentrating, unaware of time, unfortunately they lost their jobs, and could no longer pay the handsome young teacher [Toomer] for his instructions…So Jean Toomer shortly left his Harlem group and went downtown to drop the seeds of Gurdjieff in less dark and poverty-stricken fields. (241-242).

[114] Although Nellie McKay describes Toomer as blameless in her biography *Jean Toomer: Artist*, it is very hard to deduce the true story from the archival record. See pages 196-197 for her account.

1543). Gurdjieff taught a practice known as "self-remembering" where the subject is trained to self-observe, or "non-identify," at an increasingly great frequency throughout the day ("Notes on Gurdjieff Practice" Box 64, Folder 1469). Through this training, the practitioner learns to split himself into an observed body and an observer. As Toomer's lecture notes attest, "There are a number of ways by which this effort [at self-remembering] may be aided. One is to sort of see the body walking just ahead, that is, to objectify the body. Another is to try to regard one's body as if it were not one's own, but were removed as another person's body" (Byrd, *Jean Toomer's Years with Gurdjieff* 83). Toomer also conceived of this process of non-identification as a writing tool, one that could improve his concentration and allow him to more deeply probe his own thoughts and the behavior of others. On the notes to a 1926 meeting run by Orage, Toomer translated the process of "self-observation" into a specifically literary practice, writing in the margins, "Imagine that a certain person, dead, that is, uninterested, but whom you wish to interest, to be sitting in the same room with you. Write in such as way as to catch his interest, stimulate, and sustain it" ("Notes on New York Meeting with Orage, 1926").

One way to understand Toomer's relationship to Gurdjieff and his evolving understanding of what constitutes a written "work" is to see Toomer's archive as both a site of an author function, in Foucault's sense of the term, where Toomer could accrue proof of being an author, and an author *dysfunction*, where Toomer could re-envision writing as a site of non-identification, thereby disrupting the conventional expectations for authorship. If, as Foucault explains, the author function produces a specific, consumable discourse, entailing "a certain functional principle by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation…of fiction" ("What is an Author?" 119) then by writing and archiving many possible versions of his authorial identity (and doing so as part of his "mystical" practice), Toomer tested the limits of

this function to the point of exploding it. Toomer's archive, in this way, realizes what Foucault sees as authorship's constitutive fiction: "an inexhaustible world of signification" (118). So, although the materials in the archive attest on one hand to Toomer's profound faith in the "transcendental" discursivity that Foucault accords the "author function"—whereby what were once "simply rolls of paper" become "a work" once an "author" is established—its contents also suggest a profound unease with, as well as a challenge to, authorship's "classificatory function" insofar as it "characterize[s] a certain mode of being of discourse" (107).

Throughout the course of his career, Toomer would return to an image from his Gurdjieff lecture notes that is strikingly similar to Foucault's "rolls of paper," which the author function transmutes into a "work." In Toomer's notes, a "free" subject is compared with "blank phonograph rolls," to which meaning and classifiable identity are eventually affixed ("Pamphlet"). In this Gurdjieffian model (as in the Foucauldian one), recognizable and "functional" identities are conceived as stable inscriptions, written traces that have already been "impressed" onto the rolls themselves. Yet Toomer, through Gurdjieff and unlike Foucault, turns his focus from the inscription to the "blank" areas on the phonograph roll, envisioning the uninscribed surfaces of the roll as both conditioning and undermining the inscriptions that do appear and are identifiable. In the years following *Cane*, Toomer seems to have experimented with his own authorial and racial dysfunction, proliferating strategies for and accounts of the process of undoing identity in the context of his reading groups. Throughout his notes he repeats Gurdjieff's injunction that the subject should continually "take photographs" of himself in order to experience estrangement from his "mechanical" image (his stereotyped perception) and thereby resist codification into a single identity ("Transcript of Gurdjieff Lecture, 2nd Meeting"). Toomer's reading group participants would learn "take" these "photographs" through scripted

role-playing games and written self-portraits. By taking turns as the subjects and the producers of these verbal portraits, his participants could control, write about, and benefit from the experience of self-estrangement. These practices of social and personal non-identification would inform Toomer's later autobiographical essays, and, as I will show, can be read as an elaboration of *Cane's* efforts to call attention to the alienating effects of discursive and social identification.

Scripting Social Experience in Chicago

In 1926, Toomer moved to Chicago, where he set up a Gurdjieff reading group and gave lectures. A year earlier, in New York, Toomer had delineated his requirements for a successful group experience:

> It is proposed to form a number of small groups for the study of the Gurdjieff System. Groups should consist of 6-10 people, men and women, already interested, and preferably already known to each other. The meetings should be held at least once a week…Nobody should attend more than one group. ("Notes for New York Group, 1925")

These principles were maintained in Chicago, where Toomer kept a much more careful account of the group's activities than he had in New York. The archival notes to the Chicago group help explain the 1925 stricture that participants "already know each other" and stick to "one group." At these meetings, Toomer seems to have cultivated a comfortable atmosphere where members felt willing to try out "new" personality types, thereby learning to "shed" the "thick" "mask" of their solidified and socialized identity ("Pamphlet"). In light of Toomer's detailed notes describing complex role-playing scenarios, we can imagine that such improvisational games would not have worked with strangers, who may have been less eager to discard their normal behavioral traits, or, in Toomer's words, "the cartoon" version of themselves ("Notes to Chicago

and Portage Groups"). And by limiting membership to a single group, participants were encouraged to treat the group as a self-contained microcosm of the greater social world, where they could safely develop their capacity to "care" for others but also "husk off" friendships and relationships that weren't working.

Although there is no commentary on the intention or the efficacy of the specific exercises carried out by Toomer's Chicago Gurdjieff group within Toomer's archive, they seem designed to encourage an appreciation for dysfunctional authorship, and, by extension, to promote (1) greater comprehension of and control over one's social roles and (2) a greater understanding of social activity of the reading group as connected with, or even equivalent to, a work of (literary) art, where the "work" signifies less a classified/classifiable discourse than a way of making the transience of a social identity meaningful. Consider, for example, a selection of the notecards from the meetings, where members were asked to record the inflections of each other's personal attributes ("Chicago Group Notes"):

David	Bill	Mae
1. Very. Very good sweet junior star of the first magnitude. Herman.	1. Placid. Mae.	1. Chip on the shoulder – Bill
2. Efficiency, with psychological brass band excitement for accompaniment. Mae.	2. Diffident. Walter	2. Dependable, can concentrate, thorough. Walter
3. Frail but taut wire, sympathetic bird cage. Betty	3. Impractical Mark.	3. By God! That's Great! Herman
4. Mother Superior travelling incognito as world aesthete. Yvonne.	4. Judicial. Max.	4. Well, it seems to me that the main point. – Max
5. Musical comedy goes to opera. Nena	5. Poise Nena.	5. A bit superior. David
6. Cogitating honesty-rabbit-shy. Max.	6. Bewildered. Betty	6. Earnest effort. Yvonne.
7. Involuntarily perturbed, but must take shaking post graduate course. Bill	7. Eager. Yvonne.	7. Leaves nothing undone in the way of exercises. Betty
8. Neat, modest buff blotter, waiting patiently for the first blot. Walter	8. Conceited. Bill	8. Placid. Shirley.
9. Timber-line violet, trying to grow in a noisy city green-house. Shirley.	9. Dreamer Shirley.	9. Curious. Mae.
10. A little squirrel, nibbling the mulberry leaves of knowledge.		10. Personal Pride. Nena

These written "photographs" produce a sense of each participant's distinctive, creative disposition—David's playful style, for example, emerges contextually, through comparison with Bill's terse descriptors—and thus the game provides a way to enact and perceive the author-function, the process by which a discourse becomes associable with a writer. But it simultaneously reveals the impossibility of maintaining one's "cartoon" identity—and by extension a stable authorial self—in so far as participants are forced to acknowledge their diverse social reception. (Nena, in the conception of this small sample, is "Musical comedy goes to opera"; "Poise"; and "Personal Pride.") These verbal portraits highlight, in other words, the contingent nature of any "identifiable" (authored or authorized) discourse, engendered by unstable discursive borders (the fluctuating composition of the group). Bill's (lack of) style

would look different next to a different set of portraits.

It is worth observing that the notecards seldom mention physical features, suggesting that Toomer had banned such descriptions from the exercise to encourage participants to look past the alleged readability of the body. Indeed, within the game, verbal tics emerge as the most distinguishing, but also the most limiting, features of a subject, as participants both capture each other's mannered ways of speaking ("By God! That's Great!") and reveal their own verbal mannerisms (David's flamboyance, Bill's concision). The awareness of these stereotyped forms of speech and writing ("functional" authorship) produces non-identification and author dysfunction since these "cartoon" modes of self-presentation (and social recuperation) not only mark a certain "being of discourse" but also highlight the "blank[ness]" of what has *not* been successfully scripted, the unmarked portion of the phonograph roll. Gurdjieff group participants were also asked to perform skits where members would "act out" a range of unfamiliar perspectives and dispositions, presumably to force the actors to engage with, and find creative power in, self-estrangement. For example:

Jerry
1. Jerry + Diana resistant. To persuade Diana that home life should exist in the modern world. Max – resume.

Yvonne
1. Yvonne + Bill Fackert agreeing. To persuade Bill that urbanity and sophistication should exist in Chicago. Mrs. Bliss – resume.

Max

1. Max + Paulene agreeing. To (explain to) Paulene (how and why) that the desire for perfection is a hindrance when it prevents necessarily imperfect first attempts. Zella – resume. ("Chicago Group Notes")

Each skit is assigned to someone who is asked to "resume" the activity, requiring the actors to once again situate their self-perception within its social reception, and, perhaps more importantly, to underscore the discursive *legacy* of even these short parlor games. These performances foreground their textuality: not only did Toomer carefully design (and archive) these improvised skits, but also he suggests that the participants take seriously the afterlife (the "resume") of each scenario by making this verbal recuperation part of the performance itself—but also part of the way that the actor and audience are made to *resist* complete identification with the performance. The "resume" role, in between actor and audience, calls attention to the verbal mediation (rather than spectacular totalization) of the scenario. We cannot recover the specific valences of these exercises, but they are fascinating evidence that Gurdjieff meetings, at least under Toomer's stewardship, were much more imaginative and interactive than scholars have suggested. They show that Toomer's Gurdjieffian activities were not an alternative to his career as a writer, but an extension of it, where the creative "work" remains textual but is no longer confined to a single text and where authorship becomes a site of social making and re-making.

Catherine Kodat comments that "it would be going too far to call Jean Toomer the first black performance artist," although his work "invites casting Toomer in just such a role" (3). Kodat's suggestion should be taken seriously. In Toomer's Gurdjieff groups, the "work" is no longer the text, but the writer himself, who, in performing Toomer's skits, becomes both an author of, and a character within, the evolving scenarios. Toomer's archive uncovers information

about these little-discussed Gurdjieffian exercises, but it also changes how we conceive of archival *recovery*, normally thought to facilitate the presentation of a more complete picture of authorship or make possible the exhumation of a "major" new work. Instead, these Gurdjieff groups display the impossibility (and undesirability) of "functional" authorship since Toomer's Gurdjieff practice demands the interrogation and rejection of "fixed" identities and stable texts. This "spiritual" (dysfunctional) model of authorship belies its material context within his obsessively documented Yale collection, suggesting that immaterial or performative models of authorship may exist not in opposition to, but within the wealth of material archives (and object-oriented histories) of the modernist period.

Recent studies by performance theorists Diana Taylor and Shane Vogel have productively bridged performance and literary studies. Taylor analyzes the relationship between the material, textual archive and the "meaning-making" "scenarios" of the more ephemeral "repertoire" (28); Vogel analyzes the relationship between the "matrixed" "logics of [bourgeois] realism" and the nonrepresentational "scene" of literary and social production (29). But they have perhaps failed to adequately acknowledge how the archive's material texts—and efforts like Toomer's to record, recuperate, and mimetically represent authorship in its passing phases—might be powerful sites of still-to-be "matrixed" modes of writing. Toomer's archive, in other words, reveals not only his desire to resist being "classified" as a single type of author, but also to have the power to classify, or give literary meaning to, impermanent—or "passing"—interactions and conversations.

The Cottage Experiment and "Life Behind the Labels"

Although Toomer did not comment on the aim of the Chicago exercises, he wrote at

length about the intent of his "Cottage Experiment," a Prieuré-like retreat he organized in Portage, Wisconsin in the summer of 1931. His notes express hopes that the Gurdjieff "workers" will show "spontaneity and flexibility," learning to "function …successively" in a variety of roles, "as poet, director, stage manager, and so on" ("Notes for Essential Theatre Project"). At Portage, Toomer explains, members would "discover and develop potentialities" by participating in experimental theatrics, where what "is ordinarily called dramatic ability or literary ability is neither to be prized nor despised" and where an effort would be made at "spontaneous casting of roles" so that "each worker [could learn] to non-identify with an ordinary personality and so as to identify with whatever role is demanded by the situation." The press was receptive to Toomer's efforts: a long story ran in Madison's *Capital Times* applauding Toomer's "course in self-management" ("Intellectual Portage Group Delves into Intricate Study of Self Direction" 1). Toomer is quoted in the article, describing his process for disrupting conventional identity: "Every adult needs to be re-educated, because of the many things which have happened to him in life, which have not fitted him to realize his full possibilities. This philosophy attempts to tear down the false education we receive in life" (3). Toomer underscores his conviction that all adults suffer from stereotyping: "[s]pecialization…produces lopsidedness in an individual…To escape [this condition] before it is too late…the individual must force himself into a circumstance or situation which will cause him to 'snap out' of his groove." Neither this article, nor similar pieces in other newspapers, mentions Toomer's race or his authorship of *Cane*. Indeed, Toomer's effort to show the world through his reading groups and his Portage Experiment that identity could not be reduced to (or deduced from) skin color, a well-received written work, or any number of other classificatory functions, seems to have briefly succeeded.

The question of racial identity returned, however, when Toomer married one of the

Portage participants, white novelist Margery Latimer, in 1932. Much of the serious discussion of Toomer's anti-identitarian efforts at Portage was subsumed beneath sensational headlines in the press like, "Couple Marry for 'Experiment'; Ignore Color Barrier: Smash Color Line to Test Social Whims," "Romance of the Races is Bared," "Portage Girl Novelist's Negro Mate gives Home Town Gossips A Thrill," and, after Latimer's death less than a year later, "Death ends Romance of the Two Races." Thus the reception of the Portage Experiment seemed to repeat, albeit in more scandalous terms, the events that had ruined the publication of *Cane* for Toomer. Once again, he found himself reduced to a stable racial category, and once again, his perceived "Negro" make-up superseded the work he had done to critique identitarian and racial coherence.

Our contemporary critical climate, by and large, continues to make Toomer's race the only ambiguous feature of his identity, as if determining it will finally render him a stable figure of the Harlem Renaissance canon. And yet, despite the press's recourse to a racial dichotomy in the discussion of his marriage to Latimer, Toomer seems to have been received with more flexibility in 1932 than he is currently. For while contemporary critics have continually interrogated Toomer's problematic racial identity as an *author*, newspaper and journal clippings surrounding the Portage Experiment and his marriage to Latimer at least attest to Toomer's experimentation with other vocations. These articles refer to him variously as a "novelist,"[115] "poet,"[116] "art-critic,"[117] and, frequently, as a "psychologist."[118] Scholars have largely ignored

[115] Toomer is referred to as a "novelist" in this article, among others: "Reveal Marriage of Marjorie Content and Jean Toomer," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* Nov 10, 1934.
[116] This article, among others, refers to Toomer as a "poet": "Couple Marry for 'Experiment'; Ignore Color Barrier: Smash Color Line to Test Social Whims," *Chicago Defender*, March 26, 1932,1.
[117] This article refers to Toomer as an "art-critic": "Toomer's Wife Dies!" *The Pittsburgh Courier,* Aug 20, 1932.
[118] These articles, among others, refer to Toomer as a "psychologist": "Margery Toomer, Novelist, Dies in West," *New York Times,* Aug 18, 1932; "Romance of Races is Bared: And

this evidence that Toomer was, for a time, not exclusively known as an author. If the debate about Toomer's race has privileged and protected a particularly anodyne version of authorship that accords "writer" status to the "coherent" authors of stable, autonomous texts, Toomer's "psychological" exercises in Chicago and at Portage demonstrate a refusal to conform to such restrictive notions. Through these experiments, he challenged the epistemological system that made racial "passing" and "fixed" authorial identity simultaneously possible.

"The Experience," an essay Toomer wrote in 1937 about his mystical conversion to Gurdjieffian "higher consciousness" while waiting for the subway in 1926, offers his most precise articulation of a productive, authorial non-identification, where a writer's identity can never be reduced to a written work. Toomer's text describes the moment when he was able to see "Life behind labels" (41) or get past race and class-consciousness and see the world as composed simply of "earth-beings." He writes,

> Observing the passersby, I saw them as earth-beings. Each and all seemed equally strange, equally familiar. People were people stripped of the labels and classifications they foist on each other, stripped too of the ratings they give each other. I saw an earth-being, not an American or a New Yorker or a foreigner. I saw an earth-being, not a white or colored man. I saw an earth-being, not a street cleaner or taxi-driver or a salesman. (59)

His awareness of the social construction of identity is born out of the experience of being falsely defined by a superficial "label." He writes,

> "One man, happening to glance my way, seemed curious. He kept looking as though trying to size me up. Evidently he was scrutinizing my body only, assuming that he was

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Never the Twain Shall Meet," *Pittsburg Courier*, March 26, 1932; "Their Marriage Caused a

> thereby taking my measure. No doubt of it, he was equating my body with myself. What a queer sensation it gave me to be taken for my body when I was so starkly aware that I was a being." (49)

Three years before this "mystical experience" Toomer had admonished his publisher for pigeonholing him as a "Negro" author; here, he rehearses and seeks to make sense of the experience of having his identity restrictively classified. Toomer's ability to move beyond racial and authorial classification arises not through racial disavowal, as Byrd and Gates would have it, but through an awareness of the power of his own racial mobility, of continually "passing" between different selves, a paradigm Toomer's essay relocates from the realm of *inter*subjective to the *intra*subjective. Toomer's own relationship to himself becomes formulated around the poles of the classifier and the classified, a schism that provides him with feelings of authorial and personal freedom. He explains how he felt himself split into two selves: "For a time, exactly how long I cannot say, there were two of us, this-me and that-being, contiguous, yet perceptibly distinct, as though each were an independent entity" (37). And he describes this split as having a specific effect on his understanding of communicative processes: "It was a two-way relationship, with a constant stream of communications passing between the small and great poles. I saw and was seen. I moved and was moved upon, registered and was recorded" (51).

This awareness of being both capable of registering but also "recorded upon" prompts Toomer to re-consider the value of his writing. He exclaims,

> I looked at a pile of manuscripts. Those papers! What labor had gone into them! Out of curiosity I picked up a page, read it, put it down. Could it be possible that I, for months past, had tried to function by that means? Had I really believed that

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Stir," *Galveston Daily News,* March 28, 1932.

those words would convey something of worth to other human beings? (55)

Toomer's dismay here with his "pile of manuscripts" resonates with another essay of his from the same period, "Why I Entered the Gurdjieff Work," in which he explains how, before he began his Gurdjieffian practice, trying to write would frustrate him:

> The attempt to write tended to tighten me. When I tried to open the door to what was inside, either nothing would come out or out would come a rush that no words of mine could possibly put down; and, when I did put something down, nine times out of ten it wasn't at all what I wanted to say.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Gurdjieff would instruct the writers in his group to keep "a little notebook, make a record. Write down, but do nothing." Toomer's "record" of himself in his archive of mystical texts and shifting identities was an attempt to follow this mandate, thereby getting past the impasse of "[t]hose papers!" that he had failed to "function by." By writing down, but not necessarily "doing" anything with either the texts or their associated personae, Toomer was able to maintain both sides of the authorial pole, where whatever "identity" the final written product may confer was balanced by the "non-identity" of the writing subject. In this model, the author function becomes dysfunctional because the writer who should be limited and classified—in Toomer's case, as a "Negro author"—has become in, Foucault's words, a "dangerous proliferation of significations" (118).

But even as his author dysfunction challenges the readers who strictly classify Toomer's racial and authorial identity, it also poses the question of whether this sort of "nothing" authorship can be recognized at all. In "The Experience," Toomer worries that no one will notice his mystical conversion. When a friend fails to notice a change in Toomer, he wonders,

> When nothing…happened, it became clear that my new condition simply did not register

> with him—and if not with him, then with whom?…Why not this radical change for the better, this transformation which had restored me to my real being? (73)

Toomer's concern here for what makes alternative forms of racial identity and authorship visible must be read alongside the social experiments he conducted in Chicago and at Portage. Toomer's archive attests to his effort to *un*write the normal expectations of the "classified" writer. But, by recoding his reading groups' social experience as a distinctly writerly experience, one that entailed daily, detailed documentation, it also demonstrates his effort to make "conventional" authorship visible where it has not normally been acknowledged, and shows how this kind of authority is sustained within a reading group network. His reading group exercises and his outpouring of unpublished notes, journals, and essays are thus powerful sites for the investigation of how literature and literariness were re-interpreted by modernists whose authorship remains imperfectly legitimated—a crisis of authorial identity that, as Toomer's case shows, might be desirable because of the way it democratizes authorship.

Within the reading groups that Toomer created following Gurdjieffian protocols about the careful observation, documentation, and manipulation of personal and social experience, Toomer mobilized new forms of racial and authorial identity—a "mystical" process with a tangible legacy in both his archive and his published works. How does this insight into Toomer's spiritual practice inform a reading of *Cane*, a work traditionally viewed as better than his mystical writings, both in the sense of its aesthetic merits and its acute challenges to monolithic attitudes about race? And how do the Gurdjieff reading groups help us make sense of Toomer's least "functional" displays of authorship—the daily, often tedious, journals he kept as part of new Gurdjieff practice in the 1950s? By way of a coda to this chapter's analysis of Toomer's social performance of the written text, and his effort to make a form of dysfunctional authorship legible

and valuable, I offer a brief reading of these early and late texts to underscore Toomer's career-long commitment to a process of writing, where authorship developed through forms of textuality but remained irreducible to (and productively alienated from) a written text, and through which Toomer interrogated conventional racial identification, an effort that has been incorrectly interpreted as racial passing. *Cane*'s "Box Seat" in particular asserts the necessary difference between stage and self, or normative race and its dysfunctional enactments, a claim for creative self-estrangement that would be amplified and embodied through Toomer's reading group skits and later mystical writings.

Non-identification in *Cane's* "Box Seat"

> Dan: Break in. Get an ax and smash in. Smash in their faces. I'll show em. Break into an engine-house, steal a thousand horse-power fire truck. Smash in with the truck. I'll show em. Grab an ax and brain em. Cut em up. Jack the Ripper. Baboon from the zoo. And the cops come. "No, I aint a baboon. I aint Jack the Ripper. I'm a poor man out of work. Take your hands off me, you bull-necked bears. Look into my eyes. I am Dan Moore. I was born in a canefield. The hands of Jesus touched me. I come to a sick world to heal it. Only the other day, a dope fiend brushed against me—Dont laugh, you mighty, juicy, meat-hook men. Give me your fingers and I will peel them as if they were ripe bananas." (77)

This passage from "Box Seat," a story set in Washington, D.C. within *Cane*'s middle, Northern section, captures the impossibility of distinguishing between types of discourse and modes of perception, a breakdown of the distinction between reflection and expression, between desire and its satisfaction, and between speech and writing that *Cane* broadly stages. In this second section

of *Cane,* Toomer begins to use character tags ("Dan:") to mark internal dialogue, a practice that he reverses in *Cane*'s last book, "Kabnis," where quotation marks present internal dialogue and colons present spoken dialogue. "Kabnis" was originally conceived of as a play, a genetic history retained through the character tags, whose presence in the preceding section calls attention to their shared theatricality. The reversal of the meaning of the character tag from internal dialogue to spoken dialogue captures Toomer's suggestion throughout *Cane* that speech has a textual dimension; indeed, partly because of this punctuation shift, speech becomes extremely hard to distinguish from other forms of verbal engagement.

Dan's internal monologue cited above is representative of this difficulty. The colon that by convention should mark his speech sets off his thoughts instead, which do not appear *as thoughts* until the introduction of the quotation marks. Quotation marks normally signify "real" speech but here, because of their placement within the character tag, they become a sign of imaginariness, in other words, a sign that this is an internal speech rehearsing a remembered, or imagined, dialogue. More unnervingly, just as the reader realizes that this speech is imagined not uttered, Dan begins to perceive his own thoughts as reality, marked by the switch from imperatives ("Get an ax") to constantive descriptions ("And the cops come"), as his violent irritation with his present position outside his love-interest Muriel's door merges with his anger about a past injustice or a possible future injustice, situations that become identical because their emotional valence remains unchanged.

Throughout *Cane*, Toomer repeatedly calls attention to the way imagined events supersede real events: in "Theater," the manager, John, "feels" (69) Dorris's silk stockings through his powerful desire and, in "Bona and Paul," metaphors—"He is a harvest moon" (95) and "Her words…are pink petals which fall on velvet cloth" (100)— become sites of knowledge,

drawing attention to how the "reality" of race is constituted through the naturalization of symbols. So too, within the world of Dan's thoughts, self-reception becomes interchangeable with self-perception, repeating on a level of content the passage's formal collapse of discursive orders (where punctuation for speech now signals speech's absence and where thought, normally only expressible within a text meant to be read, and thus one indication that a text is *not* meant to be performed, becomes, for a moment, theatrical). Dan's own self-presentation as violent and powerful is made possible through stereotyped images (the archetypal "Jack the Ripper" and the racialized "Baboon from the zoo") whose very conventionality should deflate the fear they are meant to inspire. And indeed, "when the cops come" in this rehearsal of the experience of having blackness function as a sign of criminality, he draws attention to the absurdity of these stereotypes: "No, I aint a baboon. I aint Jack the Ripper. I'm a poor man out of work," where his claimed identity—a man out of work—makes an appeal to a condition so universal, and so humble, that it should engender his captors' empathetic identification. But when this imagined protestation fails to elicit fair treatment, he fights back through conventional slurs (cops as "meat-hook men") and the adoption of the epithet he originally resisted. When he says, "Give me your fingers and I will peel them as if they were ripe bananas," he has become the baboon.

The narrative slippage between Dan's thoughts and speech (and between an imagined scenario and a real event) correlates with the social slippage that produces racial identification: Dan moves into the world of the cops' fiction, becoming the author of his own subjugation by claiming the baboon image as his own. This metaleptic reversal, where Dan now displays the symptoms of the stereotype he tried to diagnose as such, demonstrates the self-fulfilling nature of racial classification and stigmatization. But Dan is not merely a casualty of racist ideology: in the second half of the story, which takes place in D.C.'s Lincoln Theater, he momentarily arrests the

process by which imaginary relationships become interchangeable with lived ones by exaggerating the theater's constitutive fantasy that it does not represent, but rather presents, reality. *Cane* repeatedly references the space of theater, not to drive home a truism about how performance may become interchangeable with real experience but to show how disturbing is such a proposition, just as the later Gurdjieff groups would seek to reproduce (rather than resolve) the conflicts of a scripted identity.

In "The Emancipated Spectator," Jacques Rancière argues against the conception that "good" theater deploys "its separate reality only in order to suppress it, [turning] the theatrical form into a form of life of community" (273). He continues, "The crossing of borders and the confusion of roles shouldn't lead to a kind of 'hypertheater,' turning spectatorship into activity by turning representation into presence. On the contrary, theater should question its privileging of living presence and bring the stage back to a level of equality with the telling of a story or the writing and the reading of a book" (280). In the second half of "Box Seat," Dan becomes a site of Rancière's foresworn "hypertheater": his imagining of Muriel, who is seated across the theater, becomes indistinguishable from the grotesque action on the stage: "Dwarfs, dressed like prizefighters, foreheads bulging like boxing gloves, are led upon the stage…Dan glances at Muriel. He imagines that she shudders. His mind curves back to himself…His eyes are open, mechanically. The dwarfs pound and bruise and bleed each other, on his eye balls" (87). As the dwarfs continue to "pound," "Muriel pounds" and "the house pounds" (88).

As the stage's action and Dan's reflection collapse into one, the other members of the audience become coterminous with a clichéd version of black aesthetic experience. The old man next to Dan, who was, he thinks, "Born a slave," *is* a set of familiar spirituals: "He'll die in his chair. Swing low, sweet chariot. Jesus will come and roll him down the river Jordan. Oh, come

along, Moses, you'll get lost; stretch out your rod and come across. LET MY PEOPLE GO!" (88) But at this moment when Dan has, in Rancière's phrase, "suppress[ed] the theatrical form into a form of life" (274) confusing the dwarf's offer of a bloodied rose to Muriel with his own real love, he breaks the chain of increasingly gruesome identifications through a final elision of the difference between actor and acted-upon. Just as Muriel takes the rose Dan shouts, "JESUS WAS ONCE A LEPER" (91), a sentence that so catastrophically confuses contiguity with substitutability ("Jesus was once a *friend* of lepers" or "Jesus once *cured* a leper" confused with "Jesus *was* a leper") that the "spell" of the play's presence is destroyed. Dan has inflicted onto Jesus, before the aghast audience, the same metalepsis that characterizes racial classification—where the effort to redress a debilitating condition (in Dan's case, the stereotyped baboon image) becomes symptomatic of it. This blasphemy complete, Dan experiences his first sense of difference between stage and self: "cool as a green stem" (91), he leaves the theater.

"Box Seat" thus captures the moment of non-identification of self and performance that Toomer's reading groups will elaborate through their efforts to non-identify an author with a specific type of discourse. It is precisely this effort to uncouple representation from presence that his later Gurdjieff reading groups would investigate and act out. A writer, in Toomer's Gurdjieffian exercises, becomes independent of written production precisely at the moment he realizes, like Dan, that the act of identification with the (social) text is a highly mediated and estranging experience. "Box Seat," in other words, is an early sketch of the productive self-alienation developed through Gurdjieff groups, where participants are both "photographer" and "photograph," or writer and written text. Social mediation, in *Cane* as in the Gurdjieff groups, informs *any* racial identity and makes any act of authorial creation an act of self-alienation. In other words, by performing the process by which an author functions and dysfunctions through

his writing (where "writing" includes any identifying discourse, be it an informal, oral "resume" or thorough written notes), the Gurdjieff reading groups amplify Cane's problematizing of normative racial identification.

In the nineteen fifties, Toomer returned to his Gurdjieff practice, participating in a group in New York and leading one at his home, Mill House, in Pennsylvania. The journals he kept during this period have remained Toomer's least legible form of authorship, garnering little scholarly commentary. But they are Toomer's most dramatic display of authorial dysfunction—to the point of its *defunction*—thus the culmination of his early efforts to represent non-identification in *Cane* and to present it in the nineteen-twenties and thirties reading groups. In this minutely recorded daily writing practice, Toomer obsesses over the most fleeting social interactions, seeing them as opportunities to test his ability to mentally mediate and annotate moments that would seem to necessitate immersion in, and thus identification with, the social experience. The Gurdjieffian mandate to "self-remember," or "non-identify" with "mechanical" ideas about oneself and one's social context, becomes increasingly imperative. Toomer writes, for example, that he "[s]elf-remembered twice, in and out of the door to the breakfast room" ("Notes from New York Gurdjieff meeting, March 8" 3). But, he laments, "[I] [c]ompletely forgot to self-remember as I entered the front door of Mill House. Remembered half an hour later." In this model, a successful social engagement—one where one loses oneself to the interaction—is infelicitous: "Self-remembered as I had my first sight of the ocean from the crowded boardwalk. But, after drinks, denying forces outside began 'ganging up' on me, joined with the denying forces in me" (2). In the ideal group meeting, kinship between the group members comes not from identification with the group but from the effort to see the other participants as mere "animals" who "remain to be… studied" ("Notes from New York Gurdjieff

meeting, March 5" 2) an objective that captures the way the meetings double as a practice for artistic or literary observation.

Toomer envisions his own internal process as akin to the discussions and disruptions of these gatherings: "My associative process is continually looking backward and looking forward, past situations, conversations, future situations, conversations" ("Notes from New York Gurdjieff Meeting, March 1"). Toomer worries that his recourse to a conversational mode means that he has never fully focused on "the present, right now." But then he has an insight that this dialogism is part of his creative power: "These conversations at a future time that take place in my associative process, are they not imaginary conversations? And, if so, are they not instances of imagination occurring in the mental center? I'll watch and see" ("Notes from Mill House Gurdjieff Meeting, March 7" 1). Toomer's realization here—that he is not completely identifiable with his own thoughts, which remain "imaginary" and imagina*tive*—is a more radical articulation of the split between author and text he sought to perform first with *Cane* and then through the Gurdjieff reading groups. Toomer's creativity does not have a fixed source in his body or a cast of mind (or skin color): it unfolds ahead of him, and in conversation with him, but never *as* him. This process corresponds to the stoic "practice of self" that Foucault describes in "Self Writing," where writing is "a personal exercise done by and for oneself," that captures a "disparate truth" of one's unfolded and unfolding authorship (212). Toomer, in these late journals, begins to focus less on what he has written than the subtle movement of pen on paper, writing, "Don't try to push the attention…[just] let it move down and up" (Notes from New York Gurdjieff meeting, February 1953). Writing so focused on process is almost impossible to read as a product; instead, what is visible is an author *defunction* won through what we must see as Toomer's successful struggle to turn to attention to the work of simply writing—of never coming

to pass for a written text.

Through his Gurdjieff reading groups, both Toomer and his fellow participants contributed to American modernism a textual, because highly mediated and documented, conception of social experience, one that was predicated on the partiality of all authorship. To borrow George Hutchinson's assessment of black and white participation in the Harlem Renaissance, Toomer's capacious model of literary participation "was sensitive to difference, but avoid[ed] the reification of otherness" (26) seeking to expand categories of authorship by examining and challenging, not fetishizing or marshaling, the coherency of racial, sexual, and authorial identity. The importance of Toomer's Gurdjieffian experiments resides not in a singular work of literature, but in an evolving definition of the literary, which turned attention to the author's myriad acts of self-re-creation, in which the stable, textual object is less important than the author's evolving personal and social relationship to writing. Attention to these efforts to reconceive of literature as a type of activity help us reconsider not only analogous formations in our own era but also the field of literary production as it took shape in the twenties and thirties. Comments made during the period about sociable texts and unfinished projects—Allen Tate's description of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* as "talk, talk, talk" (Qtd. in Lewty 213); F. Scott Fitzgerald's insistence that the "One Hundred False Starts" within his unpublished notebooks are a work in themselves (Qtd. In Galow 213); and Wallace Thurman's satire of literary fame in *Infants of the Spring*—not to mention the work of numerous writers who allegedly stopped writing or only wrote "minor" works—become differently meaningful through the lens of Toomer's Gurdjieffian practice. "Nothing" writing fills modernism's archives—it may also be among its richest legacies.

Coda

Writers Without Literature

"Personal contact and acquaintance are not necessary to this ultra-modern sociability. Powers operate at a distance, the only continuity being that of accordant vibrations, as in wireless telegraphy…a most interesting kind of cosmic sociability"—William Dean Howells (640).

"A language filled with 'other people's words,' just like Emma Bovary's: but where those words, instead of being passively echoed, arouse 'living and impassioned replies'"—Franco Moretti (83).

In the twenties, Gurdjieffian mysticism was in vogue: Gurdjieff's 1924 dance performances in New York had generated buzz, as had his proselytizing work with A.R. Orage, the editor of London's influential modernist magazine, *The New Age*. Anderson and Jane Heap ran a Gurdjieff group in Paris; Draper ran one in New York City; and Toomer, as my work has described, ran groups in Harlem, Manhattan, Chicago, and Wisconsin.[119] These three writers did not become Gurdjieffians because of mutual friendship: there is scant correspondence between their groups, save a few business letters between Heap and Toomer, as well as some evidence that Draper and Toomer may have briefly participated in the same New York group.[120] Nor do they seem to have had a sense that Gurdjieff might affiliate them with writers beyond their own circles: none of them, for instance, make mention of Gurdjieff's most famous literary disciple, Katherine Mansfield, who died from tuberculosis while staying at his Prieuré in 1923.

Gurdjieff was a charismatic lecturer and conversationalist but an indifferent writer, publishing only a single work during his lifetime. The complexity of his mystical schema would

[119] Anderson remained a disciple for the rest of her life; Toomer broke with Gurdjieff in the thirties but returned to the practice in the forties. Draper's interest in Gurdjieff waned in the thirties as she began to focus on communist activism.

seem to warrant more writing, as would the existence of a diverse fan base of modernist literati. Instead, his appeal to writers seems to have been predicated on his professed disregard for published authorship. Margaret Anderson begins her 1962 study, *The Unknowable Gurdjieff*, with this representative anecdote:

> One day I told Gurdjieff that I wouldn't be coming to him every day for a while.
>
> 'Why?' he asked.
>
> 'Because I must finish my book.'
>
> 'Book is nothing,' he said. (18)

A "book is nothing." The same advice had been given to Toomer who was told to "write down…but do nothing," a view that Muriel Draper channeled when, during her 1920s Gurdjieff period, she began to rail against the "habit forming drug of words." Had Natalie Barney been a little younger—she was ten years older than Anderson and Draper and almost twenty years older than Toomer—she too might have found a kindred spirit in Gurdjieff. She shared his posture of near indifference towards books. Even the well-regarded Katherine Mansfield grew suspicious of literary posterity. She left her papers to her husband John Middleton Murry with the instruction that he "publish as little as possible" (qtd. in Carswell 280).[121]

Yet, all of these writers wrote more—much more—than Gurdjieff. Mansfield's contradictory gesture—saving and bequeathing manuscripts, but asking Murry not to use them—captures this conflicted relationship to literature at the heart of these writers' Gurdjieffian

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[120] *The Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* comments, "While participating in a creative writing group (to which Jean Toomer also belonged) conducted at her home by Orage, Draper wrote *Music at Midnight*"(309). I have not seen this corroborated elsewhere.

[121] Murry ignored her. Many of Mansfield's manuscripts were posthumously published, including *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield* (1927) and *The Scrapbook of Katherine Mansfield* (1939). Kathleen Jones describes Murry's manipulations of Mansfield's manuscripts in *Katherine Mansfield: The Story-Teller* (2010).

practice. Gurdjieff's purported disregard for writing seems nonetheless to have sanctioned literary engagements of all kinds, as is particularly evident in the case of Toomer's reading groups and mystical exercises. And Anderson was incredibly prolific when she was drafting *The Unknowable Gurdjieff*. During this period, from the early 1950s to the early '60s, she published two memoirs, a volume of correspondence, and *The Little Review Anthology*. Certainly this was not "nothing."

There has been little useful scholarship on Gurdjieff and literary modernism.[122] His philosophical system is tedious and, I suspect, engenders a degree of contamination anxiety. Gurdjieffianism is alive today: a mixture of dull texts and strange people that makes association with it—even scholarly association—feel undesirable. But the lack of literary criticism on Gurdjieff, especially in light of the more considerable work on his dance exercises within performance studies,[123] must also be due to the unresolved puzzle of his allure for writers. How to understand writers who thought of themselves as writers, who engaged in a range of activities that stretched the bounds of the literary and who, at the same time, could endorse the judgment that a "book is nothing"?

In his first book, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), Roland Barthes theorizes the history of literature as a struggle with the transparency of language that culminates in the end of literature.

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[122] In Chapter 4, I discuss scholarship on Toomer and Gurdjieff and lament the numerous inaccuracies in one of the longest critical accounts, Jon Woodward's *To Make a New Race: Gurdjieff, Toomer, and the Harlem Renaissance.* But there are a few useful studies of Gurdjieff's influence on modernist writers, in particular, Rebecca Rauve's "An Intersection of Interests: Gurdjieff's Rope Group As a Site of Literary Production." Paul Taylor's *Gurdjieff and Orage: Brothers in Elysium* has useful source historical information about the literary scenes Orage participated in. And Lara Vetter's *Modernist Writings and Religio-Scientific Discourse: H.D., Loy, and Toomer* offers an important exploration of how mysticism, and related modes of what she calls the "serial recasting" of lived experience, demystified expectations of authorship.

[123] See Gordon, "Gurdjieff Movement Demonstrations: The Theatre of the Miraculous"'; Theodore, "Four interpretations of Mevlevi Dervish dance, 1920–1929"; and Eryaman, "From

Classical language is transparent because it is not reflexive: it presents no awareness of itself as a specific form of imaginative communication and thus cannot properly be described as literary. But, according to Barthes, ever since modes of literariness began to make themselves known to readers—as distinctive qualities to enjoy, or feel angry about—literary language has lost this transparency, becoming object-like in so far as it possessed the capacity to be appraised apart from content and social context and through affective responses. Yet eventually, Barthes explains, the long labor of writers to wrest literary language from transparent communication (the effort, in other words, to produce literature) returns transparency to literature. The effort to dispossess literature of all connection with straightforward communication empties it of all distinguishing features. The literary object ultimately disintegrates through the very forces that brought it into being. Literature achieves a hard-won nonexistence (there is a degree of irony to Barthes's account) as authors seek instead to produce the pure possibility of their craft—through mere "writing":

> [I]t was first the object of a gaze, then of creative action, finally of murder, and has reached in our time a last metamorphosis, absence: in those neutral modes of writing, called here 'the zero degree of writing', we can easily discern a negative momentum, and an inability to maintain it within time's flow, as if Literature, having tended it for a hundred years now to transmute its surface into form with no antecedents, could no longer find purity anywhere but in the absence of all signs, finally proposing the realization of this Orphean dream: a writer without Literature. Colourless writing like Camus's, Blanchot's or Cayrol's, for example, or conversational writing like Queneau's, represents the last episode of a Passion of writing, which recounts stage by stage the

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Whirling to Trembling: a Montage of Dervishes' Performative Inquiries."

disintegration of bourgeois consciousness. (5)

What if we understand Gurdjieff's supposed dismissal of literature—a "book is nothing"—as an expression of his appreciation for "neutral modes of writing"? In this reading, Gurdjieff's attractiveness to writers is not a paradox. Instead, he is a spokesman for "absence" as a form of author practice, a mandate taken seriously by the salon writers, whose performances of "zero degree" writing are extreme. What could be more "colourless" than blank pages and more "conversational" than scripted dialogues and radio shows? They are writers "without Literature," more so than the familiar male modernists Barthes selects as exemplary figures. [124]

Barney, Anderson, Draper, and Toomer were invested in the processes and performances of authorship, with prolonging the moment before writing solidifies into an object and is anchored to the literary canon through the use of recognizable literary codes and forms of publication. Composer George Antheil, a close friend of both Draper and Anderson, wrote to Anderson explaining one of his greatest wishes: "to have my music performed as I write it, not years afterward" (355). This ambition could be understood as the plea of the starving artist, but it is also one of the clearest expressions of the desire shared by all the salon writers: to resist recuperation (and objectification) by producing art that has no need of a communicative conduit (in other words, the physical format of a book) because it exists as the emergence of communication itself. Erik Satie, who yelled at his audience during a performance of *Furniture Music*, "Don't Listen!" (qtd. in Albright 69), offers another prime example of this impulse toward what Oren Izenberg has described as an "everyday avant-garde": "a poetic that will not pause long enough for history to take hold, or provide enough depth for criticism to plumb" (11).

Barthes explains that the true "militants" in support of the cause of "writing degree zero"

[124] Barthes's examples include Mallarmé, Gide, Queneau, and Camus.

choose to "no longer write" and "are therefore forgotten" (28). But what counts as "no longer writing"? Critics have described the writers of my study as having chosen to "no longer write." Gurdjieff has been blamed for stilling their pens, so has the embrace of fascism (Barney), and the subjection to sexism (Barney, Draper, and Anderson) and to racism (Toomer). But where other scholars have tried to locate the beginning of an author's decline, my study of salon writers sees an opening outward. Salon writing demands a more thorough reconsideration of the concept of "neutral writing"; it questions our ability to discern the ending of authorship—to even discern what counts as a display of authorial ambivalence. One way of attending to various forms of unpublished authorship has been through modernism's "paratextual communities": its enormous archives of drafts, revisions, and other errata (Golston 701). My project has resisted the word "paratext," a designation that would normally be used for the ephemera of the salon, because it assumes a clear division between writing and "no longer" writing, between authorship and its supplements, and between the art object and the processes of its creation.

Douglas Mao has proposed that this uncertainty about the ontology of the art object (whether or not it includes the supplements that constitute it as an object—both in the sense of its paratexts, its creators, and its beholders) is the fundamental concern of modernism:

> Anglo-American modernism is centrally animated by a tension between an urgent validation of production and an admiration for an object world beyond the manipulation of consciousness—a tension that lends modernist writing its dominant note of vital hesitation or ironic idealism, and that leads modernists, as thinkers and artists, to that impasse in which all doing seems undoing, all making unmaking in the end (11).

What Mao describes as a perspectival crisis within modernism might be better described as a problem for modernist scholarship. My research does not show that salon writers were

themselves worried about the potential indistinguishableness of "making" and "unmaking," although the difference between these two has mattered greatly to critics, who have certainly faced "hesitation" before modernism's supposed objects, particularly when undertaking archival recovery projects, where the ability to distinguish a text from a paratext has tended to matter. When Anderson reported that a "book is nothing," she does not sound anxious. "Nothing" for her meant as much as a book's supposed "something": even the most ephemeral encounters—what she calls "personal-experiences-personally-experienced" (25)—"possess all the characteristics of materiality," as does "everything else in the world" (14). And Barney, who published and wrote more than any other writer in this study, described her published books as "bond on the shelf." She claimed to prefer all the pages she had not written, praising blank paper as a "mind reader" and "the virgin of receptivity" (*The One Who Is Legion* 93). The salon writers appear to have cultivated Mao's "impasse," producing writing that was sometimes nothing more than an empty page, and thus exploiting fears of its unrecognizability as an instance of literary creation. More alarmist writers like T.S. Eliot may have worried that all arts were descending into "amorphous protoplasm" ("London Letter" 662), but Barney, Anderson, Toomer, and Draper took pleasure in performances of authorship that, in Toomer's words, "aim at…dissolution" ("Essential Theater"). "No longer writing" is not an accurate description of these writers' decision to pursue writing so neutral, so ceaseless, as to be almost invisible.

Through a different theoretical lens, "no longer writing" becomes synonymous with "still talking." Lisa Cohen's *All We Know: Three Lives* (2012), a brilliant study of three forgotten but influential modernist women, proposes that certain forms of literary failure may have perversely ensured the literary success of women's conversations. Modernism's writer *manqué* was a talker *réussi*. The first third of Cohen's study concerns Esther Murphy, a "nonstop conversationalist"

who considered Muriel Draper to be one of the greatest influences on her life. Murphy was more famous for what she did not publish than for the few articles she did. She claimed to be perpetually working on a history of a 17th century salon hostess, the Marquise de Maintenon, and had even signed a publication contract, but, in the end, her work amounted to less than forty pages of a never finished draft. Cohen understands Murphy's unsuccessful authorship as almost strategic: her "orations were valued when it seemed they would lead to a book" (138). In other words, Cohen argues that the intention to publish was itself a method for modernism's great talkers to endow their conversations with literary significance: a fascinating hypothesis that proposes that modernist salon organizers sustained their reputations by perpetually claiming, but deferring, literary publication. Cohen qualifies her own suggestion: "had [Murphy] not said that she was working on books—and convinced publishers that she would complete them—she might have been seen simply as that rare but known figure: salonnière, conversationalist, akin to some of the women she admired." Perhaps, but Cohen does not provide any examples of such figures in modernism because they are rare indeed. All the major modernist salon organizers purported to be writers. To have one's conversations taken seriously in the 20th century may well have required connecting them with an unending literary project.

Cohen makes another provocative implication about "failed" women writers. A thwarted literary endeavor may redirect attention to a fulfilled one (the production of great conversation) but the activity of literary non-completion also lays claim to failure itself—to the inalienable right to squander a vocation. As Cohen comments, it was during this "fraught" moment of history that, for the first time, American women "could have failed at something other than femininity and motherhood" (13). The same could be said of Jean Toomer, who seems to have enjoyed failing to be the "Negro" writer his audience wanted him to be. "Feature 'Negro' if you

wish," he famously wrote to his publisher Horace Liveright, "but don't expect me to feature it in advertisement for you" (110). The fact that Toomer is still faulted for his ambivalent performance of racial authorship begs the question of whether a writer's career was ever fully available to him in the first place. If success has such a narrow margin, it may in fact be a form of capitulation—the meek fulfillment of someone else's expectations. Rather than "making good," Toomer chose instead to pursue unsettlingly equivocal forms of literary production that continue to seem, as Barthes puts it, "colorless," a word that takes on greater pathos in the context of Toomer's alleged racial passing.

Because she posits "failed" authorship as an ambition, Cohen partly sidesteps a familiar account of modernism: that its "others" did not have access to the same literary positions as its "greats" and so were forced to search for distinction on the periphery. But by limiting her study to women, she implies that women's refusal of normative publication is also an epiphenomenon of their differential treatment—a sign, in other words, of modernism's refusal of women. Kate Zambreno's *Heroines* (2012), another new engagement with modernist women's neglected contributions, is quick to assert this shopworn story. Of 20th-century literary history, Zambreno angrily asks, "What has been omitted? What has been scratched out?" She answers her question, "Days, lives, wives" (50). My dissertation challenges this interpretation. As I have shown, modernist writers, in particular those I've called salon writers, performed much "scratching out" themselves, drawing attention away from literature as product to literature as process.

Moreover, "heroine" is not the right word, unless Toomer is one too, a possibility elevated by his fascination with Gurdjieff's ability to wield an almost androgynous racial

"mystery"[125]—a mulatto delivered from tragedy and a salon hostess ennobled by masculinity. I have included Toomer in this study because he complicates recovery projects like Cohen's and Zambreno's, which simplify the discussion of literary "failure," and the related art of continuous talking, by focusing exclusively on women. Salon writing, as I have shown, is a fulfillment of the era's preoccupation with "talk, talk, talk"[126]; in other words, it is the performance of a dominant discourse within modernism, not a forced retreat. Jon McKenzie has proposed that the episteme of our era is performance. Through work like my study of salon writing, scholarship can begin to more fully address the implications of his insight, seeking models for ongoing and ephemeral literary activity that do not re-inscribe the static margin/center geographies so characteristic of identity-centric accounts like Cohen's and Zambreno's.

I turn to Cohen and Zambreno's work not simply to underscore my project's difference. Zambreno began *Heroines* as a blog, and her book retains that quality of brief but continuous self-expression that is characteristic of authorship online. Few of Zambreno's thoughts are developed past 140 characters. When read together, Cohen's book provides the historical background for Zambreno's practice. Zambreno's voice demonstrates that distinctively modernist mode Cohen calls the "perfect failure" of authorship. Zambreno is another "nonstop conversationalist": she is chatty, self-involved, and she professes a vexed orientation toward

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[125] As Somerville comments in *Queering the Color Line,* "movement across 'the color line' usually carries with it the symbolic potential for sexual transgression as well" (134). Toomer's first impression of Gurdjieff is distinctly homoerotic. This sexual attraction seems motivated by Gurdjieff's ability to seem both powerful and delicate, "dark" but of an ambiguous race:

> His head was shaved. You could not miss the shape of it. His forehead was high and wide. His dark eyes looked. His nose was finely moulded and almost delicate in comparison to the strong jaw. And then his mustache, most unusual and large, curving down and sweeping up to the tips. His complexion was dark. He wore a tuxedo…All of him came together. He was a unit, a unit of senseable [sic] but unknown power. As he moved around,….there was something panther-like about him." (Qtd in Eldridge and Kerman 127)

traditional literary publication so as to give credence to a less recognizable form of literature, in this case, not only conversation but also one of its kin—blogging. How many blogs become books? How many tweets become short stories? And how many online commentators become full-fledged arbiters of culture? Increasingly, a lot of them do. These less authenticated, more "neutral" modes of writing are starting to become literature. There are still few methods and venues for evaluating writing online and even fewer users of social media who would call themselves "authors." This, too, will change. At the turn-of-the-century, studies of salons proliferated; now, once again, the word "salon" is having a renaissance. *Salon* is not only the name of one of the most popular news forums on the web, but also it has been appropriated by countless emergent writers who use it to attest to their production of dialogue and community in even the most virtual spaces.[127] Modernism's salon writers haven't been forgotten; they have proven to be incredibly enduring, as Zambreno and the countless others who elect digital modes of salon authorship suggest.

In 1911, William Dean Howells described the new possibility of sociability at a

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[126] Allen Tate's description of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, qtd. in Lewty 213.

[127] In 1991, for example, *Utne Reader* published a special issue on salons, which generated huge response, and produced hundreds of *Utne* salons over the country. In 2002, the magazine explained,

> "Shall we salon?" That's the question we asked you—our readers—in a 1991 cover story, "Salons: How to Revive the Endangered Art of Conversation and Start a Revolution in Your Living Room." Almost as an afterthought, we included a little note offering to introduce readers to one another so you might launch salons in your community. We were blindsided by the response. We expected a few hundred, maybe even a thousand. But more than 8,000 of you took us up on the offer, and the neighborhood salon movement was born. (See "Shall We Salon Again?)

Now, ten years later, Utne runs a popular online salon forum (see Utne Salon). Other online "salon" ventures include Salon.com's new forum "Open Salon," a user generated news source; *The New Inquiry*, a new online literary magazine and mobile literary salon that has garnered press for rekindling a literary club tradition in New York City (see *The New York Times*, "New York's Literary Clubs," December 1, 2011); The "Campaign for American Conversation" run by 92Y; and free social media educational software like Classroom Salon.

distance—"a most interesting kind of cosmic sociability" (640). A century later, Franco Moretti described dialogic literature as producing "language filled with 'other people's words'… but where those words, instead of being passively echoed, arouse 'living and impassioned replies" (83). These descriptions of what might be called "distant conversing" are optimistic, and rightfully so, given innovations to social media authorship.[128] But just as modernism's salon writers treated the word "salon" with some suspicion—"Blaa-Blaa-Blaa," as Anderson sneered—those of us, and that means all of us, who participate in "cosmic sociability" and the nonstop consumption of "other people's words," would do well to continue to scrutinize salons, examining when and where the word "salon" is and is not deployed. We might find salon writing where we did not expect it. Pauses, stutters, scratches, drafts, and omissions eventually lead to literature, but also, as the salon writers demonstrate, might instantiate it. The most "distant," because least explored, performances of authorship might be close at hand.

[128] A few examples of new social media authorship are serialized fiction websites like Byliner and Plymptom; online writing forums like Thumscribes, which allow authors to co-write fiction; and live-tweeted poetry events, hosted by organizations like NPR and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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