

SPANNING THE IMPOSSIBLE GAP: ALTERNATIVE SPATIALIZATION IN DJUNA  
BARNES'S AND MINA LOY'S PARISIAN WRITINGS

by

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Spanning the Impossible Gap: Alternative Spatialization in Djuna Barnes's and Mina Loy's Parisian Writings

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which queer/female authors engaged with, altered and represented interwar Paris in two prominent novels: Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936) and Mina Loy's *Insel* (1991). Both of these texts are concerned with repressed queer/female subjects who engage with the city in a way that deconstructs bourgeois social mores. I argue that these novels, though often read as "placeless" or "ephemeral," are, in fact, intimately aware of spatiality, and its potential to serve or repress dissident subjectivities. I employ a theoretical approach that is indebted to "geocritical" scholarship, both recent and ancient, at the core of which are works of: Robert Tally, Michel Foucault and Zeno of Elea. I begin, in my first chapter, by reading the represented spaces of Djuna Barnes' opus, *Nightwood*. I examine how Barnes demonstrates disdain for dyadic partitioning of space, and how she instead sees generative potential in a radically osmotic relationship between places. I thereafter turn to Michel Foucault's theory of "heterotopia" in order to delineate a reading that suggests Barnes sees in her form a potential to figuratively rebuild a world lost to her. In my second chapter I move on to a discussion of Barnes' friend, Mina Loy, focusing mostly on her novel, *Insel*, but also attending to her poetry and political writings. Reading Loy's writings in consideration of her relationship with two radical artistic movements – futurism and surrealism – I parse how Loy crafts spaces indebted to each group's expressed scientific interest. I focus in on *Insel* and how its spaces are conceived of as analogous to non-Euclidean geometry, specifically as it was delineated in Zeno of Elea's "paradoxes," which were of interest to the surrealist movement. The culmination of this reading ends with my suggesting that Loy's retention of *Insel* from the exchange economy was a gesture equivalent to a non-Euclidean conception of infinite space. I argue that these authors' attention to alternative spaces, when considered together with their writing's own formal qualities, as well as

that of the art depicted within their texts, evidences a vital elucidation of space that thwarts the hegemonic, entirely logical, construction thereof.

## **Lay Summary**

Studies regarding artistic engagements with place and space, and the subsequent representations thereof, have proliferated at an increased rate recently. However, these studies are often concerned with masculine, heteronormative, hegemonic and canonical authorial perspectives. This thesis aims to study how two female authors, one queer and the other not, attended to the way space affected their lives and art. Djuna Barnes and Mina Loy, the authors with which this thesis is concerned, both lived and worked in interwar Paris, a period and place that has heretofore served as fertile ground for many of the aforementioned, masculine geocritical studies. I intend to explore how these two authors, often read as “placeless,” were intimately aware of liberatory potential of rewriting space – a world whose map is their writing.

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, J. Clegg.

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To my friends, who have seen my development from a near high school dropout to a graduate student, thanks for the good times that always serve to rejuvenate my weary soul.

As for Anita, who deserves her own page...



*For Anita, and her infinite mind.*

## Introduction

At night Paris is a warren, the streets are infinite, endless, they proliferate, grow longer, merge and interpenetrate, shrink and widen, as if viewed through opera glasses, or meet at sharp angles, even right angles, constituting a vast trelliswork, a tangled scaffolding of iron tubes laid flat on the ground. Paris by night is a labyrinth where every street opens onto another or onto one of the

boulevards so aptly described as arteries

-Jean-Paul Clébert, *Paris Vagabond* (128)

Generally speaking, the aim of this thesis is to resituate the works of Djuna Barnes and Mina Loy in dialogue with the imaginative influence exerted over them by Paris during each author's time in the city. In this project I turn my gaze specifically to texts by Djuna Barnes and Mina Loy, interrogating how they replicate in their artistic practice the generative space/places encountered throughout the interwar Parisian cityscape. I aim to parse how Barnes and Loy, as prominent female authors and thinkers, distinguish between the sexually-/hetero-normative spaces of modern Paris and their generative and alternative counterparts, and how they thereafter imbue their form with a replicable spatialization. These authors both resist the notion that generative space for queer and female individuals is one that merely mimes and appropriates the dyadic hegemony of heterosexual and masculine spaces – a spatial reconfiguration that many queer female writers of their time embraced.

The Parisian historian, Eric Hazan, has noted the tendency exhibited by cultural Paris to allow the societal “rejection of genres, boundaries and hierarchies,” artistically embodied in the Benjaminian “flâneur”, “who erected the metropolis into a theoretical object, an instrument of rupture with the forms of the past” (315-316). I address a lack of geocritical work concerned

with queer/female – and queer-female – representations of the most literarily toured city in history. There is precedent with regards to the interpretive potential of reading Parisian city-literature. However, by and large, critics have not done their due diligence in applying previously established critical apparatuses to queer/female Parisian literature. One need not look any further than the aforementioned Walter Benjamin's geocritical ur-text, the *Arcades Project* (1999), particularly its opening section, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century", in order to comprehend the importance Paris has in the field of geocriticism. In the first section of this work Benjamin develops our current academic understanding of the Flâneur, as well as a cogent analysis of the modern conditions that generate the archetypical figuration thereof. Benjamin notes that Paris, throughout the nineteenth century, was the setting that allowed for the "private individual [to make] his entrance on the stage of history," and that "for the private individual, the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work" (8). This due to what David Harvey called Paris' "bludgeon[ing] ... into modernity," after the French Revolution of 1848 (2). In Paris' modern entrenchment of post-Industrial Revolution capitalism, Benjamin developed his idea of the generative reading one can undertake of the city-dweller, and the city dweller's artistic output – the life and work of the flâneur. The flâneur – epitomized, according to Benjamin, by the poet Charles Baudelaire – "stands on the threshold – of the metropolis as of the middle class," but "neither has him in its power yet" (10). Thus, the flâneur is conceived of as occupying a space outside of the modern city-proper, and its notion of middle-class comfort. I would argue that the flâneur, being simultaneously apart from and perceptive of Paris, enacts the role of critic, who is able to, unlike the porous borders of Paris' social spaces, contain his world as and in what Benjamin calls – in reference to Richard Wagner's concept of intermedial holism via theatre – "the total work of art" (11).

The geocritical framework that informs my readings of the texts that are the locus of this project is deeply indebted to the work of Robert Tally Jr. His most recent monograph, *Topophrenia* (2019), serves as a cogent map for the ways in which we read and write space, and how that same writing might contribute to its subject's production. Tally coins the term 'Topophrenia' in order to categorize a literary thoughtfulness that is invested in "thinking about place, which also means thinking about the relations among places, as well as those among subjects and places" (23). Furthermore, Tally goes on to explicate that "Topophrenia characterizes the subjective engagement with a given place, with one's sense of place, and with the possible projection of alternative spaces" (23). The "alternative spaces" of which Tally speaks are those that challenge the "objective structures and systems that condition ... our perceptions and experiences of space and place" (23). "Alternative spaces," in accordance with Tally's thoughtful analysis, emerge as a critical space that serve to impel fundamentally controlling and bourgeois spaces into relief. As such, my theoretical framework is further influenced by thinkers and authors who touch upon "alternative spaces" that are conceived of as inherently critical or otherwise literary realms. Michel Foucault's vision of "heterotopia," Joseph Franks' concept of "spatial literature," as well as Zeno of Elea's non-Euclidean geometries and the surrealist's formal appropriation thereof are all delineated later on in this project. Various other sources will be included to support these texts and allow for a political thrust: Jane Bennet's theory of vital materialism, Deleuze and Guattari's nomadism and Shari Benstock's study of female Parisian artists are all important for this work.

In the first chapter of this thesis I take up Djuna Barnes' opus, *Nightwood* (1932), as my field of study. After a brief deliberation about Barnes' expressed interest in city-writing, evidenced by her time as a journalist in New York City, I turn to her (in)famous novel. My

reading contends that Barnes rejected the modern tendency of hegemonically replicable organizations of queer-life in Paris, and that the emblematic locus of this rejection was figured in the domestic yearnings exemplified by Paris' lesbian citizens at the time of writing. I go on to parse how Barnes utilizes the (problematically) degenerate Jew, Felix Volkbein and his father, Guido Volkbein, and their tragic aspiration towards gentility as symbolized by the domestic abode, as a pedagogical cautionary tale regarding Paris' Lesbian community's desire to mime the spatial/place practices of bourgeois society. Thereafter, I turn to a reading of the radically porous spaces occupied by *Nightwood's* cohering character of interest, Robin Vote. Robin Vote, I contend, occupies and enlivens a space that rejects the home/world binary, instead choosing to exist within a heterotopic realm. I delineate exactly what I mean by appropriating Michel Foucault's term, "heterotopia," and how its implementation by Barnes serves to upset the bourgeois social order as reified in stratified space. By way of conclusion, I turn to the diegetic narrator, Dr. Matthew O'Connor, reading his narrative enterprise as itself a heterotopic enterprise, which thereby suggests Barnes' own work too, becomes an artistic heterotopia.

In my second chapter I undertake a reading of Barnes' friend and contemporary, Mina Loy, and her posthumously published novel, *Insel*. After introducing the text, wherein I discuss a good number of the slight corpus of critical works regarding Loy and *Insel*, I endeavour to historicize Loy's time in Florence, during which she was an ancillary member of the ascendant futurist movement. It was during this period, I go on to suggest, that Loy became intimate with "new physics": Einsteinian relativity, quantum mechanics, and various other radical new scientific theories. It was also during this period that much of Loy's feminism took shape by way of her manifestos and poetry, the diction of which oftentimes relied upon the language and style of the futurist aesthetic. I then turn to Loy's engagement with surrealism in Paris, a city she

relocated to just over a half-decade after her abandonment of futurism. Surrealism's ideation of illogical planes of non-Euclidean geometry will be germane to this part of my thesis. After a short discussion of how various surrealists deployed and created non-Euclidean fractal techniques and works of art, I will go on to suggest that Loy utilized surrealism's geometric tendencies in much the same way that she appropriated and altered futurist science-logic. Thus, this section culminates in my arguing that Loy employed these surrealist tricks in order to infinitely spatialize the world of her text.

In the end, by way of concluding this section and introducing the project *in toto*, I would like to turn to the author whose words serve as the epigraph for this introduction to my project. Jean-Paul Clébert, though perhaps less revered, less innovative and bawdier than Barnes and Loy, was an astute observer of the Parisian cityscape, its people, and their infinite spatiations. *Paris Vagabond* (1952) was his own attempt to recover ownership of Paris from its bourgeois interlocutors, wherein he suggests that the "revelation of the life of a city is not accessible to the public but reserved for initiates, for a very few poets and very many vagabonds" (50). Though Clébert's project, as a sort of down-and-out travelogue, could not be more formally dissimilar from my own, its objective thrust aligns with what I attempt to do here. Whereas Clébert attempted to capture an image of his home that rejected its post-war defacement at the hands of late-capitalism, I would like to, with this thesis, undo the common image of Paris as home and projection of the flâneur. Instead, I will be turning to critique a different vagabondage, that of the flâneuse.

## 1. *Nightwood's* Somnolent Heterotopias

In this dynamic rivalry between house and universe, we are far removed from any reference to simple geometrical forms. A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space.

-Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (67)

1920's Paris saw the rise of a thriving queer scene, rivaled only by the equally admired/monished one that developed simultaneously in Berlin. With the emergence of modern liberality in Paris – cultural and ethnic admixture, artistic experimentation, (semi) permissible overindulgence in drink and drugs and the intentional renegeing of sexual mores – there arose a culture around/through Paris' queer denizens that, although not by any means within the accepted demarcations of Western-Christian morals, allowed for in/out-group conviviality. The major difference between these two most prominent examples of queer scenes of modernity, as pertaining to their continued transmittance through cultural artifacts, is the identifiable difference between the major subgroups which served as the broader culture's historians. Whereas interwar queer Berlin was most frequently emblemized by gay men – Christopher Isherwood and Magnus Hirschfeld among them – queer Paris was primarily documented by lesbian and bi women. The sheer quantity of female writers (many of them lesbian/bi) that honed and practiced their talents in Paris throughout the 1920's-30s is astonishing. A distilled, yet representative, roll-call of the female chroniclers of interwar Paris includes Gertrude Stein, Radclyffe Hall, Natalie Clifford Barney, Colette, Hope Mirrlees, Mina Loy and Djuna Barnes.

The heady days of *Le Monocle* were, of course, not entirely positive. The prevalence of

lesbian and bi writers – and experimental lesbian/bi writings – is indebted to, or a fallout from, male (anti-homosexual) chauvinism that denigrated femininity (and lesbianism) to the extent that it concerned itself more with reprimanding male homosexuality, as it was seen as more detrimental to the well-being of Parisian society. Similarly, the misogynistic attitudes of the period created a public spectacle out of Paris' lesbian community. Shari Benstock notes that “by 1900 the city [Paris] itself had an international reputation as the capital of same sex love among women and was designated ‘Paris-Lesbos’”; this effluence of lesbian culture both in and out of Paris was made possible, Benstock further elucidates, because “Despite the law against female cross-dressing (or perhaps because it forced female homosexuals to remain relatively invisible), it was male homosexuality rather than female practice that was the focus of middle-class moral outrage ... male homosexuality was seen to be more threatening to the moral base of society than its female counterpart” (47-54). One of the women who Paris-Lesbos sheltered, and was thus subsequently immortalized by, was Djuna Barnes, who ventured to Paris, originally, out of vocational necessity, as *McCall's* assigned her to document the lives of expatriate Americans in the exotic French capital.

Long before she arrived in Paris – the city that she would call home for over a decade and, per Deborah Parsons, perhaps “spiritually for the rest of her life” (166) – Djuna Barnes demonstrated herself to be highly attuned to the intimate relationship she, and society in general, had with cityscapes, space, and place. The maiden voyage of Barnes' writing career took place in New York City, where she worked as a journalist for, amongst other publications, the *New York Press* and *Vanity Fair*. Much of her highly participatory work – submitting herself to force-feeding, meandering through the seedier parts of the city in male disguise – was itself urban travel writing. As Justin D. Edwards reveals, Barnes's early New York City journalism,



embedded within a highly masculine profession, one bent upon hegemony and boundary-demarcation, shook up an otherwise bourgeois form/genre; out of her gender “duplicity comes a representation of the city that destabilizes and subverts the usual travelogue approach taken by male, middle-class explorers who have no problem identifying with dominant culture” (21). And, insofar as, as Yi-Fu Tuan notes, “bodies can speak and that it is their speaking and communicating with one another that sustains the human life of the city and indeed the material city itself”, one may posit that Barnes actively, in her simultaneously protean and aping travel writing, aims to (re)construct New York City in an image that might have proved more hospitable to her as a queer woman. Barnes’ urban travel writing not only destabilizes the “dominant culture” of New York City as Edwards suggests, it destabilizes the physical nature of the city itself. Barnes’ spatially destabilizing writing, I contend, takes on an exaggerated form in her “Paris novel,” *Nightwood*, wherein Barnes accomplishes a style that replicates the spaces of Paris’ traditionally underrepresented queer community.

Critical studies of Barnes’ *Nightwood* have consistently regarded the work as a purposeful diffusion of meaning/intent based upon its illegible characters and spaces. Tyrus Miller has suggested that Barnes’ aim as she developed the carnivalesque assemblage of characters that people her text was to avoid “the impression of automatism ... Barnes’ characters are neither the puppets of her text ... nor mere playthings of their own neuroses and perversions. They are free and alive, with significant passions and pains” (123). These “free and alive” characters, Miller later posits, constitute the populace of a “positionless” text which has about it a certain “generic and categorical uncertainty” that unsettles “literary historical oppositions like modernism and postmodernism” (124). Deborah Parsons, for her part, reads the textual bedlam of *Nightwood* as a purposive assault on the typically Modern strictures of “Ezra Pound’s

advocacy of ‘straight talk’ [and] Eliot’s own argument for the disciplinary logic of the modern novel” (165). Rather, Parsons goes on to argue, *Nightwood*, through “the overstatement of its own artistry ... exposes the myth of modernism’s claim to aesthetic mastery over the chaos of history” (166). The general tendency of critical work concerned with Barnes and her opus, both before and after Miller and Parsons, tends to walk the same line – eschewing appraisal of the place/space of the text (rendering it instead, placeless) and honing in on the vital characters that populate that “positionless” and “chaotic” world.

However, recently – around the same time that Robert Tally coined and elucidated upon the strictures of “Topophobia” – critics of Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* specifically, have let a modicum of geocriticism seep into their otherwise Milleresque critiques. Mary Wilson, in one of the most pointed studies of the space/place of *Nightwood*, suggests that Barnes challenged the tendency of literary representations of queer relationships being bound within mimetic dichotomous domestic narrative(s) that were abound in heterosexually hegemonic societies: “In *Nightwood*,” she says “there is no border between home and world; any act of domestication is a futile, tragicomic attempt to perform domesticity and ‘get the world home’” (436). Referencing the declamation by Matthew O’Connor that “In time everything is possible and in space everything forgivable; life is but an intermediary vice” (126-127), Brian Glavey states that “Barnes’ intermedia art recognizes the redemptive appeal of the spatial and its repressive potential” (751).

The Paris of *Nightwood* (and indeed *Nightwood*’s represented spaces *in toto*) is space that, while allowing for ephemerality and abstraction, is highly demarcated, navigable in parts, as it were. It is not a world constructed as unreferential, but rather, in its continuous combination of seemingly disparate spaces/places, one that is well-defined through its pointed and reconciliatory

topographic admixture. According to the doubled/diegetic narrator, Matthew O'Connor, Paris (that is, the one mapped by the text) is a unique and uniquely productive place/space. Paris is a city that emits a vast and dynamic aura the world over, drawing in the huddled masses and – as is to be seen some half-decade after *Nightwood's* publication – political belligerents alike. Dr. O'Connor states that "French nights [of which Paris is emblematic] are those which all nations seek the world over"; and he goes on: "The night and the day are two travels, and the French – gut-greedy and fist-tight though they often are – alone leave testimony of the two in the dawn; we tear up the one for the sake of the other; not so the French" (82). In this description of France/French citizens, O'Connor positions Paris as a place of harmonious duality that is reified by alternative/outside cultures only for its nighttime, digressive space. The French, on the other hand, do not distinguish so ardently between "night" and "day" "travels"; rather, they bring the two travels – spatial and spatially metaphoric – into the light of the "dawn", that ambiguous half-space that is neither night nor day, but both and all at once. The space of Paris in *Nightwood* is treated much the same as its other disintegrated dualities; it might be added to the list of contradictions that Barnes reconciles. Whereas, according to Deborah Parsons, Barnes's "prelapsarian/pre-Oedipal sexuality ... has been celebrated for its social and political dissidence and inversion of the normalized oppositions of a dualistic social order; day and night, human and beast, male and female, the sacred and the profane" (175), I would like to suggest that Barnes' spatiation does not aim to "inverse" but rather to erase difference. Using Dr. Matthew O'Connor's image of France as my jumping-off point, my aim here is to interrogate the representation of *Nightwood's* representation of dualistic Paris, and the unique formal qualities utilized in that same project.

Reading spatial seepage, the propensity towards (French) or the rejection of (American)

the comingling of markers of inside/outside or night/day, in *Nightwood* reveals a combative dichotomy within the queer community (both specifically and broadly so) of an expatriate Paris that establishes battle lines between two oppositional forces. Beginning with the – as far as it pertains to the text and its characters – didactical queer community of European Jewry, the reader becomes privy to the (perceived) importance of spatial separation and how it might contribute to the development of community. Lara Trubowitz intuits Felix Volkbein and Jewishness generally as “useful for Barnes ... only when she can distinguish such traits from Jews themselves, that is, only when she transforms these traits into generally applicable, indeed distinctly aesthetic, characteristics” (312). Trubowitz intuits Barnes’ appropriation of Jewishness to be problematic; Trubowitz captures and expounds upon the thinking that Gillian Rose has decried as the philosophical tendency to imagine and represent “Judaism as the sublime Other of modernity” (vi). Yet, as problematic as Barnes’ thinking was regarding Judaism and its representation in *Nightwood*, there is no doubt that its usefulness served to inform her reading and critique of the queer community that lies at the heart of the text.

Barnes in her application for a Guggenheim fellowship that was to support her work on *Nightwood*, suggested that the figure/trope of Jewish identity was essential to her project, writing that the funding would enable her to “visit Austria, Vienna, to make a study of pre-war conditions, intrigues and relations then existing between the Jews and the Court, tracing the interweaving between the two, for a book in progress whose chief figure is an Austrian Jew” (qtd. In Trubowitz 311). The figure of the “Austrian Jew” in *Nightwood* is epitomized in the Volkbein clan, a family who from their diegetic beginning, is unhoused, typecast to wander as the persistent legend (that of the “Wandering Jew”) mandated. Opposite this figure is the “court”, that is simultaneously gentile and gentility, which is always entirely housed, oftentimes

parodically so.

In order to escape a life wherein he would be a public spectacle for the well-housed gentiles of Vienna, Guido Volkbein – the father of the hapless Felix Volkbein, husband of *Nightwood's* cohering centre, Robin Vote – marries into the Hapsburg (Habsburg) dynasty, the main line of which was dethroned after the First World War (1). The public spectacle of which Guido is afraid is a familial trauma, not his own experience, but one that drives him to marrying into the representation of civility and hegemony. One autumn evening, walking the streets of Vienna, Guido Volkbein ponders the tumult that besieged his ancestors:

Then walking in the Prater he had been seen carrying in a conspicuously clenched fist the exquisite handkerchief of yellow and black linen that cried aloud of the ordinance of 1468, issued by one Pietro Barbo, demanding that, with a rope about its neck, Guido's race should run in the Corso [street] for the amusement of the Christian populace, while ladies of noble birth, sitting upon spines too refined for rest, arose from their seats, and, with red-gowned cardinals and the *Monsignori*, applauded with that cold yet hysterical abandon of a people that is at once unjust and happy. (2)

For Guido, and this is an attitude that he is to also pass on to his son Felix, all that which is markedly segregated from the public humiliation that befalls European Jews as they are made to walk through the streets as Pamplonese bulls, that is to say gentile nobility, is exemplified by the domestic setting. Importantly, “the ordinance of 1468”, to which Barnes refers, did not only mandate that Jews “run” for the “amusement of the Christian populace,” but that they should do

so in order to be equated to Christian men and boys, who also participated in these races. However, in this attempt to equalize between these two groups it was the Volkbein's ancestors who ended up walking through the streets as Guido himself walks through Vienna's Prater, while the Hapsburgs of the world (including the ancestors of his wife, Felix's mother, Hedvig) watched from their homes, whether through the window or from their balconies. Thus, Guido goes about establishing a lineage whose continued existence is reliant on its being housed.

Guido develops the pretense of a noble and gentile history so that he can marry Hedvig, and in order to do this he pilfers the symbols of aristocracy: "a coat of arms that he had no right to and a list of progenitors (including their Christian names) who had never existed" (3). Guido was able to financially arrange his most (ig)noble marriage/marriage-home due to his efforts in the only trade which – because "In the Vienna of Volkbein's day there were few trades that welcomed Jews" – would accept him: "he had managed, by various deals in household goods, by discreet buying of old masters and first editions and by money changing, to secure for Hedvig a house in the Inner City, to the north overlooking the Prater ... [which] became a fantastic museum of their encounter" (5). After acquiring the house that is to be the ancestral home of his line, Guido decorates it in a parodically ostentatious style, where the "long rococo halls, giddy with plush and whorled designs in gold, were peopled with Roman fragments, white and disassociated" (5). The house is worldly in a way that is at once affected and gaudy; it is ornamented with "rugs from Madrid", "full length windows" described as a "French touch", "native velvets and stuffs from Tunis" as well as "Venetian blinds" (5-6). Immediately following the roll-call of international décor, it is suggested that all "wandering Jew[s]", a stereotype that Guido wishes to deny through the gaudy lineage-signification of his house, are essentially placeless: "No matter where and when you meet him you feel that he has come from some place

– no matter from what place he has come – some country that he has devoured rather than resided in, some secret land that he has been nourished on but cannot inherit, for the Jew seems to be everywhere from nowhere” (7). In the end, Guido, like his ancestors before him and Felix after, domesticates the world only in significations that serve as a pretense of nobility. But just as Venetian blinds cannot conjure up a canal outside one’s window, a gaudy manor filled with sundry artifacts does not make one either gentile or gentility.

Many years later, Felix, the second in the line of continually-degenerating Volkbeins, arrives in Paris where he looks for his own place in which to situate himself. The first task that Felix sets for himself upon his arrival in Paris is to look “for the correct thing to which to pay tribute”, all of which are, in fact, places/spaces: “the right street, the right café, the right building, the right vista” (9). In this search Felix, thanks to one of Matthew O’Connor’s many happenstance ingressions, happens upon the fainted Robin Vote, as the Doctor with whom Felix was eating is summoned to tend to her. Robin, in direct contrast to the lurid house of Felix’s youth, occupies “one of those middle-class hostelries which can be found in almost any corner of Paris, neither good nor bad, but so typical that it might have been moved every night and not have been out of place” (33-34). Robin’s room, which is both definitively and generally Parisian, is similarly both entirely generically domestic at the same time as it is “of the world”. Robin is found splayed “On a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly over-sung by the notes of unseen birds which seemed to have been forgotten” (34). Even her body is presented as being an amalgamation of the qualities of interior and exterior:

The perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi,

which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry ... Her flesh was the texture of plant life, and beneath it one sense a frame, broad, porous and sleep-worn ... [she had] the troubling structure of the born somnambule, who lives in two worlds. (34-35)

Robin's body, being of "two worlds", is self-similar to the room which she occupies; in reading of her "frame" one imagines roof-beams and flooring, while at the same time her exterior is made up of "earth-flesh ... the texture of plant life". And unlike Felix's home which tries to speak in specificities, demarcating origin and provenance at the same time, through signifiers of belonging, identity, and attachment, Robin's rejects domestic binarism through organic, unsignifiable foliage. It is filled with "plant life" rather than trees or flowers of a specific locale, and thus the room itself is all the more florid and alive.

After this meeting but before the eventual matrimony and procreation between Robin and Felix, O'Connor and the Baron sit and discuss the latter's desire for "a son who would feel as he felt about the 'great past'" (38). Innocuously, almost as if in passing, O'Connor asks which nationality the Baron would wish his wife to be, to which he responds: "'The American' ... 'With an American anything can be done'" (38-39). O'Connor then responds with profound foresight, wherein he distinguishes between great and feeble men by way of how they treat/are-treated-in their homes; where they are "placed":

A king is the peasant's actor, who becomes so scandalous that he has to be bowed down to – scandalous in the higher sense naturally. And why must he be bowed down to? Because he has been set apart as the one dog who need not regard the



rules of the house, they are so high that they can defame God and foul their rafters! But the people – that’s different – they are church-broken, nation-broken – they drink and pray and piss in the one place. Every man has a house-broken heart except the great man. The people love their church and know it, as a dog knows where he was made to conform, and there he returns by his instinct. But to the graver permission, the king, the tsar, the emperor, who may relieve themselves on high heaven – to them they bow down – only. (39)

This passage gestures forward to the famous closing scene of *Nightwood*, where Robin becomes a sort of alpha dog in relation to Nora’s actual dog. It is in this section that Barnes’ cartography is fully realized, epitomizing the fallout/consequences of trying to house that subject which belongs not to any world but to all of them. Much as with its other dyadic tropes, such as melancholia, which it “is ultimately more invested in *using*” rather “than in curing” (Fama 42), *Nightwood*’s geographic generativity is dependent upon its contextual malleability. The contextual malleability of space comes to the fore when *Nightwood*’s setting is shifted to America, where dichotomous space is, according to Felix Volkbein, exemplified.

Jenny Petherbridge, the last matron and lover of Robin, moves the couple to America. When there she suggests that “they should make their home in the country,” to which Robin responds, “a hotel [is] ‘good enough’” (167). Robin shows herself immediately to be unhappy participating in the pseudo-homesteader life of America, with herself positioned as the housewife to Jenny’s dotting husband; thus, she begins to wander:

Jenny could do nothing with her; it was as if the motive power which had directed

Robin's life, her day as well as her night, had been crippled. For the first week or two she would not go out, then, thinking herself alone, she began to haunt the terminals, taking trains into different parts of the country, wandering without design, going into many out-of-the-way churches, sitting in the darkest corner or standing against the wall, one foot turned toward the toe of the other, her hands folded at their length, her head bent ... Moving like a housewife come to set straight disorder in an unknown house, she came forward with a lighted taper ... A moment later Jenny, who had followed her, looking about to be sure that she was unobserved, darted up to the sconce, snatched the candle from its spike, blew it out, re-lit it and set it back. (167)

The wandering that Robin undertakes does little in the way of undoing the dyadic system that creates a male/female organizational system, as she is still positioned as a "housewife" to Jenny's husband. After a series of marital squabbles stemming from Robin's adventures and Jenny's subsequent accusation that she is in a "sensuous communion with unclean spirits," Robin inexplicably heads for "Nora's part of the country" (168). Robin "circle[s] closer and closer" as she figuratively communes with "insect[s] and bird[s]" and sleeps "on a bench in the decaying chapel", until in the distance she hears the bark of Nora's dog which conjures her half-dead form: "the barking of the dog brought her up, rigid and still" (168). Nora follows her almost-rabid dog up the hill to the decrepit chapel out of which Robin made a perfectly exteriorized home. What follows is perhaps the most shocking scene found throughout the whole of the novel, a scene about which scholars are still unable to come to agreement. Robin, seeing Nora's dog, gets on all fours and becomes, as O'Connor suggested she would, the dog-king of her own house:

Then she began to bark also, crawling after him – barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. The dog began to cry then, running with her, head-on with her head, as if to circumvent her; soft and slow his feet went padding. He ran this way and that, low down in his throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees. (170)

Robin, in this scene, shows herself to be, if not definitively, then at least partially, insane. Her illogical stance, however, is not without its redemptive potential. In it, she exerts control, metaphorically, over the most notable societally-encoded “house” that there ever was. Unlike Guido, Felix, and the whole Volkbein clan (perhaps all those of Jewish descent, according to Barnes) – with their interwoven yearnings for elevated social and thus, religious stature, as made possible by domesticity – Robin is able to escape the litany of imposed binaries by way of O’Connor’s fruitful suggestion that she obfuscate, through scandal, the distinction between the domestic setting and its profane exterior. The situation of *Nightwood’s* climax is not bathetic in the least, regardless of its inconspicuous cessation; instead, Robin seems to have, in the end, taken her concern with domestic/exterior binarization to the echelon of domesticity: the “house” of God. The church, as house of God, is an inherently masculinized locale, it is the home of the “Father” and the “Son” above all else. It is on the enclosed setting of religious masculinity that Robin, in the end, sets about to disrupt; this, not by taking her place on the pulpit as female-priest – a role, even when altered, that is inherently masculine – but, rather, as un-housetrained dog-

king, who can't help but draw together oppositional forces, ending the narrative with the sonorous admixture of "laughter" and "crying", a multifarious gesture that emotes at the same time as it signifies nothing at all. It is the church that becomes the radically osmotic world in which traditional significations of the male/female binary is undone, allowing for a new form of interpersonal relations. This world mirrors closely one whose theoreticization would occur some three decades later.

Michel Foucault, in his 1967 lecture entitled "Des Espaces Autres" (Of Other Spaces), claims that the "present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space" (22). Drawing upon diverse sources – notably Galileo's discovery of "infinite, and infinitely open space" (23) – Foucault suggests that the infinite possibilities (relations, palimpsests, ebbs and flows) amongst and between space(s) does not erase or otherwise make a "void" of space, but rather that "we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another" (23). It is out of our modern comprehension of "infinite space" that subjective, but eminently specific and extant, spaces arise; these spaces are what Foucault, in this lecture, terms Heterotopias, which can be roughly translated as "Other Spaces". Foucault delineates his conception of heterotopia according to the following six principles:

- 1) "there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute heterotopias ... But the heterotopias obviously take quite varied forms" (24).
- 2) "a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion" (25).
- 3) "The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (25).

- 4) “Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed ... heterochronies” (26).
- 5) “Heterotopias always presupposed a system of opening and closing that both isolated them and makes them penetrable” (26).
- 6) “they have a function in relation to all the space that remains” (27).

Heterotopias might be considered to have two potential roles, in two potential forms, says Foucault: “to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory ... Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space” (27). The heterotopic space is either one that mirrors our reality in a “non-real” form or it is a “real space” that inverts, confuses, and otherwise discombobulates the accepted and consistent organization of the society out of which it has developed. The imbrication of space according to cultural interrogation has been developed here with reference to Foucault’s theory and according to its political potential, by Edward Soja and Homi Bhabha with their interlaced theories of “thirdspace.” Soja, for his part, suggests that, akin to “Lefebvre’s nomadic meta-Marxism ... [thirdspace] rejects any totalization that finitely encloses knowledge production” (57). Foucault proffers the theater, which is capable of bringing together “a whole series of places that are foreign to one another,” as representative of “non-real,” thirdspace-esque heterotopia; and in order to exemplify the form of “real space” heterotopia Foucault turns to the cemetery, which is “no longer the sacred and immortal heart of the city, but ‘the other city,’ where each family possesses its dark resting place” (25). Djuna Barnes, I argue, developed *Nightwood* in the form of the former in view of her dejection due to the destruction and failure of the latter, epitomized in the various characters’ intrusions into and

destruction of Robin Vote's sacred, heterotopic space.

In order to understand the specificities of Barnes' recuperatively spatiated text, it is essential that we turn to the study that many credit as instigating (or at least inspiring) the geocritical turn in literary criticism itself, a study whose theoretical locus is *Nightwood*. Joseph Frank, in his seminal "Spatial Form in Modern Literature", held *Nightwood* up as the urtext for the as-of-yet unformulated school of spatial literature that he was to critique. He suggests in this essay that Barnes and writers like her write in a form that is beyond "narrative sequence" and that they "can be properly understood only when their units of meaning are apprehended reflexively" (62). Frank goes on to read Barnes' spatial imperative in *Nightwood* as the following:

Miss Barnes abandons any pretensions to this kind of verisimilitude, just as modern artists have abandoned any attempt at naturalistic representation; and the result is a world as strange to the reader, at first sight, as the world of abstract art was to its first spectators. Since the selection of detail in *Nightwood* is governed, not by logic of verisimilitude, but by the demands of the *décor* necessary to enhance the symbolic significance of the characters, the novel has baffled even its most fascinated admirers. (72)

*Nightwood*'s lack of "verisimilitude" and its employment of affective "décor", Frank goes on to suggest, is the natural spatial evolution that has as its direct antecedent the work of Barnes' acquaintance and reader, James Joyce. With *Ulysses* (1922), Frank suggests, Joyce set out to "build up in the reader's mind a sense of Dublin as a totality, including all the relations of the

characters to one another and all the events which enter their consciousness”; Frank then goes on to suggest that Joyce did so in a typically modern fashion: “unless one is a Dubliner, such knowledge (of the whole) can be obtained only after the book has been read, when all the references are fitted into their proper place and grasped as a unity ... [Joyce] proceeded on the assumption that a unified spatial apprehension of his work would ultimately be possible” (64). Joyce’s typically modern fractured but whole narrative contributes to a work whose space, while hard to comprehend as the reader is suspended *in media res* through many hundreds of pages, is comprehensible in that it has its own intrinsic sense of narrative and spatial teleology. *Nightwood*, on the other hand is not a coherent cartographic analogy of some larger mappable space – unlike Joyce with *Ulysses*, who controls “the ebullience of [his] naturalistic detail by the unity of space”, *Nightwood* is a work wherein the “naturalistic principle is totally abandoned” (Frank 70). And Barnes’ mutated inheritance can be extended further yet because, as Frederic Jameson acutely points out, for Joyce the “*Odyssey* serves as a *map* ... whose closure is that of the map of a whole complete and equally closed region of the globe, as though somehow the very episodes themselves merged back into space” (167). The *Odyssey*, much as the Volkbein home was, is pure signification by way of its entirely mimetic cartography; in referring to the greater world and attempting to contribute to its production, the *Odyssey* is no longer a world unto itself. Oxymoronically, the text that is most faithful to its represented spaces fails to be in the world, distinct, a subject that is both real and vital.

*Nightwood*, a once-further evolution of literature that is essentially cartographic, is definitely concerned with space, but unlike its antecedents *Nightwood* is not text-as-map (and thus, map as space and vice versa *ad infinitum*) but rather text-as-space-itself. It does not assist in the development of comprehensible space for the colonial(ized) subject, as Jameson says *Ulysses*

did through its aping of the highly “enclosed” *Odyssey*, so much as it refuses to take part in the process of literary mapping at all. By juxtaposing seemingly dissident characters, narratives, and narrative-tellings, Barnes, with *Nightwood*, “rehouses” the characters that are unable to find solace and sanctuary in houses/spaces of their own. Take, for instance, Frank’s suggestion that the details of *Nightwood* are not concerned with “verisimilitude” but are, rather, positioned as “décor” apart from sequence; when juxtaposed against the gaudy décor of Felix’s and Jenny’s homes, it seems that Barnes attempts to mirror the unnaturally domestic in her style. But she does so in a way that, unlike Guido, Felix, or Jenny who devitalize far-flung entities by domesticating them as pure signifiers, opens up the “home” in/of the book out into a range of interpretable possibilities. *Nightwood*, as Deleuze and Guattari explicate in the cartographic language of *A Thousand Plateaus*, is a “Go piece”; whereas chess pieces – contained as they are by cartographic rules and procedures – have a “milieu of interiority” that maintains “biunivocal relations with one another, and with the adversary’s pieces”, the “Go piece has only a milieu of exteriority, or extrinsic relations with nebulas or constellations, according to which it fulfills functions of insertion or situation, such as bordering, encircling, shattering” (353).

Apposite Deleuze and Guattari’s (de)limiting, deconstructive and altogether negative (but oxymoronically productive) discussion of the inherently “exterior” Go piece, Barnes binds together the tripartite productivities of birth, storytelling and exteriority in the figure of Robin, who is able to exist as a self-made narrative product, at once the “Wandering Jew” and the house itself. It is the act of storytelling by which Robin becomes pregnant; she figuratively *tells* herself to become pregnant at Felix’s behest. And when Robin is pressured into the role of Mother, she, as go piece and not “biunivocal” chess piece, becomes a whole new world unto herself. She takes to wandering, her body a world within a world, a home for a child and a child housed the globe



over, a Foucauldian Heterotopia that is both a “penetrable” referent for the world and an “isolated” system:

Robin prepared herself for her child with her only power: a stubborn cataleptic calm, conceiving herself pregnant before she was; and, strangely aware of some lost land in herself, she took to going out; wandering the countryside; to train travel, to other cities, alone and engrossed. Once, not having returned for three days, and Felix nearly beside himself with terror, she walked in late at night and said that she had been halfway to Berlin. (45)

Because Robin is forced into a biunivocal relationship vis-à-vis her husband and her child, as made possible by her narratological prowess, she is able to seize control of her own narrative productivity. She realizes that to tell a story is to create, and to create is to become the godhead of a world, and thus she speaks – one of the very few times she does throughout the whole text – and it is of her desire to go and better learn how to mime the world. Felix, oddly, keeps the fact that Robin “didn’t want him” – that is their son, Guido – and that it “seems [he] could not accomplish that,” to which the latter responds: “Why not be secret about him? ... Why talk?” (49). It is the act of talking, an essentially narrative (worldbuilding) gesture, that transfers the idea of Guido from Felix to Robin. It was this same gesture that postured/birthing Robin anew regarding her place in/as the world, and thereafter she goes about telling her own dichotomous story: “She grinned, but it was not a smile. ‘I’ll get out,’ she said. She took up her cloak; she always carried it dragging. She looked about her, about the room, as if she were seeing it for the first time” (49). After she leaves, only one party knows where Robin has fled, where she is once

again “unable or unwilling to give an account of herself”, and it is the diegetic narrator, Dr. Matthew O’Connor; he explains, and we trust him regardless of whether or not we definitively *see* Robin there, that she was in “America, that’s where Nora lives. I brought her into the world and I should know” (49).

In an oft-quoted aside, Dr. O’Connor, already obviously a storyteller supreme, gestures to the narratorial nature of his station in the novel when he challenges Nora – the last in Robin’s textual history of lovers/dictators – with the suggestion that he has “a narrative, but [she] will be put to it to find it” (97). This metafictionally tinged quip comes at a point in the climactic, narratively-bent chapter “Watchmen, What of the Night?” when O’Connor has already spent considerable time pondering place, specifically how provenance can be at once general and specific. He receives Nora in a room that is described in a way that obliquely mimes the previous description of Robin’s room, but is more concerned with feminine/masculine binarism rather than inside/outside collapse. “The room was so small that it was just possible to walk sideways up to the bed; it was as if being condemned to the grave the doctor had decided to occupy it with the utmost abandon,” and it is also encoded with dueling images of traditionally masculine and feminine signifiers: it is “like the room in brothels ... yet this room was also muscular, a cross between a *chamber à coucher* and a boxer’s training camp” (78-79). O’Connor, after receiving Nora in his squalid flat, goes on to narrate in much the same obtuse and baroque diction as the narrator of the novel itself, making it so that the reader of the narrative, and there is one, “will be put to it to find it”. He digresses seemingly at random, talking at length of the “night”, death, religion and dreams, the last of which he continuously describes as domestic entities, capable of shielding and housing. O’Connor concurrently suggests that “The sleeper is the proprietor of an unknown land” and that “We wake from our [dreams] in a deep sweat for they happened in a

house without an address, in a street in no town, citizenized with people with no names with which to deny them. Their very lack of identity makes them ourselves. For by street number, by a house, by a name, we cease to accuse ourselves” (87-88)

Dreams (the landscape of pure signification, as are words/narratives), according to O’Connor, are domesticities/spaces that are, much as the Heterotopia is, defined by their apposite positionality vis-à-vis the world in which extra-diegetic (re: both the dreams and the novel) subjects reside. Furthermore, O’Connor exhorts Nora, after he imagines that she is trying to interrupt his constant babble, to ponder the fact that “even the greatest generality has a little particular” (89). The generality to which he speaks is, of course, the dream that is peopled by nameless subjects residing in nameless worlds, that proffer the dreamer “a guilty immunity” (88); while the particularity to which O’Connor speaks is the imbuing of characteristics by the dreamer, an act that reminds us that the dreamed characters are, in fact, “ourselves”. Dreams, like literature, are spaces that do not necessarily follow the binarism that is instilled by the “real world”. Instead they are vast “generalities”, the blank page so to speak, brought to life by personal (and interpersonal) interstices. To further the point, that dreams are tantamount to literature, I again invoke the sage wisdom of Dr. O’Connor who lambasts American (non-French) binarism that is undreaming at the same time as it is anti-literary:

Oh, God, I’m tired of this tirade. The French are dishevelled and wise; the American tries to approximate it with drink. It is his only clue to himself. He takes it when his soap has washed him too clean for identification. The Anglo-Saxon has made the literal error; using water, he has washed away his page. Misery melts him down by day, and sleep at night. His preoccupation with his

business day has made his sleep insoluble. (90)

The American, in this passage, is envisioned as hygiene obsessed. They, in their propensity for constant purification, demarcation and distinction, oxymoronically wash away their own “identification” at the same time as they do the “page” through which they might discover a “clue” to what that identity is. It is exactly because the American is so obsessed with demarcation that they are washed away, as they are unwilling to reify the self through literary plotting or “dreaming” that reneges the stability that a finite personhood requires.

Much of O’Connor’s oration that thereafter follows outlines a productive dream/narrative space that is heterotopic because it serves as a specific referent for a specific society; as Foucault notes, a heterotopia is a “heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that [we] occupy” (24). O’Connor, after all, does acknowledge that provenance is of the utmost importance in dreams: “sea level and atmospheric pressure and topography make all the difference in the world ... If you think that certain things do not show from what district they come, yea, even to an *arrondissement*, then you are not out gunning for particular game, but simply any catch” (92). And in this heterotopic space, because it is able to transverse real-space, time and logic, unlike the society for which it is referent, which binds and controls space in the realm of pre-existing significations, a literally boundless world opens up for its denizens:

My heart aches for all the poor creatures putting on dog and not a pot to piss in or a window to throw it from. And I began to think, and I don’t know why, of the closed gardens of the world where all people can make their thoughts go up high

because of the narrowness and beauty, or of the wide fields where the heart can spread out thin its vulgarity. (99-100)

The heterotopic space, it seems, mimes Felix, Jenny and Nora's desire to domesticate the world (Robin), it is a "closed garden" after all. And yet, because it is once removed from its referent, it becomes a space unto itself, it is imbued with the space that inspires it but it is not beholden to it; instead, the idea of Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* as heterotopia, focalized through the keen narrative eye of Dr. Matthew O'Connor serves a dreaming "mind so rich that it is always wandering" (105). Many of which there were in Paris Lesbos.

## 2. Non-Euclidean Geometry and Mina Loy's *Insel*

from the moment the casket is opened, dialectics no longer exist. The outside is effaced with one stroke, an atmosphere of novelty and surprise reigns. The outside has no more meaning. And quite paradoxically, even cubic dimensions have no more meaning, for the reason that a new dimension – the dimension of intimacy – has just opened up.

-Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (106)

If Djuna Barnes was, as she wrote in a 1963 letter to Natalie Barney, “the most famous unknown of the century”, then her good friend Mina Loy, though she lived and worked at the same time as Barnes, is the most famous unknown of our current century. Though contemporaneously recognized and appreciated by the relatively small circle of artists/writers who she surrounded herself with, it was not until the 1991 publication of her only novel, *Insel*, that Loy re-entered the conversation as a seminal figure of the avant-garde of Parisian modernist writing. Shari Benstock suggests that the same misogynistic attitudes that Loy confronts in her work were ones that suppressed publication of her writing and therefore too, the subsequent critical appraisals of her work and the author's life that could have arisen. Benstock states that “Loy's publication record may suggest that the avant-garde effort to overturn the bourgeois and conventional may not have included an overturning of conventional male attitudes to female sexuality or have been comfortable with a woman poet who so persistently held up the contradictions of patriarchal sexual practices to inspection” (387). In other words, many radical artistic movements of modernity endeavoured to overturn some aspects of bourgeois normativity, while maintaining the conservative gender politics that it inscribed.

One of the few heterosexual women embedded within the cafés and salons of Paris Lesbos, Mina Loy was nonetheless queer in her own way – insofar as the definition of queerness can be and is extended, as Barnes did in *Nightwood*, to all those subjects who diverge from bourgeois normativity. Much of Loy’s own queer feeling was caused by the ethnic “double consciousness” (to borrow W.E.B. Du Bois’ phrase) of her childhood as a half-Jewish half-Christian British subject, whose mother (Julia) imposed upon her feelings of moral inadequacy for Loy’s perceived lack of Evangelical guilt. Carolyn Burke has suggested that her mother’s moralizing exhortations and commands most likely, and to the opposite effect of her intentions, “served to strengthen [Loy’s] resolve and focus her imagination” (17). Loy’s artistic identity, much the same as her ethnic/cultural one, was (and is) fractured, unfocused in both form and genre, and hard to catalogue. Loy was a writer (of poetry, politics, plays and prose), model, painter and lampshade designer. Loy’s output in all forms was erratic and unprolific. Apart from the singular collection of poetry published during her lifetime, *Lunar Baedeker* (1923), as well as a few exhibitions of her paintings, Loy rarely released her work into the world commercially or professionally. The task of defining Loy as an artist would be a tall order were it not for consistent themes of feminism, science, and spatiality which mark her work. These crystallized for her during the time she spent in Florence and Paris. It was in these spaces/places that Loy came under the influence of two divergent radical artistic movements. In Florence, Loy engaged with the futurist movement; while in Paris she became involved with a group of actively practicing surrealists. Given that Loy’s artistic practices, as well as her engagement with artistic movements, was place dependent, it stands to reason that her literary work can be read for its engagements with space.

Critical appraisal of Mina Loy and her work is a small but emergent field. Scholarship

that deals explicitly with the spatiality of Loy's corpus, or her recently recovered opus, *Insel*, has not yet produced a series of readings that explain how Loy (re)produced place/space in her writings. Scholarship regarding Loy and her work can be split into two non-antagonistic camps: that concerned with her feminism, and that concerned with the ways in which her work was classifiable within the futurist aesthetic. According to Lucia Re, "Loy's irreverence, laughter and 'brutality' owed a lot to Marinetti and futurism, but she soon learned to turn the futurists' own weapons against them. This was perhaps the most consequential and rigorous way for a woman to be a futurist" (806). The "irreverence," "laughter," and "brutality" to which Re refers are the tripartite forces that futurism deployed in order to promote a sort of pseudo-accelerationist (definitely fascist) policy change in Europe; one that, according to Natalya Lusty, required the artist (Loy) to "turn towards the vibrancy of art in the public sphere" (248). Typical of futurism's public-facing agenda, oftentimes their works took the form of the manifesto, a genre that set itself apart from common textual practice through its defacement of typological norms in typesetting and page layout. Typical of futurism's manifesto aesthetic are the practices of underlining, varying font size, emboldening and using exaggerated punctuation, all of which are meant to engage audiences within the public sphere and to participate affectively in the political realm. By and large, these futurist maneuvers spatiate the page on which the writing appears, this in order to purposively engage with the public as a politically viable artistic subject. As Lucia Re notes, futurism had an "anti-aesthetic, anti-metaphysical thrust to recuperate the body, the sexual and the material for modern thought and creativity" (809).

Similar critical attention has not been paid to Loy's later involvement with Andre Breton's surrealist group in Paris, and the art Loy produced during the period. While it was during this period that Loy wrote *Insel*, scholarship has not attempted to draw connections



between *Insel's* spatial aesthetic and the surrealist one. Of the few works that concern themselves with Loy's time in Paris, and the city's influence on her work, none deal with how the artist's involvement with the surrealist group influence the aesthetic of her work and its spatialization. In his close-reading of Loy's only non-posthumous collection of poetry, *Lunar Baedeker* (1923), Andrew Michael Roberts parses through the work's explicit relationship to Karl Baedeker, the guidebooks he published, and those he inspired. One of the influential works, Roberts suggests, is John Chancellor's *How To Be Happy in Paris Without Being Ruined!*, a guidebook intended for middle-class men who desired all the adventure that Paris had to offer without the requisite financial travesty. In it, again according to Roberts, Paris is constructed as a "woman ... it means that the projection of lack and desire can be made onto the city and its culture in total and the very act of visiting, of entering and exploring the city is both sexualised and masquerades as the defining, neutral, untainted gaze which merely observes the desire, pleasure and depravity which is 'there'" (136).

In this chapter, my aim is to parse the radical, embodied spatiality of Loy's work during her Paris period, influenced significantly by the surrealists. Loy, I contend, was intimately aware of the role that geography and space plays regarding one's subjective experience of the city. And in her art, especially in consideration of the proclivities of her artistic familiars, Loy found a balm for that misogynistic control exerted over her by those same groups and by society *in toto*.

The conflation of Loy's multifarious interests is frequently attributed to her experiences during the time she spent in Florence, living, working and loving amongst the vanguard of the emergent futurist movement. The futurists provided Loy with an artistic outline that allowed for "defiant courage to go against the grain of tradition," that cohered with her "intrinsic connection between aesthetic innovation and radical social change" (Lusty 249). It was towards the latter

part of the period (1906-1916) that Loy and her husband Stephen Haweis lived in Florence, where they primarily moved amongst the large expatriate community that called the city home at the time, that Loy met, romanced and came under the artistic influence of the prominent futurists: Giovanni Papini and Filippo Tommaso Emilio Marinetti. It was through her interactions with these men, both alluring and misogynistic in their highly-masculinized artistic practice, that Loy came to become an ardent – and more importantly, public – feminist.

Günter Berghaus articulates that “the prevalent image of Futurism as a misogynist precursor of Fascism” does a disservice to those artists that were able to employ the aesthetic for other purposes (401). He goes on to posit that “women of talent and intellectual acumen joined the futurist movement for pragmatic reasons, because at this point, Futurism was the most progressive, unorthodox, and liberal-minded organization on the Italian scene” (410). Berghaus lucidly describes the generative potential that futurism bore for women who engaged with its practices regardless of Marinetti et al.’s propensity for chauvinism – Loy being only one amongst a large number of women who successfully adapted futurism for more radical and liberatory purposes. Loy’s *Feminist Manifesto* (1914) employs many of the same galvanizing, declamatory and energetic techniques that the futurists use in their own work. Loy mocks the futurists’ braggadocious chauvinism at the same time that she falls in line with much of their proto-fascist, sometimes esoteric other times scientific, rhetoric. In one passage in particular, Loy shows herself to be so indebted to the science of the futurists that her work succumbs to the temptation to promote feminized pseudo-eugenics:

Each child of a superior woman should be the result of a  
definite period of psychic development in her life – & not

necessarily of a possibly irksome & outworn continuance of an alliance – spontaneously adapted for vital creation in the beginning but not necessarily harmoniously balanced as the parties to it – follow their individual lines of personal evolution –

For the harmony of the race, each individual should be the expression of an easy & ample interpretation of the male & female temperaments – free of stress

Woman must become more responsible for the child than man –

Women must destroy in themselves, the desire to be loved –

The feeling that it is a personal insult when a man transfers his attentions from her to another woman (155-56)

Loy's register in this excerpt is simultaneously that of the futurists (scientific, degrading, violent) and that of first-wave feminism. A woman's right to breed is depicted as being dependent upon her "superior" status and make-up and her willingness to "destroy" the natural tendency towards loving relations at the same time as she should endeavour to reproduce not because of an "irksome ... alliance" but rather because of "a definite period of psychic development in her life". However, at the same time that Loy's manifesto upholds the bourgeoisie codification and binarization of society via eugenics, it simultaneously aspires to galvanize its female readers into debunking the narrative that distinguishes them as the eroticized lower-classes amongst society's phallogocentric hierarchy. It rejects sexual and gender normalization, insisting instead that each

woman should individualize themselves according to their own “personal evolution,” and that thereafter “each individual should be the expression of an easy & ample interpretation of the male & female temperaments”.

While the diction of feminism is, as it pertains to futurist and futurist-adjacent writings, entirely Loy’s own, there is no doubt that it was interspersed with futurist language. Much of the scientific language in Loy’s work – even when it is written in the name of a feminist cause – is deeply indebted to her futurist familiars. Take, for example, the following passage from Marinetti’s “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” (1909):

8. We stand on the last promontory of the centuries! ... Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible?

Time and Space dies yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.

9. We will glorify war – the world’s only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman.

10. We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice. (41-42)

Marinetti’s futurist manifesto is simultaneously artistically progressive and socially regressive. It promises an unfathomable transgression of the “doors of the Impossible” at the same time as it, in an early artistic prefiguration of Italian fascist logic soon to rise under Mussolini, “glorif[ies] war [as] the world’s only hygiene”. There is a fractious ideological split in Marinetti’s

exhortations regarding the usefulness of scholarship, science and knowledge production to the futurist movement. Marinetti suggests that apposite the “Time and Space” of the modern present, there lies in the beyond-impossible a world wherein “omnipresent speed” is inserted as the constitutive organizing scientific principle. Futurism’s “omnipresent speed” while bound by the logic of speed in place of spatiotemporal logic will deconstruct and extirpate the social mores bound up in logic. Futurist speed is posited against both “museums, libraries, academies” and “feminism”.

The futurist fascination with speed in place of the spatiotemporal, given its emergence in the modern context, can be explicated through social theory à la Paul Virilio, who notes that speed is essential to both the modern milieu and the militant fascist psyche:

As soon as it takes power, the Nazi government offers the German proletariat sport and transport. No more riots, no need for much repression; to empty the streets, it’s enough to promise everyone the highway ... It soon gathers half a million drivers and trains them to drive over every kind of terrain, to shoot while driving. (49)

The fascistic impulse towards speed that Virilio ties to the Nazi regime that began its rise to power in the 1920’s, at the same time that Loy abandoned the futurists for New York and, later, Paris, is, much as Marinetti’s manifesto aims to do, a call to mass public participation in a form that disintegrates previous communal and social conventions. Virilio later explicitly refers to Marinetti and the futurists, suggesting that in “1921, Marinetti metaphorizes about the armored car: the overman is over-grafted, an *inhuman type* reduced to a driving – and thus deciding –

principle, an animal body that disappears in the superpower of a metallic body able to annihilate time and space through its dynamic performances” (84). Speed according to Virilio – especially when it is subsumed into the futurist aesthetic – is inherently against the traditional organizing principles of “time and space”. Given the futurist embrace of the contemporaneously ascendant field of quantum mechanics and Einstein’s theory of relativity, speed, and its requisite notion of spatial eradication, figured heavily in Mina Loy’s work during that period.

Recently, a small number of Loy scholars have made attempts to locate her poetry (primarily that contained in *Lunar Baedeker*) within the broader history of contemporary scientific developments of the day. Rachel Fountain Eames contends that “Loy’s writing often seems to reify atomic dispersal as the apotheosis of human evolution. Loy found in the new physics a flexible, dynamic and authoritative framework through which to articulate her own experiences of modernity” (32); she says further that “Loy’s understanding of physics emerged from her exposure to Futurism, particularly her responses to the writings of Marinetti” (33). The “new physics” to which Eames refers is that strain of science that ascended during modernity – spearheaded by figures such as Albert Einstein, Neils Bohr, Erwin Schrödinger and Max Planck – and attended to the micro rather than the macroscopic. Amongst the interests of new physics were quantum mechanics, atomic and subatomic particles; broadly speaking, and in accordance with Marinetti and the futurists’ valuation of speed above time and space, new physics was engaged with well thought out abstractions cum mathematical formalisms of otherwise imperceptible minutiae.

The poetry that Loy wrote during her Florence/futurist period often bore phrases and witticisms that when taken as polemical statements argued against a spatiotemporal figuration of subjective experience, instead proposing “vitality” and “intensity” as scientific alternatives for

universal organization. In her brief but powerful poem, “There is no life or death” – which is made up of little more than sharp and simple declarative sentences, much like Marinetti’s *Manifesto of Futurism* or her own *Aphorisms on Futurism* – Loy plainly states that “There is no Space or Time / Only intensity / And tame things / Have no immensity” (3). The anti-spatial turn in this poem is the culmination of a series of other declarations that Loy makes beforehand. The rest of the poem, as with the above passage, posits a series of oppositional, or opposite generating, forces against theories of equity and boundlessness. “Life [and] Death” are posited against “activity” which Loy suggests results in an “absolute” without “declivity” (a slope); “Love [and] Lust” are replaced by “propensity,” to “possess” Loy goes on to suggest, results not in an eradication of the possessed but in that “who would possess”; and, lastly, Loy claims that “There is no First or Last / Only equality,” wherein the ruler is a part of “the majority,” thereby casting the entire populace as ruler and ruled.

Loy, in these early poems, recapitulates the futurist aesthetic of speed and vitality in a way that equalizes rather than stratifies, and generates rather than eradicates. However, Loy’s interest in science and its generative potential was tenuous and conditional. By the end of her time with the futurists she had abandoned the scientific aesthetic prescribed by futurism, turning instead to a school of artistic thought that allowed for a more unbound logic of spatialization. As Ellen McWhorter asserts, Loy’s “Songs to Joannes”, a series of brief poems written immediately after her relocation from Florence to New York City, navigates a “cultural moment whereby reason and fact came to be aligned with scientific and technological achievement wholly cut off from the messier insights of ordinary human experience” (3). At the same time that Loy valued the generative potential of the futurists’ radical, and anti-spatiotemporal, scientific bent, she grew weary of their inability to parse the inner, inexplicable, depths of subjective experience. It was

not until some years later, after yet another repatriation to Paris, that Loy found a movement that radically altered how one organizes their subjectivity in space at the same time as it allowed for a mining of the inexplicable, but rich, deposits of the soul. Loy entered the world of the surreal, peopled by artists with equal interest in space.

René Magritte, one of surrealism's most successful producers, painted a piece in 1964 that explicitly connects the surrealist movement to alternative conceptions of space. The painting, as with much of the purposefully spatially obfuscating surrealist work, portrays a colossal boulder levitating precariously over an otherwise idyllic scene, replete with blue skies dotted with gauzy clouds parting before an almost uncannily pristine crescent moon. The effect of the boulder, the weary feeling one gets from its suspension, is that of stasis. One imagines that it should be falling, hurtling through the pastoral scene and crashing into the earth below, but it never does. The fact of the painting itself, as an imagistic representation of a boulder suspended-perpetuum, disallows the boulder from ever reaching its destination, there is always some more distance for it to travel.

The title of Magritte's nerve-racking painting, *La Flèche de Zenon* (Zeno's Arrow), refers to the concepts formulated by Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea, a member of Aristotle's circle, the latter describing the former as the inventor of the dialectic method. Zeno is most well-known for his characterization in Aristotle's *Physics*, wherein he delineates the "paradoxes" which have come to be known simply as "Zeno's Paradoxes", and which have baffled philosophers and mathematicians (including Bertrand Russell and Henri Bergson) to the present. The "Arrow paradox", perhaps the most famous of Zeno's troubling scenarios and the one to which Magritte refers, posits that "if it is always true that a thing is at rest when it is opposite to something equal to itself, and if a moving object is always in the now, then a moving arrow is motionless" (161).



Essentially, Zeno's Arrow paradox theorizes that space-time is infinite as an arrow can only exist in relation to its opposite – presumably a target or a body – and the space between the two, when captured in an instance of time, is infinitely divisible. Or, to be even more succinct, there are infinite halfway points in the distance between the arrow and its intended target. It is not so much that a moving arrow is properly “motionless”, but more that our perception of it in an instant of time captures it in an imminently motile state, never traversing the infinitely-divisible space between itself and its intended target. Thusly, space becomes infinite.

The non-Euclidean geometry that informs Zeno's Arrow paradox, referred to in Magritte's *La Flèche de Zenon*, is taken up by various surrealist artists. The most notable non-Euclidean technique utilized by surrealist painters is decalcomania, the practice of pressing paint between two surfaces. Among the avid practitioners of decalcomania during Loy's time in Paris was Max Ernst, the close friend of Richard Oelze, the surrealist whom the character Insel supposedly fictionalizes. Ernst's decalcomania – exemplified in the work produced during his mid-career American period, *L'oeil du silence* (The Eye of Silence), *L'Europe après la pluie* (Europe After the Rain) and many more – has been cited by mathematicians at Yale as an artistic recapitulation of fractal, and therefore potentially illogical, non-Euclidean, spaces. They argue that by utilizing the decalcomania technique, wherein one uses “viscous paint” on one sheet of paper and then “cover[s] the paper with another piece of paper”, thereafter “applying pressure to the top sheet,” surrealist artists caused “paint ridges [to] coalesce and a branching pattern [to] appear,” and thus “a dendritic fractal [to] form”. While, at the time of surrealism's heyday, non-Euclidean perceptions of space had largely given way to an Einsteinian post-theory-of-relativity sense of a logical understanding of incomprehensible space, it was Breton's phalanx that (while they acknowledged Einstein's incredible discoveries) remained fascinated with the radical

potential of non-Euclidean space. As Linda Henderson notes in her ground-breaking monograph, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, “the temporal fourth dimension of Einsteinian Relativity Theory had largely displaced the popular fourth dimension of space in the public mind;” however, “Breton and various Surrealist painters during the 1930s and 1940s retained many of the pre-Einsteinian implications of ‘the fourth dimension’ and non-Euclidean geometry” (205). Since Loy, throughout her time in Paris, flitted on the periphery of Breton’s surrealist group, and especially in consideration of her knowledge and appropriation of futurist techniques during her time in Florence, there can be no doubt that Loy attended to and appropriated surrealist techniques of infinite spatiation for her own creative purposes.

*Insel*, the title of the book and the name of its protagonist, is itself a spatializing term; “insel” being the German word for island or, more poetically intonated, isle. As with the poems collected in *Lunar Baedeker*, *Insel*’s contents are, from the outset, imbued with a certain sense of concrete spatiality. Much in the same way that the boulder suspended in Magritte’s *La Flèche de Zenon* unnerves the viewer by its ceaseless transmutation of space, the idea of an island conjures a sense of perpetual autonomy, being disjointed from the world at large, expansive and whole in its disconnectedness opposite the broad and fractured “mainland”. Criticism of *Insel*, the work of Christina Walter specifically, has attended to the spatially subjective connotations of the term “insel”, and its relation to the novel’s protagonist, at the core of which is Walter’s suggestion that “Loy’s novel by that name ... traces the title character’s enactment of an embodied, unstable, and automatically conditioned subjectivity” (Walter 674). However, by immediately attending to *Insel* the character rather than *Insel* the novel, critics overlook the spatial subjectivity Loy produces through her form, and attaches to artistic form more generally.

In Paris, Loy emerged as a peripheral member of Andre Breton’s surrealist group who, no

doubt, akin to the futurists before them, thought of their female compatriot as ancillary rather than a full-fledged contributor. However, artistically at least, the surrealists were a movement whose mantras were, in many ways, antithetical to that of the futurists. Whereas the futurists were *men* of logic, science and fascism, the Breton phalanx of surrealism (as opposed to the oppositional unit brought together by Yvan Goll) concerned itself with the dream-realm, emotional automatism and communism. Breton's own manifesto decries logic and its spatially constraining abilities:

We are still living under the reign of logic: this, of course, is what I have been driving at. But in this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating directly to our experience. Logical ends, on the contrary, escape us. It is pointless to add that experience itself has found itself increasingly circumscribed. It paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge. (9-10)

Unlike the futurists before/beside them, the surrealists completely removed their passions from the "absolute rationalism" instilled in the arts by science, regardless of its forward-thinking or otherwise revelatory nature. "Logical ends" are not the aim of the surrealist ethos; rather, the surrealist's promotion of illogical art aims, in its very transgressive and antagonistic nature, to deconstruct the "circumscription" of subjective experience. The math-logic of Euclidean geometry, even when couched in new physics and Einsteinian theoreticality, might trap the surrealist in a "cage". In fact, it becomes clear, not only participates with and thinks through

surrealism, but does so in scientific and geometric terms. The “cage” is not a fortuitous metaphor for Insel, it is a very real space that aims to control and obstruct both body and mind.

Loy depicts Insel as a consummate surrealist throughout the novel. Writing to a friend, Insel’s narrative and artistic foil Mrs. Jones states that “Aaron’s latest surrealist is absolutely divine” (4). And later in the same letter, comparing Insel to practitioners of “black magic” unsexed and with a “cranium full of intellectual dust”, she suggests that Insel, in typical surrealist fashion, is “very, in [his] fantastic ways, expressive of [his] art, which after all takes on such shapes as would seethe from a cauldron overcast by some wizard’s torturous will” (5). According to Mrs. Jones, Insel is a mutable artist, one who can easily assume the form of his art, taking it into his body and then metamorphizing his lived experience and form into an ongoing exhibition. However, one major outside factor influencing Insel’s infinitely mutable surrealist performance is that it requires an outside participant – an audience – in order to be consummated.

As such, Insel is depicted as a character with an eminent fear and hatred of enclosed spaces, homeliness and domesticity. Insel is “forever in search of a haven” at the same time as he prefers “*any* discomfort to going home” (16). “Haven” for Insel does not lie in the domestic realm; he prefers his “role” as “helplessness personified” (21). Mrs. Jones too, is depicted as Insel’s co-conspirator in his bohemian vagabondage, her thoughts on the matter crystalized in the following passage:

Whenever I have seen poor people asleep on stone seats in the snow, like complementary colors in the eyes, there arise in my mind unused ballrooms and vacationers’ apartments whose central heating warms a swarming absence. To the

pure logician this association of ideas might suggest a possible trans-occupation of cubic space, while mere experience will prove that the least of being alive is transacted in space, so much does sheer individuality exceed it; that providing a refuge for a single castaway brings results more catastrophic than a state of siege. (Loy 21)

According to Mrs. Jones, the imagination is where one transacts and enacts “being alive”. Only the “logician” – that is the futurist logician, who is nonetheless radical – believes that “cubic space” is of any use to the practitioner of “sheer individuality”. In fact, by reneging the logic of “cubic space,” Mrs. Jones suggests that, in blatantly spatial terms, one can “exceed” their bounds. If we are given “refuge” in logical space then we are susceptible to an attack more devastating “than a state of siege”. It is, according to Mrs. Jones, imperative that space be public, mutable and infinite.

The settings of Insel’s animated surrealist exhibition are, more often than not, Paris’s archetypal cafes and bistros. Upon their first extended interaction, during which Mrs. Jones “wish[es] to get on familiar terms with an acknowledged surrealist,” the pair meet in “a cafe (sic), and, in the embracing glare of a locality above all others conducive to the liberal exchange of confidences between the most heterogeneous people, the meager personality of this stranded German opened up” (6). The fact of Insel and Mrs. Jones being “heterogeneous people” correlates with my earlier suggestion that critical appraisals of *Insel* have often posited the former – and I would argue that by association so too the latter – as an “island” unto himself, entirely isolated and subjective. However, insofar as he is an embodiment of his art, and the goal of any art(ist) is to be seen, to affect the world as a highly personal and distinctive

communicative utterance, then it is also necessary that art(ists) partake in society, to exist as a heterogeneity amongst a vast web of heterogeneous figures. In *Insel*, the space that facilitates the surrealists in their endeavour to be both heterogeneous and public-facing artist is the café. When Mrs. Jones meets Insel in a cafe or bistro setting, “all the filaments of what has been called the astral body, that network of vibrational force,” are “drawn out of [her] towards a terrific magnet ... the half-rotten looking man of flesh” (38).

At another point in the narrative, in another of her numerous happenstance encounters with Insel, Mrs. Jones refers, as she has done many times before, to Insel’s paucity, noting that “he greeted [her] with the relief of an object which, having fallen apart, should chance upon its other half again” (53). Mrs. Jones, who has intentions to keep an appointment with another of her friends is so dispirited by Insel’s sad half-formed countenance that she yields to the surrealist’s pleas to sit and “suffuse another stray café with the ineffable haze of his contagion” (53). Insel exemplifies an uncanny ability to establish in such public places as the café or the bistro a sort of home which fosters his participatory artistic vision, wherein – unlike the confining and repressive “cage” of finite, demarcated, and once and for all completed work – his endless painterly project is given space to roam. The cafés that Insel and Mrs. Jones frequent are quite often described as being infinite spaces, ones that open up throughout the evening, allowing for a seemingly endless array of stories to emerge. One cold evening – when Insel, “in his unusual liveliness,” was speaking “words, like roomy cupboards, dipped into the reservoir of excited honey and flapping their open doors spilled it all over the place as they passed” (58) – the intrepid pair, aiming to warm-up inside, remove themselves:

as if receding into a lair, from the terrace to further and further inside the café,

from the open to the enclosed – each time ordering a new *consummation* from a different waiter – till [they] reached an inaeate core of the establishment. Here [they] inexplicably came upon a friend whose hypothetic non-existence insured Insel’s vaunted isolation. One after another the same Germanic wag would shuffle up to our table, each time wearing a different face. (58-59)

The café is described, while the pair make their seemingly endless journey to its core, as an extension of the terraced exterior. Though the space they recede into is “enclosed” it retains the scaffolded “terrace” effect of its exterior. The fact of it being a public space causes the café to allow a modicum of openness exemplified by the pseudo-people-watching that Insel and Mrs. Jones are able to undertake, wherein subjectivities are multiplied infinitely: there are always “different waiter[s]” and double negative interactions with the Germanic wag who hypothetically *doesn’t* exist and is able to assume diverse appearances. At one point later in the evening, Mrs. Jones excuses herself from the table that she and the two Germans were seated at in order to “buy some rouge”, and upon her return she is astonished to find that “it looked as if empty space in [their] quiet comer (sic) had come alive, the leather padding had broken out in a parasitic formation, a double starfish whose radial extremities projected and retracted rapidly at dynamic angles” (59). It is as if, from out of the primordial soup of the café, an entire universe emerges as a fractal from one spot. As with the ceaseless terracing of the café, the social locus of Insel and Mrs. Jones’ evening is an endlessly productive locale. This café when peopled by the surrealist, as Mrs. Jones goes on later to suggest, is “a dimension where a packet of ten cigarettes encompassed a universe” (61). The infinite space of surrealist-occupied Parisian cafes is also a liberatory realm, one that multiplies subjectivity as it does space; as Mrs. Jones notes of her

“evening outside the Lutetia,” cafés allow an ongoing “doubling of space where different selves live ... different ways in different dimensions at once ... [imbuing a] sense of timeless peace – of perfect happiness” (96). It is the spatiotemporally altering possibilities of cafés such as the Lutetia, infinitesimal and all-encompassing at the same time, much as a fractal is simultaneously one point and the entirety of its form, that allows for surrealists such as Mrs. Jones and Insel to (re)perform their art away from the strictures of science, law, and, most of all, repressive and hegemonic political control.

While the café(s) of *Insel* are delineated in terms of infinite space and social-performativity, they are also depicted as transgressive spaces, particularly generative for racial/ethnic minorities and women, with both of whom Loy identified and with whose quandaries she concerned herself. The café is emblematic of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque; in its embodied surrealism, the forthright admixture of life and art, the café bestows to all comers a broad and empowering subjectivity. As Bakhtin notes, “in carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act ... its participants *live* in it ... that is, they live a *carnivalistic life*” (122). The café(s) of *Insel*, doing what any good carnival must, suspends the “hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it – that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people” (123). After returning from her sojourn to purchase “rouge”, Mrs. Jones notes that Insel is “draped with the bodies of two negresses, spiked with their limbs” (59). After seating herself and, intensely aware of societal racial prejudice, greeting them with “an inclusive smile of welcome,” Mrs. Jones suggests that Insel was partaking in a “virtually prohibited conjunction with a race whose ostracism ‘debunks’ humanity’s ostensible belief in its soul” (60). Mrs. Jones, while displaying good-will in acknowledging the inherent racial biases of



society external to the café, still falls prey to the propensity to see the world according to racial and sexual biases; hearing the “negresses” berate Insel in French (a language that he has no grasp of), calling him a “pimp” and a “skunk”, Mrs. Jones suspects that these women with their exotic feminine guile are taking advantage of her poor little “ant” (60). However, after having abandoned him for her home, and thereafter imagining herself as a “damp and heroic” saviour of the man she imagined bore “a treasure to be saved at all costs”, Mrs. Jones realizes that her perception of the power-dynamic between the two was entirely obverse to reality, when the majordomo explains to her that Insel “lives off these women of the Dôme” (62). The café is a world that is paradoxically both open and closed, to which the artistic mind, and not the finite artistic product, serves as the key.

Christina Walter, writing about Insel/*Insel*'s “impersonal aesthetic”, argues “that incompleteness is finally key to the potential that Loy registers in the body” (685). Here, I would like to extend Walter's fruitful notion and suggest that “incompleteness,” while important to the subject proper, is mediated and empowered as an aesthetic consideration via a spatial analogy. The geographic signifier that is most commonly associated with *Insel/Insel*, both explicitly and otherwise, is the key. It is in his discussion of wardrobes, and the infinite mysteries that they contain, that Bachelard posits that there is not a “single dreamer of words who does not respond to the word wardrobe” (99). The wardrobe, according to Bachelard, is a space that exemplifies the majesty of retained and perpetually generative sublimity; “the real wardrobe,” Bachelard explains, “is not an everyday piece of furniture. It is not opened every day, and so, like a heart that confides in no one, the key is not on the door” (100-101). Instead, the key exists as an imaginative object, it is the literary imagination's exaggerative inquisitions of the wardrobe's interior that unlocks the bounty that lies within. Against the base psychoanalytic symbolist

reading of “locks and keys”, Bachelard posits his competing topoanalytical reading, that the artist “gathers the universe together around and in an object. We see it open chests, or condense cosmic wealth in a slender casket” (105).

As to his own history as key-bearer, Mrs. Jones suggests that Insel’s “destiny appeared to [her] to get mixed up with keys” (10). After Insel explains that his father was a *schlosser* (blacksmith) who “surely” made keys, Mrs. Jones goes on to suggest to him that he’s “*inherited* the keys [his] father made. [He’ll] see the whole of [his] life will turn on a key. Some people are accompanied throughout their career by a fixation of their destiny – [his] is a key” (10).

Insel’s artistic practice, as has been alluded to previously, bears many of the aesthetic markers of surrealism that crafts a key-like art that opens the wardrobe of the universe. Mrs. Jones purports, in a conversation with her friend Mlle Alpha, that Insel and his art are “too surrealistic for the surrealists” (104). Insel is so intense a practitioner of illogical and lived surrealist art that Mrs. Jones expresses an impassioned concern for the artist and his constantly frustrated attempts to produce art, stating:

I know his work is a technical miracle and I submit to the active hypnosis with which he has the power to infuse dead paint – still –. There! That’s one thing we’re always talking about. His future work. He *shows* me what he is going to do. Sometimes I feel he has found a short cut to consummation in defiance of the concrete. That he is feeling the galleries of the increate. He seemed so worth helping, I’ve only just begun to notice he *never* paints. (104)

The paradoxical relationship that Mrs. Jones establishes between Insel’s painterly practice and its

implied vitality – that he “never paints” at the same time as he has the power to “infuse dead paint” with “active hypnosis” – is perplexing at best. On the one hand, Mrs. Jones seems to be suggesting that Insel’s extant corpus is, in the vein of Jane Bennet’s “vital materiality”, a harbinger of “thing-power”, an “existent ... in excess of [its] association with human meanings, habits, or projects” (4). However, at the same time, and perhaps wrongly so, Mrs. Jones excoriates Insel’s “increate” artistic sensibility as a “short cut” to “consummation”. It is consummation, indeed, that seems to be the teleological end-game of Insel’s demiurgic practice; his is one where consummation, and not (re)production, is the generative act. The “vital materiality” of Insel’s art is therefore, as with Zeno’s arrow and the cafés of Paris, infinitely generative, located in the only space that is simultaneously singular and all-encompassing, the human mind. Later, after Insel explains that “none of the surrealists will have anything to do with” him, Mrs. Jones ponders why, suggesting that in so doing the other surrealists might “learn what supereality is about – [because he is] organically surreal” (108). Insel, it seems, is the art.

Insel was “in jail nine months,” and prior to his birth from that womb-prison, he “*conceived* of a greater wealth than the wealth of banks. Within [himself he] found the artist” (11 emphasis mine). And it is crafting the artist, not the art, that is the core prerogative of Insel’s surrealist aesthetic. Even those pieces of art that Insel does have the gumption to produce end up being kept back from entering the public economy, instead existing as gift objects in interpersonal communications. Passing Mrs. Jones “a black passe-partout,” Insel explains that he wishes her to have it as he “refuse[s] to sell” (34). The piece itself had the effect of the “atmosphere that clung to him as ours clings to the earth ... [it] seemed almost astir with that somnolent arrested motion revealing his nature” (34). The art produced is always attached to that man that is half-formed, *in media res* of his parturition, at the same time as it is apart from math-

logic spatiation, existing instead as an “astir” art object in “arrested motion”. Insel’s art cannot exist in the exchange economy because that would mean it has succumbed to geography, the logic of which is antithetical to his surrealist methods. Instead, it must be a part of him, sometimes as an idea and other times as an interpersonal in-group gift. In either case, the space of Insel’s art is infinite as with that of the arrow paradox, it is extant but is never capable of reaching its teleological end.

Mrs. Jones propounds, in one of her many seemingly wayward conversations with Insel, that “the artist’s vindication does not lie in ‘what happens to him’ but in what shape he comes out” (14). Regardless of gendered diction (Mrs. Jones oft veers less feminist than her author), this suggestion is evocative regarding the 50-odd-year gestation that *Insel* experienced prior to its publication. If the artist’s “vindication” is a subjectively generative moulding through methodical formal craft, then Loy, with *Insel*, endeavoured as much as any one person can, to craft a narrative that was perpetually a vindication of generativity. Loy, Mrs. Jones’ real-world counterpart, much like Insel, never saw her work make its way out into the world. *Insel* existed in the world of her mind and the pages of her journal. Apart from its being read by a few of Loy’s close friends, and a few aborted attempts at publication, *Insel* was never made available to the public during Loy’s life. *Insel*, it seems, as with the always imminent art of its title character, never gets to where it’s going; and so, there is, according to Loy’s surrealist aesthetic of illogical spatiation, a world between.

## Conclusion

life originates forms, and it is perfectly natural that life, which is the cause of forms, should create living forms. Once again, for such daydreams as these, form is the habitat of life.

-Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (133)

This thesis has attended to various overlapping interests that resituate the experience of queer and feminist writers in interwar Paris. Though it is concerned with writers and characters from different national, ethnic and sexual identities, and with divergent political biases to their writings, the authors and characters of *Nightwood* and *Insel* both display an experience of, and desire for, space that counters notions of social and scientific modes of normalizing spatiotemporal organization. These confounding narratives display a series of comparable concerns: how does one's occupation of space reify or reject a dominant social order? What "illogical" forms of spatial organization allow for a politically charged rejection of the hegemonic ordering of space? What are the generative possibilities of formal and literary miming of space?

Beginning with *Nightwood*, a text which I chose because of what I considered to be a dearth of geocritical and spatial studies of it, I aimed to parse how space, according to Djuna Barnes, was most generative when it rejected the dichotomous world/domesticity relationship through despatialization and aspatialization. My protean intuition regarding space in *Nightwood* was that Barnes' characters occupy a world of "placelessness" that "threatens to [cause] spatial dissolution" (Miller 127). But, in the end, I found that Barnes considers space as producing the opposite effect and allowing for a seemingly infinite number of expanding, not contracting or eliminating, possibilities.

For *Insel*, a text similarly lacking critical attention to its space but, even more lacking critical attention *in toto*, I partook in a reading project that looked at how public spaces, opposite private ones, serve as an infinitely generative realm. My reading here, more than I thought it would at first, was dependent upon contextualizing Loy via her relationship to, and participation in, two of the most prominent avant-garde artistic movements of modernity. Beginning with an analysis of Loy's attachment to Futurism, and her ingenious use of that group's misogynist scientific rhetoric for her feminist cause, I worked through the math-logic that was important for this period in the author's life. Later in her life, after she relocated to Paris (again), Loy abandoned the Futurists and subsequently took up a more nebulous relationship with surrealism and surrealists. It was here, in her Paris period as narrativized in *Insel*, that Loy evidenced her most acute comprehension of the liberatory potential that alternative spaces afford. Beginning with an analysis of the surrealist propensity to employ illogical techniques of non-Euclidean spatiation, I went on to suggest that Loy, with *Insel*, crafted an infinite fractal Paris within narrative space.

I have no intention to promote a focus on the novelistic works of Barnes and Loy that rejects the already well-established habit of reading them as essentially a-/non-spatial. The assertions that I have made throughout this thesis are, as with all self-aware works of scholarship, highly personal and enacted at the behest of a minute focus. Rather, I would like to suggest that my reading – that is, a geocritical one – is aligned with the anti-normalizing intentions, spatial and otherwise, that are a major concern of both *Nightwood* and *Insel*. Moreover, my reading uncovers how – in the brief interstices in which the two authors that serve as my study's locus discuss what Bachelard calls “the sites of our intimate lives ... [wherein] the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant roles” (30) – one can be of a city, its

place and its people, yet deny that same city's imposition of control and demarcation. In reading these alternative conceptions of space, I would like to finally suggest, we might too take a flight of fancy by unshackling our consciousnesses from their bordered world, for about us there are unfathomable realms on illogical planes.

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